

)LML ,QGLDQV DQG &RPPRGLWLJDWLRQ RI /DERU  
\$XWKRU V -RKQ ' .HOO\  
6RXU\$FHULFDQ (WKQRORJLVWR )HE SS  
3XEOLVKHG E\ %ODFNZHOO 3XEOLVKLQJ RQ EHKDOI RI WKH \$PHU  
6WDEOH 85/ <http://www.jstor.org/stable/644827>  
\$FFHVVG

---

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>. JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you may use content in the JSTOR archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Please contact the publisher regarding any further use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at <http://www.jstor.org/action/showPublisher?publisherCode=black>.

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

---

JSTOR is a not-for-profit organization founded in 1995 to build trusted digital archives for scholarship. We work with the scholarly community to preserve their work and the materials they rely upon, and to build a common research platform that promotes the discovery and use of these resources. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).

# Fiji Indians and “commoditization of labor”

JOHN D. KELLY—*Princeton University*

This article considers, in relation to a particular ethnographic problem, some basic questions about commoditization, labor, and capitalism. Does “labor” exist apart from its commodity forms? Can capitalism itself be approached as a culture? The article centers on the forms Fiji Indian labor has taken, but it is not the story of the commoditization of Fiji Indian labor, as if that labor existed before gaining a commoditized form. It argues that in our analyses we do not have to accord universal standing or a priori privilege to political-economic ways of giving form to things, activities, and people. The article examines Fiji Indian labor forms against the Fiji Indians’ own broad cultural and historical background, South Asian and colonial, with particular attention to *bhakti* devotionism and to postcolonial, colonial, and even South Asian pre-colonial capitalisms. It is the story of Fiji Indian articulations of systems that inform social life, focused on two contrasting ways in which Fiji Indians articulate capitalism with devotionism.

After more than a century of capitalism, economy and society in the Fiji Islands are organized not only by class but also by “race.” The category “race” is descended from colonial usage, denoting what scholars would typically call “ethnicity”; foregrounding this category used and occasionally contested in Fiji will reveal how far colonial theories of differences between “races” are still part of social life there. Differences called racial separate Indians (the descendants of South Asian indentured laborers) from indigenous Fijians and Europeans. Capitalist cultural forms, such as “commodities,” “ownership,” and especially “labor,” fit differently into the lives of these different groups within the same nation, even while all participate in their own fashion in one capitalist market. In Fiji most labor markets are organized by race. For example, sugarcane growers, who are independent contractors, are 80 percent Indian, while the members of market gardening cooperatives are almost entirely indigenous Fijian. And different groups within the same “race” use capitalist cultural forms in different ways. I focus on one such problem among the many in the organization of Fiji’s capitalism.

The vast majority of Fiji’s Indians are descendants of indentured laborers, but the Fiji Indians also include an important minority community of free emigrants from Gujarat and their descendants. The former group are known locally by the unmarked term, as “Indians,” while the latter group, when distinguished from them, are called “Gujaratis.” (Henceforth in this article, “Indians” will refer to the Fiji Indians descended from indentured laborers, not including the Gujarati and other free immigrants, and “Fiji Indians” will refer to the population of South Asia-descended people in Fiji as a whole. Of course, Fiji’s Gujaratis are as much “Indians” as Fiji’s Indians are, but here they will be referred to simply as Gujaratis.) Indians and Gujaratis relate

---

*Fiji “Gujaratis,” free emigrant shopkeepers, refuse to commoditize their own labor, unlike the Fiji “Indians,” descendants of indentured laborers. The difference can be explained in relation to two different syntheses of bhakti devotionism and capitalism, but only after the capitalism in Fiji’s colonial history, the capitalism in India’s precolonial history, and the relation of capitalism to Europe have been re-considered. This article seeks to demonstrate the utility of a cultural approach to capitalism. [capitalism, commoditization, labor, Fiji Indians, bhakti]*

---

very differently to Fiji's labor market. Indians readily commoditize their labor in many forms, working for wages or salaries. The Gujaratis resist all forms of commoditization of their labor, but provide many of Fiji's most successful indigenous entrepreneurs and most of the urban Indian shopkeepers.

This problem might be approached as an epiphenomenon of "world system" dynamics, market niches, and the irresistible force of various market conditions, or perhaps as a product of these things and a historical struggle of political interests. And capitalism clearly is lived in a world system of market relationships, in which many conditions of possibility are material. However, I suggest that capitalism is itself a culture. This claim is arresting, especially since capitalism is obviously not a homogeneous behavior pattern of a unified people, easily bounded in space and time. But of course we have come to doubt whether any truly homogeneous and easily bounded cultures exist. I claim that capitalism is a good example of the kind of cultures that really do exist: by "culture" I mean a complex of forms and a grammar for their use, something that changes over time not simply because of the limits and pressures of material exigencies, nor merely in the play of practical reason and chance, but in a process of transformation, renewal, and expansion in the hands of otherwise diverse and variously situated agents empowered by it. Such a culture, continually changed and renewed by creative as well as by impelled and exploitative practice, need not be understood to be primordial to the places it is found, nor to be the only culture of those empowered by it, nor ever to be "pure," unmixed with other culturally constituted forms and grammars. As we give up the idea of pure and bounded cultures, it is also time to give up the idea of capitalism as something that can slide under or penetrate a cultural field without being cultural itself. We can abandon the scenario of world-system violation of local cultural purity without accepting the universality of political-economic forms, and we can locate capitalism instead as one powerful cultural system, increasingly used and lived, in an already, always creole world.<sup>1</sup>

Of the issues and problems raised by taking a cultural approach to capitalism, I will focus on labor forms. The difference between Indian and Gujarati labor forms in Fiji is a different sort of ethnographic problem if one approaches labor as a cultural category rather than a natural one. I will argue not that labor is a human universal, the objective relation of "man" to a numinous "nature" beyond his cultural constructions, but that it exists only in a cultural world, only in the ontological field generated by capitalism itself in practice. And I will argue that the Indians and Gujaratis seek different forms of work because they combine capitalism and *bhakti* devotionism differently, that Fiji Gujaratis relate to god through capital, while the Indians relate to god through labor.

The article begins with Fiji Indian labor history and Fiji's economy, then proceeds to capitalism as a cultural system, to issues of commoditization in general, and to "commoditization of labor" in particular. Tracing the Fiji Indian and Fiji Gujarati orientations to labor historically, it leads us to two interesting and relatively overlooked episodes in the history of capitalist world markets: colonial plantation production by way of Indian indentured labor (and Gandhian resistance to it), and precolonial Gujarati merchant capitalism. The article concludes with a comment on the study of the history of capitalism in general.

## **Fiji Indian labor history and Fiji's economy**

In 1874 the British made Fiji a British colony. Between 1879 and 1916, over 60,000 South Asians were brought in to work Fiji's sugar plantations as indentured laborers, or "coolies." They called themselves *giritiyas*, from the English word "agreement" or *girit*, their name for the indenture contract. The British intended them to be a laboring class in place of the indigenous Fijians, who, for their own protection, were insulated by colonial policy from the workings of the capitalist market. At present, the Fiji Indians, including later free immigrants,

compose almost half of Fiji's population, 48 percent, to 48 percent indigenous Fijians. The official statistics do not distinguish the descendants of *girmityas* from the free immigrants and their descendants; the free immigrants from Gujarat, who came especially during the 1920s and early 1930s, and their descendants make up much less than ten percent of the Fiji Indian total.

Throughout the colonial period, Fiji Indian resistance to colonial authority and colonial organization was more effective in economic than in explicitly political arenas. The *girmityas* resisted plantation forms of labor once their indenture contracts ran out. They worked hard for money—but not for the European planters when they could help it, and often for themselves and for other Indians when they could arrange it, mostly as small-holding sugar growers on leased land. The resulting labor “shortage” drove the European planters out of the sugar business. The Indians also established their own businesses, in direct competition with the local Europeans for ownership of enterprise in Fiji's economy. In some areas of trade and in some service industries, such as land transport, Indian firms gained control of whole markets. In other areas—groceries, pharmacies, duty-free sales to tourists—European- and Indian-owned firms split markets, with the Indians controlling the major share. Other markets split more evenly between Europeans and Indians, including hardware and construction supply, construction itself, publishing, and auto sales. Most split markets have the same story: a one-time colonial European oligopoly began, in the 1920s and 1930s, to face serious Indian competition. The European firms then fought the decline in their market share by circling the wagons through mergers. In many markets, and conjoining many others, single major European-owned firms were created, bringing conglomerations of locally prestigious names into competition with aggressive Indian firms in the late colonial and postcolonial periods.<sup>2</sup>

While Fiji Europeans and Fiji Indians often competed in the same markets, their entrepreneurial strategies differed. What I will call the European colonial “first economy” was grounded in extractive, resource-oriented primary enterprises, such as sugarcane growing, copra production, and gold mining. Indian profits were and continue to be generated in trading and service industries, profits on labor and exchange. While Fiji's economy as a whole is still dominated by its primary industry, sugarcane growing, it has diversified in recent decades, and the core industries of the colonial first economy have stagnated as the international sugar and copra markets have entered a permanent structural decline with international overproduction.<sup>3</sup> This diversification is predictable enough in a world market doing the same, but its racial structure in Fiji is marked. The Indian-owned and -run share of the economy, what I will call Fiji's “second” economy, has become increasingly important, and it has been the vehicle through which some Fiji Indians have escaped the future that their colonial importers had envisioned for them all: a future of agricultural and other menial work as Fiji's laboring class. The best index of the rise of a Fiji Indian bourgeoisie was the flight, at independence in 1970, of the local Europeans, the vast majority of whom saw no future for themselves in the islands, far from the perpetual European superiority of the colonial imagination.

Even in the absence of the colonizers, Fiji's postcolonial capitalism remained racially structured, as is revealed by the 1976 Fiji census, especially its occupational profile of “economically active” Fiji citizens of all “races” in the first decade of Fiji's independence. Half of all “economically active” indigenous Fijians, as identified by the census, were in agriculture, most of them “Fijian villagers.” This special occupational category had to be added to the Fiji census code, which otherwise followed an internationally approved set of categories, the “International Standard Industrial Classification” (ISIC). These villagers had no regular “jobs” and earned no regular cash income from productive activity. Thirty-eight percent of Indians were in agriculture, all with a money income, most “self-employed” cane growers. Now as then, very few of such growers own their land. Eighty-three percent of Fiji's land is owned in perpetuity by indigenous Fijian kin groups, a perpetual reservation established by the British just before the arrival of the Indian “labouring class” and maintained since.

