

KOMAGATA MARU REVISITED: “Hindus,” Hookworm, and the Guise of Public Health Protection

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BETWEEN MAY AND JULY 1914, Canadian Department of Immigration officials prevented most of the SS *Komagata Maru*'s 376 South Asian passengers from landing in Vancouver. Although this action was challenged in court, the British Columbia Court of Appeal upheld the decision and affirmed the validity of the newly reinstated orders-in-council P.C. 23, P.C. 24, and P.C. 897, the three acts of legislation maintaining South Asian exclusion.¹ The Canadian naval ship HMCS *Rainbow* escorted the *Komagata Maru* from Canada on 23 July. This article offers a new perspective on this much discussed incident by studying what Erika Lee terms “law at its bottom fringes,” and it broadly addresses Tony Ballantyne’s recent call for revisionist scholarship on the early South Asian immigrant experience.² Drawing upon a previously unexplored government file on South Asian immi-

¹ P.C. 1914-23 stipulated that immigrants arrive in Canada by “continuous journey” from their country of birth and/or nationality, and P.C. 1914-24 ordered that Asian immigrants, except those whose entry was governed by other legislation (Chinese and Japanese nationals), have two hundred dollars in their possession upon arrival. These January 1914 orders-in-council replaced P.C. 920 and P.C. 926 of 1910, which were updated versions of the original orders-in-council P.C. 920 and P.C. 926 of January 1908. P.C. 1913-897 of 31 March 1914 is discussed later.

² Building upon the important work of Hugh Johnston and others, Radhika Mongia explores the incident in the context of the Canadian passport system, Ali Kazimi provides a detailed analysis of key events and actors in the affair, and a chapter in Renisa Mawani’s forthcoming book highlights the role of other legal frameworks in the incident. See Hugh Johnston, *The Voyage of the Komagata Maru* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979); Radhika Mongia, “Race, Nationality, Mobility: A History of the Passport,” *Public Culture* 11, 3 (1999): 527-55; Ali Kazimi, *Undesirables: White Canada and the Komagata Maru – An Illustrated History* (Toronto: Douglas and McIntyre, 2012); and Renisa Mawani, “Law and Migration across the Pacific: Narrating the *Komagata Maru* Outside and Beyond the Nation,” in *Thinking Inside/Outside the Nation*, ed. Adele Perry, Karen Dubinsky, and Henry Yu (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, forthcoming). Missing from these accounts is a discussion of how the guise of public health protection shaped official policy on South Asian immigration. See also Erika Lee, *At America’s Gates: Chinese Immigration during the Exclusion Era, 1882-1943* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 11; Tony Ballantyne, *Between Colonialism and Diaspora: Sikh Cultural Formations in an Imperial World* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 83.

gration, it shows for the first time how Canadian officials secretly initiated unprecedented health screening for South Asian arrivals in 1912 and, in anticipation of the arrival of the *Komagata Maru*, prepared a contingency plan to test for the curable disease of hookworm, a bacterial parasite that affects the small intestine and causes lethargy and anemia but that was not formally classified as a contagious or loathsome disease under the Immigration Act.

Approximately five thousand first-wave South Asian immigrants landed in British Columbia between 1904 and 1907, joining close to thirty-five thousand Chinese and Japanese settlers in the province. Soon after, labour leaders, politicians, and other Asian exclusionists began to view the new arrivals, who were mostly Sikhs from the Punjab, as competitors for white labour. The exclusionists argued that immigrants from India were unsuited to Canada's climate and suffered from medical conditions and diseases that were specifically attributable to their race. These ideas were initially subsets of a larger argument that South Asians were unassimilable because they accepted a lower standard of living, had caste prejudices, spoke a foreign language, and were potential anti-imperial activists who would fight for Indian independence. Quickly, however, the climate and disease arguments took on lives of their own and became key components of the argument against further immigration from India. For example, in late 1906, Victoria's Trades and Labour Congress resolved that Indians posed "a constant danger" to public health because they carried "bubonic plague, smallpox, Asiatic Cholera and the worst forms of venereal diseases."³

In January 1908, shortly after a major anti-Asian riot in Vancouver, Prime Minister Wilfrid Laurier introduced an order-in-council (P.C. 920) barring immigrants who had not arrived in Canada by continuous journey from their land of birth or citizenship, along with a second order-in-council (P.C. 926) requiring that Asian arrivals possess at least two hundred dollars upon entry to Canada.⁴ Since it was impossible for residents of India to travel to Canada without changing ship in Japan or Hong Kong, this provision cleverly excluded South Asians

³ Three hundred and eighty-seven South Asian immigrants arrived in the 1905-06 season, followed by 2,124 in 1906-07, and 2,623 in 1907-08. See Joseph Pope to Martin Burrell, "Draft Minute on Asiatic Immigration," 22 January 1912, Library and Archives Canada (hereafter LAC), RG 25, vol. 1118, file 66-1912; Secretary F. Grey, Victoria Trades and Labour Congress to W.D. Scott, 15 October 1906, LAC, RG (Record Group) 76, vol. 384, file 536999, pt. 1.

