This is 1955 and all the talk in ‘British Guiana’ is of ‘Fed’rashun,’ i.e., the West Indian Federation. The bodies brought together over centuries for the sole purpose of working the plantation are pondering their future: having made History, they are now gathered to have their say on Geography. The West Indian Federation, as originally envisioned, was to extend from British Honduras in northern Central America to British Guiana on the northern coast of South America and encompassing the Caribbean islands of the British Empire that lay in between. This represents a new beginning. Against a white background, it is a beginning begun with several absences: whites, Amerindians, women. Not a palm tree, not a building, it is odd that this cartoon gives no sense of where these men are standing. This cleansed, sanitized placeless background, as we have seen, was no coincidence.

The Mighty Sparrow, Trinidadian calypsonian, wrote of Federation,

*If they know they didn’t want federashun*
*And they know they don’t want to unite as one,*
*Just tell the Doctor you not in favour.*
*Don't behave like a blasted traitor!*
*How the devil you mean you ain't federatin no more?!*¹

The life of Federation,² however, was shorter lived than the calypso Sparrow wrote. And just as quickly as he changed rhythms, so too did the islands and territories under British rule in the Caribbean change their tune from federation to independence. British Guiana was one of the earliest to withdraw its support for federation. In both instances, however, there were no dearth of voices – some discordant, others harmonious – ready to provide the notes by which the anthem of West Indian independence in general and British Guiana in particular could be sung. There were the usual suspects: for example, the Americans and the British. This chapter, in a different turn, focuses on two often overlooked moments: India’s final relinquishing of its responsibility to the Indians of ‘British Guiana’ and Britain’s Queen’s to the Amerindians of same.

![British Guiana 1950 Census Data by Racial Group](chart)

**Figure 1.** With a total Population of 425,000 the numerical break-down by racial group is as follows: East Indian: 194,000; Negro: 156,000; Mixed: 44,000; Amerindian: 17,000; Portuguese: 8,000; Chinese: 3,000 & Other European: 3,000.³

Indians at Federation and Amerindians at Independence settled their relationships with two sovereigns, India and the British Queen, respectively. The first section of this chapter looks at how a subtext of a ‘migrant indigene’ informed the focus of

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¹ Mighty Sparrow, calypsonian. *Federation.* The ‘Doctor’ he refers to is Dr. Eric Williams of Trinidad and the ‘they’ refers to the Jamaicans.

² The original West Indies Federation lasted from January 1958 to May 1962.

³ As per the 1950 census of British Guiana as cited in F.18-14/55-UK.
newly independent India’s interventions in the West Indies at the time of Federation. The second section considers how Amerindians’ concerns, raised directly with the Queen in the build up to ‘British Guiana’s’ independence carried within it the notion of the ‘sedentary nomad’. Furthermore, between federation and independence in ‘British Guiana’, belonging gets articulated in three ways: constitution, petition and rebellion. These are explored in the three sections of the chapter.

I. FEDERATION AND INDIANS.

In his monthly report on the British West Indies and British Guiana, dated 15 August 1955, the High Commissioner for India, B. N. Nanda, informed his superiors that the M. V. Resurgent had been chartered and would sail on September 4 from British Guiana with 300 ex-indentured Indian labourers.4 Nanda wrote again in September to report that the Resurgent had sailed on schedule but minus the 44 persons who had registered and paid advances but at the last moment changed their minds and remained back.5 This would be Nanda’s last report as Commissioner from the West Indies. On 28 October 1955, at the insistence of the British, Nanda was transferred to Manila because ‘he had let himself become a focus for inter-racial antagonisms and for opposition to Caribbean federation both in Trinidad and in British Guiana’.6 B. N. Nanda, as the first Indian High Commissioner to the British West Indies, added a new dimension to India’s presence in the Caribbean: a diplomatic one. Though this new role of India’s would last into the present, for Nanda it was short lived and his troubles began when, in January 1955, a letter began circulating among British officials that he had for some time been ‘abusing his position by improper contacts with politicians of Indian descent’.7

Nanda began to attract attention in the West Indies after 19538, the year Cary Fraser has argued as being critical to British Guiana’s on going crisis of political legitimacy.9 Beginning with the unrest in the Indian dominated sugar industry in the 1930s and the

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5 Ibid.
6 DO 35/5226. Indian Representation in British Guiana.
7 Ibid.
8 1953 was also the year that Norman Manley’s (socialist labour) People’s National Party came to power in Jamaica.
black dominated bauxite industry in the 1940s, the events of 1953, Fraser argues, was an apogee from which British Guiana has not yet recovered.\textsuperscript{10}

In British Guiana there had been unrest in the sugar industry in the 1930s and during the World War II, in the bauxite industry in 1947, and in 1948, five sugar workers were killed by police sent to deal with protests at Enmore estate, some sixteen miles from the capital Georgetown. The unrest was an outgrowth of the very poor working and living conditions that shaped the lives of working-class people in the foreign-owned sugar and bauxite industries in British Guiana.\textsuperscript{11}

Again in 1953 it was the labour question that was high on everyone’s mind. The strike called by the Guyana Industrial Workers Union that closed down the sugar industry in August 1953 led the minister of labour of the newly elected government of the People’s Progressive Party (PPP),\textsuperscript{12} on 8 October, to table and ‘pass a bill providing for a poll in any industry, with recognition being granted to the union gaining the majority of votes’.\textsuperscript{13} Though the Colonial Office, on 24 September 1953, communicated to Governor Savage of British Guiana its decision to suspend the constitution, it did so only on 9 October when British troops were deployed to take control of the colony. Fraser concludes, ‘as in the other West Indian colonies, the new political order [of 1953] emerged out of labor unrest’.\textsuperscript{14} Both the archival and secondary literature on the period testify to this fact. Until independence everyone in British Guiana, with the exception of the Amerindians, was an employee of the British Empire. What is described in British Guiana as a call for independence, it could be argued, was nothing more than the culmination of a series of labour related disputes. There was an underlying assumption that any call for independence implied either an existing nation or a potential one. It is an assumption to which we are still hopefully clinging.