Outside of agriculture, economic affairs look less unusual at first glance. Workers of all “races” were wage or salary earners, a few running their own businesses. However, many sectors of Fiji’s economy were, and still are, racially specific in labor, ownership, or both. Labor statistics are easier to come by. For example, the 1976 census reports that 82 percent of those employed in land transport but only 13 percent of those employed in water transport were Indian. Fiji’s Indians ran and still run land transport, construction, wholesale and retail trade, and they were and are disproportionately employed in professions and professional services: medicine, law, accounting, banking, and so forth. Long before the coups of 1987, indigenous Fijians were overrepresented as labor in many “public sector” enclaves, and they often became part-owners of resorts and other enterprises requiring political patronage. They were and are also favored in postcolonial European corporations, especially in the visible jobs at resorts and in tourist-oriented businesses. But aside from small-scale agricultural cooperatives, few private companies of any kind are wholly owned by indigenous Fijians. Since independence, indigenous Fijian chiefs have controlled Fiji’s government, except for a few days of ambiguity in 1977 and for a four-week period between the 1987 elections and the first coup. But apart from their land reserves, indigenous Fijians own relatively little in Fiji. In 1987, the two coups returned the indigenous chiefs to political power, disrupted and depressed Fiji’s economy, and intensified the racial distinctions in Fiji’s social and economic structure, but they have yet to change indigenous Fijians’ economic roles.<sup>4</sup> Local European and multinational corporations still vie with Fiji Indian firms for ownership of most of Fiji’s capitalist enterprises.

Both the Indians and the Gujaratis were part of the “second,” Indian-owned economy, but they had and still have different roles. The immigrants from Gujarat came to Fiji primarily to open their own shops and businesses. The Indians, after they fled the plantations, became independent sugar growers of a sort, their income suspended between the land rents they paid to indigenous Fijians for three- to twelve-acre plots and the prices they received for the cane they grew. The size of their plots and the rents were fixed by the government; the prices for the cane were set by the local sugar refining monopoly corporation, the Australia-based Colonial Sugar Refining Company. Since the end of indenture in 1920, *giritiya*-descended Indians, unsatisfied with the terms and incomes of this cane growing, have forced changes in the organization of the sugar industry. The company’s power to set the price for cane has been restricted, both by the sugar growers’ unions and by increasing organization of the world sugar market. Even so, with falling profits for the industry overall, the Indians have left sugarcane growing in increasing numbers in each generation. By the 1976 census, only 38 percent of the Indians were still agriculturalists. The Fiji Gujaratis however are still, as they were upon their arrival, overwhelmingly a community of shopkeepers and businesspeople.

Starting in 1924, Fiji law required the registration of businesses. Statistics on Fiji Indian business registrations between 1924 and 1945, compiled by Prasad (1978:263), reveal a difference between Indian and Gujarati businesses. Although the Gujaratis were a tiny fragment of the whole Fiji Indian population, they registered 153 of the 156 Indian tailor/drapper businesses, 35 of the 45 jewelry businesses, 22 of the 23 laundries, and all 13 of the bootmakers. Gujaratis registered 298 of the total of 557 Fiji Indian businesses. But Indians registered nine construction companies, Gujaratis only one; Indians registered 52 transport or taxis businesses, Gujaratis only two; and Indian Muslims opened all ten Fiji Indian butcheries. The Indians also dominated other service businesses, such as photography, film distribution, and auto servicing. Both groups registered many “general merchant” businesses—Gujaratis 50, Indians 69, Punjabi free immigrants 18—but the Gujarati merchants clustered in the bigger towns and cities and came to dominate urban Fiji Indian commerce. Multinational trading and manufacturing companies have been launched from within Fiji’s “second,” Fiji Indian-owned economy, all of them Gujarati-owned, some now grossing tens of millions of dollars a year.

The difference between the position of the Indians and that of the Gujaratis in Fiji’s second economy can largely be explained by the intense commitment of the Gujaratis to their restricted

pattern of economic enterprise, a commitment and restriction still enduring into the 1990s. Table 1 details statistically an example cited to me in 1985 by Fiji Indians, both Indians and Gujaratis, to explain their different work patterns. The hardware business is a bastion of Gujarati firms, its market a competition between their firms and the remaining consolidation of European-owned firms, Morris Hedstrom Builders Merchants (along with two major Indian Muslim-owned firms). In contrast, the construction firms supplied by these hardware vendors are European- and Indian-owned. While the Gujarati firms have entered the hardware field and compete aggressively within it, none has entered construction.

The logic to the pattern is simple. The paradigmatic Fiji Gujarati business is one operating out of a controlled space, buying and selling commodities with a limited commitment in warranty or service. Long-term service work in subordination to particular client/employers—such as on-site construction work—is avoided, as perhaps is the sale of items with significant warranty commitments, such as automobiles. The perfect commodities to sell, such as groceries, garments, or duty-free luxury goods, have limited warranties and a high turnover.

As striking as the restrictions on this pattern is the commitment of the Fiji Gujarati community to it. According to informants, as many as 80 percent of Fiji Gujarati men work as this sort of shopkeeper. Many who study to qualify for other types of work return to shopkeeping—I knew one man who had tried life as a civil servant before becoming a video shop owner and another man who had been a chemist with the sugar company before joining the family garment business. Informants report that many of the Fiji Gujaratis who go on to advanced degrees do so in fields, such as law and accounting, explicitly chosen to meet needs of the family business. Further, they report that when someone takes employment outside the family, especially in a

Table 1. Suva-area hardware and construction companies.

Hardware <sup>a</sup>				
Company	Ownership			Comments
	European	Indian	Gujarati	
Morris Hedstrom Builders Merchants	X			
H. P. Kasabia Bros.			X	Kubhar
G. B. Hari & Co.			X	Darji
Popular Furniture		X		Muslim
Suncourt Hardware			X	Darji
Vinod Patel & Co.			X	Patel
Gulam Mohammed & Sons (Fiji)		X		Muslim
Smaller hardware vendors		5		all Hindu
Smaller hardware vendors			2	one Patel, one caste unknown

  

Construction				
Company	Ownership			Comments
	European	Indian	Gujarati	
Bidesi & Sons		X		Hindu
J. S. Hill & Associate	X			
Marlows	X			
Moidean & Govind Construction		X		Muslim and Hindu
Narain Construction Co.		X		Hindu
PDC & Allied Enterprises	X			
Raghwan Construction Co.		X		Hindu
Reddy-Fletcher Contractors	X	X		Hindu
Reddy Construction Co. <sup>b</sup>		X		Hindu
Smaller construction companies		13		all Hindu

<sup>a</sup>This table is compiled from business directories and interviews. In the top section, the castes of Gujarati owners are listed under "Comments"; in both sections, the religions of Indian owners are listed.

<sup>b</sup>The same man is owner of Reddy Construction Co. and part-owner of Reddy-Fletcher Contractors.

European-owned company, it is often to “learn the business” in order to later open a concern in competition with that of the former employer. Indeed, it is said that many Gujarati businesses in new fields were founded in this way.

In short, while the Indians have entered many sorts of work to avoid exploitative and denigrating plantation labor, the Gujaratis seek specifically to run their own businesses dealing in commodities. The Fiji Gujarati pattern is paradoxical: seeking out opportunities to deal in commodities, they resist the commoditization of their own labor.

## **a cultural approach to capitalism**

Fiji also poses a larger puzzle about capitalism and “religion.” The indigenous Fijians were loyal colonial subjects and quick converts to Christianity, but they resisted and continue to resist commodity forms and money logic (see Rutz 1987; Toren 1989). In contrast, the Fiji Indians resisted colonial authority and Christian missions, but were and are readily capitalistic. The forms of indigenous Fijian Christianity, and the complexities and contradictions in indigenous Fijians’ attitudes toward markets, commodities, labor, and money, are outside the scope of this article.<sup>5</sup> But I will argue that Fiji Indian forms of Hinduism are relevant to their capitalism. The Fiji Indians, both Indian and Gujarati, are mostly Hindus, though the Indians, irremediably polluted by indenture, are Hindus without caste. Both groups identify closely with their own particular versions of *bhakti*, or devotional Hinduism, and as we will see, not only does their devotionalism contribute to their capitalism, but the differences between Indian and Gujarati devotionalism are closely related to the differences between Indian and Gujarati capitalism.

Social scientists, including anthropologists, tend to treat “religion” differently than “economics,” perhaps seeing a distinction between values and facts, or, like Durkheim, between the sacred and the profane, between ritual and praxis. But are the problems in understanding the historical process of conversion to Christianity, or resistance to it, really different in kind from the problems in understanding the historical encroachment of capitalist markets, the encroachment of the world system?

If we reconsider Western economic history, possibly not. In *The Great Transformation*, Karl Polanyi shows vividly that capitalism was accelerated in Europe by a discourse. The rapid and massively exploitative extension of marketplace rules over social relationships in 19th-century Europe was the consequence of the elite’s conversion to a belief in *laissez-faire* and the political freeing of markets, a “veritable faith” Polanyi calls “the liberal creed” (1957:135). Keith Tribe (1978) also finds this industrial revolution to have been an inscription of a new discourse, a discourse he calls not the liberal creed but “Classical Political Economy.” By either name, what Max Weber imagined as a material force—a “secularizing influence of wealth” (1958:174) that eroded the faith of Europe’s earlier Protestant “sober bourgeoisie”—might be seen instead as a new faith, a faith in laws of nature governing people beyond and beneath their moral pretensions. Europe’s capitalist explosion might then reflect not material influences but the influence of a materialist ontology. Thus, we might question the hegemonic ideology of our time, the supposition that economic facts and relationships are specially and differently real. Rather than granting a material nature to capitalist relations, let us see what we find if we look for cultural forms to capitalist substances.

The search for a cultural system in capitalism, for a system of forms with a grammar by which agents operate on and with the forms, is related to an old project in sociology, Simmel’s attempt to “construct a new storey beneath historical materialism” (1978:56). Simmel sought a new, deeper level at which “these economic forms themselves are recognized as the result of more profound valuations and currents of psychological, even metaphysical preconditions” (1978:56).<sup>6</sup> Here I will inquire into two basic operations in the grammar of capitalism—what I will call “objectification” and “uniscalar valuation.”

What makes it possible to compare a newspaper and a pair of socks, a cup of coffee in a restaurant and a night in a motel, a phone call to New York and an hour of unskilled labor? All six are objects, regardless of their material substance. The pair of socks has a unity beneath its duality, the newspaper a unity beneath its plurality of leaves; the others have clear boundaries despite their immateriality. Capitalism is a world of objects, an ontological field created by agents capable of discerning the discrete and objective character of the most complex, fluid, and even immaterial phenomena. Second, the objects so discerned in the ontological field of capitalism are measurable against one another on a single, quantifiable scale—uniscalar valuation.