⁴ Government of Canada, P.C. 920, 8 January 1908, which prohibited immigrants who did not arrive in Canada by continuous journey from the land of their birth or citizenship, and P.C. 926, 3 June 1908, which effectively added a two-hundred-dollar requirement to all Asians except Chinese and Japanese.

without naming them specifically and thus exacerbating anti-Imperial political tensions in India. After Deputy Minister of Labour William Lyon Mackenzie King reported on the situation in British Columbia, Dominion officials explored the possibility of transferring BC's South Asian population to British Honduras, but community representatives objected to the plan.⁵

Newly arrived immigrants from Asia already faced closer medical scrutiny and a greater probability of detention than Europeans. Between 1881 and 1904, most vessels from Asia, and many from San Francisco, underwent primary inspection at William Head quarantine station on an isolated headland near Victoria before proceeding to their destination. However, 1905 legislation allowed vessels from US Pacific coast ports to skip this step, and, while the quarantine station would continue to operate on a reduced scale for another five decades, by 1910 improved mainland port inspection facilities also allowed most vessels from Asia to proceed directly to Vancouver and Victoria. The small number of Europeans travelling on these vessels in steerage, and passengers in first- and second-class, generally passed inspection on the day of their arrival, but medical inspectors detained Asians at least twenty-four hours for observation because, as one inspector at Vancouver explained in 1910, "the crowded condition of the Asiatic steerage" and "the susceptibility of Asiatics" to trachoma, a contagious eye infection, necessitated extra time in detention "before the medical inspection [could] be satisfactorily completed." This additional level of inspection included checking for trachoma by flipping back the eyelid. In 1906, the superintendent of Vancouver's immigrant detention hospital reported to Ottawa that "*Genuine cases of Trachoma are not so frequent [among South Asians] as among the Chinese or Japs,*" yet inspectors at BC ports attempted to reject as many South Asians as possible for medical reasons, especially after the summer of 1907, when A.S. Munro, medical inspector at Vancouver, gave South Asian arrivals a "rigid physical examination" on Minister of the Interior Frank Oliver's orders.⁶

In British Columbia, as in the American Pacific coast states, all Asian groups encountered widespread levels of resistance and hostility.

⁵ For a discussion of King's post-riot investigation, see John Price, "'Orienting' the Empire: Mackenzie King and the Aftermath of the 1907 Race Riots," *BC Studies* 156/157 (2007-08): 53-81.

⁶ Linda M. Ambrose, "Quarantine in Question: The 1913 Investigation at William Head, BC," *Canadian Bulletin of Medical History* 22, 1 (2005): 143-45; J.H. MacGill to W.D. Scott, 30 September 1910, 1; Robert McKechnie, Superintendent Detention Hospital, to W.D. Scott, 9 December 1906, 2. Emphasis in original. The last two references are both in LAC, RG 76, vol. 306, file 281230 Vancouver, pt. 1. See also A.S. Munro to Frank Oliver, 14 September 1907, LAC, RG 76, vol. 384, file 536999, pt. 1.

As Patricia E. Roy and others have shown, virulent and sustained anti-Asian activism throughout British Columbia had brought about a prohibitive Chinese head tax in 1885 (increased in 1900 and 1903), and immigration from Japan was governed by a 1907 “gentleman’s agreement” under which Japan limited immigration to Canada by restricting the granting of passports to its citizens. India’s colonial status, and the continued association of South Asians with disease, situated popular and official discourse on the “Hindu” issue at the unique crossroads of colonial theory and what Alan Kraut has termed “medicalized nativism,” which occurs when an ethnic group’s stigmatic “association with disease in the minds of the native born” reduces each immigrant from “a whole and usual person to a tainted, discounted one.”⁷ In the period immediately preceding the *Komagata Maru* affair, the popularly theorized link between South Asians and disease dominated discourse on BC’s “Hindu problem” and became a convenient tool for exclusionists in both the government and among the general public.

In 1910, Department of Immigration officials began developing a dossier that is an invaluable source of documents pertaining to public health issues of South Asian immigration in Canada. Frank Oliver, Liberal minister of the interior under Laurier until 1911, originally opened it to monitor the American response to US Public Health Service physician M.W. Glover’s September 1910 discovery that many South Asian arrivals at California’s Angel Island Quarantine Station had hookworm.⁸ As historians Joan Jensen and Nayan Shah have shown, American immigration officials subsequently used hookworm testing to facilitate what Jensen calls a policy of South Asian “executive restriction” – a stringent, often questionable interpretation of immigration legislation – before Congress finally legislated South Asian exclusion in 1917. However, as Oliver’s file demonstrates, Glover’s discovery also had an important impact in Canada, where government officials, like their American counterparts, eagerly seized upon and implemented Glover’s findings at Pacific ports. For Oliver and for the Canadian medical inspectors at BC’s ports, the American discovery of hookworm in South Asian immigrants confirmed a key tenet of early twentieth-century tropical medicine, which Alexandra

⁷ See Patricia E. Roy, *A White Man’s Province: BC Politicians and Chinese and Japanese Immigrants, 1858-1914* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1989); Alan Kraut, *Silent Travelers: Germs, Genes and the “Immigrant Menace”* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 3.

⁸ The file “Prevalence of Hook Worm among Hindus Applying for Admission to US and among the Negroes (Blacks) of the US” is housed in LAC, RG 76, vol. 584, file 820636.

Stern explains was “deeply connected to the production of colonial and racial difference.”⁹

Shortly after Glover released his findings from Angel Island, Oliver ordered Canadian border agents to reject any prospective immigrants of South Asian origin with hookworm coming from the United States.¹⁰ When P.H. Bryce, chief medical officer of the Department of Immigration, visited the Pacific coast a year later, G.L. Milne, the department’s immigration inspector in Victoria, recommended a more formalized inspection policy to check for the disease. However, after leaving the coast, Bryce learned that hookworm could only be transmitted through direct exposure to infected fecal matter, something that was unlikely in North America and thus appeared to be questionable grounds for rejection. Yet, since South Asian legislative exclusion in Canada meant that Canadian inspectors had not yet had the opportunity to test South Asians for the disease, he was insistent that Canada should verify that any future South Asian arrivals did not have hookworm. He thus permitted Milne to order a microscope and other equipment for the “careful examination of the bowel contents in Hindus or other immigrants whom you may deem suspicious.”¹¹

There the matter rested until April 1912, when William Charles Hopkinson, the department’s immigration agent responsible for political surveillance of the province’s South Asian population, received information that three to four hundred South Asians were bound for BC ports on the SS *Orterio*. Since the vessel was travelling directly from India, the potential immigrants could not be legally prevented from landing. In a telegram to Deputy Minister of the Interior W.W. Cory, Hopkinson suggested that medical examiners at Vancouver and Victoria “confidentially” test the *Orterio*’s South Asians for hookworm as this had proved “effective” in barring hundreds of South Asians at US ports. Cory approved and ordered “a special Medical inspection” to ensure that all were “carefully examined,” though not without the following proviso:

⁹ See Joan Jensen, *Passage from India: Asian American Immigrants in North America* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1988), 113; and Nayan Shah, *Contagious Divides: Epidemics and Race in San Francisco’s Chinatown* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 190. Given its import, it is therefore surprising the file has not even been mentioned in the historiography, while the subject of hookworm has also been completely overlooked in the narrative of South Asian immigration to Canada. See Alexandra Stern, *Eugenic Nation: Faults and Frontiers of Better Breeding in Modern America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 46-47.

