

## CHAPTER 1

## East Indian–Creole relations in Trinidad and Guiana in the late nineteenth century

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There were in effect two semi-autonomous sets of working class struggles against the domination of capital – the one conducted by the descendants of ex-slaves and the other by indentured labourers and their fellow Indians. Pursuing their legitimate aspirations, these two ethnically defined sectors of the laboring people could and did come into conflict with each other (Walter Rodney, *A History of the Guyanese Working People*, 1981, p. 179).

In his masterly study of the working class of Guiana in the late nineteenth century, Walter Rodney argues that inter-racial or inter-ethnic discord must be seen in the context of the indentureship system, and – in particular – the use of the system to repress, displace and undermine the Afro-Guyanese working class. This is undoubtedly true. Rodney goes on to suggest that there were five main reasons for a ‘racial contradiction’ emerging in what was, in essence, a working-class struggle. These were the numbers of Indian immigrants, their separation from the Afro-Guyanese population, the mutual unintelligibility of cultural traditions, the ‘slow rate of diversification of the colonial economy’ and the attempt to exploit racial differences by those with state power. What Rodney does not do is weigh the significance of these factors.

This chapter is an attempt to do that by looking at the indenture system in its local context in both Guiana and Trinidad.<sup>1</sup> Immediately this is attempted, it becomes clear that some of the issues that Rodney addresses are much less relevant than others. While it is true that relatively and absolutely more Indians were imported into Guiana than Trinidad, it is not immediately obvious why the simple demographic fact of numbers should create a sense of injustice. We can see from elsewhere that numbers of immigrants can be very low and still generate fears of ‘swamping’. The issue is one of competition or the availability of resources and the degree to which differences are exploited for political ends. I argue in this chapter that

the key issue of resources was not numbers but land. Second, I do not accept the ‘spatial’ or the ‘cultural’ arguments. While the question is not specifically addressed in this chapter, there is no reason to suppose that where propinquity is increased, hostilities diminish. On the contrary, the opposite is probably true. Certainly in Trinidad, where inter-ethnic hostilities were far less, it would not be true that propinquity was greater. Moreover, there is no reason to think that the cultural gap was wider in Guiana than in Trinidad which, if we accept that important relevant differences existed between these two colonies, suggests that we should not look to culture itself for an adequate explanation.

On the other hand, the remaining two arguments used by Rodney are confirmed as being of major importance. This chapter opens therefore with some comparative notes on the indenture systems in each territory and then looks at explanations for understanding the relations between newly-arrived Indians and indigenous or migrant Africans in terms of land availability, economic conditions and official policies. The argument is that in these topics lie the essential differences, and thus the key issues in accounting for patterns of inter-ethnic rivalry.

### *The indenture period*

It is hardly surprising that the abolition of slavery should have prompted the black Creoles to try to leave the estates that were associated in their minds with such previous degradation. There is every reason to suppose that this was a common feature throughout the West Indies, but whereas Jamaica, Barbados and the smaller islands did not have land readily available, Trinidad and Guiana certainly did. In Trinidad there were plentiful supplies of fertile land in the Northern and Central ranges which, in terms of accessibility, were also suited to peaceful squatting as well as subsistence agriculture. Despite the vast size of Guiana, fertile land was confined largely to the narrow coastal strip, and was not as easy to obtain. Crown lands too required extensive and expensive preparation which made squatting more difficult, so that much of the drive for independence from the estates had to be in the form of land purchases. Although by the time of complete emancipation on 1 August 1838 there were a number of settlements already in existence, these had tended to form as trading posts at ferry-points such as on the Mahaica and Mahaicony Rivers and at Williams Town on the Essequibo Coast.<sup>2</sup> Individual Creoles bought front lands from some plantation owners but these were notoriously difficult to maintain with the critical problems of drainage and irrigation with which all the estates had to contend.<sup>3</sup>

What was particularly important during this period was the collective purchase of plantations by groups of freed Creoles. These were later to form the first real village settlements entirely independent of the plantations. The first of these was taken over in November 1839 when 83 former slaves paid 30 000 guilders for Plantation Northbrook on the Demerara East Coast. Part of its 500 acres was later to be renamed as the village of Victoria. Again, plantation New Orange Nassau (380 acres) was bought by 128 Creoles for \$50 000 in April 1840 and later became Buxton. These were soon followed by plantations such as Beterverwagting, Fellowship, Dem Amstel, Plaisance, Friendship, Litchfield, Perseverance, Ithaca, Gibraltar, Rosehall and Liverpool. Initially an attempt was made to run the plantation as a genuine cooperative, but this type of shareholding usually failed and the land was then divided up in accordance with the amount of initial investment. In this way the Creole villages of Guiana were formed.<sup>4</sup>

The effect on the sugar plantations was marked, for labour became very scarce and sporadic and wage rates doubled. In all probability the 'push' from the estates was much stronger than the 'pull' of peasant proprietorship for the treatment that the labourers could expect on the estates was almost as harsh as in the earlier period and land was very difficult to obtain. There is no doubt, however, that the plantations began to decline for lack of labour. Sometimes attempts to deter the loss of labour during slavery rebounded upon the planter after emancipation in a quite specific way. For example, a slave seeking to buy his freedom would hear his master declaring his worth, albeit exaggerated, to the court and was loath thereafter to work for anything less. This argument convinced at least one contemporary:

In that valuation he (the planter) sought ... to impede the negro in his desire for freedom but by it *he settled on oath the future rate of wages.*<sup>5</sup>

Despite higher wages and the other steps taken by the planters to retain their labour, such as preventing the black Creoles obtaining land or destroying their crops, a serious alienation of labour occurred in both colonies.<sup>6</sup> After a number of other possible labour supplies had been unsuccessfully tried, the owner of plantations Vreeden Hoop and Vreedestein in Guiana wrote to a firm in Calcutta requesting immigrants under an indenture contract. This letter, written by John Gladstone, father of William Ewart, on 4 January 1836, really marks the first West Indian interest in labour from India.<sup>7</sup> It resulted in the arrival of 396 'coolies' in two ships in 1838 under five-year indenture contracts, of whom 236 were to return to India in 1843, while almost two-thirds of the remainder died – often from ill-treatment. It was reports of slave-like conditions in Guiana and Mauritius which led to the temporary cessation of Indian immigration from 11 July 1838 until it was revived under pressure from the planters in 1845. In all, over 380 000

Indians were eventually introduced into Trinidad and Guiana during the indenture period, as shown in Table 1.1.