Noncapitalist peoples unable to recognize and manipulate the “objects” generated by these operations have often been reported on by travelers and early ethnographers concerned about their “irrationality” (though in this century such peoples have clearly become harder to find). In capitalist eyes such value constructions are “natural”—or “objective,” to use another descriptive figure that asserts but also masks its connection with the particular ontology involved. Note how culturally specific a type of “value” is the value of objects reckoned on a quantified scale and how different this type of value is from linguistic value as theorized by the structuralists. The value of a commodity is hardly the sum of all the things which it is not. As a type of value, commodity value enables (and later requires) a particular evaluative perspective toward worldly forms, the objects it creates. The grammar of capitalism makes it possible to enquire into the value of any thing. Histories of capitalist practice then make it necessary.

We live, then, in a world of valuable things, and we produce and consume more of them than other societies do. Our surplus is not just a surplus of bundles of material substances. The power of the West is probably better defined by highly valuable things of all levels of immateriality—copyrights and trademarks, licenses and networks, educational degrees and research centers, corporate headquarters, owned and controlled information of many sorts. The general name for the things, material and immaterial, that constitute capitalism, for the forms created by the operations of objectification and uniscalar valuation, is “commodity.” The historical process by which the significance of commodities in a social system grows, the process by which their power to define the ontological field increases, has been called by Keith Hart (1982) and others “commoditization.”

Histories of commoditization involve the reconfiguration of many substances, events, and relations into things with objective value and then into commodities transacted for their objective value. One could trace, for example, the strange history of the limited commoditization of land, food, and many kinds of services for indigenous Fijians through Fiji’s colonial period (see France 1969; Rutz 1987; Toren 1989). However, most critical to histories of commoditization is commoditization of labor, the creation of objects in a class called labor with a value comparable to other commodity values. These labor commodities are objectifications of human activity, put onto markets, bought, and sold with the same currency used to transact other commodities. Obviously, this objectification and new valuation of human activity have had a radical impact on human relationships, creating in most capitalist systems two basic classes, those who sell their labor and those who buy it. But in the political-economic literature there is great confusion about the nature of labor itself.

## **the birth of labor**

In both “bourgeois” and “Marxist” or “critical” political-economic theory, one finds teleologies focused on concepts of human nature. The inadequacies of Adam Smith’s conception of man’s bartering nature were laid bare by Marx’s criticism; Marx revealed the naiveté of Smith’s *post festum* supposition that commodities were universal and natural, and he emphasized the historical character of the commodity form (1976[1867]:168). But in Marx’s historical materi-

alism, there is a tension between the materialism and the historical sensitivity. A materialist metaphysics underlies all historical realities and possibilities. In this sense Marx too created an "economic man," a man always defined through his labor, conceived as the state of his relations with nature. Marx writes, in chapter 7 of *Capital*, that "labour is, first of all, a process between man and nature, a process by which man, through his own actions, mediates, regulates and controls the metabolism between himself and nature" (1976[1867]:283). In the same chapter, he explains more fully:

The labour process, as we have just presented it in its simple and abstract elements, is purposeful activity aimed at the production of use-values. It is an appropriation of what exists in nature for the requirements of man. It is the universal condition for the metabolic interaction [*Stoffwechsel*] between man and nature, the everlasting nature-imposed condition of human existence, and it is therefore independent of every form of that existence, or rather it is common to all forms of society in which human beings live. We did not, therefore, have to present the worker in his relationship with the other workers; it was enough to present man and his labour on one side, nature and its materials on the other. [1976(1867):290]

The appropriation of use-values is also, to Marx, universally a "production" of such values, because the materials of nature are made to suit human desires. The activity in production is specifically separate from the rest of human activity because productive activity, labor, always has an object, and that object is to make objects. The making of objects is imagined as the universal nature of labor; history is made up simply of different systems of object-productive relations and processes. "It is not what is made but how, and by what instruments of labour, that distinguishes different economic epochs" (1976[1867]:286). Note the ambiguity, then, in the next passage, crucial to Marx's "labor theory of value," an ambiguity that enables the object of labor to be always an object, a "product," a product whose essence and value are therefore, naturally, objectified labor:

In the labour process, therefore, man's activity, *via* the instruments of labour, effects an alteration in the object of labor which was intended from the outset. The process is extinguished in the product. The product of the process is a use-value, a piece of natural material adapted to human needs by means of a change in its form. Labour has become bound up in its object: labour has been objectified, the object has been worked on. What on the side of the worker appeared in the form of unrest [*Unruhe*] now appears, on the side of the product, in the form of being [*Sein*], as a fixed, immobile characteristic. The worker has spun, the product is a spinning. [1976(1867):287]

But is it the object of all humanity to make objects? Does all humanity inhabit a world of things known as separately made, and thus valuable, according to the activity employed in giving them form? Or is this metaphysic only a definition of a type of activity in a particular, socially constituted ontological field? In Marx's view, labor is a universal process, universally objectified in its (universally concrete, discrete, material) objects. Since capitalism best realizes this form of value in its system of exchange, Marx viewed capitalism as historically inevitable, and we can understand the teleology in his view of history. All other systems are seen as incomplete realizations of capitalism and its system of value founded on units of real labor.

To see the problem as it enters contemporary ethnographic discussion,<sup>8</sup> consider Eric Wolf's explanation of the emergence of capitalism: "For Marx, the capitalist mode came into being when monetary wealth was enabled to buy labor power. This specific capability is not an inherent attribute of wealth as such; it develops historically" (1982:77). This is, indeed, a description of the increasing reach of commoditization and the development of a labor market. But Wolf goes on: "Labor power is not in itself a commodity created in order to be offered for sale in a market. It is an attribute of human beings, a capability of *Homo Sapiens*" (1982:77).

I argue the opposite. What reason is there to identify so-called subsistence activity in general with activity organized for the efficient production of commodities for sale? In Marxist discussions, the forms of capitalism are consistently smuggled into the descriptions of other practices. Scholars find earlier "stages" in an evolution and alternative "modes of production" in which putative laborers "own" their "means of production." Even subsistence activity is imagined as a sort of commodity production, regardless of the fact that no objects are fashioned for sale in

markets. In a projection of ownership, a capitalist form of relation to objects, these putative laborers are imagined to own the object-products of their purported labor, imagined also to own their own labor itself.

The classic criticism of this universalization and naturalization of labor is Simmel's critique of the labor theory of value: that Marx seeks in labor all the characteristics of money. For labor to be the ground of value in capitalism, it must have the characteristics of the token of value, money—quantifiability, uniformity, scalar character. Marx tries to find monetary qualities in "abstract labor" by finding time units intrinsic to natural labor. To Marx, abstract labor is realized only in capitalism, because exchange relations cause all labor forms to be reduced to what they have in common: time units. But this premise ignores the basic nonuniformity of concrete activity, as opposed to the already commoditized, and thus abstracted, object known as labor. The labor theory of value becomes a money theory of labor, and fails as such. But if labor is not a human universal with a money character, then what is it?

Perhaps the significance of real differences between *forms* of labor has been underappreciated. If we reject the materialist conception of labor as a historical universal, we find other observations about labor easier to understand. Le Goff begins a study of labor in medieval Europe by noting that "the documents from the early Middle Ages are silent as to labor and laborers" (1980:72). He shows that the clerics had an ideology of the value of manual labor for their own spiritual development (note, a value not quantifiable), that craftsmen and artisanal techniques existed, and that the 9th century saw a resurgence of the Indo-European tripartite organization of society into "men of prayer," "men of war," and "men of labor." In South Asian *dharmashastra* (treatises on duty, law, and natural order) the three-part scheme became four- or five-fold, with the role of men of labor redistributed among the Vaishyas (producers of wealth—farmers, merchants, artisans), the Shudras (servants), and the Untouchables (unclean people, doers of unclean tasks). The functions of classes of people were not forms of labor but *dharmas*, the duties and destinies, natural and moral, of types of people. It was the political economists who discovered labor in everyone's activities. In the same move they gave everyone's activity the same general form: in the political-economic universe, the production of valuable objects becomes everyone's *dharma*. In this Procrustean bed, not only is there a distortion of those human activities not productive of commodities, but the specificities of particular forms of labor are made secondary to the general phenomenon. Then Wallerstein and others come to imagine this universe as a system with a logic as tight and inexorable as that of a structural-functionalist ethnography, only here the system covers the world and is oriented toward the reproduction of capital, not social harmony. So, for example, indentured labor is a phenomenon of one location in the system, slavery is a phenomenon of another, more peripheral one, and time-wages are characteristic of the conditions of the core. But is history so neat? Or did other systems influence the particular deployments of capitalist grammar in history? Did racist evolutionary views of other societies, for example, influence the vision of what was possible in the non-Western parts of the world? Did they shape slavery and indentured labor?

Many world-system scholars make sharp distinctions between mercantile, or merchant, capitalism—a precapitalist phase—and real capitalism. The point of transformation is almost always wage labor in European factories, the end of the teleology, the final historical emergence of labor's true money form. As Sidney Mintz points out, however, Marx himself had difficulty in assessing earlier, slavery-based organizations of commodity production. The colonial plantations, not the factories in Europe, were the first large-scale, industrially organized, and European-owned enterprises of commodity production for world markets—world markets that they, not Europe's factories, reorganized to Europe's favor and profit. Mintz quotes Marx:

Direct slavery is as much the pivot of our industrialism today as machinery, credit, etc. Without slavery, no cotton; without cotton, no modern industry. Slavery has given their value to the colonies; the colonies have created world trade; world trade is the necessary condition of large-scale machine industry. Before the traffic in Negroes began, the colonies only supplied the Old World with very few products and made

no visible change in the face of the earth. Thus slavery is an economic category of the highest importance. [1985:66]

However, Marx was unable to reconcile the notion of the slave as a commodity with his abstract notion of labor in general in capitalism, elsewhere describing the plantation owners as capitalists but “anomalies within a world market based on free labour” (quoted in Mintz 1985:59).

Could it be that slavery, indentured labor, wage labor, and various other labor arrangements—salaried labor, professional services, and so on—are not resolvable into one commodity form, but are different forms? Could such species of labor be historical products not of the commoditization of labor but of the commoditization of human activity into different labor commodity forms? Was the birth of quantified labor commodities the realization that activity could itself be objectified, bought, and sold in various forms, to be employed in the production of valuable objects for sale in money markets?

Let us return to Fiji.

### **from indenture to the service businesses: the Indians**

Frantz Fanon is famous for the generalization that race comes before class in colonial social formations (1963:38–40). But the proposition, while evident, is difficult to reconcile with a theory of colonial economics. As we return to Fiji I will begin with race and class in the early colonial days and with the origin of the first form of labor for Indians in Fiji: indenture.

Tinker (1974) shows that the indenture systems with Indian coolies were a direct extension of plantation slave-labor production systems, organized on estates with lines, overseers, tasks, work gangs, and so on. Whereas in the Caribbean and elsewhere indentured Indian coolies were literally moved into lines inhabited years before by African slaves, in Fiji they were brought in where no slaves had worked. Plantations were built from scratch; the plantation model was chosen from among many options as the one best fitting the project of the European adventurers settling in Fiji.