¹⁰ *Victoria Times*, 17 October 1910; Frank Oliver to W.D. Scott, 18 October 1910, LAC, RG 76, vol. 584, file 820636.

¹¹ G.L. Milne to P.H. Bryce, 14 November 1911, and P.H. Bryce to G.L. Milne, 28 December 1911, 1-2, LAC, RG 76, vol. 584, file 820636. Emphasis in original.

“It is important that this matter should be kept private.”¹² Immigration superintendent W.D. Scott’s instructions to Milne and Malcolm J. Reid, immigration inspector at Vancouver, made it clear that this order was to apply only to South Asians. His terse telegram read: “Request Medical Inspector examine Hindu passengers ‘Orterio’ specially for hookworm. This is *confidential*.” A week later, it transpired that the *Orterio* carried no South Asians.¹³ Still Bryce went out of his way to find Milne a “first-class” microscope to use in future cases of South Asian immigration.¹⁴

According to historian Nayan Shah, the use of “biopolitical techniques” like the hookworm test gave medical inspectors, for the first time, the ability to “extend the boundaries of the human body beyond its epidermal container to its wastes,” to “coax ‘truth’ from the recalcitrant body and to interpret that truth.” By such means they sought to ascertain physical fitness in order to predict an immigrant’s future as “worker” and “citizen.” Early twentieth-century bacteriological testing “collapsed the identification of a parasite organism within the body with the status of being a social parasite and dependent” as those infected would presumably require state aid. Historian Amy Fairchild agrees that, at Pacific coast ports in the pre-war period, bacteriology had “both social and medical implications” as government officials argued that an immigrant’s infection would likely impair her/his potential labour productivity. Just as pathogens caused disease in healthy bodies, so diseased immigrants “infected the economic body.”¹⁵

The view of Department of Immigration officers that South Asians were diseased must be understood within the wider context of early twentieth-century conceptions of the racial theory of disease transmission. Although germ theory was developed in the 1860s and the development of bacteriology had shown that all national groups and

¹² W.C. Hopkinson to W.W. Cory, 15 April 1912; and W.W. Cory to W.D. Scott, 16 April 1912. The foregoing references are both in LAC, RG 76, vol. 384, file 536999, pt. 5. See Jensen, *Passage from India*, and Johnston, *Voyage*, for a detailed discussion of Hopkinson’s key role in South Asian immigration inspection and community surveillance before his 1914 assassination.

¹³ W.D. Scott telegrams to G.L. Milne and Malcolm J. Reid, 17 April 1912, LAC, RG 76, vol. 384, file 536999, Pt 5. Emphasis in original; G.L. Milne to W.D. Scott, 20 April 1912, LAC, RG 76, vol. 584, file 820636; M.J. Reid to W.D. Scott, 18 April 1912; M.J. Reid to W.D. Scott, 27 April 1912. The last two references are both in LAC, RG 76, vol. 384, file 536999, pt. 5.

¹⁴ P.H. Bryce, Memorandum to W.D. Scott, 14 May 1912; J.H. Chapman to P.H. Bryce, 23 May 1912; P.H. Bryce to J.H. Chapman, 28 May 1912; P.H. Bryce, Memorandum to W.D. Scott, 28 May 1912; W.D. Scott to J. Chapman, 30 May 1912. All of the foregoing references are in LAC, RG 76 vol. 584, file 820636.

¹⁵ Nayan Shah, *Stranger Intimacy: Contesting Race, Sexuality and the Law in the North American West* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 200–2; Shah, *Contagious Divides*, 180 and 196; Amy Fairchild, *Science at the Borders: Immigrant Medical Inspection and the Shaping of the Modern Industrial Labor Force* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), 39, 181–82.

social classes could catch and transmit infectious disease, colonial officials maintained the race-disease association because understandings about the “backwardness and pathology” of marginalized groups persisted. Moreover, South Asians – like Jews, Eastern Europeans, and other minority groups – fell victim to what psychiatrist and epidemiologist Morton Beiser calls the “Sick Immigrant Paradigm,” a theory popular in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, which holds that immigrants fled their homelands for North America in order to escape disease. These ideas offered convenient support for the continuing antagonism of British Columbians towards Asian and South Asian immigrants.¹⁶ Immigrant medical examination was a systemized means of subjecting the immigrant body, in Michel Foucault’s terms, to “a machinery of power that explores it, breaks it down and rearranges it.” Indeed, as Fairchild points out, “immigrants could exercise very little autonomy” between leaving their homeland and arriving at their destination.¹⁷

By 1913, British Columbia’s South Asian population had dwindled from the approximately three thousand remaining at the time of the 1911 census to fewer than twenty-five hundred.¹⁸ Yet, at summer’s end, Scott expressed his concern that P.C. 920 and P.C. 926 were insufficient controls on Canada’s South Asian community. In July, Hopkinson had informed the department that nine South Asians, five of whom were new to Canada, arrived on the SS *Sado Maru* with prepaid tickets purchased in Victoria in 1912. The five had “fully complied” with the Immigration Act by coming on tickets previously purchased in Canada, but they were detained “a day or so at the Immigration Hall with a view to a strict medical examination – more especially for ‘Hookworm.’” Yet all were landed at Victoria at the end of July. At the same time, a mistake by a Canadian immigration commissioner at Ellis Island, who had allowed eight South Asians arriving at New York to proceed to New Brunswick, indicated that a general and nationwide order-in-council was necessary to keep South Asians out of Canada. Accordingly, Scott called for a new regulation “framed in such a way that it would apply without any question.”¹⁹

¹⁶ Stern, *Eugenic Nation*, 46-47; Morton Beiser, “The Health of Immigrants and Refugees in Canada,” *Canadian Journal of Public Health* 96, 2 (2005): S30-31.

