

**Sugar and Gold:
Indentured Indian and Chinese Labour in South Africa**

Karen L Harris

*Department Historical and Heritage Studies, University of Pretoria, Hillcrest,
Pretoria, South Africa, 0002*

Telephone: 012 420 2665, Fax: 012 420 2656, E-mail: karen.harris@up.ac.za

KEYWORDS "Coolies". Natal Plantations. Transvaal Mines. Contracts. Colonies

ABSTRACT This article proposes to compare the Indian and Chinese indentured labour systems introduced into colonial South Africa in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Between 1860 and 1911 the Colony of Natal imported 152 184 Indians to work primarily on the sugar plantations, and between 1904 and 1910 the Transvaal Colony reverted to the importation of 63 695 Chinese to work exclusively on the gold mines. While both the Indian and Chinese labour schemes have received considerable academic attention in their own right, relatively little work has been done in terms of a comparative dimension. This may partly be ascribed to the inherent differences between the two schemes, despite the fact that the British authorities orchestrated both. It will be shown that to a large extent the experiences of the Indian labour system informed and determined the nature of the Chinese scheme. It will however be argued that the impact of the one upon the other went far beyond the legal parameters of the indenture contracts and regulations, having ramifications which swept across the broader societal domain and which impacted on the very different place and perception of these two minorities in subsequent South African history.