The organizing principle of the plantation is not a relation between capitalist and productive laborer but a relation between an estate owner and his productive *land*. Keith Tribe (1978) has shown that the supposition that *land* is the source of profit and productive potential was once dominant in English and other European discourse. It was an organizing theme of the colonial productive project, the plantation production which was the first large-scale “industrial” production undertaken by Europeans. And in the colonial world, hopes for wealth and profit from land survived long after the rise of factory industry and profits from wage labor in Europe itself.<sup>9</sup>

The settlers who came to Fiji during and after the cotton boom of the 1860s were entrepreneurial throwbacks. Many turned to agriculture in Fiji after failing to make their fortunes in a gold rush in Australia, hoping in Fiji at least to be the “first comers,” to find virgin land to exploit (Young 1984). However, they needed labor in order to gather the bounty of the land, and in Fiji as in many other colonies the indigenous population could not be worked without jeopardizing their acceptance of colonial rule. When faced with the same problem centuries earlier, other colonies had brought in slaves. In this social formation, the organizing principle was *not* that of one class buying labor from another class selling it, a social field determined by a market relation between people. It was based on one group owning, the other owned. The slaves, far from being partners in social transactions, were themselves commodities only. Further, the colonials had a term for these groups, the owning and the owned. They were different “races” of people, not of the same social substance. As members of a different race the slaves were a different type of human, things objectified.

Thus race came before class as an organizing principle of European systems of industrial production. Commoditization of human activity began, in European industrial systems at least,

as commoditization of total human beings. But in the 19th century slavery was abolished as a result of the rise of the “liberal creed” of political-economic analysis and its notion of an economic man universal in human nature. The colonial world faced a crisis in its productive organization, a crisis resolved in many colonies with indentured labor. Long before Fiji was colonized, colonial plantation economies were refitted with indentured labor, especially from India and China, and in the British Empire especially from India. The first governor of Fiji brought Indian indentured laborers there five years after the colony was founded, long after Indian indentured labor systems had been established elsewhere in the empire. He had personal experience of the system from his time as governor in Trinidad and Mauritius.

However, if indentured labor was useful enough to advertise itself to Fiji’s new governor, it was founded upon a contradiction in social valuations, a contradiction in effect between the class-based conception of labor of the metropole and the race-based social formations of the colonies. In India, indentured labor recruiting operated through a self-contradictory synthesis typical of *raj law*, which employed British legal forms where stipulated by Imperial law and where convenient and which justified departures from those forms by appeals to native character and local custom. In India of the 19th century and earlier, the rents and taxes associated with land commoditized for tax purposes changed debt relations and led many rural Indians to seek employment that offered a money income. In some areas agriculture shifted into agricultural production; crops were shifted to those that could be sold for cash. Younger sons and others without access to land sought work with a money income, and many were recruited for labor on plantations both within and outside India.

The systems for the recruitment and indenturing of plantation labor varied from place to place. Fiji’s system was in many ways at the slavelike extreme.<sup>10</sup> But the indentured labor systems also had common features. Workers were paid by the task and were not paid if the day’s task was not completed to the satisfaction of the overseer. The contract bound the worker to a tenure of years as an indentured laborer, and penal sanctions could be invoked if the laborer refused to work, left the plantation, or simply failed to complete his or her work. The worker had no control over the terms of employment, which included where he or she would work and where he or she would live for the term of indenture. Finally, in Fiji at least, employers used the rhetoric of ownership concerning their coolies. The European planters would frequently remind the *girmityias*, “For five years you belong to me” (see Ali 1979; Sanadhya In press [1914]).

Organizing this system was a racial notion, that a coolie was a different type of person, with different capabilities and different needs, fit for tropical manual labor and a laborer’s way of life for which Europeans were biologically unsuited. The system was self-contradictory because it was based on a contract, a social transaction between two parties, yet in operation and in the social arrangements of the plantation colony it denied the social nature of the arrangement and regarded the coolie virtually as property of the planter. In outcome, then, the system had the same efficiency problem as slave labor—the labor had no incentive to work—with the added complication that discipline was a formal, jural matter. Even when the coolies were routinely convicted on their overseers’ word, they had their days in court. Violent labor confrontations, and the sexual abuse of coolie women, brought the collapse of the system, and it ended in 1920 (see Kelly 1990).

If indenture collapsed because of contradictions in its structure, the history of its collapse is also relevant to us. Indenture ended, finally, because of mass agitation against it in India, because of criticism and protest on the grounds that it exploited and polluted the Indians. The anti-indenture protest was one of the first protest movements of Indian nationalism to involve a truly mass public in India. Gandhi began his social contemplations and *satyagraha*, “insistence on the truth,” protest efforts working for former indentured laborers and other overseas Indians in South Africa. As the anti-indenture protest advanced in India itself, Fiji became a focus of attention. Gandhi sent his friend the Rev. C. F. Andrews to Fiji, and the stories told by

Fiji Indians who had returned to India generated public fury. More important for this article, analysis of indentured labor as a labor form and concern about labor forms in general became part of Indian nationalist discourse, especially in Gandhi's influential interpretations.

The majority of Fiji Indians chose to stay in Fiji after the end of their indenture and after indenture itself was abolished.<sup>11</sup> But the first form of their labor in Fiji created ambiguities about their social nature and citizenship there. The Fiji Europeans were primarily oriented to Fiji as a *land* to develop for their own advantage, and to the "savage" indigenous Fijians, for whom they undertook a patronizing and protective civilizing project (see Kaplan 1989; Kelly 1988c, 1989). The Indians, brought in explicitly to be a laboring class, were regarded as intruders out of place when they demanded entry into Fiji's nascent civil society, a piece that did not fit into the social framework of the Fiji of the colonial imagination. Yet in legal fact the Indians were subjects of the Crown, with rights as individuals once their indenture contracts expired. Enormous conflicts over voting rights and land-owning rights followed. "Common roll" voting was never granted to the Fiji Indians, and for the protection of indigenous Fijians the reservation of 83 percent of Fiji's land, once thought temporary, was made permanent. Since the Europeans already controlled most of the rest of the land (as freehold and as Crown holdings), the Fiji Indians were made, and remain, virtually landless.

In this context the political and social categories of the Fiji Indian community developed in articulation with nationalist ideology in India, especially in Gandhi's redaction. Gandhi accepted capitalism, its forms and grammar, including labor commodity forms, as part of this world (if also decrying them, and this world, as *Kali Yug*, the most degenerate age). However, Gandhi also interpreted labor in general as a devotional reality, as part of the essential relationship between a devotee (*bhakta*) and god:

The law, that to live man must work, first came home to me upon reading Tolstoy's writing on "bread labour" [also from reading Ruskin]. The divine law, that man must earn his bread by labouring with his own hands, was first stressed by a Russian writer named T. M. Bondaref. . . . In my view the same principle has been set forth in the third chapter of the Gita, where we are told, that he who eats without offering sacrifice eats stolen food. Sacrifice here can only mean bread labour. [1957a:66]

Gandhi saw labor as a requirement of natural law, borrowing explicitly from European discourses (albeit utopian pastoralist ones) about humanity and nature. But he connected labor to the Bhagavad Gita 3.9–3.15, a passage which explains that only sacrificial action is exempt from *karma*, binding and polluting consequences. People and sacrifice were created together, and if people serve gods through sacrifice, gods will serve people in return. Therefore, those who eat only what is left over after sacrifice are cleansed of all taints, while those who cook for themselves alone "eat filth" and pollute themselves. Gandhi thus identified labor with a kind of sacrificial or ritual action that "originates from the *brahman* of the Veda" (Bhagavad Gita 3.15 [van Buitenen 1981]), a kind of action basic to the devotional relationship between the self (soul, *atman*) and god. If we take *bhakti*, or devotional Hinduism, to be, like capitalism, a cultural system with its own forms and grammar, we find here a particular merging of the grammar of capitalism with the grammar of *bhakti* devotionalism. The central operation of *bhakti* grammar might be called "realization," a search for divine form in self and world. How to find the divine? Gandhi saw labor itself as a means and a path, labor as a divine service.

Gandhi mobilized the Bhagavad Gita's theory of disinterested action for his nationalist revolutionary program. He saw the problem with European capitalists (and India's colonial rulers in particular) as greed and exploitation, anxiousness to appropriate for themselves the fruits of labor, both their own labor and the labor of others. He argued that in fact, people are not lords of creation, even of their own product, but rather servants of god's creation. Only through service and selflessness can people come to realize that their self (*atman*) is also divine, participating in a divine unity of all creation. He argued:

Hinduism excludes all exploitation. There is no limit whatever to the measure of sacrifice that one may make in order to realize this oneness with all life, but certainly the immensity of the ideal sets a limit to

your wants. That, you will see, is the antithesis of the position of modern civilization, which says, "Increase your wants." . . . On the contrary Hinduism rules out indulgence and multiplication of wants as these hamper one's growth to the ultimate identity with the Universal self. [1950:39–40]

Gandhi's synthesis of capitalist and devotionalist forms and principles led him to propose a radical reorganization of political-economic logic. He argued that if all people did so-called bread labor for themselves, then money and property of all forms could be taken as vehicles of public interest and welfare, all property in effect becoming a public trust. He felt that individuals for themselves, and people collectively, would have to transform these economic forms in their attitudes toward them, in the way they worked and dealt with money. In concrete terms, he argued that workers could transform their places of employment by their attitudes toward them:

You must consider every labourer an equal with you and as your blood-brother. If you reach that state, you will at once understand what a great power you can be for your own good and for the good of the country. . . .

If you will only think a little, you will find that, by reason of your being employed as labourers in any individual concern, you become part-proprietors of that concern precisely as are those who invest money in that concern. Labour as a matter of fact, is as much money as metallic coin. If some put their money in any particular concern, you put your labour in it. Just as without money your labour would be useless, so also all the money in the world would be perfectly useless without labour. [1957b:59–60]

Thus he advised laborers that they were, in fact, co-owners of their enterprises of employ (just as each was, in fact, a self [*atman*] participating in the divine [*brahman*]). However, their attitude might prevent them from *realizing* this reality, and a change in attitude could make it real. In other words, to phrase it in terms of political-economic discourse, labor is not alienated except when the worker shares the presuppositions of the appropriative capitalist. In the Gandhian view, sale of labor does not per se create a worker alienated from his own activity or its product. Precisely *because* labor is an object with a money value, it is an investment in the enterprise, and the worker can realize and assert rights as a co-owner.