¹⁷ Fairchild, *Science at the Borders*, 15-16 and 289; Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage, 1979), 25-26, 138.

¹⁸ Census data in F.C. Blair to Sir J. Pope, 25 July 1922, LAC, RG 25, G1, vol. 1300, file 1011, FPI.

¹⁹ W.D. Scott Memorandum, 30 September 1913, 1-2; W.C. Hopkinson to W.W. Cory (confidential), 1 August 1913. Both of the foregoing are in LAC, RG 76, vol. 385, file 536999, pt. 6.

The arrival of the Japanese steamer SS *Panama Maru* at Victoria in October triggered a brief immigration crisis.²⁰ Though immigration officials rejected thirty-nine of the ship's fifty-six South Asian passengers for failing to meet the continuous journey provisions of P.C. 920, the BC Supreme Court found a technical inconsistency in the wording of the order-in-council and allowed all but five of the passengers rejected for standard medical reasons (likely trachoma) to land. The decision dominated the province's newspaper coverage for almost a month, and federal member of Parliament for Vancouver H.H. Stevens and others wondered if the vessel was the harbinger of a larger plan to circumvent the Canadian Immigration Act. What never made the papers, however, was the fact that Milne and his assistant medical inspector, H.B. Rogers, had secretly initiated non-standard fecal testing on the detained passengers for hookworm – a test previously performed only on the South Asians of the SS *Sado Maru* – and requested funds to hire a tropical disease expert.²¹

After examining a fecal sample taken from passenger Jewalla Singh, Dr. W.P. Walker of Victoria reported that there were no mature hookworms present but that he had found “numerous segmented non-opercular ova” that were “most probably” of the hookworm parasite. Walker could not be sure of these results and noted that a mature worm specimen could only be passed from the body after the patient had taken an anthelmintic solution like thymol, which he recommended administering before taking another fecal sample.²² In the end, Department of Immigration staff were unable to prove that Singh had hookworm.

See also *Ottawa Free Press*, 8 October 1913. The South Asians were admitted on 30 July 1913. See arrivals for that vessel on <http://www.ancestry.ca>.

²⁰ Johnston, *Voyage*, 20–21.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 17–21. See also G.L. Milne to W.D. Scott, 26 November 1913, LAC, RG 76, vol. 385, file 536999, pt. 8; *Vancouver Province*, 23 October 1913; *News-Advertiser*, 24 October 1913; W.C. Hopkinson, 25 October 1913; and G.L. Milne to W.D. Scott, 27 October 1913. The last two references are both in LAC, RG 76, vol. 385, file 536999, pt. 6. W.D. Scott to W.W. Cory, 28 October 1913, in RG 76, vol. 385, file 536999, pt. 6. Ministerial permission granted in W.D. Scott to G.L. Milne, 8 November 1913, in RG 76, vol. 385, file 536999, pt. 6.

²² W.D. Scott to W.W. Cory, 28 October 1913, in *Ibid.* Ministerial permission granted in W.D. Scott to G.L. Milne, 8 November 1913, in *Ibid.*; W.P. Walker, Victoria, to G.L. Milne, 18 November 1913, LAC, RG 76, vol. 584, file 820636. “Jewalla” Singh was almost certainly the thirty-five-year-old “Jowalla Singh” described in the department's passenger manifest. See “Jowalla Singh,” passenger of the SS *Panama Maru*, which arrived 17 October 1913 (see Canadian Passenger Index, <http://www.ancestry.ca>); W.H. Schultz, “A Study of the Relative Efficiency and Danger of Thymol as Compared with Certain Other Remedies Proposed for Hookworm Disease,” *Journal of the American Medical Association* 57, 14 (1911): 1102–6. See also *New York Times*, 7 October 1911. In 1911, US government pharmacologist Dr. W.H. Schultz was credited with being the first to widely publicize the effectiveness of thymol, a natural derivative of the herb thyme, in treating hookworm.

The BC Supreme Court ruling on the *Panama Maru* came only a few days after Dr. Walker submitted his initial report. The immediate release of the vessel's passengers – paired with the fact that four of the five men ordered deported for other medical reasons escaped from detention before deportation – deprived the specialist of the opportunity to re-test the patient.

It is clear that Milne opposed the Supreme Court's decision. His letter to W.D. Scott later in December offers insight into his perspective as a gatekeeper of Dominion public health, and, more important, into departmental-level policy approaches to South Asian immigration during the immediate pre-war period.²³ Milne opined: "The more I consider the question of Asiatic immigration to this coast, the more am I convinced that the only really effective restriction would be obtained by thorough examination for hookworm disease." Yet, in order to test future South Asian arrivals, Victoria's detention quarters required facilities for ensuring that passengers could be monitored during defecation. During the *Panama Maru* crisis, Milne had been unable to obtain fecal samples from most of the detainees because "the Hindus were rather rebellious, and it was rather difficult for us to segregate them." Milne's staff had secured Singh's sample only because he had been detained separately from the others while he recovered from a cold. Anthony Caminetti, the US commissioner general of immigration, had informed Milne that US authorities along the Pacific coast were now checking every Asian immigrant for hookworm and were finding the parasite in about 90 percent of cases. Milne noted that, if Canada adopted the same practice:

*I have no doubt that we would find 90% of Asiatics, & particularly Hindus, infested with this disease ... You will, therefore, see that if we were to proceed on these lines, & were able to reject 90% of these people, the object of the Gov. would be attained. The rejection of immigrants under this cause would not be followed by so much criticism by the general public; in fact, on the other hand, it would appeal to them strongly as a measure for the protection of the public health.*²⁴

Replying to Milne, Scott agreed that, "in view of the importance of the subject," Milne should continue to test South Asians for hookworm. If the parasite were found in "any" Indian immigrant, then it would be "in order to hold up every individual Hindu until his case can be

²³ *Victoria Colonist*, 28 November 1913. See P.C. 2642, 8 December 1913.