\textsuperscript{10} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{11} Ibid. p. 24.
\textsuperscript{12} As per Fraser, “In April 1953 the PPP won 51 percent of the popular vote and eighteen of the twenty-four elected seats in British Guiana’s legislature. It was the first election held under the Waddington constitution, which had introduced universal human suffrage to the British colony on the South American mainland. As a result of the elections, the PPP was expected to name six of the ten members of the new Executive Council and enjoy a majority in both the lower house and the combined lower and upper houses of the legislature. A new era in the history of British Guiana was about to begin with its first popularly elected government representative of the multiethnic population of the colony.” “The introduction of universal suffrage and internal self-government was part of the reform strategy implemented by the British government in response to labor unrest in the colony in 1948.” These characteristics would lead Cheddi Jagan, the catalyst for its suspension, in his book \textit{The West on Trial}, to describe the constitution as “one of the most advanced colonial constitutions for that period.”
\textsuperscript{13} Ibid. p. 41.
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid. p. 24.
It is to this situation that Nanda referred when he reported, ‘British Guiana during 1954 could best be described as one of stagnation and frustration’.

The lull in local anti-colonial activity, however, gave Nanda ample time to survey the situation on the ground. As would be a major concern of the Indian Commission in the West Indies for years to come, Nanda observed the growing interest that the Americans were taking in British Guiana. The British Guiana Government’s economic and social programmes, for example, were being supplemented by aid from the Foreign Operations Administration of the United States. It has also been observed that Consular Officers of the United States Consulate General in Trinidad have made more visits to British Guiana during 1954 than even the Indian Commissioner.

Nanda, after advising his superiors at home that this increased activity be understood in connection with the American’s ‘well-known Monroe Doctrine’ he concluded, ‘the action taken by the British Government in the colony perhaps had the approval or might even have been taken with the concurrence of the Americans who want to see the entire western hemisphere free from the taint of communism’. Furthermore, ‘they have also been exploring the desirability of re-opening the Consulate in British Guiana which was closed down a few years ago’. These concerns led Nanda to recommend, ‘we should also take immediate steps to implement our decision to open an office in Georgetown’.

The keen eye kept on the Americans was a result of India’s concern with American imperialist expansionism. In a lengthy note written from its Commission in 1955 about the situation in British Guiana, the anxieties of India get revealed. From the oil reserves in Venezuela, the boundary dispute between Venezuela and British Guiana along which a 80-mile long iron ore deposit was discovered, US mining interests in British Guiana, US plans to open libraries and USIS wings there, to the then recently discovered ‘vast concentrated monazite deposits … in the Rupununi district adjoining

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16 Ibid.
17 Ibid.
18 Ibid.
19 Ibid.
Brazil. Radioactive monazite mineral contains uranium, the Indians were watching every move of the Americans. In such a geo-politically sensitive situation, who controlled the government of British Guiana was of grave concern to everyone concerned. And everyone, according to the Indian Commissioner, including the Americans, the Venezuelans and the British, naturally eyed the PPP and Jagan with suspicion; everyone except the Indians, who in the same note simply described the PPP as having a 'progressive outlook'.

In keeping a check on American imperialism the Indian state, as represented by its foreign service officials, was willing to overlook communism, in its efforts to check anti-Indianism, the Indians were willing to overlook communism. In overlooking communism and focusing instead on 'protecting' Indians, India's interventions at this time helped to foster a communal Indian identity in the West Indies and thereby also added fuel to the fire of racial tension there.

The growing American interest and influence in British Guiana concerned Nanda not because it was anti-communist but because it was potentially anti-Indian. Cheddi Jagan, an Indian by origin and leader of the People's Progressive Party, by 1955, was a well identified and feared as an advocate of communism. Given the Nehru Government's crack down on communists in India until 1951, when the ban on the Communist Party of India was lifted, one is left to wonder at its apparent turning of a blind eye to it in territories outside of its jurisdiction. It is useful to recall here that in August 1955, when the Citizenship Bill was being discussed in the Indian parliament, the Deputy-Speaker, in the course of silencing the comments being made by Shri K. M. Vallatharas (Pudukkottai), said, 'the hon. Member can easily say it is useless to remain in this society as citizens unless it becomes Communistic State'. Calling for 'world citizenship', Vallatharas, probably stunned the House when he said, 'if all cannot be made happy, there is no use in a government existing'. The Speaker decided against allowing this discussion to enter the debate. The fact that Jagan was

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20 F.18-14/55-UK. "Shri B.N. Nanda's article on British Guiana - Decision to publish it in journal of the Indian Council of World Affairs."
21 Ibid.
23 Ibid. p. 9469.
24 Ibid. p. 9472.
a believer in parliamentary democracy and never advocated armed struggle may help explain this anomaly. The Indian Commission in the West Indies did not appear to need any help in ignoring the growth of communism in British Guiana. Very sensitive to American and British imperialist designs, the Commissioner in 1955 rather disdainfully reported, British Guiana’s ‘position in the Commonwealth has deprived it of American attention, capital, mass production and development until very recently when Communist-phobia brought in British troops and American technical know-how’.25 The communist threat in the West Indies in the eyes of India’s diplomats there was exaggerated.

The Indian Commissioners remained dismissive of the communist threat in the West Indies for years to come. In 1957, for example, on the eve of the emergence of the Federation, the Commissioner reported that the Commission appointed to recommend suitable sites for the Federal Capital, in rejecting Trinidad as the capital had

thrown up the bogey of a Communist Party in Trinidad and mention the existence of another party which was racial in outlook, meaning People’s Democratic Party - the political arm of the Sanatan Dharma Mahasabha of Trinidad. The Commissioners also found that the presence of a large percentage of Indians in Trinidad, with loyalty and cultural affiliations elsewhere, was a disturbing element in its public life and they did not want the Federal Capital to be contaminated by these surroundings.26

As Deborah Sutton has argued with respect to the Indian state’s relationship with Indians in Kenya vis-à-vis communalism,27 this ambivalence and at times almost total disregard with respect to communism among Indians overseas was a reflection of the Indian state’s inability to resolve its relationship in general to Indians abroad. Whereas Sutton has argued that communalism was not to be tolerated or encouraged amongst Indians overseas as it was not in India itself, the reverse seems to be true with respect to Indians and communism abroad. Tyabji, the Indian Commissioner in Kenya, announced that Indian communalism and communalists abroad had to be ‘controlled, curbed and converted’ and this process was the legitimate business of

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25 F.18-14/55-UK. “Shri B.N. Nanda’s article on British Guiana - Decision to publish it in journal of the Indian Council of World Affairs.”
26 F. 16-6/57-UK. Monthly Political Reports from the British West Indies for the year 1957.
Indian diplomacy'.  