The Gandhian vision of labor as service, self-sacrifice, and investment had its impact on Fiji almost as soon as it was articulated. As the nationalist agitation in India brought the indenture system to an end, Fiji Indians read Indian nationalist newspapers and pamphlets and sought and gained leaders out of the nationalist ranks. A barrister named Manilal came to Fiji with Gandhi's blessings in 1912, responding to a call for help that Fiji Indians had published in an Indian nationalist newspaper. By 1920 he and his wife had been deported for their role in organizing a strike. A self-described Gandhian who called himself Sadhu Bashisht Muni arrived in Fiji in 1920 and within months had become the leader of a much larger and longer strike, a strike that shut down the Fiji sugar industry for most of a growing season. The strike concerned not only the wages of labor but labor relations in general: the Sadhu called for increased Indian self-discipline and self-respect and for a nonviolent boycott of all European employers. He demanded an agreement to pay Indians the same wages as Europeans and led the Indians to seek self-sufficiency as an alternative until such an agreement could be reached. The impact of the strike on Fiji's relations of production was radical. Resisting the "agitation," Fiji's dominant cane miller, the Colonial Sugar Refining Company, lowered prices on key commodities rather than raising Indian farmers' wages, and the government deported the Sadhu. But with the government's blessing, the sugar company gave way to Indian preferences on the basic issues of labor organization, vastly expanding an experimental policy that made Indians cane planters and contractors. With increasing government assistance, Indians were helped to gain small-holdings on lease from the company or directly from indigenous Fijian landowners. The Indians were hardly independent of European capital or control. But within five years of the end of indenture, Fiji's white sugar planters were out of business. In 1922, Indian officials toured Fiji to investigate the situation of Fiji Indians and, they wrote in their report, "Wherever we have gone we have been welcomed with cries of '*Mahatma Gandhi ki jai*,' a piquant experience for a deputation from the Government of India" (quoted in Gillion 1977:56).<sup>12</sup>

From the 1921 strike onward Fiji politics in large became a confrontation between Indians asserting that they were part of Fiji, co-owners of its economy, and others in Fiji minimizing and denying the Indians' local place, seeking simply to buy their labor as an alienated commodity. The labor unions of the Indians, their most successful political vehicles, were explicitly founded as vehicles for advancing Gandhian truths, and they used Gandhian tropes of selflessness, service, and communal self-realization and uplift to articulate their cause. Insofar as they could, the rural Indians withdrew from the colonial economy and society, using credit accounts with their own (Indian and Gujarati) storekeepers rather than European banks and continually renegotiating the rules of cane production with the Colonial Sugar Refining Company. There were definite limits on the degree to which the Indians could realize themselves as owners of their own labor and its product. Most of the growers were deeply in debt to the company, and in the cities, where many went as leasehold areas filled and rural prospects shrank, most of the available employment entailed working for Europeans on their terms. Work was readily available, however, in the types of employment for which Europeans felt themselves unsuited. The Indians, descendants of the indentured laborers, not only filled the available spaces working for Europeans as servants, clerks, menials, and outdoor laborers, but also sought ways to work as independent servants owning their labor while providing it. Jobs as car drivers were followed early on by jobs as independent cab drivers and then by ownership of Indian transport companies. Further, the Indians did not simply seek employment independent of Europeans, forms of "labor" in which they were, in colonial legal terms, the owners of their activity. Their relations with the colonial Europeans were more complex, and a matter of continuing difficulty for both sides. Indians attached prestige to jobs in civil service and to other white-collar forms of work, such as clerking for public and private European concerns. They assimilated themselves to the British colonial employment status hierarchy, which ranked public over private as well as white- over blue-collar jobs. But the Europeans were explicitly worried about allowing an Indian middle class to form, and they sought to limit both particular careers and the spread of English-language education in the Fiji Indian community generally. Partly because of the struggle to create a larger place for themselves in the colony's public life, the Indians accorded great prestige to the white-collar Indians who were autonomous, especially the barristers from India who could act independently and forcefully in the colonial public world. Many of these barristers came to Fiji with law degrees in hand, explicitly to work "selflessly" to advance the Fiji Indian community as a whole.

Through their history in this century, the Indians in Fiji have developed an etiquette of selfless service and a politics of self-sacrifice. In both rural and urban settings, "big men" (*bada admi*) demonstrate their standing by means of carefully calculated public gifts (*dan*) and the sponsorship of appropriate religious and social events. The Indians' sense of wealth and its implications contrasts sharply with the Gujaratis'. Many rich Indians apologize for their wealth and justify it with references to family needs and charitable plans. An ethic of "tender egalitarianism," as Brenneis (1984) has termed it, pervades Indian social life. This century has posed many dilemmas for these indenture-descended Indians of Fiji, tests of their commitment to the idea of labor as selfless service and their demand for equity in social relations. World War II, in particular, was a communal crisis. While demanding loyalty and service, the British again refused to grant the Indians equal wages and treatment. In political campaigns during the war, candidates claimed and vied to be the "Gandhi of Fiji" as they proposed different strategies for dealing with the Fiji Europeans. Despite the efforts of a locally born cane grower to show that he sought less for himself and sacrificed more, the victor was A. D. Patel—another barrister sent by Gandhi to Fiji—and his version of noncooperation. Under Patel's leadership the Indians withdrew from the war effort and, in protest over the low, fixed wartime price, even refused to cut sugarcane, engendering an enmity that still endures among Fiji's other "races." The ethics and politics of the case are still, on occasion, debated; A. D. Patel led the Indians until his death during the negotiations for Fiji's independence.

The history of Fiji Indian devotional and capitalist practice is diverse and complex. But there are also some general themes. I have tried here to introduce one such theme and some of the complexities in the ways Indians adapted and used the Gandhian theory of selfless service and sacrifice in their relations of production and of race in Fiji.<sup>13</sup> Remolded by events and reformulated in debates and controversies, an ethic of labor as a sacrifice and a religious duty and an etiquette of selfless service have oriented Indian practice in Fiji. One version of this theory of labor was explained to me in 1985, again as an interpretation of the Bhagavad Gita, by a young Indian executive I knew well. Here is his comment, in a conversation about the powers of prayer, as recorded in my notes the same day: “An hour, half or even half of half an hour is good for prayer in *Kali Yug* [this corrupt age]. But the main thing is *karma yoga* as in the Gita. Work is Worship. Do your duty 100%. This is the most faithful Hinduism for a householder.” Before reading the Bhagavad Gita, he explained, he had liked to test god and hadn’t really believed in religion; he had known “formulas only.” When he read the Gita, his real faith and practice began. In this conversation and in several others over the course of our friendship, this man used the Gita and this version of *karma yoga* to explain the moral structure of his life. He experienced, in his own reading of the Gita, an interpretation of work, self, and god that had oriented Fiji’s Indians for most of this century.

### **the Fiji Gujaratis and the legacy of merchant capitalism**

The Fiji Gujaratis came to Fiji as free immigrants during and after the indenture period, until, in the mid-1930s, Fiji’s colonial government sharply limited their entry. To recall, they were and are still a community of shopkeepers, notorious for their work ethic, for their long hours of work, and for their total commitment to their large, small, and sometimes very small businesses. Fiji Gujarati businesspeople will buy labor and engage in production, especially in the larger-scale grocery and garment businesses, when they see an advantage. But they are oriented to profit in exchange, not in production. And while dealing readily in commodities, they refuse to commoditize their labor in any form. To explain their style of capitalism, I begin at a point earlier in capitalism’s history than we have yet gone, with the capitalism that existed before Europe was a major player, before Europe’s colonial era. I turn to questions about “merchant capitalism” in Asia.

When the British conquered and colonized India they increased the penetration of commodity forms into the rural Indian social fabric, commoditizing land for taxation. But markets of scale and market commodities of many sorts were known in India and elsewhere in Asia long before the Europeans themselves were. On the Indian coast, and especially in Gujarat, trading centers were part of the world’s major trading network of the time, a network stretching from the Middle East in the west to Indonesian and Chinese ports in the east. This was the world of commerce that awed Marco Polo; the search for access to its commodities triggered European exploration and conquest.

Sweeping models seek to capture the logic of this commercial—should we call it capitalist?—world, models ranging from Marx’s Asiatic mode of production, in which tribute superseded trade, to constructions of a general type of “Asian merchant,” such as Geertz’s model (1963), in which Asian merchants obtained profits by bargaining, in a competition between buyer and seller, as opposed to Western or “modern” merchants, who obtain profits in a competition between sellers. Recent studies (Braudel 1982; Chaudhuri 1985; Curtin 1984; Haynes 1987; Pearson 1976; Perlin 1983; Rudner 1987) make it clear that major trading networks emanated from coastal South Asia, especially Gujarat, with large-scale capital investments and far-strewn branch agencies and with merchant guilds (*mahajan*) acting as their own political and legal masters. However, much remains unclear about the structure of commodity markets and commodity forms, especially when it comes to the relations between the com-

mercial masters and the producers, that is, the organization of productive activity. And one cannot confidently trace the whole social history from the 15th-century *mahajan* merchants to the large-scale 19th- and 20th-century diaspora of Gujarati merchants, nor can one judge the directness with which the latter international merchant network is descended from the former.

The connection that is clear is at the level of ethic. A cultural construction of a *bania*, or “merchant,” project connects, through colonial vicissitudes, the contemporary overseas Gujarati businessman with the Gujarat of the 15th century, dominated by *bania* (*vania*, *vaishya*) caste and status groups. In some respects the *bania* identity, especially in British colonial situations, can be understood as a form of “pariah capitalism” (as Weber would put it), a capitalism of a far-flung community holding itself separate from its local social and political environment, relating to the locals principally through commercial manipulations. However, little about the motives of such migrating merchants is explained by the models of pariah capitalism or even merchant capitalism—motives that can be illuminated if we examine the devotional construction which is, for Vaishnava *banias* at least, the interior of the *bania* ethic.<sup>14</sup> This devotional capitalist ethic, present in the suppositions and practices of Fiji’s Gujarati shopkeepers, is perhaps most succinctly captured in a 15th-century verse by a Gujarati devotional poet, Narasinha Mehta: “Oh god, your *hundi* [promissory note] is with me. / I myself have no wealth, but I am rich.”<sup>15</sup>

A *hundi*, a note of credit backed by the *sheth* (merchant) issuing it, was the principal form of money for large-scale transactions in 15th-century Gujarat. A loan, or the capital to open a branch agency in a new trading port, would take the form of a *hundi* issued by the parent commercial agent, often literally a parent or other senior relative. To Mehta, the *hundi* could serve as a figure to express the relation of the divine reality to people. All that people had was extended to them by the divine; by themselves they had and were nothing, but on divine credit they were rich. I suggest that this connection also works in reverse, that the key to *bania* devotionism is the way in which, simultaneously, devotionism (*bhakti*) is figured commercially and commerce figured devotionally.<sup>16</sup> Here we find a new and different synthesis of *bhakti* devotionism and capitalism. If the *giritiya*-descended Indians, following Gandhi and the devotionism in nationalist ideology, relate to god through labor as selfless service and sacrifice, the Gujaratis, following a Gujarati, *bania* ethic and devotional tradition, realize their relation to god in their *capital*. Divine grace is seen in commercial success, literally in money, the token of capitalist value as it is accumulated. Money is seen as a devotional form.