Table 1.1 East Indians introduced into Trinidad and Guiana mainly under indenture, 1838–1918<sup>8</sup>

Year	Guiana	Trinidad
1838	396	–
1845–50	12 374	5 568
1851–55	9 981	5 054
1856–60	16 206	11 208
1861–65	15 654	7 474
1866–70	22 436	11 836
1871–75	24 355	11 868
1876–80	27 374	12 763
1881–85	20 500	11 551
1886–90	20 471	13 988
1891–95	21 397	13 565
1896–1900	14 780	7 414
1901–05	13 177	12 433
1906–10	10 592	12 547
1911–15	7 304	4 051
1916–18	1 912	2 619
	238 909	143 939

During the period from 1843 to 1916, 66 140 Indians returned to India from Guiana and 29 448 from Trinidad, usually with free or later with assisted passages. These returning immigrants reached their peak in 1891–95 for Guiana when 10 082 Indians left, compared with a high point of 3838 a decade later in Trinidad. Of course, long after the indenture system ended, many immigrants were entitled to return passages. Thus in 1930 the Government of Trinidad, in answer to a question from Saran Teelucksingh, estimated that 42 000 Indians were still entitled to return passages in addition to the 41 763 who had already been repatriated by 1929.<sup>9</sup> It was common practice to return not only those who wished to exercise their rights under the original contract but also those who were a drag upon the resources of the colony. In 1931, 56 per cent of the 1012 Indians returned to India from Trinidad were classified as 'destitutes'; a proportion far in excess of that for earlier years.<sup>10</sup> For example, in Guiana the total sent back who were classified as 'criminals, bad characters, habitual idlers, infirm, old, blind, lepers etc.,' was 3584 for the whole period 1838–1859.<sup>11</sup>

Migration from India to these West Indian colonies was not the only inflow of labour – although it was by far the most important. Guiana received far more Portuguese-speaking Maderians and Chinese than Trinidad, as Table 1.2 shows.

Table 1.2 *Migrants introduced into British Guiana and Trinidad, 1834–1918*<sup>12</sup>

<i>Origins and year of entry</i>	<i>Guiana</i>	<i>Trinidad</i>
India (1838–1918)	238 909	143 939
Madeira (1835–81)	32 216	897
Africa (1834–67)	14 060	8 854
China (1852–84)	13 533	2 645
Europe	381	–
Other	1 868	1 333

In terms of the social characteristics of the Indian immigrants, there is no reason to suppose that there was any great variation in recruitment for each colony. Nearly all the immigrants came originally through the port of Calcutta though they were drawn from the United Provinces and Bihar.<sup>13</sup> A survey of the Immigration Agent-General's records in Georgetown revealed that 85 per cent of immigrants were recruited from this area and that 83 per cent fell between the ages of 10 and 30 years. The average sex-ratio worked out at slightly over two men to every woman, although in both colonies this was far more unequal when the system first started. The disparity was reduced through pressure from government sources. Because of continued trouble over infidelity on the estates, a minimum of 40 women to every 100 men were recruited, which was achieved by paying more for women to recruiting agents.<sup>14</sup>

In both societies the ordinances governing the introduction and treatment of the Indians were comprehensive and paternalistic. They determined in law the conditions of recruitment, housing and health of the immigrants. There were also sections on marriage, divorce and conditions of work (including a minimum wage) and the penalties which were likely to be incurred for offences (such as 'wilful indolence' or absconding) against the indenture code.<sup>15</sup> A government department was set up for the purpose of enforcing this code and in general supervising the welfare of the Asiatics. In Trinidad the head of this department, following the Indian precedent, was styled the 'Protector of Immigrants' while in Guiana he was known as the Immigration Agent-General, or more popularly both the office and the incumbent came to be termed the Crosby after James Crosby, a particularly sympathetic and fair-minded holder of that office from 1858 to 1880.

The societies into which the Indians came were essentially very similar, for there was not that much to discriminate between a plantation in Guiana and one in Trinidad. The graphic picture painted by Edward Jenkins could have depicted with equal accuracy a plantation along the West coast of Trinidad:

Take a large factory in Manchester, or Birmingham, or Belfast, build a wall round it, shut in its work people from all intercourse, save at rare intervals, with the outside world, keep them in absolute heathen ignorance, and get all the work you can out of them, treat them not unkindly, leave their social habits and relations to themselves, as matters not concerning you who make the money from their labour, and you would have constituted a little community resembling, in no small degree, a sugar estate village in British Guiana.<sup>16</sup>

And yet a crucial difference began to emerge very early on in the post-emancipation societies, which was later to become magnified by a number of important events. This was essentially to do with the relations between the ethnic and racial groups constituting each society. In both, the intention of the planters was, apart from merely acquiring cheap labour, to offer competition to the despised black Creole labourers. Throughout much of the literature of the period runs a streak of smug retribution by the planters for what they regarded as the disloyal and ungrateful attitude of the Creoles who were no longer prepared to suffer their previous indignities. It is this which lies behind the emphasis on the 'coolies', supposed virtues of thrift and industry. And it is perhaps at this time that the familiar stereotypes of the Creole appear most frequently, for such caricatures had no real function in a system based solely on coercion but became more necessary after emancipation.

In the early years it is hard to find a voice raised against the indenture system from within the societies themselves although, as before, the Anti-Slavery Society could be relied upon to challenge what to them appeared to be merely vicarious slavery. Barrett sarcastically warned against encomiums of Indian indentureship and slavery alike:

In the old days of slavery, every tropical tongue was eloquent in descriptions of the comfort of the slave, his abundant rations of food and rum, and his happy exception from those vulgar earth-born cares that distracted the heart of his languid master, residing in his humble Belgravian home.<sup>17</sup>

They, at least, saw no more reason to believe the glowing testimonials to the new system than they had for the old.

The important point is that the threat offered by the arrival of the



Indians proved to be a very real one for the Creoles of Guiana whereas it did not emerge as anywhere near such a strong force in Trinidad. As a result, relations between Indians and Creoles in the latter society fluctuated between indifference and passive hostility while for the former, competition was continually perceived as being present and overt conflict along racial lines was common. I will document the degree to which this was so before going on to account for it.

### *The pattern of inter-ethnic relations*

The Wesleyan missionary H. V. P. Bronkhurst, who had spent his life's work among the East Indians in Guiana, was in no doubt that this conflict was real – so much so that only the cessation of immigration (a policy which he advocated) would prevent it:

There is no denying the fact that there exists an uncalled-for, bitter feeling between the native Creole and the Indian Immigrant towards each other. The native looks upon the heathen Indian as an intruder or interloper, whilst the Indian looks down upon the native black as a being inferior to him in a social aspect. Very often in the Colony disturbances of a serious nature take place between the Asiatics and the descendants of the old slaves, which end in a free fight; and I suppose this feeling of hatred and dislike for each other will last as long as Immigration from India continues.<sup>18</sup>

He seemed to feel, however, that Christianity would cope eventually with those that were there, but that the fight to integrate them would never be successful if thousands more, committed to 'heathen idolatry', were admitted. In particular he singled out competition in the crucial field of employment as the area of greatest strife and another reason why immigration should cease.