Neither himself nor Nanda however, ever made such a statement on communism amongst Indians abroad. This may be reflective of the fact that there was no consistent anti-communist feeling amongst the liberal Congressmen like Nehru – the position taken was vis-à-vis communism was more strategic, and contingent, conjunctural. This is not so in the case of Communalism. Congress defined itself in opposition to communalism, even when many of its members had a communal heart.

Though he was following his career closely, Nanda, at least in the documents made public, never addressed Jagan's communism directly. Instead, he concerned himself with Jagan's Indian identity. In his summary of the Colonial Government’s actions after the suspension of the British Guiana constitution in October 1953, it is difficult not to come away with the impression that Nanda perceived emerging in British Guiana a strong anti-Indian feeling.

After the suspension of the constitution the Governor carried on the administration throughout the year with the aid of a nominated Legislative Council and a nominated Executive Council. It is interesting to note that only one out of the ten Executive Councillors and 5 among the 27 legislators are Indians by race. These members incidentally have no following whatever among the Indians. It is clear, therefore, that the Government places more blame for the constitutional break-down on the Indian elements than on the Negroes.

This ‘blame’ arose, he conjectured, because of the ‘predominant position which Jagan occupied in the People’s Progressive Party and also due to their efforts to enlist sympathy from India’. Even though the Commissioner reported in 1957, The Times of London had denounced Dr. Jagan as an ‘irreconcilable exponent of Communist doctrine and an advocate of Communist tactics in Guianese politics’, remained unconvinced. Jagan, in other words, if he was a communist at all in the eyes of the Indian state, was a communist by association; the same by extension was true therefore generally of Indians in British Guiana and accusing the Indian of being communist was an excuse to get rid of them. While the Indian Commissioner took cognizance of the fact that ‘the racial situation in British Guiana made it a good thing

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28 Ibid. p. 5  
30 Ibid.  
31 F. 16-6/57-UK. Monthly Political Reports from the British West Indies for the year 1957.

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to get rid of the Indians who supported the communist party', and thereby accepted that Indians were indeed communists, he never looked for or found any proof to suggest that Indian communists were being targeted by the anti-communism forces in the colony. The Indian Commissioners completely ignored Indian communism and based their policy in British Guiana on the premise that 'Indians' had to be protected. In this way, as we will go on to see, racial tensions already brewing in the colony were further exacerbated.

The extent to which the Indian Commissioners saw the anti-communism motives of the Americans and the British as more of an anti-Indian one was further made clear in their assessment of the true story behind the desire to repatriate the abovementioned ex-indentured labourers. The Indian position, on repatriation was established decades earlier: it was to be discouraged. As early as 1926, describing them as 'out of the frying-pan into the fire', Gandhi agreed with the Imperial Citizenship Association's recommendations that returned emigrants 'will not be happy except in the Colonies'. Between the two of them, Gandhi and the Association came to the conclusion that it mattered not which colony it was, just that the almost 1,000 emigrants stranded in Matiaburz, Calcutta, be sent back. As he put it: 'it is the clear duty of the Government to send them back to the most suitable Colony that would receive them'. In a striking turn from his earlier position, as we saw in the previous chapter, Gandhi added, 'the tropical Colonies must be glad to have them in preference to raw recruits who have to be initiated'. Gandhi substantiated his position by arguing that Indians from the colonies, he mentions Fiji, Trinidad, Surinam and British Guiana, were no longer Indian and 'that their own people in their villages will not have them'. He wrote,

The fact that the majority of these men are Colonial-born aggravates their misery. The reader will not appreciate the full meaning of being 'Colonial-born'. These men are neither Indian nor Colonial. They have no Indian culture in the foreign lands they go to, save what they pick up from their uncultured half-dis-Indianized parents. They are not Colonial in that they are debarred access to the Colonial, i.e., Western, culture. They are therefore out of the frying-pan into fire. There at least they had some money and a kind of

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34 Ibid.
35 Ibid.
36 Ibid.

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Benarasidas Chaturvedi was puzzled by Gandhi’s article and wrote to him saying that ‘there are certain statements in your article “Out of the Frying-pan” published in the Young India of 9th Sept. which require explanation at your hands’. Chaturvedi had been ‘entrusted with the work of looking after these [return] emigrants’ by Gandhi and C. F. Andrews. He had ‘been in close touch with many of the returned emigrants for the last six years and had visited their quarters not less than twenty times during that period’. He was, therefore, in a position to refute Gandhi’s assertions about ‘social lepers’ and them not knowing ‘the language of the people’. Chaturvedi wrote, ‘during my several visits to Matiaburz I did not come across a single Indian to whom your phrase “not even knowing the language of the people” could apply’. Furthermore, while agreeing with Gandhi that those at ‘present stranded in Matiaburz suffered at the hands of their caste people, the zamindars and the police and the pandits’, he was careful to emphasize that ‘they form only a small percentage of the total number of the returned emigrants’. He stressed, ‘more than eighty per cent of the returned emigrants get absorbed in the villages of India and it is only less than twenty per cent who find their way to Matiaburz’. Chaturvedi was anxious that Gandhi qualify his statements, especially his recommendation that return emigrants be sent to the ‘most suitable colony that would receive them’, because he was ‘afraid that the Indian Government may take advantage of this statement of yours and despatch these Fiji Indians to British Guiana’. Summing up, he reminded Gandhi, ‘in our anxiety to give these people immediate relief we must not neglect this aspect of the question, i.e., how many of them will make good Colonists’ and politely upbraided him by stating ‘our duty does not finish simply in despatching these people in haste to any Colony’.