²⁴ G.L. Milne to W.D. Scott, 12 December 1913, 1-2, LAC, RG 76, vol. 584, file 820636. Emphasis in original.

decided.” Milne later sent Scott a circular on hookworm that Caminetti had recently dispatched to his immigration officials, addressing a newly released Rockefeller Sanitary Commission report, which estimated that 60 to 80 percent of India’s population had hookworm. Scott then distributed the flyers to his BC agents.²⁵

By Nayan Shah’s account, the discovery of the hookworm parasite in the stool of South Asians at Angel Island dramatically influenced inspection policies at that quarantine station. In the midst of a crisis over station management, the high rate of infection among a sample of South Asian arrivals enabled Public Health Service officials to use bacteriology as a means of “sidestepping other strategies of border control and exclusion.” Official “confidence in hookworm’s predictive value was dubious” as infection was possible in those displaying no outward symptoms of the disease. Yet inspectors at Angel Island “emphasized the unassailable expertise of the medical examiner’s diagnosis” that an immigrant with hookworm endangered public health.²⁶ BC politicians eagerly adopted these views on South Asians and hookworm as non-debatable “truth.”

In November 1913, Vancouver MP H.H. Stevens informed reporters that he planned to ask Cabinet to hire a bacteriologist to study the “many serious diseases” of Pacific coast Asians, whom he believed were “infested with several bacterial diseases,” including hookworm, which had existed in Asia for hundreds of years. Like Milne, Stevens concluded that “the health side of the Asiatic problem is just as important as the industrial, racial and social.” Yet Stevens seems to have been slow to act; after spending a month in central Canada, he told reporters that he was still planning to raise the inspection issue.²⁷

Stevens’s continued use of the disease argument demonstrates how it prevailed even in the face of contradictory evidence. In 1913, Alberta physician E.H. Lawson informed the editor of the *Victoria Colonist* that, having served as ship’s surgeon on CPR vessels during the height of Indian immigration to Canada before 1908, he had personally inspected many of the immigrants landing at British Columbia. As Lawson recalled:

²⁵ W.D. Scott to G.L. Milne and M. Reid, 7 January 1914, LAC, RG 76 vol. 584, file 820636; “Circular No. 30, Distribution of Hookworm Inspection,” 1 November 1913, 1, forwarded by Milne to Scott on 26 December 1913, LAC, RG 76 vol. 584, file 820636; Scott requested more circulars in W.D. Scott to John H. Clark, 19 December 1913, LAC, RG 76 vol. 584, file 820636.

²⁶ Shah, *Stranger Intimacy*, 200–2; Shah, *Contagious Divides*, 180.

²⁷ *Toronto Mail and Empire*, *Toronto News*, and *Montreal Gazette*, 11 November 1913; *Montreal Gazette*, 4 December 1913. By December, Stevens had unaccountably switched his focus to lung fluke.

Although at first I was strongly prejudiced against them I lost this prejudice after thousands of them had passed through my hands and I had compared them with the white steerage passengers I had seen on the Atlantic. I refer in particular to the Sikhs and I am not exaggerating in the least when I say that they were 100 per cent cleaner in their habits and freer from disease than the European steerage passengers I had come into contact with. The Sikhs impressed me as a clean, manly, honest race.

Lawson added that his recent medical work with white workers in mining camps, which were “rife” with immorality, had “increased [his] respect for the Sikhs.” He concluded that he had “not yet seen one good reason why they should not be permitted to bring their families in as freely as the European immigrants.”²⁸

A Saskatchewan farmer brought Lawson’s letter to the attention of the Prime Minister’s Office the following year. David Ross declared that western farmers urgently needed sixty thousand workers to harvest their grain crops. After hearing a rumour that more South Asians were destined to Vancouver in the wake of the *Komagata Maru* incident, he addressed Prime Minister Robert Borden: “Let western farmers sample the Sikhs, I beg of you. Let the coming ship-load of East Indians land after thorough physical inspection.” After personally seeing South Asians at work, he emphasized that “*there are no finer men in Canada to-day than the Sikhs,*” and he quoted from Lawson’s letter to show that, “in regard to their cleanliness,” most South Asians were socially suited for life in Canada.²⁹

Early in 1914, when Chief Medical Officer P.H. Bryce planned to visit British Columbia to find first-hand evidence of “Hindu hookworm,” Scott suggested this might be unnecessary as Caminetti’s circular had apprised all BC agents of the South Asian-hookworm connection. Shortly thereafter, however, Scott changed his mind on hearing that several South Asians in Yokohama were purchasing through tickets for a charter vessel that would depart for Vancouver. From the timing of this

²⁸ E.H. Lawson, MD, Highland, Alberta, letter to *Victoria Daily Colonist*, 25 September 1913. Bernard Harris shows that other physicians in this period also attempted to disprove Social Darwinist conceptions that certain immigrant groups, particularly Jews, were especially prone to disease. See Bernard Harris, “Pro-Alienism, Anti-Alienism and the Medical Profession in Late-Victorian and Edwardian Britain,” in *Race, Science and Medicine, 1700-1960*, ed. W. Ernst and B. Harris (London: Routledge, 1999), 195-96.