At times I have sincerely wished that Immigration from India could altogether be stopped, so as to enable the native Creole to enter the labour field without any opposition.<sup>19</sup>

Where there is a chance of comparing the reception given to the Indians in both colonies, the evidence again shows that a much more hostile reaction came from the Creoles of Guiana. Surgeon-Major D. W. D. Comins, the Protector of Immigrants in Calcutta, who visited both colonies at the request of the Government of India in 1891, supported the view put forward by Bronkhurst and remarked that

There is not as yet an approach to anything like fusion between the immigrants and other sections of the population, in fact between them and the blacks there is a mutual antipathy.<sup>20</sup>

Indeed, it was partly on the basis of this antipathy that the gold-mines of the interior became solely a black preserve:

In this colony Indian immigrants are not allowed to the gold diggings, where being physically weaker than the negroes, in the minority, and not overloved by the blacks, they would probably be roughly treated.<sup>21</sup>

But Comins was much more impressed with the position which the Indians had come to occupy in Trinidad – his next port of call on leaving Guiana. In fact he could hardly contain his enthusiasm for the lot of the immigrant, especially if he had been able to acquire his own lands in the Northern or Central Ranges after serving the initial five years of the Indenture. Beneath his usual paternalism, it is obvious that he perceived a far more rosy situation:

Here the cooly, who in India has been accustomed to lead a life of drudgery to gain the daily pittance sufficient to keep him alive, finds himself the possessor of a comfortable homestead with an increasing farm of the richest and most fertile land around him on which he lives with his family and becomes in a small way quite an important person.<sup>22</sup>

At times Comins seems to become almost lyrical at the possibilities which pertained for the fortunate Indian:

it looks very much as if they [Indians] [are] going in the course of years to take entire possession of this beautiful island, through the principal forests of which they are boring in every direction and turning what was dense jungle into a highly cultivated garden.<sup>23</sup>

On the other hand, Comins was not quite so keen on the condition of those still serving indenture contracts, for the ordinances in Trinidad lacked the comprehensive coverage of the new 1891 Ordinance in British Guiana.<sup>24</sup> He remarks that

The immigration Ordinances of Trinidad are so little in accord which [sic] actual practice, and are so far behind what is now expected in a first class colony, that a complete revision is necessary.<sup>25</sup>

It was another eight years before his warning was heeded and then two revisions followed quickly on each other to bring Trinidad into line.<sup>26</sup>

Despite all this, when it came to the question of permanent settlement, the representative of the Indian Government was in no doubt at all as to where his fellow countrymen received the better deal:

Of all the colonies of the West Indies, Trinidad is the favoured home of the coolie settler, where he can easily and rapidly attain comfortable independence, and even considerable wealth with corresponding social position. British Guiana, in consequence of the long continued efforts of successive generations of legislators and planters, has brought its system for the beneficial control of indentured labour to a higher pitch of perfection than any other colony, but it has no such solid advantages to offer the settler as Trinidad. If I were a coolie I should like to spend my indentured service in British Guiana, and then settle down in the hills of Trinidad.<sup>27</sup>

### *Explanations of difference*

There are three reasons – or rather groups of reasons – that seem to have been important in raising the level of competition and conflict between the different ethnic groups in Guiana relative to that in Trinidad. While these are not discrete categories, I will discuss them under the headings of availability of land, the overall social and economic situation, and the attitudes and policies of the planters.

### **The land question**

In the first place, there seems little doubt that for all the vast areas of empty land in Guiana there was little which was suitable for the type of crop that the Creoles, trying to get away from the estates, might have wished to grow. To this day the sandy loams between the alluvial coastlands and high uplands of Guiana support little but tropical forest, and they must have seemed an impenetrable barrier to the aspiring Creoles. It is true that they bought old estates and often found land on the banks of the great rivers that divide the hinterland, but even for those who were successful, life could be particularly hard. The most pressing problem was coping with the ravages of the sea on one side and the flood waters from the highlands behind – an almost insuperable task. The planters themselves were constantly demanding assistance from central revenues to help them, but the independent smallholder stood no chance of any such help – not least because he could expect nothing but unmitigated opposition from the planters themselves.

The policy of the government was not, in general, to encourage land-settlement but where it did it was only for the benefit of the Indians. In order to absolve the Colony from the costs of returning former indentured labourers to India in accord with their contracts, the Government instituted a number of land-settlement schemes. The first of any note was the old plantation at Huis t'Dieran in Essequibo which was bought in 1880 and laid out in two-acre plots for the sole use of the Indians, who were prepared to commute their return passage. After November 1882, when 49 residential plots and 69 for cultivation had been laid out, the policy of granting land in lieu of a return passage was ended and the plots had to be bought. Whether purchased or not, this settlement, and later ones at Helena, Whim and Bush Lot, all proved disastrous failures and those that had not already been inundated and ruined by water were effectively destroyed by the drought of 1899.<sup>28</sup> The interesting point is that all of these land-settlement schemes were for the sole benefit of the Indians and even though they never rivalled the successes achieved by the Indians on their own, it must have been a policy which aggravated the sense of frustration and bitterness felt by the 'dispossessed' Creoles.

In Trinidad events were rather different. First, there was abundant fertile land available. Much of this was taken over illegally by squatters, some of whom had extensive estates under cocoa, occasionally in excess of one thousand trees. Despite the obvious annoyance of the planters, no great attempts were made to remove such squatters and indeed a number of governors, such as J. H. T. Manners–Sutton and Lord Harris before him, had declared themselves in favour of establishing an independent peasantry. But it was during the term of Arthur Hamilton Gordon (1866–70) that this policy became firmly established. Between 1847 and 1865 only 3423 acres of Crown Land had been sold – and that at the comparatively high price of \$10 (£2.08) per acre. Such were the financial and legal difficulties involved that even by the time of Gordon only 4.63 per cent of the surface of Trinidad was legally occupied.<sup>29</sup>

Gordon halved the price of Crown Lands and lessened the administrative burden entailed in acquiring them. Squatters with long-established holdings were normally granted legal rights while others were moved to new settlements. Gordon did pursue the same line of policy as the administrators of Guiana but with far more success:

By the end of 1870, one-hundred and eighty time expired Indians had commuted their return passages for land and another ninety-six had bought nearly one-thousand acres between them.<sup>30</sup>

But apart from this, lands were not distributed along racial lines and many Creoles gained an independent economic base during this period.

Testimony to the importance of Gordon's policies comes from a number

of quarters. For example, Sir William Des Voeux, Governor of St Lucia but formerly magistrate on the west coast of Demerara, and bane of the planter interest for his outspoken criticisms over the suffering of Indians, referred to Gordon as a man 'whose views in respect of coolie immigration and the subject races generally were much in accord with my own and who had already carried out in Trinidad some of the reforms which I desired for British Guiana'.<sup>31</sup>

So far as Crown Lands in Guiana were concerned it was not until more than twenty years later that the cost was substantially reduced. On 14 January 1890, Crown Lands, which before had cost \$10 an acre, were reduced to one dollar (21p).<sup>32</sup> In addition, it was only at this time that the previous policy of refusing to alienate Crown Land in parcels of under 100 acres was modified; a policy which did not finally disappear until 1898. Even then the settlements which could be opened up, and the encouragement given by the Government, were almost solely for rice-growing – an occupation peculiarly suited to the Indians but one which was anathema to the Creoles.