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37 Ibid.
39 Ibid. p. 499.
40 Ibid. p. 499.
41 Ibid.
42 Ibid.
43 Ibid.
When it was pointed out that he had admitted two years prior 'that it was an error ... to have stated that 500 workers should be permitted to emigrate to British Guiana as an experimental measure',\textsuperscript{44} Gandhi responded, 'in my opinion, it [his earlier statement] has no relevance to the present opinion'.\textsuperscript{45} He clarified that at present his only concern was for 'those who are now living in a disgraceful state in Calcutta', those who, contrary to Chaturvedi's experience, Gandhi claimed 'cannot and will not go to the villages'.\textsuperscript{46} This conjuncture led Gandhi to inform Chaturvedi, 'I am therefore sorry that I cannot reconsider the opinion I have given'. When Gandhi had met Nunan six years earlier he had objected to further emigration to British Guiana. At that time the question of what to do with repatriates did not arise. What Gandhi, himself a 'returned emigrant', was now clarifying that not only was he against further emigration but that he also did not consider it wise that those who had migrated and were born in the Colonies should return and further, those who managed to return should be sent back, albeit 'if they choose'.\textsuperscript{47} Though Benarasidas Chaturvedi, challenged this position, by 1955,\textsuperscript{s} discouraging repatriation, at least among agricultural workers in the sugar colonies, became the official Indian policy.

Nanda was therefore simply doing his job in 1955 when he tried in vain – through 'inspired letters to the editor' and failed attempts to convince the Governor that 'the money spent on repatriating the people might be utilised in a better way for providing houses for these people or for settling them on land'\textsuperscript{48} – to dissuade ex-indentured labourers in British Guiana from applying and actually repatriating to India. In the parliament in New Delhi, for instance, referring to the 'large number of Indians who are in the United Kingdom, in the colonies or in other places', the then Home Affairs Minister, Pandit G. B. Pant made it clear that India [was] not anxious to repatriate and bring them back to our country [i.e., India].\textsuperscript{49} At this moment, as his following comment reflects, Nanda's reasons were different from Gandhi's, 'it is clear to us that it is entirely within their discretion to give land grants to these people in lieu of the cost of return passage. Although there is no dearth of land, it is felt that there is

\textsuperscript{45} CWMG, v. 36. p. 456. Returned Emigrants in Young India, 4-11-1926.
\textsuperscript{46} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{47} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{49} Lok Sabha Debates Part II, 1955. p. 9741.
definite opposition from certain quarters to make the Indian economically independent and a power in the land. New Delhi was now objecting to repatriation because it was being used to cheat Indians in the West Indies of their hard earned rights. This view stemmed from Jawaharlal Nehru’s reflection that these Indians had ‘worked hard for themselves, and for the country of their adoption. They made good for themselves, and the country they had gone to also profited’. The Indian view would later harden when they saw a pattern in the British treatment of Indians in numerically Indian dominated colonies. In 1960, N. V. Rajkumar, the Commissioner to the British West Indies, would write:

The other point that has emerged is the caution shown by the U.K. Government in transferring political power to a party and government composed mostly of people of Indian origin in the Colony. While Britain has been generally agreeable - willingly or unwillingly - to the transfer of power to the elected representatives of the peoples in her several colonies, she has hesitated in places like Mauritius, British Guiana and Fiji where the preponderant majority of the people are Indians. This fact has come into sharp relief in recent years. Wherever the Africans have been in the majority and would be the beneficiaries of independence and self-government, the British have bowed to the inevitable compulsions of the time-spirit. In the three territories mentioned however, the situation has developed differently. In Mauritius where the majority is of Indian origin, there were insidious attempts sometime ago to introduce proportional representation in order to nullify the effects of majority rule. In British Guiana as we know, a similar demand from the opposition parties was given indirect support by Britain and her supporters in the colony. In Fiji excuses are made that the indigenous Fijian population are backward and unprepared for a government based on the majority. These instances give the impression that the British do not trust people of Indian origin with their more nationalistic background while they do not see any danger in putting power into the hands of the Negro people, whether in Africa or elsewhere. This is not a mere suspicion or indication but a conclusion logically derived from recent events and from the attitudes and policies adopted by the Colonial authorities in London.

India it seems was being careful not to export what it perceived as its own nationally disruptive creations, i.e., its internal problems to other countries.

Communism, however, was not an ‘Indian’ creation and hence India’s ambivalence towards it outside of its own borders. Anti-communism as a source for this

51 Speech by Prime Minister Nehru in the Constituent Assembly on 4 December 1947. In Jawaharlal Nehru, India’s Foreign Policy: Select Speeches, September 146 – April 1961. (New Delhi, 1961). p. 127.
52 6(80)R&I/60. Reports (other than annual) from Br. Guiana (Trinidad) March 1960.
ambivalence must, however, be qualified in light of the multiple relationships the Nehruvian Indian government was in the process of defining both nationally and internationally. Public policy was defined by a consideration owned, no matter what your private opinions were. At this time there was no general publicly proclaimed hostility to communism. Do not forget that this was the great era of Indo-Soviet friendship and Indo-China friendship. India as the leading member of the non-aligned movement did not, could not oppose communism as a general policy. They were dependent on Soviet support for industrialisation and growth. The 1950s was the great era of Nehruvian socialism when left wing intellectuals defined state policies, when the public sector was developing and agrarian reforms were being undertaken, while communists assertion, as in Telengana was also being repressed. There was a negotiation between long term and short-term policy decisions, and between support to state socialism and opposition of communism. The role that the Indian state saw itself playing in the West Indies was not so much as Sutton has argued was the case in Kenya, i.e., 'to cultivate a unified Indian community groomed according to highest ideals of the newly established Indian state', but admittedly, having a particular notion of 'Indianness' in mind, it was dominated by the desire to curb anti-Indianism. In the eyes of the Indian state, the twin issues of anti-Indianism and communism converged, for example, in the choice of the Federal Capital. As the Commissioner wrote of the Report of the Commission appointed to select a suitable site for the capital of the West Indies federation in the early months of 1957,

They have also thrown up the bogey of a Communist Party in Trinidad and mention the existence of another party which was racial in outlook, meaning People's Democratic Party - the political arm of the Sanatan Dharma Mahasabha of Trinidad. The Commissioners also found that the presence of a large percentage of Indians in Trinidad, with loyalty and cultural affiliations elsewhere, was a disturbing element in its public life and they did not want the Federal Capital to be contaminated by these surroundings.