I risk proposing too general a model, but at least it is a model of the Vaishnava groups adhering to a *bania* tradition and not a model of “Asian capitalism” altogether. This *bania* ethic in operation in Fiji might be described in relation to Marriott’s ethnosociology (1976). For all *bhaktas* the ideal is transformation of self, a sort of purification, ultimately to realize divine form in self, something none expect to achieve in this life. All four of the transactional strategies that Marriott associates with the four *varnas* can be found in use in one or another *bhakti* tradition in South Asia. Relevant to the practice of *banias* is the “minimal transacting” strategy associated with the *vaishya varna* (the artisan/agriculturalist/merchant *varna*, or caste grouping). Here the strategy is to protect and shield the self—to minimize negative influences, to avoid disadvantageous transactions, by maximizing one’s control over the conditions of exchange. Historically, the *vaishya* have been the quintessential manipulators and controllers of transactions, best at measuring for their own advantage and manipulating and limiting context to that end. The 15th-century *banias*, typically members of *vaishya* caste groups, used such a strategy to gain control of commodity markets; they brought it to bear in transactions in the capitalist field of quantifiably valuable objects. In the practice of the Fiji Gujaratis, the same strategy is evident in the pains taken to control commercial relationships and in the emphasis placed on owning and running one’s own business. The castes of the Fiji Gujaratis are not all *vaishya varna*. Some are higher, some lower. And unlike the Indians, who lost their caste in the pollution of indenture, the Fiji Gujaratis still organize their community in some respects—in marriage relations

to a large degree, but not in food transactions—by caste. Further, many of the Gujarati emigrants to Fiji were not merchants in Gujarat before emigration. For many, but not all, the emigration to Fiji (and elsewhere in the British Empire) was a means to leave rural life and become merchants and shopkeepers like the *baniyas*. In other words, for many if not all, the emigration project and the *bania* ethic were a selected path, and the two seem to have gone together. Once in Fiji, the goal of life for Gujarati men has been, with remarkable consistency, the establishment of an identity as an independent man of business. Even family businesses rarely survive the third generation, often breaking up into smaller firms in competition in the same field at the insistence of otherwise junior partners who wish to run their own businesses.

With god, however, the transacting is not “minimal” but “pessimist.” God is fundamental to the devotional ontology, and transactions with god are regarded differently than all other transactions. Wishing god’s grace in any form, the devotee will take whatever god offers to give—the exchange strategy associated with the lowest *shudra* castes and the strategy most associated with *bhakti* devotional movements in general. The devotional *bania* hopes that the grace of god, in the form of wealth, will flow to the devotee as a consequence of the devotee’s simultaneous openness to god and discipline in life. By controlling daily transactions one can minimize distorting and polluting influences and can keep oneself worthy of and open to divine grace. As with Weber’s Protestants, this strategy only works if one’s discipline and openness are constant. Unlike Weber’s Protestants, the *bania* does not consider all “work” the same. One’s own activity sold as labor elsewhere has become an item, a commodity, in someone else’s transactions. Such self-abandonment and loss of control over the nature and consequences of one’s own activity are appropriate only in service to god. Service to someone else is radically different, and self-limiting. While in the Gandhian view labor is necessary to self-development and labor in a capitalist enterprise is labor in service to community and god, in the *bania* view such labor is radically different from self-controlled work and service to god. In the *bania* view one serves god, and generates prosperity for family and charity for community, by developing one’s credit, the *hundi* that god is extending through grace.

This conjunction of transactional strategies, of aggressive, controlling discipline in business with open, accepting submission to god’s will, is apparent in Fiji Gujarati practice. Both historically and at present, the long work days of the Fiji Gujaratis are punctuated by prayer. The working day in almost all Fiji Gujarati shops begins, and in many also concludes, with offerings and “prayers” (recited *mantras* and salutations to the divine) at *bhagwan sthan*, or divine places established inside the shop. These *bhagwan sthan* are usually shelves or boxes containing images, both two- and three-dimensional, of divine forms. Present are both major and minor deities, almost always including Lakshmi, and living avatars, often Sai Baba. These divine places are usually located near the shop’s major store of money, its safe or cash register. The point of their vivid acknowledgment of divinity was explained when I asked Gujarati shopkeepers (in 1985) about the prayer in their shops and its relation to their work:

[Are prayers and work separate?] Everything is a prayer, an offering to god. Everything is his will.

[Success is all up to god?] We believe this. He is the one who gives and who takes away.

[Are prayers and work separate?] If prayers are said with devotion, that will be reflected in your daily work. If because of prayers you have a good frame of mind, the result will be good.

[Success is all up to god?] True, but on the other hand you must put in your full effort yourself. You should make every effort. Of course, the reward is in the hands of the Almighty. If it is not in your fate, no matter how hard you try, without blessings it is no good. That is where the cycle of *karma* comes in.

[How is this?] Like if you try your best, all, are diligent, success is not there unless there is a grace. Maybe prayers would help.

[Could you change *karma* by appealing to god?] Yes. But as Baba says, a doctor relieves pain, but the body is still there. Grace relieves problems, but *karma* is still there. Many devotees still suffer. Pray with devotion and leave the rest in the hands of god. A true *bhakta* will not ask, takes what’s given. God will give what’s best for you.

While one of the shopkeepers I knew well prayed literally to the money in the cash register, seeing it as a form of Lakshmi, neither he nor any of the others prayed in the Christian sense, making requests for anything in particular. Rather, as they put it, they were “remembering the god.” They did not pray or keep god by the cash in order to increase business. “It’s not a lightning rod for customers,” said a shopkeeper of his *bhagwan sthan*. Rather, the prayers were part of their own discipline, their efforts to make themselves purer of heart and mind, and success followed such discipline according to god’s will.

## conclusions and implications

I do not mean to imply that all Fiji Indians make solemn personal commitments to seek divine form in all things or that they are all like the young Indian executive, explaining their work in relation to the Bhagavad Gita, the Ramayan, or Sai Baba. Such people exist, but the community is varied, and many think only occasionally about the divine forms in their lives—just as it is the exceptional American who describes his or her shopping as “the pursuit of happiness,” thinks of hatred of taxes as a social theory, or views “wasted time” as a loss of money. However, cultural connections are there in all these cases. Most Americans do spend time, pursue happiness, and put the individual before society. In the same sense, in Fiji most Indians locate virtue in sacrifice and selfless service, and most Gujaratis see capital as divine favor and investment. These synthetic premises orient their capitalist practice.

In Fiji these two groups, the Gujaratis and the Indians, do not always understand each other. Despite their putative cultural similarity (one Indian informant declared, “Our gods are 95 percent the same”), the Indians join others in Fiji in accusing the Gujaratis of inordinate greed, a selfishness they contrast with the ideal of selfless service. The Gujaratis see themselves as peaceful and disciplined, and they accuse others, especially poor Indians and indigenous Fijians generally, of laziness, a lack of discipline, and polluting habits. They are proud of their economic successes, and they relate levels of income and success to levels of personal moral attainment.

Nevertheless, despite their differences, the two groups have been interdependent economically for most of this century and have together developed the second economy that established the Fiji Indians’ “place” in Fiji. The Gujaratis sold the Indians groceries, garments, and general merchandise and ran the credit network that, for the first half of the century, the Indians preferred to banks. Cooperatively (and, most would agree, to the Gujaratis’ advantage), the arrangements turned first economy wages into second economy capital. While Fiji’s economy is still heavily dependent on multinational corporations and European-owned—and, more lately, Japanese- and other Asian-owned businesses, the local economy has unquestionably been strengthened by the rise of the local Fiji Indian bourgeoisie and its enterprises. The rise of this class, in turn, was clearly a product of the two different syntheses of devotional and capitalist forms and operations.

The Gujarati synthesis dates back to a 15th-century bourgeois ethic, one that was not part of the colonial encounter with Europe at all; the *bania* version of capitalist success is about controlling transactions, an orientation to activity that is not in a labor form. In Fiji the Gujaratis will buy labor commodities when they can see a use for them, but they resist contracting to sell them, and they especially resist making their own activity, their own work, into labor and giving up control of it. The Indian synthesis, on the other hand, is cut off from the world of caste strategies for “substance-code” transactions (Marriott 1976). The Indians accept a world in which labor is a universal object, part of human nature, as in the political-economic discourses of the West, even if they also once deployed the devotional reevaluations of the Indian nationalists to contest colonial social relations and definitions.

The economic projects of the Indians and the Gujaratis in Fiji were not determined by “economic constraints,” market situations, and extant structures of economic relationship. The Gu-

jaratis would not have come to Fiji if they had not sought to live out a version of the *bania* ethic; far from the context shaping the project, the project sought the context. The former indentured Indians and their descendants need not have resisted the form of laborer status and labor arrangements imposed upon them by the colonial state. In resistance, they need not have embraced the Gandhian system, a political-economic ethic of their own, nor have countered colonial capitalism with their own capitalist enterprise. There is no way to determine, a priori, how capitalist forms and operations will articulate with other systems. Differing articulations are possible, even as we have seen here, between two given cultural systems, capitalism and *bhakti*.

Further, here the relation between capitalist world markets and Western colonial projects is more problematic than is generally realized. Most anthropological studies of colonial capitalism find a confrontation between a peripheral locality and an outside world, an outside world defined simultaneously as capitalist and as Western. But in Fiji the colonials did not introduce the Indians to capitalism or the labor market. When recruited for indenture the Indians were already looking to sell labor for money. Fiji introduced them instead to a particular form of labor, part of a particular extractive capitalist project. Fiji didn't make them capitalists—it made them coolies. Even more, the capitalist project of the Gujaratis is at least partly precolonial in its organizing principles. The world system, then, did not express and extend itself simply through European economic projects. World markets contributed to the failure, not the success, of colonial European planters in Fiji, and more lately world market conditions have fostered the stagnation of the resource-extractive colonial economy and the success of the second, Indian economy in Fiji.

What then might the history of capitalism look like? What, in particular, is its relationship to Europe? There was, evidence suggests, a bourgeoisie in 15th-century Gujarat—perhaps not a bourgeoisie in the sense of an economic class, a class buying labor in relation to a class selling labor, but still a bourgeoisie in Weber's sense, that is, a group organizing its life around profit. Centuries before Weber's Puritans, the *baniyas* of Gujarat seem to have practiced what Weber (1958) would call a "methodical rationalization of life." Like the European bourgeois Protestants, they organized the whole of life around the specifically bourgeois goal and duty of profit in all transactions. It becomes impossible to distinguish the precapitalist or noncapitalist from the capitalist, or to accept Europe as the sole author of real capitalism.