Dr Comins too was keen to point out the important effect that Gordon's policies had had on the fortunes of, in particular, the Indians:

How greatly the system he (Gordon) introduced has prospered is sufficiently illustrated by the fact that at the present day Indian immigrants alone own or occupy 35,844 acres of land besides 2,026 lots and 2,480 houses.<sup>33</sup>

It was the continuation of Gordon's policy which was of crucial significance after the sugar crisis of 1885, for this depression stimulated the exodus from the estates and thus the demand for land, which, in the case of Trinidad, could easily be met. Not only was the policy of distributing Crown lands continued by a number of Gordon's successors (notably Sir William Robinson), but they undertook the vital improvements to the road system which itself became another important source of employment:

New facilities were given to the buying and holding of Crown Lands in places the choice of which was left to the purchaser. The extension of roads not only gave lucrative employment, but introduced the immigrants to parts of the island remote from the sugar estates.<sup>34</sup>

Because of the comparatively healthy state of Trinidad's economy during the slump in primary product prices after 1890, she was able to continue building up an effective communications system. In fact, it was only in Trinidad that official funds were sanctioned for such expenditure, constituting as it did only 'indirectly remunerative' investment.<sup>35</sup>

Where the two main racial groups were forced to remain in praedial work on the estates it appears that antipathetic feelings deepened between them. This was the case in Guiana where Africans were paid substantially more as cane-cutters than the Indians could hope to achieve as weeders.<sup>36</sup> This discrimination was justified in terms of the Africans' greater strength, but it is notable that this competitive situation did not enter the fields in Trinidad where all the labour on the estates, with the exception of the factory workers, was East Indian. This is not to deny that cane-cutters were paid more in Trinidad but any antagonisms this engendered were kept within the Indian group. It is also true that factory workers could expect more money but they were not viewed as competition in the same sense and, in any case, they worked much longer – averaging for the year about ten hours per day but rising in crop-time to 16–18 hours.

The availability of land for both races in Trinidad also had the effect of bringing into existence the so-called 'cane farmers', who were independent smallholders supplying cane to the central factory or *usine*. The establishing of these *usines* greatly assisted the development of the cane farmers, who were initially made up of Creoles and Indians. In 1899 they supplied 20 per cent of the cane milled and by 1908 they grew 139 422 of the 519 756 tons of cane produced, or 27 per cent.<sup>37</sup> The total number divided into racial groups at around the turn of the century is given in Table 1.3 which also shows the growing predominance of the Indians who now completely control this crucial part of the Trinidad sugar industry.<sup>38</sup>

Table 1.3 *East Indian and Creole cane farmers in Trinidad, 1898–1908*<sup>39</sup>

Year	East Indian	Creole
1898	2326	3824
1899	2826	3870
1900	2826	3591
1901	3819	4737
1902	4506	4850
1903	4443	4440
1904	4646	4685
1905	5424	5462
1906	6127	5446
1907	6557	5777
1908	5922	5619

Cocoa farming offered another opportunity for settlement and subsistence independent of the estates. At the turn of the century, cocoa was the most important export from Trinidad – much of it, again, grown on small-



holdings of a few acres. Where independent peasant holdings were possible these appear to have lessened racial tension by effectively reducing direct competition. In Trinidad the Indians were soon occupying new lands in direct proportion to their overall strength in the population. Thus although between 1885 and 1890 they were taking only 24 per cent by area of the total land distributed while they constituted 35.10 per cent (70 218) of the population in 1891, the average for the period 1891–95 had risen to 34 per cent.<sup>40</sup> They were by no means as fortunate in Guiana, either in the volume or proportion of the land which they were able to acquire.

### Wage levels and economic conditions

The overall economic development of each colony and, in particular, the way this impinged upon the lives of the various constituent groups is another related cause of heightened inter-group tension. In general, shortage of labour stimulated competition between employers and tended to improve the lot of the worker, while shortage of work had the effect of stimulating conflict between labourers. Even before the advent of the oil industry, Trinidad was more prosperous than Guiana, with competition between sugar and cocoa cultivators producing a more buoyant market for labour, although this had only marginal effects upon wages – possibly preventing them falling as much as they would have done during depressions. In Guiana the continued flood of Indians, and the lack of alternative avenues of employment, stimulated the demand for work while at the same time providing little pressure for the improvement of conditions on the estates themselves.

Perhaps one of the most important insights into the condition of the Indians in Guiana during the nineteenth century may be drawn from the report of the commission set up to enquire into allegations made by George William Des Voeux, who had been a stipendiary magistrate during the 1860s. His letter, sent from his new posting in St Lucia to the Secretary of State, Earl Granville, on Christmas Day, 1869, following riots in Demerara, was described by *The Times* as the severest criticism of public officers 'since Hastings was impeached for tyranny over the Lord of the Holy City of Benares and over the Ladies of the Princely House of Oude'.<sup>41</sup>

To Des Voeux himself it was intended as no such thing but rather a plea for a change in the system which allowed human beings to live in such conditions of degradation and exploitation. For example, on the punitive application of the labour laws concerning absconding, he reflected,

while the law compelled me to punish for desertion, and the fear of causing a wholesale abandonment of the estates rendered it

necessary to make this substantial, the half starved appearance of most of those convicted could not but raise unpleasant doubts as to the conditions of life on the plantations which caused them to prefer to it the precarious existence of a fugitive.<sup>42</sup>

The most fundamental criticism that he had to make was aimed not at the public officers directly but at the inordinate misuse of uncontrolled power by the planters. He charged that the conditions of health and welfare of the indentured immigrants would never improve while the doctors were employed by the estates and even the magistrates enforcing the labour ordinances invariably deferred to the planter interest.<sup>43</sup>

It was Des Voeux's conclusion on continued immigration that the arrival of the Indians may initially have had a salutary effect upon the Creoles but that the competition which they now offered had dispossessed this group to the point where immigration could not now be condoned. As he expressed it:

The Negro labourers ... required competition as an incitement to industry, and the lesson which has been taught them has been doubtless wholesome and just, though a very severe one. But I would most respectfully urge that its severity is now becoming disproportionate to its justice, and every year more so.<sup>44</sup>

The report itself is remarkable for the fact that it denies the majority of Des Voeux's accusations while at the same time collecting information, and even adducing arguments, which show that his charges were *under-* rather than *overstated*.<sup>45</sup> On the specific charges that Des Voeux makes, the commissioners concluded that in default of surer knowledge and wider information he was personally not entitled to bring them.<sup>46</sup> Not only did they dismiss most of the points contained in the letter; they were of the opinion that its existence justified the attempts made by the planters to hide the very things that Des Voeux had unearthed.

Thus they vindicate the apparent reticence of the planters to reveal details of the indenture system by saying,

if we have sometimes had cause to complain that witnesses from whom we have expected much have given us the minimum of information possible, we cannot but recognise that it was a difficult thing for members of the community to seem, by frank disclosures of the weak places in the system to make common cause with the common accuser.<sup>47</sup>

Despite this, Des Voeux himself was later to write that he obtained satisfaction – not so much from the Commission itself or from the unsympathetic official reaction (with the notable exception of James Crosby) as from the

sudden expenditure on improving the conditions of the Indian workers which the planters felt necessary before defending their position.