This reflection of the Indian diplomat reflect the influence of race and communism on the thinking and practice of political engagement of both the Indian and newly emerging West Indian states. At a minimum, both held ambivalent attitudes towards communism. Both recognized race as a motivating factor in West Indian political life. While neither was advocating communism, both were in different senses anti-racist.

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53 Sutton, ""divided and uncertain loyalties"", p. 7.
54 F. 16-6/57-UK. Monthly Political Reports from the British West Indies for the year 1957. January.
For example, in the case of India, there is an erasure of difference, a discovery of sameness among Indians in the West Indies that would not be recognised within India. Whether the actions taken by either side helped or hindered race relations in the West Indies in general and in 'British Guiana' in particular is a matter of debate. If, however, we recognise that identities are defined in opposition to an other, then the figure of that perceived other will always define the boundaries of the inclusive community that is forged.

Nanda was transferred out of the West Indies because of the Colonial Office's charge that he was

> there was a very real risk of racial rivalries being stimulated as a result of the activities there of Nanda. One of the grounds for requesting that Nanda should be transferred from the West Indies was that he attempted to influence debates on federation in the British Guiana Legislative Council by urging leading members to oppose it. There were in fact indications that Nanda was becoming a focus for political antagonism between racial groups in BG, as in Trinidad. 55

Furthermore, they charged, he had

> been abusing his position by improper contacts with politicians of Indian descent on the island. Some of these reports have added apparently as a speculation that he was attempting to organise them against Federation of the West Indies. The suggestion that his interventions were directed against Federation which is a policy of the U.K. Government obviously made these reports a matter of particular concern. 56

Nanda's activities, according to the Colonial Office, were apparently 'much more serious' than that of the Indians under Pant in Kenya with respect to the Mau-Mau, 'namely to have intervened directly and effectively against a major matter of British policy – the encouragement of the West Indian territories to federate'. 57 Nanda's activities, described as 'nefarious', the British felt, had helped to create a situation such that 'Indians on the island [Trinidad] had opposed Federation in a body and had probably seduced certain African groups such as the followers of Uriah Butler to support their side'. 58 For this reason, not only was Nanda transferred, but the British

56 Ibid.
57 Ibid.
58 Ibid.
also decided, 'in the interests of racial harmony', 59 to delay their permission for India to open its High Commission in British Guiana. Similarly India's attempts to bring Indian culture to the Indians in the West Indies were viewed with suspicion. The request for permission to open a Commission in British Guiana was seen by the British as India's attempt to take its role in promoting 'Indian separatism' to the 'next stage'. 60

This was the interpretation that was given to the arrival of Pundit Rishi Ram, Indian lecturer in philosophy and Yoga, in the Colony on the 16 of November on a lecture tour, accompanied by Mr. Mahatam Singh. While the British admitted that Pundit Rishi Ram's lectures, the basis of which has been racial unity had 'not touched on controversial political issues', they felt that 'the significance of his visit from the racial point of view is its long term effect in stimulating an East Indian culture'. 61 Mahatam Singh, an Indian national and a lecturer in Indian languages, financed by the Commissioner, was to remain in the Colony for about two years, with the object of raising the standard of Hindi education. He has started to give refresher courses to Hindi teachers. This, according to the British officials, was 'undoubtedly a matter of some importance, both from the point of view of cultural separatism and also from the scope it provides for subversive activity; the Hindi schools are not subject to control or inspection by the Education Department and are open targets for political and subversive propaganda'. 62 Another arrival was that of Mr. A.D. Mani, described as Editor and Publisher of Hiteavada, who came to British Guiana on 1 December for a stay of four days. Mani it was reported 'professed embarrassment at press reports of some remarks attributed to him on the subject of An East Indian Empire part of which was 6,000 miles away from India'. 63

The British objection to India's cultural activities in British Guiana is ironic. This, especially given the fact that in setting up the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) much care was given by the Indians not to offend the British but also to model it according to British 'cultural' centres. In responding to India's High Commissioner

60 Ibid. 8 February 1955. Memo from A.F. Morley to G.H. Middleton in New Delhi.
61 Ibid.
62 Ibid.
63 Ibid. Letter from R.C. Ormerod to Mr Harrison, 21.1.55.
in Trinidad’s request to acquire property for an Indian cultural centre in British Guiana, the New Delhi official responded,

I notice from the letter of the Commissioner of India in Trinidad dated 24th December, 1954 that the British and United States Governments were expanding their information activities in British Guiana and in particular the British Council was taking increasingly active part in the matter. Therefore the proposed Indian set-up should be after the British Council pattern. It may be recalled that recently there has been some criticism in the British press with regard to the activities of the Indian Commission in that area. If we have a set-up of the British Council pattern the scope for criticism and suspicion could be considerably less.  

India’s position was that it was doing in the West Indies nothing that the other nations were not. To a large extent the ‘criticism and suspicion’ that the Indian Commission in the West Indies confronted was based on speculation. But, further along, the same note contains an example of an instance where the suspicion may have indeed been warranted.

Though similar organisations, like the British Council, are actively functioning in the British West Indies, our cultural activities have aroused considerable suspicion both among the Colonial Administrations and among Negro and other elements of the local population and the position of our Commissioner has become increasingly untenable. I would, therefore, advise that, in the special circumstances of the British West Indies, we slow down the tempo of our activities lest our Mission or the Indian community should run into further difficulties. Moreover, we are pressing the UK Government to concur in the opening of a separate office, under our Commissioner’s supervision, in Georgetown. *It would be tactically inadvisable to give the Colonial Government concerned or the UK Government a foretaste, in the shape of a building purchased by the ICCR and run as a full-fledged cultural (or community) centre, of our possible lines of activity in British Guiana. This may further delay the concurrence of the UK Government which, as it is, has been much delayed* [emphasis added.].