New historical problems then rise as we try to trace the grammar of capitalism through its articulations with other cultural systems—that is, as we try to trace the processes through which markets grew in importance and commodity forms remade social ontologies. In particular, we need to learn much more about the history of capitalist culture in Asia and about its encounters and entanglements there with other cultural grammars. And if, as I have tried to show, the syntheses of capitalist culture with other cultural systems cannot be predicted, then we have to study historical contexts in order to understand any capitalist system.

Further, a new problem arises for the study of the present and future of capitalism. How well do we really know capitalism's forms and operational principles? Much that we know about capitalism might really be knowledge of capitalism as entangled with European ontological presuppositions that are only contingently and historically associated with its basic forms and operations. What other capitalisms are possible? For a concrete example, is the devotional capitalism of the Fiji Gujaratis merely some kind of survival of an earlier, "merchant" stage? The Gujaratis have succeeded in Fiji, but Fiji's history alone contributes little to the question of merchant capitalism as a model. One has to consider more generally where value and profits really come from.

Marxists and many other political economists see labor as the only real source of value. Wage labor is then the labor form most productive of surplus value, as the capitalist appropriates the difference between the labor actually expended in commodity production and the wage paid for labor-power. If that is so, then overseas Gujaratis, wherever they are making their profits

without producing the commodities they sell, are really simply parasites on value created elsewhere. Their profit is not a surplus value extracted from a process producing new value but simply someone else's loss (probably their customers') in a circulation system with a zero sum. But we have noted problems with the labor theory of value, in its money theory of labor. Suppose that we neither naturalize labor nor imagine reified labor-time units as the basis of value. Then the extraction of surplus value from the wage laborer is expressible as the difference in money value between the actual product and the laborer's negotiated subsistence wage, and this extraction of surplus is no different in kind from other ongoing manipulations of relations of exchange between buyers and sellers. If capitalist profits and value are irreducibly expressed in money-form and are actually created in exchange, then things are very different. We lose the mechanistic certainties of a substantialist conception of value flows—we see value really gained and lost in a variety of ways. And we can widen our search for points of value creation and extraction and for types of exploitation.

The Fiji Gujaratis are bourgeois, but not "materialist" and not "Western." It may one day become clear that capitalism simply had a Western and materialist moment. That moment was, perhaps, a key one in the development of the grammar and its forms, the moment in which labor forms were extended through the social formation and thus the moment in which society became organized by capitalist classes. But even so, it may have been a mistake to imagine that capitalism was a European phenomenon or to think that it would always be centered there. Possibly the materialist ontologies are reflections of the real. Perhaps *bani* devotionalism, like the Protestant ethic as Weber saw it, is a transition from a constraining traditionalism to the clear light of modernity (or the even clearer light of postmodernity). If so, it is a very long transition, still ongoing after five centuries. If, instead, the "this world" of "this worldly" capitalism is a world of commodities, a socially constituted ontological field and not the "disenchanted" Newtonian space-time of a mechanistic economic nature, then the future of this world—or even its present—may not be so clearly understood. Far from being a difference-annihilating iron cage, the world system may be an awkward integration, a dialogue and contest between an increasing number of capitalist peoples.

## notes

*Acknowledgments.* This article is based on research conducted in the Fiji Islands in 1984–85. I thank the Fiji government for permission to conduct the research and the Fiji National Archives (Setariki T. Tuinaceva, Archivist) for permission to consult relevant materials. My understanding of Fiji depends upon many Fiji Indian informants, whom though I do not name I sincerely thank. This article has benefited from advice I received at various points in its development from Robert Foster, Jane Fajans, Tony Stewart, Marshall Sahlins, audiences at Mount Holyoke College and Princeton University, anonymous *American Ethnologist* reviewers, and especially Martha Kaplan.

<sup>1</sup>The literature on capitalism and cultural systems is large, beginning with cultural theory itself and extending through too many formulations to review. In recent years, scholars have focused their attention on cultural apprehensions of capitalist relations (Tambiah 1984; Taussig 1980), on the integration of semiotic with political-economic modes of analysis (Baudrillard 1981; Rossi-Landi 1983), on a reexamination of exchange relations and the things exchanged (Appadurai 1986; Gregory 1982; Parry and Bloch 1989), on theories of commoditization (Hart 1982), on capitalism as a form of discourse (Shell 1978, 1982; Tribe 1978), and even, in various forms, on theories of capitalism as a historically constituted cultural system (Agnew 1986; Gudeman 1986; Macfarlane 1987; Sahlins 1976).

<sup>2</sup>For example, by the mid-1980s Morris Hedstrom's, a merger of several European grocers and merchants including Morris, Hedstrom, and others, faced price wars with many Indian-owned grocers; it survives today in part by selling products manufactured and/or packaged in Fiji by the major Indian grocery firms. Similarly, the Fiji Times and Herald, Ltd., still publishes the nation's leading newspaper, *The Fiji Times*, but has faced competition from many Indian printing firms for other printing business. With the market shares of European firms falling since Fiji's independence, mergers and sell-outs continue. Morris Hedstrom's recently merged with Burns Philp, both already owned by an Australia-based conglomerate, Carpenter Holdings, Ltd. In 1984 the Carpenter group tried to sell both holdings to the indigenous Fijian Great Council of Chiefs. The Great Council, after borrowing money and levying contributions from indigenous Fijian kin groups to raise the capital for the purchase, opted instead to buy another old colonial corporation, Carleton Breweries.

<sup>3</sup>Consider some gross domestic product statistics. In 1950, agriculture was 44.2 percent of Fiji's total product, mining 5.3 percent. In 1981, agriculture was only 19.9 percent of the product, mining 0.1 percent. Over this time, manufacturing held a constant share of the economy as a whole, while construction, transport, and the like rose from 8.4 percent in 1950 to 19.7 percent in 1981. Most decisively, over this time the product ratio of agriculture to trade shifted dramatically toward trade. By 1981 the proportions were almost equal, with trade accounting for 16.1 percent of Fiji's product.

<sup>4</sup>The coups were explicitly intended to promote indigenous Fijian welfare and have intensified the disproportionate use of public resources for the benefit of indigenous Fijians, but this was always a feature of Fiji's system, even before independence. Since the coups, some of the larger Gujarati firms have begun to relocate, and professionally skilled Indians have been leaving Fiji in large numbers. But even before the coups, Fiji Gujarati firms had been going multinational and Fiji Indians apprehensive about their future in the islands had been emigrating up to their quota limits to New Zealand, Australia, Canada, Britain, and the United States. Since the coups, efforts to promote indigenous Fijian entrepreneurs have been renewed by such groups as the U.S. Peace Corps, but the results remain to be seen.

<sup>5</sup>There have been many attempts to explain the difficulties indigenous Fijians have with money, "development," and capitalism in general (see, for example, Belshaw 1964; Fisk 1970; France 1969). Their Christian conversion has generally been taken for granted, but see Sahlins (1985:37–40) and Kaplan (1990a, 1990b). Similarly, it has generally been taken for granted, in Fiji, that Indians are natural capitalists. Christian missionaries wrote at length about the special difficulties in preaching to them, owing to their sinister racial character (Burton 1910, 1912). Their resistance to colonial authority, owing to the same sinister character, was the predominant theme of colonial descriptions of them.

<sup>6</sup>One could, in this light, also reconsider the work of Sombart and of Weber, especially their efforts to delineate a "Geist" or "spirit" of capitalism and its rise. But I will not focus here on themes of hedonism or asceticism, on duties to profit or desires to consume, though both would be important in a fuller treatment of capitalist culture (cf. Baudrillard 1987; Mukerji 1983).

<sup>7</sup>This question has relevance to an important issue in social theory, though there is little space to discuss the matter here. Shouldn't anthropologists and others be wary of generalizations of the concept of production into a theory of activity or practice in general, as in theories (those of Bourdieu and Giddens, for example) of the production and reproduction of social and cultural structures? Is culture really a product of labor? Note that if it is, it must then have a specifiable quantitative value, comparable to that of other labor products and expressible in money, determined by the socially necessary labor time invested in its production. I suggest instead that values (of all sorts) are phenomena dependent on cultural grammars and that activity or practice, while always enabled by the cultural grammars that the agents deploy and extend, is not always a matter of the production of objects. To Bourdieu (1977), all of cultural history is a matter of capital, investments, and scarcity. Here these are seen as the essentials of a particular culture, capitalism.

<sup>8</sup>I am skipping over the literature on the "transformation problem" in political-economic theory, a debate over attempts to formally resolve the relations between value and price (see, for example, Bharadwaj and Schefold 1990; Meek 1973; Sraffa 1960). Most of this debate begs the questions I am asking, working out problems set not in real history but in, for example, "an extremely simple society" (Sraffa 1960:3) where commodities are produced, but only two (see also Meek 1973:xxxii–xxxiii). As when Adam Smith imagined savages trading bows and arrows for meat, Sraffa operates *post festum* and presumes the presence of the commodity form, labor for sale, and ongoing operations of objectification and scalar valuation; he is interested only in how scales of value get unified. It is not surprising, then, that Sraffa simply announces that labor arrives to his equations in standard, moneylike units of value in production (1960:10). When the "historical transformation problem" is seriously discussed, the most sophisticated analysts discover principally that the formal categories of capitalism are interconnected and that efforts to arrange them in a real historical sequence of emergence or development have failed (see, for example, Morishima and Catephores 1978:178–207). The most curious feature of the standard approaches to the transformation problem is the attempt to find labor value units existing prior to price, logically and historically. The problem is formulated as the transformation of value into price and not vice versa, despite the obvious evidence that the historical shift was from mercantile profit and investment to investment in production itself as well (cf. Morishima and Catephores 1978:194). We need a social theory that can apply to societies, people, and activities not organized by price or by this sort of value. And surely the historical transformation was from price (named in unisalar money) to value (in the classical sense of labor units), a historical emergence of valuation of human activity in money terms: the emergence of forms of activity with quantifiable value, the emergence, not the commoditization, of labor.

<sup>9</sup>The most important and extensive discourse on land as the source of value was of course that of the French Physiocrats. The point here is the ubiquity of the conception before the rise of a political economy focused on labor value, as well as its persistence in many quarters despite the great transformation in Europe. The North American frontier was another locus of interest in land as a source of value. Slotkin (1986) suggests that the frontier ideology in the United States in the 19th century was a vision of profit to be gained by conquering and exploiting new lands, leaving behind the exploitation and competition in crowded Europe.