One way the planters circumvented the minimum wage specified in the indenture contract was to make arbitrary distinctions between 'effective' and 'non-effective' labour. Even so, the Commission discovered a large number of remarkable discrepancies. For example, on Plantation Schoon Ord the manager claimed that his 263 'effective' male labourers were paid 48 cents per day and that they worked on average four days per week. This, the Commissioners concluded, must mean that his annual wage bill merely for the 'effective' male workers was  $200 \times 263 \times 0.48$  or \$25 248. In fact the books for the estate showed that the total wage bill for *all* workers was only \$10 471, 'that is to say, two fifths of the sum that, at 48 cents per working day, ought to have been earned by the effective indentured males only'.<sup>48</sup>

### The exploitation of racial divisions

Apart from the ill-effects of the intense competition which the Indians brought to the labour market in Guiana, the report arising from Des Voeux's accusations also remarks on the inter-racial conflict induced by the tradition of having Creole drivers for task gangs on the estates – another notable difference from the situation in Trinidad. Coming as they did from Creole villages where many felt alienated from land which they felt to be rightfully theirs, the Creoles remaining on the estates are said to have used any positions of power they retained to make life as difficult as possible for the 'coolies':

the African blood has asserted its superiority over the Asiatic, in the fact that a negro gang has always a negro for a driver, with here and there an exception in favour of a Portugese; but, upon the whole, it is most common for the Chinese to have a Chinese for a driver, and the Coolies a negro.<sup>49</sup>

While in these positions of power, the claim was that 'the negroes are apt to be violent and brutal, more from contempt than dislike, with Asiatics'.<sup>50</sup>

The Commissioners perceived the value of this mutual animosity for the stability of the planting interest for, with united opposition to the system being out of the question, the Africans would always take exception to agitation by the Indians. In an approving remark on this policy of 'divide and rule' they say:

The Coolie despises the negro, because he considers him a being not so highly civilized as himself; while the negro, in turn, de-

spises the Coolie, because he is so immensely inferior to him in physical strength. *There never will be much danger of seditious disturbances among East Indian immigrants on estates as long as large numbers of negroes continue to be employed with them.*<sup>51</sup> (emphasis added)

This would hardly have been the conclusion in Trinidad where, despite animosity between the racial groups, there was much more chance, even at this time when the slump in sugar was making itself felt, of united action on what could loosely be called a 'class' front. Certainly there is evidence of the Creoles combining in some protests with the Indians. For example, incensed at restrictive regulations governing Carnival in 1882, blacks joined with Indians in their defiance over similar repressions at Muharram.<sup>52</sup> On 30 October 1884 the police fired on a gang of 2000 people attempting to take their *tadjah* into San Fernando and thence to the sea, killing 16 and wounding 80. The presence of Creoles on this occasion in Trinidad certainly did not prevent trouble but seems to have fomented opposition to officialdom. One observer of the riots – a magistrate – commented that 'their number is estimated at two-thousand and they were accompanied by Creoles, dressed as Coolies'.<sup>53</sup> The leading role taken by the Creoles in what was essentially an Indian problem was again pointed out by an army officer:

They came steadily on towards us, preceded by a great many creoles, also armed with sticks, who came up and stood all around us.<sup>54</sup>

In addition, one Creole, George Andrew, was given a six-month sentence for inciting Indians to violence.

Possibly the greatest source of conflict was over wage rates. In both colonies the Indians were blamed for reducing wage levels. It is not particularly significant to point out that wage rates may have fallen anyway as a consequence of the general depression after 1890 for, particularly in Guiana, the Indians were *perceived* as the main reason for the worsening plight of the Creoles. Part of the general opposition to continued immigration was often voiced in terms of the inequity of continuing a system whereby all members of the society paid for part of the cost of immigration by levies, duties and taxes, and not merely the planters who stood to gain directly. It was bad enough to see one's chances of work reduced, but to be forced to contribute was seen as positively suicidal. Perhaps the best statements of this feeling and the way that it incensed the Creoles of Guiana while only irritating them in Trinidad is contained in the papers laid before the Sanderson Committee of 1910.<sup>55</sup>

The Committee, in common with all previous and most subsequent enquiries of a similar kind, tended to come to conclusions consonant with



planter interest and, in particular, the planters' views on the desirability of further immigration. On the latter question they were in no doubt:

the continuation and extension of the system of immigration into British Guiana, British Honduras and the British West Indies of agricultural labourers from India is in the highest degree desirable....<sup>56</sup>

This was a view to which the Planters' Association in British Guiana readily subscribed. However, opposition to any such continuance and objection to what had gone before was forcefully expressed by the People's Association which, in part, claimed its representative legitimacy from the fact that seven of the 14 elected members in the Combined Court were drawn from its ranks.

As its general secretary, H. Aaron Britton, explained in his memorandum to the Committee, the Association was formed 'in the conviction that a strenuous and organized effort is necessary to secure for the people an adequate measure of recognition in the Colony's political and economic affairs'.<sup>57</sup> The Association was, in fact, a Creole pressure group set up to try and bring about a fairer deal for the Creoles in their losing struggle with the Indians – and, of course, with the planters themselves. They were in no doubt that the crisis was of such major proportions that their whole existence was in jeopardy. To them 'a crisis fraught with the gravest outlook for the future of the African race had arisen...'

At this moment the problem is not merely the material welfare and progress of the African population; it concerns whether adequate measures can be adopted to prevent the race from being eventually extinguished. The issue involved is the life or death of the people whose claims to the soil are paramount and who under wiser administrations should have formed by now a settled and prosperous peasantry.<sup>58</sup>

That they saw themselves as a race in decline and as a 'landless and disheartened populace' is not in itself surprising for, apart from the difficulties of obtaining land, poor health conditions and economic privation had led to enormous mortality and suffering. And the Creoles, on the whole, were without the safeguard, albeit minimal, of the estates' welfare and educational provisions. The Population Census for 1911 contained the statement that 'had there been no East Indian immigration the population would have shown a decrease of 9.8 per cent on the population of 1891'.<sup>59</sup> For the Creoles a large part of this situation was derived from appalling infant mortality rates, although they were by no means the only ones to suffer from high death rates overall.<sup>60</sup> The difference was, of course, that the Indians were constantly replenished by new arrivals. In addition, with the

paternalistic care of the estates, the Indians suffered lower infant mortality although this was offset by very high death rates among male field workers.<sup>61</sup> While the Census denied the 'generally accepted and often expressed belief' that the Creoles were declining in numbers, it is hardly surprising that this belief should have been held in a society where, with continued large-scale immigration, the population had only risen by 17 713 to 296 041 in the intercensal period from 1891 and where for the decade after 1891 the mean death rate (31.65) had comfortably exceeded the mean birth rate (29.7).<sup>62</sup>

The fact that Creoles were generally landless was seen by the People's Association as the result of a deliberate policy by the planters. They noted that the Land Code of 1839 had not only set a high price for Crown Lands but, much more damaging, it had specified that a minimum of 100 acres was the smallest lot that could be acquired. It was only after the first change in 1890 and the subsequent one of 1898, when the sugar industry was in decline and the battle to retain labour became, for a brief period, of lesser consequence, that the planters acquiesced to the possibility of a landed peasantry.