What ‘possible lines of activity’ was India planning in British Guiana in 1955? On the one hand, it may have been increased trade. Though the British dismissed the Indian economic interests in the West Indies as ‘slender’. Commissioner Pillai confirmed this when he reported that in the first 6 months of 1955 ‘India bought nothing from British Guiana’. This report, however, was filed in the same month that the Commissioner and his wife hosted ‘a cocktail party in honour of Mrs. J. R. D. Tata

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64 F.18-3/55 UK. Proposal to set up a Cultural Centre in British Guiana - Recommendations of the Commissioner, Trinidad.
65 Ibid.
held at their residence', and when ‘Birla also laid [the] foundation stone for the building of Bhadase Maraj’s Sanatan Dharma Maha-Sabha Hindu temple’. Mr. L.N. Birla, the prominent Indian industrialist paid a short visit to the colony during the 2nd week of September. His principle object was to explore the possibility of starting an Overseas Bank managed by Birla interests. He met prominent Trinidadian Indian businessmen at the Commissioner’s residence to discuss the matter.

On the other hand, India’s designs in the West Indies may have been related to its own ongoing complex project of citizenship formation. In 1959, the ministry of External Affairs in New Delhi wrote to its High Commissioner in Kuala Lumpur on the subject of overseas Indians acquiring Indian citizenship. In that note, External Affairs advised,

if persons of Indian origin were allowed to re-acquire Indian citizenship while still resident abroad, it will create the impression that the acquisition of citizenship of a Commonwealth country by a person of Indian origin is only a ruse and a temporary expedient. This would be unfortunate as it will raise doubts about such persons identifying themselves with the country of which they become citizens. You may explain to them that such a position would ultimately be detrimental to their own interests.

In the 1950s the debate over the content of the idea of Indian citizenship occurred in the context, Shrimati Renu Chakravartty (Bashirhat), in the Lok Sabha, pointed out, of certain ‘special’ historical circumstances: partition and emigration, which saw the potential subjects of this citizenship widely dispersed across the globe. Amounting to a notion of migrant indigeneity, the reverberations of this conundrum was felt in distant places and interpreted in a variety of ways. Despite the suspicion of West Indian leaders about the Indian states’ intentions in the West Indies, the evidence suggests a battle was being waged between different groups with different political and ideological suasions to give their own meaning to the debate, to shape the idea of

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67 In addition, Birla announced ‘the award of two scholarships for Indian students from West Indies to pursue studies in Engineering in India’. 68 Maraj was described by the Indian High Commissioner as a “communal-minded Hindu to the point of fanaticism.” - F.16(20)/55 UK. 69 Here lies a possible area for further exploration: the relationship between Hindu (communal) capital and the rise of a West Indian Hindu communal identity. 70 15(8)55-UK. 15 September 1955. 90.35. 71 21(26)-PVI/60. Question of Acquisition of Indian Citizenship by Persons of Indian Origin in Commonwealth Countries. Letter dated Dec. 15, 1959, from Y.K. Puri, External Affairs to Acting High Commissioner of India to Kuala Lumpur, Prithi Singh. 72 Lok Sabha Debates Part II, 1955. p. 9496.
citizenship. The interests motivating each group must be rigorously interrogated lest the homogenizing categories of Indian, Imperial and West Indian become reified.

CONCLUSION.

'Extra-national' was a term introduced into West Indian politics in 1955 by Trinidad's Minister of Labour, Albert Gomes at the Regional Economic Conference in British Guiana in 1955, to describe Indian West Indian's (British Guianese and Trinidadians) connection to India. Gomes accused Indians of a certain 'ilk' of 'working insidiously, under the guise of religious and other national meetings and conferences to indoctrinate their communities against acceptance of West Indian nationhood' and of 'damaging the cause'. In his autobiography, *Through a Maze of Colour*, he wrote:

> When India achieved independence in 1948 the pageantry of extra-territorial patriotism exceeded itself in Trinidad. An Indian Commissioner appeared on the scene, appointed by the Government of India, obviously with the consent of Her Majesty's Government, but certainly not with the approval of any of her elected representatives of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. This much I knew because I was a member of the Executive Council. We just were not consulted. On the face of it the appointment looked suspiciously like gratuitous reinforcement of the general mischief of communal promotion.

Gomes was active in promoting the federation of the British West Indies in the 1950s. One of his visits to 'British Guiana' in 1955 coincided with Nanda's. Gomes saw Nanda as fomenting unrest in the West Indies. Nanda's activities in the West Indies caused Games to write:

> It the event my worst suspicions were confirmed when one of these diplomatic gentlemen proceeded to appoint himself leader of our Indian community and its political counsellor and organiser. On the surface, of course, it all seemed above board and in the cause of culture, but to my keen instinct the sinister purpose was unmistakable. Indian separatism was being sedulously fostered by India's diplomatic representative in our midst.

Nanda, as reported in the *Guyana Times*, was in 'British Guiana' in the early months of 1955 to promote the official policy of Indian in the West Indies, which was 'one of selling East Indian culture to West Indian Indians'. In this visit Nanda 'sought to

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73 Argosy, 31 May 1955.
75 Ibid. p. 167.

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have compulsory Hindi introduced in the schools'.\textsuperscript{77} Apparently, at ‘Port Mourant (Jagan’s birth place), he told Indians not to vote for federation’ and instead ‘called on Indians to give their heart and soul to India first and the West Indies next’.\textsuperscript{78} Gomes came to know of these ‘subversive activities’,\textsuperscript{79} as he described them, and remarked to the media, ‘I have no illusions of what is being done. The middle class East Indians who have political ambitions have elected to satisfy these ambitions by pandering to the extra-national loyalty of others, fortifying it and making his fellow citizens less than West Indians’.\textsuperscript{80} The middle class to which Gomes was referring were, for example, local pundits, like Charran and Sookool, who were ‘preaching in the Indian temples warn[ing] East Indians to stay out of federation lest an alien people come into British Guiana to get their lands and marry their daughters’.\textsuperscript{81} These Indians, the history of whose emigration Jawaharlal Nehru described as reading ‘almost like a romance’,\textsuperscript{82} were not only at the center of the debate on the ‘sine qua non of West Indian nationhood’\textsuperscript{83} but were also integral to the then unfolding meaning of citizenship in India. The summer of 1955 recall was also the time when the Indian parliament was debating its Citizenship Bill. In the course of the debate Home Affairs Minister Pant, in defending the bill revealed that ‘we have an urge for a wider fellowship of nations. We in the Congress, from the olden days, have been dreaming about a world citizenship. That has been our dream’.\textsuperscript{84} Between Gomes’ ‘maze’ and Congress’ ‘dream’, i.e., between the attempts to constitute two states, floated the debris of citizenship.