²⁹ David Ross to Robert Borden, 28 July 1914, 1-3, LAC, MG 26, H (Borden Papers), 1(a), vol. 40. Emphasis in original.

report and the follow-up correspondence on the matter, it is virtually certain that the vessel in question was the SS *Komagata Maru*.³⁰

Scott quickly instructed Milne to “pay special attention” while screening the incoming South Asian passengers of this vessel for hookworm. In a letter to his direct supervisor W.W. Cory, Scott stated that, in light of the “probability of a number of Hindus applying for admission to Canada at Vancouver,” he recommended the use of a specialist to “detect[t] the parasite or ova of the Hook-worm in the case of Hindus or other immigrants from India.” Scott also approved Milne’s November request for “a properly equipped place” to detain immigrants for defecation. Cory granted Scott’s suggestion to prepare the Vancouver office for the South Asians, and Scott authorized both Milne in Victoria and Inspector Malcolm J. Reid in Vancouver to hire tropical disease experts.³¹

Scott’s instructions came in spite of the recent findings of Dr. W. Bapty of BC’s Provincial Board of Health, who reported that the province had received no complaints that resident South Asians had or were spreading hookworm. Bryce made a similar report after his BC mission in March, during which he had interviewed the medical teams of both Milne and A.S. Munro (the medical inspector of immigrants at Vancouver) and consulted with a physician attached to Vancouver’s US Public Health Service branch. Repeating a sentiment he first expressed to Milne in 1911, Bryce asserted that, while hookworm infection was a serious health risk in India, where people often went barefoot and lived without proper sanitation: “It does not follow that we are to be satisfied that these are reasons why immigrants from these infected countries should be excluded from Canada unless it can be shown, that similar habits of life will be followed here and that therefore the dangers through contamination through the spread of the disease are similar.” Bryce explained that the chance of cross-infection was very low in Canada, where even “foreigners” lived more hygienically than they did in countries where hookworm was prevalent. He added that none

³⁰ W.D. Scott to P.H. Bryce, 24 January 1914; P.H. Bryce to W.D. Scott, 26 January 1914; W.D. Scott, Memo to W.W. Cory, 2 February 1914; and W.D. Scott, Memo to W.W. Cory, 19 February 1914. All of the foregoing are in LAC, RG 76, vol. 584, file 820636. (Hopkinson and Cory’s memos are described in W.D. Scott to W.W. Cory, 19 February 1914.) Hugh Johnston explains that, at this time, Gurdit Singh was soliciting passengers and securing the vessel. The vessel did pick up passengers at Yokohama. See Johnston, *Voyage*, 25, 26 and 33.

³¹ W.D. Scott, Memo to W.W. Cory, 10 February 1914, 1-2; W.D. Scott to G.L. Milne, 10 February 1914. Both of the foregoing are in LAC, RG 76, vol. 385, file 536999, pt. 8. See also W.D. Scott to M. Reid, 2 March 1914; H.E. Young to W.J. Roche, 21 February 1914. Both of the foregoing are in LAC, RG 76, vol. 584, file 820636. See also W.D. Scott to C.J. Davidson, Act. British Consulate General, Yokohama, 26 February 1914, LAC, RG 76, vol. 385, file 536999, pt. 8.

of the “prominent physicians in Vancouver and Victoria” with whom he had spoken had heard of any Asian individual with symptoms that could be “reasonably attributed to this disease,” such as sallow complexion, anemia, or abdominal tenderness.³²

Soon thereafter, the Department of Immigration reversed its policy and abandoned its plans to test the coming *Komagata Maru* passengers for hookworm. Bryce’s conclusion likely played no role in this decision as Scott still intended to seek ministerial approval for wide-scale testing a full week after the chief medical officer submitted his report. Three other factors appear to have quashed the plan. The first of these was its cost. Although Milne could collect stool from patients and do some microscopic work, he did not have the expertise to analyze the test results himself. Dr. Walker in Victoria was the natural choice for the project, but when Reid asked Walker for a quote for testing in anticipation of the *Komagata Maru*’s arrival, Walker replied that “the proposed examination of Hindu or other immigrants from India” for hookworm would cost \$2.50 per case for fifty passengers or more. At \$2.50 for each of the vessel’s 376 passengers, the cost would be almost \$1,000, close to what W.C. Hopkinson earned in an entire year.³³

Walker may have inadvertently given the Department of Immigration a second reason to back off the hookworm strategy. In conversation with Reid, he admitted that passengers could cheat the hookworm test by taking an initial dose of thymol while still en route from Asia. Since, in his estimation, the timing of the dose would flush out worms and allow hookworm ova to cling to the intestine in a later test, an immigrant with a severe infection could disguise his or her condition.³⁴ There is insufficient evidence to prove the influence of this point on policy – especially since the presence of the ova alone was insufficient grounds to prove hookworm infection – but a third factor caused the department to abandon its plan to screen the *Komagata Maru*’s passengers for hookworm. On 31 March, order-in-council 1914-897 passed, barring non-farming “artisans and labourers” from landing at BC ports; this was a renewed version of legislation the government had passed the previous December after hearing the rumour that a steamship line was considering opening a direct service

³² P.H. Bryce, Memo to W.J. Roche, 25 March 1914, I-4, LAC, RG 76, vol. 584, file 820636.

³³ See (RUSH) M.J. Reid to W.D. Scott, 31 March 1914, I-2, LAC, RG 76, vol. 584, file 820636; See also W.D. Scott to W.W. Cory, 1 April 1914, LAC, RG 76, vol. 584, file 820636; After an original annual salary of \$1,200 in 1909, Hopkinson’s salary became \$1,800 in March 1912. See W.W. Cory to W.D. Scott, 26 February 1912, LAC, RG 76, vol. 561, file 808722, pt. 1; Hugh Johnston, “The Surveillance of Indian Nationalists in America, 1908-1918,” *BC Studies* 78 (1988): 16.