The improved position of the freedman following emancipation was therefore destroyed by the planters when they 'persuaded the local legislature to deny to the African the right of settling on the soil as an agriculturalist'.<sup>63</sup> The process of alienation and the construction of an inherently antagonistic situation proceeded since 'having succeeded in demoralizing the local labour market by their own unenlightened tactics the planters clamoured for Asiatic immigration'.<sup>64</sup>

The People's Association were unequivocal in their judgement on the result of this policy and in their condemnation of the racist myths upon which it was based:

With the advent of the indentured labourer a new period of repression began for the black race. The negro, it was asserted, 'required competition as an incitement to industry', and a class of immigrants was introduced who, because of his fewer needs, his ability to subsist on a smaller wage, and the legal restraints under which he carries out his indenture, has succeeded in almost completely displacing the African employed on the sugar estates.<sup>65</sup>

The Association were convinced that wages had fallen with the introduction of the immigrants and there seems little doubt that this was indeed so. But there were two other points which aggravated them still further when they compared their position with the Indian labourer. In the first place, they were paid the same rates for the same work as the Indians under indenture, whereas in Trinidad, which they cited with approval, the free labourers, whether Indian or Creole, were paid more to compensate them

for the advantages of schools, hospitals, and housing which were provided by the estates. Second, it was their contention that Indians could live on lower wages than Creoles since the latter had been brought up to live in a 'British' fashion. After all,

The negro has been Christianized and educated in accordance with British ideas and conceptions; his tastes in food and clothing approximate to those of the British, and he has been taught to think and to act in harmony with the particular civilisation of which he is a product.<sup>66</sup>

This was not, of course, true of the Asiatics but, contrary to the express dictates of the 1891 Ordinance, it 'is the East Indian under indenture who fixes the rate of wages rather than the free labourer'. And, as if all this was not bad enough, an added source of constant frustration was that not only had

The system ... ended by virtually displacing the native labourer in the cane fields, except in respect to certain forms of work, such as cane cutting, which the East Indian, because of his feeble physique, is ill-fitted to undertake<sup>67</sup>

but also,

the race to whose detriment the coolies were being introduced were made to contribute to the cost of a scheme of immigration designed either to supplant the negro or to coerce him into service with the planters at a wage inadequate for his proper maintenance.<sup>68</sup>

This particular complaint arose from the fact that in both colonies large proportions of immigration costs were derived from public revenues, in particular customs duties. The People's Association charged that only recently had the proportion contributed from public funds fallen as low as one-third and that the total cost of medical services, the immigration department and the recruiting office in Calcutta were publicly financed. What exacerbated this frustration was the fact that the estates not only received this benefit but they were also exempt from many of the other taxes which the small man had to meet. For example, much of their machinery and other imports were allowed in tax-free and the planters were also exempt from licences for mules and carts, whereas the peasant had to pay four and five dollars a year respectively for these essentials.

In the light of this well-argued and often eloquent plea from the Creoles it is interesting to note the response of the Committee and, indeed, of the Governor himself. Both dismissed this memorial in subjective and often emotive terms. In doing so they perpetuated the myths of the lazy,

indolent African and added even further fuel to the fire of discontent that the Creoles felt both in relation to the planters and to the Indians. In forwarding an earlier memorial from the People's Association to Chamberlain on 14 July 1903, Governor Swettenham had begun by dismissing any claims that the Creoles may have felt to express an opinion on the grounds of their 'indigenous' occupation of Guiana. He then subscribed to the stereotype of irresponsibility and unfavourably compared the performance of the blacks with the white settlers of Canada, New Zealand and Australia! On their claim for greater representation and for the necessity of curtailing further Indian immigration he said,

I have not been able to detect such a capacity for managing the affairs of the Colony as would warrant their being made responsible for that management, or would warrant the government in excluding others from the Colony for their sake.<sup>69</sup>

The Governor felt it was quite just for the labourers to be taxed, rather than the estates, and suggested that the country should receive ten times the 150 000 Indians who had already arrived. Rather predictably, Chamberlain concurred with the Governor's assessment of the situation and reaffirmed that these 'underdeveloped estates' should not fall into the incapable hands of the Creoles. This fact, together with the vast potential which Guiana was seen to offer,

make it impossible for me to approve a policy which would make these extensive properties a close preserve for those who have not yet shown that they are both able or desire to make use of them.<sup>70</sup>

In a similar fashion, the Sanderson Committee itself was able to base its arguments for dismissing the claims of the disaffected Creoles on a contrast between the admirable qualities of the Indians and the lamentable shortcomings of those they had displaced. The report cites with approval and concurrence a section of the *Annual Report* for the Colony in 1902-3.

It is to be feared that the ordinary Creole villager has not the same qualities of industry and tenacity of purpose as are possessed by the East Indian coolie who has served his time of indenture and elected to remain in the colony as a permanent settler. The emigrant from India understands what a struggle for existence means. The black man of the present class in Guiana does not; more than this, he is in many cases of a dreadfully wasteful and thriftless disposition.<sup>71</sup>

It is this view of the black Guianese which characterises the attitude of the planters and administrators alike during this period. For the most part they would dismiss the cries of the Creoles on economic grounds; that



is, by suggesting that they had gained and not lost from immigration. For example, when the end of indentured immigration seemed near and the planters were desperately trying to mobilize support for continuing the system, one white owner, Fred Bascom, remarked,

To those who believed that paying for the immigrants that the colony needs out of general revenue means taxing the labourers already in the colony to bring in others to take the bread out of their mouths, I would recommend a study of the history of their country. Such study would teach them that the coming of the coolie took the bread out of no man's mouth; on the contrary it produced an economic development that made it easier for everyone, from the highest to the lowest in the land, to make a better living.<sup>72</sup>

Even when it was recognized that the Creoles really might have suffered by immigration, to the planters it was the Creoles' own fault. James Rodway, President of the Royal Agricultural and Commercial Society and noted local historian, felt that the Creole had not 'competed fairly' but that if he did he

could more than hold his own because he is stronger than the East Indian. But there is no such competition for these immigrants who work five days a week have no rivals. They stand alone in the colony as the only people who will keep the cane mills in working order. We may safely state that others may cut canes by the job, (but) there could be none to feed the mills if there were no East Indians.<sup>73</sup>

It was especially the case in Guiana that underlying these arguments there lay a deep-seated animosity towards the Afro-Guianese which was rabidly racist. Even that famous commentator on the races and ethnography of Guiana, E. F. Im Thurm, could not avoid this judgement when addressing the Royal Colonial Institute in London when he argued that 'it is all very well to say that a man is a man whether his skin is white or black; but it is certain that the vast majority of West Indian blacks - all but the very few really educated members of the class - are not men but children, great, strong, generally good tempered children, but almost always fickle, and essentially, though from mere thoughtlessness, cruel'.<sup>74</sup>

The alienation and disaffection that the Creoles of Guiana felt was projected very strongly in their evidence to the Committee of 1910 but it would not be fair to conclude that no similar representations were made from Trinidad. The Trinidad Workingmen's Association, under its president Alfred Richards, and honorary secretary Adrien Hilarion, also argued that the coming of the Indians had lowered wages and that it was quite

wrong to continue a system whereby finance for continued immigration came from a tax on agricultural exports when, in the case of sugar, 40 per cent was grown without the aid of indentured labourers, and for cocoa this proportion rose to two-thirds. But what is so striking is that despite the truth of many of their claims, there was no suggestion of the racial persecution which characterized the Guianese representations.<sup>75</sup> Indeed, they even subscribe to the view that at least until 1870 the advent of the Indians was a good thing for 'it rendered a service by helping in various ways the descendants of the emancipated negroes to adopt habits of steady industry'.<sup>76</sup> After that date they contended that wages fell; on cocoa estates, for example, they fell from 60 cents per day to 35 cents.