As suggested in the following memo, there was an element of indifference in the Indian state’s regard for the West Indies Federation:

With the inauguration of Federation on January 3, 1958, a ten-year old dream, which has exercised the minds of West Indian statesmen and politicians, has become a reality.... However, in the midst of the rejoicings over the newly-founded nationhood, the fact that the Federation will still be a Colony is conveniently forgotten.\textsuperscript{85}

\textsuperscript{77} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{78} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{79} Gomes, Maze, p. 167.
\textsuperscript{80} Gomes in the Guyana Times, VI (2nd Quarter, 1955), p. 32-33, quoted in Glasgow, Guyana, p. 108.
\textsuperscript{81} Guyana Times, VI (2nd Quarter, 1955), p. 15. Quoted in Glasgow, Guyana, p. 109.
\textsuperscript{82} Nehru, India’s Foreign Policy, p. 127.
\textsuperscript{83} Gomes, Maze, p. 167.
\textsuperscript{84} Lok Sabha Debates Part II, 1955. pp. 9740.
\textsuperscript{85} F. 16-6/57-UK. Monthly Political Reports from the British West Indies for the year 1957. December.
The roots of that indifference, though directed at the Federation, lay in the larger debates of post-colonial belonging as it was then being articulated through the concept of citizenship. How this concept influenced the way people of 'British Guiana' understood and enacted their belonging to that place is beyond the purview of this chapter, suffice it to say, however, that there is no doubting the impact that the process of defining had on the day to day lives of the people.  

One example of the painful manifestations of this debate was seen in what has been described as the race riots in the Wismar, Christianburg and Mackenzie regions of 'British Guiana' in the summer of 1964, details of which are contained, for example, in the 29 January 1965 “Report of the Wismar, Christianburg and Mackenzie Commission”. It is reported therein that,  

On 6 July 1964, a passenger launch, the *Sun Chapman*, traveling from Georgetown to Mackenzie on the Demerara River was completely destroyed by a huge explosion. More than 36 persons, all Africans, died in this mishap. When the news of this incident reached Mackenzie, many Africans there, assuming that the launch was bombed by Indians, became highly enraged, and in acts of reprisal, they brutally attacked Indians in the town and five of them died as a result.
II. (A) INDEPENDENCE AND AMERINDIANS.

Plate 2. The Mountain of Ataraipu, in Guayana.87

The following is the text of a petition to Her Majesty The Queen from the Amerindians of British Guiana presented to the Secretary of State for the Colonies (Mr. Duncan Sandys) on 5 November 1962 by Mr. Stephen Campbell on behalf of the Amerindian people of British Guiana:

To the Queen’s Most Excellent Majesty. The humble petition of the Chiefs of the Amerindian villages of British Guiana respectfully sheweth: your petitioners are the Captains, Tushau or Chiefs of the below-mentioned villages and represent the Amerindians who are the descendants of the original inhabitants of this country.

Our people number about 30,000 and live in villages scattered over approximately 68,000 square miles, which is about 78% of British Guiana’s total land area.

Our people have lived peacefully in their villages in the forest and savannas of British Guiana and have enjoyed the protection of Your Majesty’s Government for over 162 years.

Your petitioners have heard that there is a possibility of independence being granted soon and they are afraid of what will happen after independence when Your Majesty’s protection will be withdrawn.

Your petitioners especially fear that their rights will then be abrogated and ignored and the lands on which the Amerindians have lived for thousands of years will be expropriated. Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that the rights of the Amerindians which they have hitherto enjoyed under Your Majesty’s Protection be guaranteed forever by Your Majesty. That a General Election is held before Independence is granted. And your petitioners as in duty bound will ever pray.\(^{88}\)

Her Majesty responded, through the Governor of British Guiana, that she was ‘well aware that the Amerindian people of British Guiana have long been loyal subjects of the Crown’.\(^{89}\) That loyalty, however, was not enough to secure Her enduring protection. The Queen went on to explain that the present constitution of British Guiana provides for a Minister to be specially charged with responsibility for Amerindian affairs, while the provisions relating to fundamental human rights would protect individual Amerindians. The principle of independence for British Guiana, however, on which agreement was reached at the Constitutional Conference of 1960, meant for the Amerindians ‘the transfer to an independent Government of the powers and responsibilities in British Guiana which have hitherto been exercised by the British Government, on Her Majesty’s behalf’.\(^{90}\) One of those responsibilities was the ‘protection of the Amerindians’.\(^{91}\) Furthermore, the Governor was to urge the Amerindian leaders to fit themselves and their people to take an active part in their own Government, and ‘to make their needs and wishes known to the British Guiana Government through Constitutional channels’.\(^{92}\) The Amerindians were to prepare themselves ‘to play a part in the Government of the whole country through their representatives, and thus help in building a Government which, in an independent Guyana, will watch over their interests as vigilantly as these have been watched over in the past’.\(^{93}\) Though independence would come to British Guiana in 1966, it was apparently already a foregone conclusion in 1962.

The Queen, to whom the Amerindians were appealing, sought in her response to their petition to simultaneously absolve the British Crown and Government of their hitherto

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\(^{88}\) CO 1031/5028. Petition to Her Majesty The Queen from the Amerindians of British Guiana. 1963-1965. Presented to the Secretary of State for the Colonies (Mr. Duncan Sandys) on 5 November 1962 by Mr. Stephen Campbell on behalf of the Amerindian population of British Guiana.