<sup>10</sup>For some colonies, such as Ceylon, the labor recruiters came from the laborers' home region and also served as the work bosses (*sardar*). Work gangs were organized by home region or village, even by caste, and the threat of dismissal and return home was a major disciplinary tool. For Fiji, in contrast, the recruiters

stayed in India and were paid according to the number they recruited. Region of origin was ignored in labor assignments, claims of caste distinction and privilege were actively rejected, and return to India was a privilege withheld for ten years. For more detailed accounts of indenture in Fiji see Ali 1979 and 1980, Gillion 1962, and Lal 1983. For firsthand accounts see Andrews and Pearson (investigators sent by Gandhi) 1916, Sanadhya In press [1914] (a *girmitiya* autobiography), and Gill 1970 (an overseer's autobiography).

<sup>11</sup>As coolies they had lost caste and had otherwise been socially transformed during their five years of life in Fiji. Those in Fiji soon became aware that Fiji *girmitiyas* faced great difficulties on their return to India, that many were outcasted and impoverished there, that some were even pleading for a return passage to Fiji. Fiji was to be their home.

<sup>12</sup>On the 1920 and 1921 strikes and the reorganization of Fiji's sugar industry, see Ali 1980, Gillion 1977, Knapman 1987, and Moynagh 1981.

<sup>13</sup>For a more extensive discussion of Gandhian and other Indian influences on changing Fiji Indian ritual practices in this century, see Kelly 1988b.

<sup>14</sup>Certain aspects of this cultural construction are not dealt with here, among them issues related to profit as a goal, asceticism, and self-development in capitalist culture, especially for its ruling bourgeoisie, its owning class. The Fiji Gujaratis are more "methodical" in their orientation to life than are the Indians in Fiji (cf. Weber 1958); in this sense they might be thought of as more bourgeois. See Kelly 1988a.

<sup>15</sup>I thank Vishvajit Pandya for bringing this verse to my attention and for translating it from memory.

<sup>16</sup>Compare Marc Shell (1978, 1982) on commercial figures as tropes and forms for thought in European history generally.

## references cited

- Agnew, Jean-Christophe  
1986 *Worlds Apart: The Market and the Theater in Anglo-American Thought, 1550–1750*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Ali, Ahmed  
1979 *Girmit: The Indenture Experience in Fiji*. Suva: Fiji Museum.  
1980 *Plantation to Politics: Studies on Fiji Indians*. Suva: University of the South Pacific and Fiji Times and Herald.
- Andrews, Charles F., and W. W. Pearson  
1916 *Report on Indentured Labour in Fiji: An Independent Enquiry*. Calcutta: Star Printing Works.
- Appadurai, Arjun, ed.  
1986 *The Social Life of Things*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Baudrillard, Jean  
1981 *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign*. St. Louis, MO: Telos Press.  
1987 *Forget Foucault*. New York: Semiotext(e).
- Belshaw, Cyril S.  
1964 *Under the Ivi Tree: Social and Economic Growth in Rural Fiji*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Bharadwaj, Krishna, and Bertram Schefold, eds.  
1990 *Essays on Piero Sraffa: Critical Perspectives on the Revival of Classical Theory*. London: Unwin Hyman.
- Bourdieu, Pierre  
1977 *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Braudel, Ferdinand  
1982 *Wheels of Commerce*. New York: Harper.
- Brenneis, Donald  
1984 *Straight Talk and Sweet Talk: Political Discourse in an Occasionally Egalitarian Community*. In *Dangerous Words: Language and Politics in the Pacific*. Donald Brenneis and Fred R. Myers, eds. pp. 69–84. New York: New York University Press.
- Burton, John Wear  
1910 *The Fiji of To-Day*. London: Charles H. Kelly.  
1912 *The Call of the Pacific*. London: Charles H. Kelly.
- Chaudhuri, K. N.  
1985 *Trade and Civilization in the Indian Ocean*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Curtin, Philip  
1984 *Cross-Cultural Trade in World History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Fanon, Frantz  
1963 *The Wretched of the Earth*. New York: Grove Press.
- Fisk, Ernest K.  
1970 *The Political Economy of Independent Fiji*. Canberra: Australian National University Press.
- France, Peter  
1969 *The Charter of the Land*. Melbourne: Oxford University Press.

- Gandhi, Mohandas K.  
 1950 *Hindu Dharma*. Ahmedabad, India: Navajivan Publishing House.  
 1957a *Economic and Industrial Life and Relations*. Vol. 1. Ahmedabad, India: Navajivan Publishing House.  
 1957b *Economic and Industrial Life and Relations*. Vol. 3. Ahmedabad, India: Navajivan Publishing House.
- Geertz, Clifford  
 1963 *Peddlers and Princes*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Gill, Walter  
 1970 *Turn North-East at the Tombstone*. Adelaide: Rigby.
- Gillion, Kenneth L.  
 1962 *Fiji's Indian Migrants*. Melbourne: Oxford University Press.  
 1977 *The Fiji Indians: Challenge to European Dominance 1920–1946*. Canberra: Australian National University Press.
- Gregory, Chris A.  
 1982 *Gifts and Commodities*. London: Academic Press.
- Gudeman, Stephen  
 1986 *Economics as Culture: Models and Metaphors of Livelihood*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Hart, Keith  
 1982 *On Commoditization*. In *From Craft to Industry: The Ethnography of Proto-Industrial Cloth Production*. Esther Goody, ed. pp. 38–49. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Haynes, Douglas E.  
 1987 *From Tribute to Philanthropy: The Politics of Gift Giving in a Western Indian City*. *Journal of Asian Studies* 46:339–360.
- Kaplan, Martha  
 1989 *The “Dangerous and Disaffected Native” in Fiji: British Colonial Constructions of the Tuka Movement*. *Social Analysis* 26:20–43.  
 1990a *Christianity, People of the Land, and Chiefs, in Fiji*. In *Christianity in Oceania*. Association for Social Anthropology in Oceania Monograph no. 12. John Barker, ed. pp. 189–207. Lanham, MD: University Press of America.  
 1990b *Meaning, Agency and Colonial History: Navosavakadua and the Tuka Movement in Fiji*. *American Ethnologist* 17:3–22.
- Kelly, John D.  
 1988a *Bhakti and the Spirit of Capitalism: The Ontology of the Indians of Fiji*. Ph.D. dissertation. Anthropology Department, University of Chicago.  
 1988b *From Holi to Diwali in Fiji: An Essay on Ritual and History*. *Man* (n.s.) 23:40–55.  
 1988c *The Fiji Indians and Political Discourse in Fiji: From the Pacific Romance to the Coups*. *Journal of Historical Sociology* 1:399–422.  
 1989 *Fear of Culture: British Regulation of Indian Marriage in Post-Indenture Fiji*. *Ethnohistory* 36:372–391.  
 1990 *Discourse about Sexuality and the End of Indenture in Fiji: The Making of Counter-Hegemonic Discourse*. *History and Anthropology* 5(1):19–61.
- Knapman, Bruce  
 1987 *Fiji's Economic History, 1874–1939*. Pacific Research Monograph no. 15. Canberra: Australian National University.
- Lal, Brij V.  
 1983 *Girmitiyas: The Origins of the Fiji Indians*. Canberra: Journal of Pacific History.
- Le Goff, Jacques  
 1980 *Time, Work and Culture in the Middle Ages*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Macfarlane, Alan  
 1987 *The Culture of Capitalism*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Marriott, McKim  
 1976 *Hindu Transactions: Diversity without Dualism*. In *Transaction and Meaning*. Bruce Kapferer, ed. pp. 109–142. Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues.
- Marx, Karl  
 1976[1867] *Capital*. Vol. 1. New York: Vintage Books.
- Meek, Ronald L.  
 1973 *Studies in the Labor Theory of Value*. 2nd ed. New York: Monthly Review Press.
- Mintz, Sidney W.  
 1985 *Sweetness and Power*. New York: Viking.
- Morishima, Michio, and George Catephores  
 1978 *Value, Exploitation and Growth: Marx in the Light of Modern Economic Theory*. London: McGraw-Hill.
- Moynagh, Michael  
 1981 *Brown or White? A History of the Fiji Sugar Industry, 1873–1973*. Canberra: Australian National University Press.
- Mukerji, Chandra  
 1983 *From Graven Images: Patterns of Modern Materialism*. New York: Columbia University Press.

- Parry, Jonathan, and Maurice Bloch, eds.  
 1989 *Money and the Morality of Exchange*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Pearson, Michael N.  
 1976 *Merchants and Rulers in Gujarat: The Response to the Portuguese in the Sixteenth Century*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Perlin, Frank  
 1983 Proto-Industrialization and Pre-Colonial South Asia. *Past and Present* 98:30–95.
- Polanyi, Karl  
 1957 *The Great Transformation*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Prasad, Kamal Kant  
 1978 *The Gujaratis of Fiji, 1900–1945: A Study of an Indian Immigrant Trader Community*. Ph.D. dissertation. University of British Columbia.
- Rossi-Landi, Ferruccio  
 1983 *Language as Work and Trade*. South Hadley, MA: Bergin and Garvey.
- Rudner, David  
 1987 Religious Giving and Inland Commerce in Seventeenth-Century South India. *Journal of Asian Studies* 46:361–379.
- Rutz, Henry  
 1987 Capitalizing on Culture: Moral Ironies in Urban Fiji. *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 29:533–557.
- Sahlins, Marshall  
 1976 *Culture and Practical Reason*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.  
 1985 *Islands of History*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Sanadhya, Totaram  
 In press [1914] *My Twenty-One Years in the Fiji Islands*. Uttra Singh and John D. Kelly, trans. Suva: Fiji Museum.
- Shell, Marc  
 1978 *The Economy of Literature*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.  
 1982 *Money, Language, and Thought*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Simmel, Georg  
 1978 *The Philosophy of Money*. Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Slotkin, Richard  
 1986 *The Fatal Environment: The Myth of the Frontier in the Age of Industrialization 1800–1890*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press.
- Sraffa, Piero  
 1960 *Production of Commodities by Means of Commodities*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Tambiah, Stanley J.  
 1984 *The Buddhist Saints of the Forest and the Cult of Amulets*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Taussig, Michael T.  
 1980 *The Devil and Commodity Fetishism in South America*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- Tinker, Hugh  
 1974 *A New System of Slavery*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Toren, Christina  
 1989 Drinking Cash: The Purification of Money through Ceremonial Exchange in Fiji. In *Money and the Morality of Exchange*. J. Parry and M. Bloch, eds. pp. 142–164. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Tribe, Keith  
 1978 *Land, Labour, and Economic Discourse*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- van Buitenen, Johannes A. B., trans.  
 1981 *The Bhagavadgita in the Mahabharata*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Weber, Max  
 1958 *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.
- Wolf, Eric  
 1982 *Europe and the People without History*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Young, John  
 1984 *Adventurous Spirits*. St. Lucia, Australia: University of Queensland Press.

submitted 11 April 1988  
 revised version submitted 14 February 1990  
 second revised version submitted 7 June 1990  
 accepted 18 August 1990