If there is a contrast in the type and tenor of the objections raised by the Creoles to continued immigration into Trinidad and Guyana, there is one sphere where the response to such objections was consistent; the reply of the Governor. The Acting Governor dismissed the claims of the TWA in the following words:

The members of the Trinidad Working Men's Association belong to the most part to the artizan class. They are apparently under the influence of men who have but little, if any, stake in the Colony, and who, even though convinced of their honesty of purpose, I should hardly consider to be capable of forming an impartial and reliable opinion on such a question as this.<sup>77</sup>

It could be argued, however, that while the effect of the replies to the claims of the popular representatives of the working class was the same for both colonies, there is an important difference between them. This was that the Acting Governor of Trinidad should have dismissed the TWA on *class* lines - that is, because they had 'little stake in the Colony', while in Guyana the inherent inadequacies of the *race* were the justification.

## Conclusion

In this chapter I have tried to argue that while the migration of one ethnic group into a social system of one or more other ethnic or racial groups may define the parameters of future conflicts, it is not in itself sufficient explanation of those conflicts. Colonialism as it was manifest in both Trinidad and British Guiana certainly provided, as a system based in the last resort upon overt coercion, an inherently 'conflictive arena' but this has not been my main focus of interest. In both colonies the arrival of the Indians was a threat, but in one the lack of adequate land, the economic condition of the colony, and the policies and prejudices of planters and administrators alike, albeit constrained by these fundamental economic facts, were such as to



turn this threat into a confrontation. Thus a situation was born where stereotypes emerged with greater virulence on all sides and served as they always do to divide further by justifying with an aura of rationality a basically false situation.

The fact that the greatest labour leader British Guiana ever had, Hubert Critchlow, could come to London in 1925 and describe the Indians as 'a menace to the other workers of the country' was the result of this emerging situation which was to provide one crucial component of later social and political developments.<sup>78</sup> In Trinidad, on the other hand, inter-ethnic divisions also emerged, but – to use Donald Wood's phrase – 'a *modus vivendi* has always been possible'.<sup>79</sup>

### Notes

- 1 For British Guiana, see Dwarka Nath, *A History of Indians in British Guiana* (London: Thomas Nelson, 1950) and Peter Ruhomon, *Centenary History of the East Indians in British Guiana 1838–1938* (Georgetown: Daily Chronicle, 1947). For Trinidad, see M. J. Kirpalani et al, *Indian Centenary Review, 1845–1945* (Port of Spain: Guardian Commercial Printery, 1945).
- 2 See J. Graham Cruikshank, 'The beginnings of our Villages', *Timehri*, Vol. 8, August 1921, pp. 65–76.
- 3 At high tide, almost all the coastal lands of Guyana are beneath sea-level and are only prevented from inundation by an elaborate, and expensive, system of empoldering and drainage canals which were laid down originally by the Dutch colonists.
- 4 For further discussion of this point, see Rawle Fawley, 'The rise of the village settlements of British Guiana', *Caribbean Quarterly*, Vol. 3, no. 2 (1953), pp. 101–9. Also Eric Williams, 'The historical background of British Guiana's problems', *Timehri*, Vol. 26 (November 1944), pp. 18–34.
- 5 Rev. William Garland Barrett, *Immigration to the British West Indies: Is it the slave trade revived or not?* (London: A. W. Bennett, 1859, p. 6, emphasis in original).
- 6 In British Guiana a technique commonly used by the planters was to flood or overdrain the land and thereby destroy the crop of the smallholder.
- 7 See Dwarka Nath, *History of Indians*, Chapter II.
- 8 Adapted from G. W. Roberts and J. Byrne, 'Summary statistics on indenture and associated migration affecting the West Indies, 1834–1918', *Population Studies*, Vol. 20, no. 1 (1966), p. 129.
- 9 *Minutes of the Legislative Council of Trinidad and Tobago*, 21 May 1930. Cf. *Annual Report of the Protector of Immigrants, 1929*.
- 10 *Annual Report of the Protector of Immigrants for 1931*, Legislative Council Paper No. 43 of 1932.
- 11 *West India Royal Commission* Cd. 8655 (London: HMSO, 1897), Appendix C, Part II, pp. 126–7.
- 12 Roberts and Byrne, 'Summary Statistics', p. 127.
- 13 Those that did come from Madras were reputed to be better workers.
- 14 R. T. Smith, 'Some social characteristics of Indian immigrants to British Guiana', *Population Studies* Vol. 13 (1959), pp. 35–6. Smith found that immigrants came mainly from Basti, Azarnghar, Ghazipur, Gonda, Fyzabad, Allahabad, Gorakpur, Jaunpur, Shahabad and Lucknow. Cf. Judith Ann Weller, *The East Indian Indenture in Trinidad* (Puerto Rico: Institute of Caribbean Studies, 1968), espec. Appendix I, and pp. 123–6. Also Arthur H. Hill, 'Emigration from India', *Timehri*, Vol. 6 (September 1919), pp. 43–52.
- 15 See *Immigration Ordinances of Trinidad and British Guiana*, Cd. 1989 (London: HMSO, 1904).
- 16 Edward Jenkins, *The Coolie: His Rights and Wrongs* (London: Straham and Co., 1871), p. 95.
- 17 Barrett, *Immigration*, p. 3.
- 18 Rev. H. V. P. Bronkhurst, *Among the Hindus and Creoles of British Guiana* (London: T. Woolmer, 1882), p. 22.
- 19 *Ibid.*, p. 26.
- 20 Surgeon-Major D. W. D. Comins, *Notes on Emigration from India to British Guiana* (Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Press, 1893), p. 95.
- 21 *Ibid.*, p. 4.
- 22 Comins, *Notes*, p. 16.
- 23 *Ibid.*, p. 16.
- 24 Immigration Ordinance, 1891. Combined Court Paper No. 18 of 1891.
- 25 Comins, *Notes*, p. 50.
- 26 Immigration Ordinance, 1899, Legislative Council Paper No. 19 of 1899 and Immigration Ordinance, 1902, Legislative Council Paper No. 33 of 1902. All these ordinances are reprinted in Cd. 1989 (see note 15).
- 27 Comins, *Notes*, p. 50.
- 28 See Nath, *A History*, pp. 94–106.
- 29 Donald Wood, *Trinidad in Transition: The Years After Slavery* (London: Oxford University Press for the IRR, 1968), p. 270.
- 30 *Ibid.*, p. 275.
- 31 William Des Voeux, *My Colonial Service* (London: John Murray, 1903), Vol. I, p. 131.
- 32 A. H. Alexander (Immigration Agent-General) *Statistics and Other Information prepared for Dr Comins, Protector of Immigrants, Calcutta in regard to Immigration from India* (Georgetown, Demerara: The Argosy Press, 1891). Large parts of this report were incorporated verbatim but unreferenced in Comins, *Notes*.
- 33 Comins, *Notes*, p. 2.
- 34 *Ibid.*, p. 7.
- 35 See H. A. Will, 'Colonial Policy and Economic Development in the British West Indies, 1895–1903', *Economic History Review*, Vol. 23, no. 1 (1970), p. 141.
- 36 The wage rates were normally about double. Indian weeders could expect 25–45 cents per day while Creole cane-cutters would be paid within the range of 60–85 cents.
- 37 Wood, *Trinidad in Transition*, p. 296.
- 38 At present approximately 40 per cent of sugar in Trinidad is grown by cane farmers.
- 39 *Report of the Committee on Emigration from India to the Crown Colonies and Protectorates* (Chairman: Lord Sanderson), Cd. 5194, BPP XXVII, 1910. Part III: Papers Laid, p. 115.
- 40 *Report of the West India Royal Commission* C. 8655, 1897. Appendix C, Part IV (Trinidad), Appendix H, p. 309. For the period from 1885 to 1908–9 the grants of Crown Lands sold to Indian immigrants amounted to 69 087 acres out of a total of 227 508 acres sold. See Sanderson Committee, Report, Cd. 5192, p. 69.
- 41 Des Voeux, *Colonial Service*, pp. 130–1.
- 42 *Ibid.*, pp. 120–1.
- 43 Des Voux points out, for example, that in rural areas the magistrates would accept accommodation and hospitality from the manager or owner of a plantation and that it was customary for the latter to seat himself beside the magistrate during proceedings.
- 44 *Report of the Commissioners Appointed to enquire into the Treatment of Immigrants in British Guiana*, C. 393 (London: HMSO, June 1871), p. 11.
- 45 The Commissioners were William E. Frere, Sir George Young and Charles Mitchell.

