The administration of Indian indenture in the British Empire.
A global network, 1833-1920

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Overview

The general aim of the project is to describe administrative networks in the field of Indian indenture in the British Empire. Within nearly 100 years around 1,3 million labourers were transferred from India to 13 colonies throughout five different continents. Although many studies address the working and the social conditions of this labour system while focusing on the question if indenture is the successor of slavery or not (most recently: Kumar 2017), this research shifts its focus on the administrative network behind indenture. The term "network" is omnipresent in the field of colonial history; however, the studies usually lack both an analysis and visualization (Marx 2016). Contrary to those, this thesis links the career paths of all 309 governmental employees who worked in the administration of Indian indenture between 1833 and 1920.
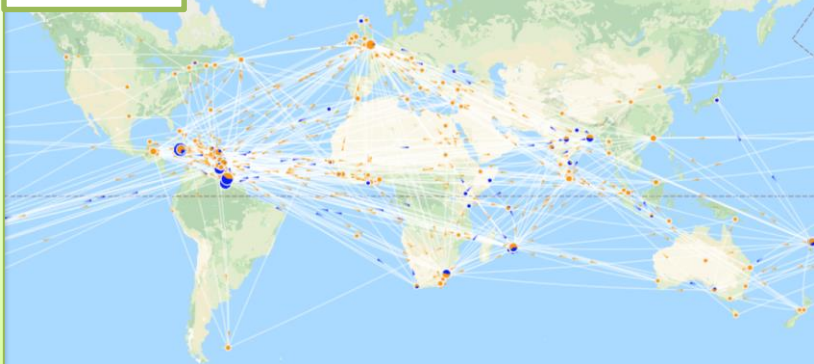
Research Questions

1. Who worked in the field of Indian indenture and who created the laws and guidelines for the planters and for the Indian indentured labourers?
2. How was the structure of power in and between different departments, the governor and the plantation owners?
3. Were the employees transfered between colonies or did they usually stay at the same place?
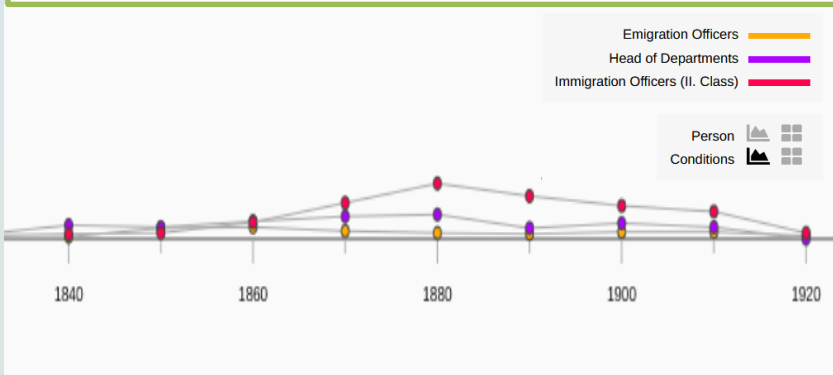4. How did the adaption and transfer of knowledge work?

Method

1. Identifying the parts of the administration
   - I. Employees of the Immigration Departments
   - II. Governors
   - II. Emigration Officers

2. Extracting the careers of all 309 governmental employees from the COL and the BB

3. Implementing the results in *nodegoat*

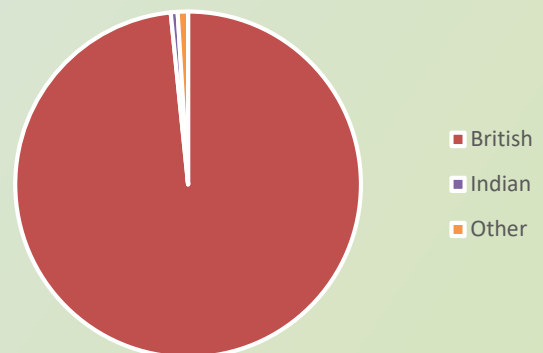4. Analysing the created spatial and temporal network

Outcomes

Figure 1: The administration of Indian Indenture, 1833-1920

Number of Administration Officers, 1833-1920

Emigration Officers
Head of Departments
Immigration Officers (II. Class)

Person
Conditions

1840 1860 1880 1900 1920

Nationalities in the Administration

- British
- Indian
- Other

First Results

- The network of administration in the British Empire linked the colonies, departments and individual biographies
- Head of Departments and Governors were highly mobile in a global scale while minor officers stayed mostly in the same colony
- Although the administrated people were indentured labourers, none of the 309 people were a former indentured Indian and the vast majority of the administration was British
- The most officers in the immigration department worked between 1876 and 1884, although their number never exceeded 86 employees. This small number of people were in charge of up to 150.000 indentured Indians at the same time.

Literature

Bree, Pim van & Geert Kessels. 2013. nodegoat: a web-based data management, network analysis & visualisation environment. Accessed December 30, 2020. http://nodegoat.net from LAB1100: http://lab1100.com.
Kumar, Ashutosh. 2017. Coolies of the Empire: Indentured Indians in the Sugar Colonies, 1830-1920. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Marx, Christian. 2016. „Forschungsüberblick zur Historischen Netzwerkforschung. Zwischen Analysekategorie und Metapher." in: Handbuch Historische Netzwerkforschung. Grundlagen und Anwendungen, edited by Marten Düring et al., 63-84. Berlin: Lit Verlag.