³⁴ (RUSH) M.J. Reid to W.D. Scott, 31 March 1914, I-2, LAC, RG 76, vol. 584, file 820636.

between British Columbia and India.³⁵ Two weeks after forwarding Bryce's and Reid's reports for ministerial approval, Scott advised Reid that "the provisions of P.C. 897 would appear to be sufficient to dispose of this matter for some time." Borden tellingly reissued this order-in-council the day after his government learned that the *Komagata Maru* had left Hong Kong for Canada. The Department of Immigration later followed this exact course, using P.C. 897, along with the newest incarnations of the continuous journey (P.C. 23) and two-hundred-dollar requirement provisions (P.C. 24), to exclude most of the vessel's passengers.³⁶

When the vessel anchored off Vancouver on 23 May, Canada's parliamentarians, still in session in Ottawa, voiced their dismay at the arrival of the South Asians. The outcry extended across party lines as members from the ruling Conservatives and the Liberal opposition alike agreed that Canada should reject the passengers. Minister of the Interior W.J. Roche declared: "We are going to stand by the immigration law in its fullness." This despite Liberal Frank Oliver's criticism that the government had been slow to resolve the situation using the Immigration Act. Oliver also opined that excluding South Asians was necessary in order to protect Canada against a "population that shall hamper and deter" the nation's "ideals of civilization": "[It is] under those principles that, for my part, I desire to see this law administered."³⁷ This reaction typified Oliver's approach to immigration, which he had implemented as minister of the interior between 1905 and 1911. His 1906 Immigration Act had dramatically increased the health requirements of immigrants and expanded the definition of an "undesirable" immigrant. His precept that South Asians were wholly at odds with Canadian society reflected the prevailing viewpoint of both parties on Parliament Hill in 1914.

This mode of thinking, which lay at the heart of all social, economic, and political arguments against further South Asian immigration in general and the admission of the *Komagata Maru* passengers in particular,

³⁵ After the government learned that the SS *Komagata Maru* was destined for Canada, its P.C. 1914-897 of 31 March 1914 renewed its P.C. 1913-2642 of December 1913. See Ninette Kelley and Michael Trebilcock, *The Making of the Mosaic: A History of Canadian Immigration Policy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), 150.

³⁶ W.D. Scott to W.W. Cory, 1 April 1914; W.D. Scott to M.J. Reid, 14 April 1914. Both of the foregoing are in LAC, RG 76, vol. 584, file 820636. For the legislative history of P.C. 1914-897 (formerly P.C. 1913-2642), see Bruce Ryder, "Racism and the Constitution: The Constitutional Fate of British Columbia Anti-Asian Immigration Legislation, 1884-1909," *Osgoode Hall Law Journal* 29, 3 (1991): 670; Sir Francis May, Governor of Hong Kong, Telegrams to Duke of Connaught, 31 March 1914 and 6 April 1914, LAC, RG 25, G1, vol. 1138, file 1914-40c. See P.C. 3432 23 (September 1914).

³⁷ House of Commons, 12th Parliament, 3rd Session, vol. 5, 26 May 1914, 4214; *ibid.*, 27 May 1914, 4295. See also *ibid.*, 30 May 1914, 4533; *ibid.*, 1 June 1914, 4562 and 4565.

stands as a near-perfect demonstration of Edward Said's now-classic theory of Orientalism. This theory holds that Europeans saw and treated Asians from a firmly Western perspective because of a pervasive "ontological and epistemological distinction made between 'the Orient' and (most of the time) 'the Occident.'" By arguing that South Asians were incapable of assimilation, Oliver and his colleagues perpetuated an imagined demarcation between white society and what Said describes as the "Oriental" – by which he meant the "people, customs," and, above all, the "mind" of those from Asia, all of which early twentieth-century politicians and theorists interpreted as an intractable philosophical affront to the values of Western civilization.³⁸

Returning to the standby of public health protection, Roche replied to Oliver that the *Komagata Maru's* passengers had been "undergoing a very critical medical examination" and that "a good many of these" were infected with trachoma and other eye diseases. Roche later informed the House that ninety of the men had been rejected for physical reasons – reasons that Hugh Johnston has identified, in most cases, as trachoma. There is no record of medical examinations or of the detention of *Komagata Maru* passengers in Vancouver as only the ship's physician and his family and twenty returning immigrants were allowed to disembark. Without such documentation it is difficult to ascertain the health of the passengers when they first arrived on BC's coast. Norman Buchignani, Doreen Indra, and Ram Srivastava argue that the government's discovery of trachoma at Vancouver was "an old trick" designed to "make deportation certain" by "finding non-existent disease in prospective immigrants." However, the authors offer no evidence to support this claim.³⁹

Although, in 1912, the Department of Immigration had prepared for hookworm testing on the South Asian passengers of the SS *Orterio*, and, in 1913, initiated testing on South Asians from the SS *Sado Maru* and the SS *Panama Maru*, immigration officials abandoned the hookworm inspection plan a month before the *Komagata Maru* reached Canada. In the end, and despite the fact that Munro's staff may have found that some of the men aboard the *Komagata Maru* had trachoma, disease was not a determining factor in the rejection of any of the passengers. This

³⁸ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (25th anniversary ed.) (New York: Vintage Books, 2003), 2-3.

³⁹ House of Commons, 12th Parliament, 3rd Session, vol. 5, 1 June 1914, 4565 and 6 June 1914, 4954-55; Johnston, *Voyage*, 44. Seventy-seven of the eighty-eight men rejected for physical reasons had trachoma. See House of Commons, 12th Parliament, 3rd Session, vol. 5, 8 June 1914, 5026; Johnston, *Voyage*, 36-37; *Vancouver News-Advertiser*, 22 May 1914; Shah, *Contagious Divides*, 61-63; Norman Buchignani, Doreen Indra, and Ram Srivastava, *Continuous Journey: A Social History of South Asians in Canada* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1985), 44.

is shown in July 1914's BC Supreme Court ruling in the case of Munshi Singh, a representative of the *Komagata Maru's* passengers whose appeal case represented all on board. This ruling upheld the government's finding that the vessel's passengers were excludable not for health reasons but, rather, because they did not meet the provisions of P.C. 23, P.C. 24, and P.C. 897. The government's November 1914 report on the incident confirmed that the passengers had been deported for the sole reason that they failed to satisfy the stipulations of these orders-in-council.⁴⁰