- 46 *Ibid.*, p. 29.  
 47 *Ibid.*, p. 30.  
 48 *Ibid.*, p. 32.  
 49 *Ibid.*, p. 87.  
 50 *Ibid.*, p. 87.  
 51 *Ibid.*, p. 91.  
 52 The Muhurram Festival, though strictly speaking confined to Shi'ite Muslims, was generally supported by all Indians. In Trinidad it is termed after its leading deity as Hosein or Hose.  
 53 Letter from Arthur Child to Colonial Secretary, 31 October 1884. Reprinted in *Report and Correspondence on the Recent Coolie Disturbances in Trinidad* (Chairman: Sir H. W. Norman), C.4366 (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1885), p. 11.  
 54 Major Bowles to Colonial Secretary, 3 November 1884. *Ibid.*, p. 11.  
 55 Sanderson Committee, Cd. 5192: Report; Cd. 5193: Minutes of Evidence; Cd. 5194: Papers Laid.  
 56 Cd. 5192, p. 14.  
 57 Cd. 5194, p. 15.  
 58 *Ibid.*, p. 15.  
 59 *British Guiana – Census Report for 1911*, p. V.  
 60 For the period 1891–1911, 71 542 Creoles died, of whom 16 573 were infants under one year of age.  
 61 Between 1891 and 1911, 72 696 Indians died, of whom 45 295 were male and 35 364 between the ages of 20 and 50.  
 62 Census, p. XXV.  
 63 Cd. 5194, p. 15.  
 64 *Ibid.*, p. 16.  
 65 *Ibid.*, p. 16.  
 66 *Ibid.*, p. 19.  
 67 *Ibid.*, p. 18.  
 68 *Ibid.*, p. 19.  
 69 Reprinted in Cd. 5194, p. 31.  
 70 Chamberlain to Swettenham, 10 September 1903. Reprinted in Cd. 5194, p. 36.  
 71 Cd. 5192, p. 60.  
 72 Fred C. S. Bascom, 'The Labour Question', *Timehri* December 1912. Reprinted in *Indentured Immigration: Its ethnics and raison d'être* (Georgetown: The Argosy Co., 1913), p. 11.  
 73 James Rodway, 'Labour and Colonization', *Timehri*, Vol. VI (September 1919), p. 36.  
 74 E. F. Im Thurm, 'Notes on British Guiana', paper read at the Royal Colonial Institute, London, 13 December 1892, pp. 7–8.  
 75 The Commission of 1897 had sent round a questionnaire to sugar estates in Trinidad which revealed, on their own admission, that 14 out of the 20 who reported had lowered their wages in the previous few years – although all contended that this was due to the depression. See *Report*, C. 8655, Appendix C, Part IV (Trinidad), Appendix D, p. 307.  
 76 Cd. 5194, p. 114.  
 77 Knaggs to Secretary of State, 8 March 1909. Reprinted in Cd. 5194, p. 115.  
 78 Hubert Critchlow, in *Report of the First British Commonwealth Labour Conference* held at the House of Commons, 27 July–1 August 1925 (London: TUC and Labour Party, 1925), p. 83.  
 79 Wood, *Trinidad in Transition*, p. 304.

## CHAPTER 2

# Race and ethnic relations in Burnhamite Guyana

*Ralph Premdas*

### *Introduction*

In Guyana, race relations between persons of African and Indian descent (hereafter referred to as Creoles and Indians) are marked by covert contempt and deceptive distrust. Inter-racial suspicion runs silently deep, each side engaged in a contrived drama of studied hypocrisy about inter-communal amity. To the casual observer, Creole–Indian relations may appear cordial. Many Creoles and Indians may live in mixed neighbourhoods in town or village, their children attending the same schools under a racially integrated staff and may participate in the same school-sponsored games, even saying the same morning prayers in school. Overt inter-racial interaction is plentiful, easy to be interpreted as evidence of unity and harmony. But these same people, in the privacy of their homes and racial communities, enact a script of racist antipathy to their cross-communal compatriot that shows how perilous every day is to open racial conflagration. Each side has contrived a set of secret intra-community symbols, idioms, and nuanced expressions that communicate group solidarity built on an understanding of collective contempt for the other side. Forced to live together by the dictates of the colonial past, inter-racial accommodation is in fact a 'cordial' state of conflict in which Indian submission to Creole political dominance changes place, and interweaves with Creole under-performance in relation to Indian economic dominance. Everywhere race enters into everything in a perennial struggle. In the end, the psyche and soul are scarred; each side equally dehumanized. This is race relations in a divided society.

To understand how this sad state of affairs came about, it is necessary to return to the colonial past when Guiana's plural society was first forged into existence from a diverse immigrant population settled to produce sugar and profits for imperial Europe. Early settlement pointing to racially-determined occupational structures and residential patterns as well as the values of racial dominance that attended colonial social organization planted