The 1914 resolution of the *Komagata Maru* crisis and the BC Supreme Court's affirmation of legislative exclusion removed the need for Dominion officials to continue hookworm testing. Although American officials continued testing most Asian arrivals for hookworm until 1919, the inconclusive 1913 test of Jowalla Singh was Canada's last test in a decade. Then Milne reintroduced fecal inspection for hookworm at Victoria in order to deport a group of Chinese actors; however, his ruling was reversed immediately by Bryce's successor J.D. Page. Testing was suspended and Milne was reprimanded for "committing an injustice" by using a positive hookworm test to bar otherwise healthy immigrants. Page concluded, just as Bryce had in 1913, that hookworm was not "a menace to public health" – a truth that Department of Immigration officers had ignored in their quest to bar South Asians between 1912 and 1914.⁴¹

The *Komagata Maru* debacle continues to command significant public attention as a defining element of the early twentieth-century South Asian experience in Canada. The past decade alone has seen its commemoration in a documentary film, radio play, and collaborative government and university-sponsored website.⁴² The incident has also repeatedly resurfaced in recent parliamentary debates. Soon after the House passed a Liberal Party motion for a government apology, on 3 August 2008, Stephen Harper publicly apologized for Canada's handling

⁴⁰ See *Re Munshi Singh* (6 July 1914), 20 B.C.R. 243 (BC Court of Appeal); and H.C. Clogstoun, *Canada: Commission to Investigate Hindu Claims Following Refusal of Immigration Officials to Allow Over 300 Hindus Aboard the SS Komagata Maru to Land at Vancouver* (Vancouver: Government of Canada, 1914).

⁴¹ See US Public Health Service Order, 7 March 1919, which removed hookworm from the list of "Loathsome and Contagious Diseases," in Washington, DC, National Archives and Records Administration, RG 85, vol. 54261, file 184; A. Joliffe, Memo to J.E. Featherstone, 5 April 1923; J.D. Page, Chief of Division of Quarantine, to G.L. Milne, 5 April 1923. The last two references are in LAC, RG 76, vol. 584, file 820636. Page was specifically referring to the case of Lai Hung Sang, whom Milne deported for hookworm without Page's consent.

⁴² See Ali Kazimi (writer, director, and producer), *Continuous Journey*, TV Ontario, 2004, 87 mins.; and Sugith Varughese, *Entry Denied* (radio play), CBC Radio, 2002. See also "Komagata Maru," a collaborative Simon Fraser University and Citizenship and Immigration Canada website, at <http://komagatamarujourney.ca>.

of the affair. After it became apparent that many Sikh Canadians had felt cheated that Harper apologized at an event in Surrey, British Columbia, and not in the House of Commons, the Liberals, in 2010, called for an in-House apology. The late National Sun Media columnist Peter Worthington argued that it would be pointless for Harper to grant this request as “most Canadians haven’t a clue why an apology is necessary” for “something that happened so long ago that only history books remember.” In response, I called attention, in the *Ottawa Sun*, to the fact that many Canadians were ignorant of the incident and its key historical significance. I added: “Worthington has shown [that] we as Canadians need more education about Indo-Canadian history and the consequences of racial prejudice.”⁴³

In May 2012, the New Democratic Party renewed the debate by again requesting an in-House apology. In the ensuing debate, NDP member Jasbir Sandhu astutely observed that the *Komagata Maru* affair cannot be remembered as an isolated racist incident as the continuous journey legislation remained in effect for over three decades after 1914. Indeed, the incident and legislation were deeply interconnected within a broader federal policy framework designed to exclude South Asian immigrants. After protracted debate the motion for an in-House apology was defeated by a vote of 147 to 118 in the Conservative-controlled House on 28 May 2012.⁴⁴

That the debate over an apology continues demonstrates that the *Komagata Maru* incident today represents much more than the deportation of a few hundred South Asians a century ago. For many the affair remains a shared yet deeply personal reminder of the significant challenges South Asians faced in Canada. While parliamentarians were debating the *Komagata Maru* apology in May 2012, the *National Post* reported that the government had stopped a plan to help Sri Lankan migrants stranded in Togo come to Canada. Eighteen people were arrested in Ghana due to a tip from Canadian Intelligence officers, who had been “aggressively tracking suspected international migrant smugglers” to “prevent another influx of boat people arriving on Canada’s shores.”⁴⁵ Writer, director, and film producer Ali Kazimi explains that the Canadian “moral panic” over the 2010 arrival of the

⁴³ See Ruby Dhalla motion, House of Commons Debates, 40th Parliament, 3rd Session, Entry 49, 26 May 2010; Peter Worthington, *Ottawa Sun*, 12 April 2010; Isabel Wallace to *Ottawa Sun*, 15 April 2010.

⁴⁴ House of Commons Debates, 41st Parliament, 1st Session, vol. 146, no. 127, 18 May 2012, 1005. The record of the motion’s 28 May 2012 defeat is in House of Commons Debates, 41st Parliament, 1st Session, vol. 146, no. 128, 28 May 2012, 1910.

⁴⁵ *National Post*, 25 May 2012.

MV *Sun Sea*, which brought almost five hundred Tamil migrants seeking asylum to Vancouver, empowered the Conservatives to draft and pass a version of Bill C-49, which targets human smugglers but also allows the imprisonment of some refugees, including minors, for several months pending a review of their claim.⁴⁶ Since public and official anxieties over the arrival of the *Komagata Maru* and the *Sun Sea* passengers were both based on racial grounds, a comparison of these incidents offers scholars a promising field for future study.

⁴⁶ Kazimi, *Undesirables: White Canada and the Komagata Maru*, 11; The Protecting Canada's Immigration System Act, S.C. 2012, c. 17, passed royal assent on 28 June 2012.