\(^{89}\) Ibid. Despatch to the Governor of British Guiana. 1963.

\(^{90}\) Ibid.

\(^{91}\) Ibid.

\(^{92}\) Ibid.

\(^{93}\) Ibid.
self-imposed responsibility to ‘protect’ the Amerindian, to shift that responsibility onto the soon to emerge independent Guyanese government and to encourage the Amerindians to place their fate in the new constitution of the country of which they had no voluntary part in making. The paternalism that characterized the British approach to Amerindians in British Guiana in the past and that was to continue through the independent Guyanese government was not lost on anyone, least of all on the British themselves.

Ralph Grey, Governor of British Guiana, admitted of British rule, ‘we have nothing to be proud in our failure to grapple with this problem. The only salve to our conscience must be the cynical statement that there are only about 20,000 Amerindians within our borders’. The varying estimates of the number of Amerindians in ‘British Guiana’ betray a desire on the part of the Colonial authorities to have the Amerindians and therewith the ‘Amerindian problem’ disappear.

There is no evidence to suggest that it was as a direct result of Europeans’ wars against them that the Amerindian population in ‘British Guiana’ fluctuated – in ‘British Guiana’ there was no Morne des Sauteurs. There is, however, ample evidence to show that it was as a result of European diseases and displacement that it did. In a sense, as we shall see, the story of the treatment of illnesses among Amerindians tells how, in ‘British Guiana’, the entire population was made into ‘outsiders’. The resilience shown by Amerindians to the genocide perpetrated against them thereby is contained in their increasing numbers. Even though, as was acknowledged, in most of the past censuses the Amerindian population was estimated and never enumerated and therefore no reliance should be placed on them, the data upon which all discussion of their affairs was based tell the story of resurgence.

94 Ibid. Letter from Ralph Grey, Governor of British Guiana to the Colonial Office, February 18th, 1963.
95 ‘In 1650, in the island of Grenada (the Windward group) the French, in an outburst of savagery, set fire to a whole Carib village, and after helping themselves to the crops and everything that seemed of value possessed by the subject race, pursued the fleeing victims who, rather than suffer capture, committed suicide by leaping off the edge of a high cliff at the northern end of the island - a cliff known to this day as Morne des Sauteurs.” – Edgar Mittelholzer, With a Carib Eye (London: Secker & Warburg, 1958). p. 15.
Their numbers, for example, grew from being ‘unknown’ in 1841 to 7,000 in 185196 and as stated above 30,000 in 1862. A ‘note’ prepared in 1952 gives some idea of the fall and rise of the Amerindian population in British Guiana.97 Prepared by the colonial officials, it estimated from the records of the period that in the year 1665 the Amerindian population of ‘British Guiana’, which comprised tribal groups of Akowios, Warraus, Wapisianas, Macusis, Caribs, Patamonas and Wai-Wais, was about 50,000 persons. ‘During the next 100 years the Arawak, Akowoi and the Warrau tribes suffered considerably from the attacks of the more warlike Caribs who were then the principle slave dealers for the Dutch and Brazilian colonists. Later, diseases played their part in the reduction of the population; and malaria, small pox and probably jungle yellow fever took heavy toll on the Amerindians’.98

The British were selective in what they chose to inherit from the Dutch in the early years of the nineteenth century. When for example, as we saw in 1830, the British asserted their jurisdiction over the Amerindians of ‘British Guiana’, they did so claiming that they had ‘succeeded to the place of the Dutch’.99 While willing to accept from their predecessors the responsibility to ‘protect’ the Amerindians, the British completely distanced themselves for the atrocities that may have been committed under Dutch rule. This pattern of selective inheritance can help to account for why the Amerindians also found themselves in the 1950s, to use an expression Gandhi employed to describe the position of Indians in the colonies, ‘out of the frying-pan and into the fire’.

While the above account, written in the 1950s, is vague as to how ‘diseases played their part’ in the decimation of Amerindians, Richard Schomburgk, travelling on a mapping expedition in the region in the early 1840s with his more famous brother, Robert, provides a more telling story.

During our almost four years’ stay with these “Tribes without Tears,” all the signs we gathered point incontestably to the fact that the Present is the closing scene for them in that great drama which everywhere is, and will be, renewed where European culture gains and has gained a footing.

98 Ibid.
The many European-introduced diseases that have become indigenous amongst the tribes of the interior, particularly small-pox, are helping on this closing scene to an increased degree. In 1794 the Caribs were still able to place 800 young fighters in the field: according to the census of 1841 the whole coast tribe including women and children amounts to 500. Nine-tenths of the Arawaks have disappeared in the interval, and half of the Akawais and Warraus are no more...\(^{100}\)

History has proven Richard Schomburgk wrong. Their numbers grew and are growing. In 1952, Amerindians were estimated to be between 19,000 and 20,000. That, by all accounts, it increased to 30,000 in the early 1960s proves the unreliability of these numbers. The British accounted for this increase in two very interesting ways: sanitization and immunization!

Dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane (DDT) spraying began in the interiors of British Guiana in 1947. Dr Jones, responsible for the Medical Survey of Amerindians in British Guiana between 1949 and 1951, began his report with the following reminder:

> Many early authors writing about British Guiana made frequent reference to the high incidence of "fevers" along the coastal areas but only a few explorers mentioned the extent of these maladies in the Hinterland. Both Robert and Richard Schomburgk around 1840 stated that "fever" was prevalent on the Rupununi Savannas.\(^{101}\)

The 'inflammation of the abdominal organs' and liver complaints observed by Richard Schomburgk in the 1840s, Dr Jones now diagnosed as caused by malaria, one of the major causes of death and illness among the Amerindians. Jones reported, 'our observations today show liver infections amongst Amerindians to be a rarity', and in his professional opinion proposed that 'it is reasonable to suppose that the inflamed abdominal organs referred to [by Schomburgk] were spleens, in which case it is highly probable that the cause (of the enlargement) was malarial in origin'.\(^{102}\)

Malaria was supposedly uncommon in the hinterland of Guiana until diamond mining began there in the 1930s. George Giglioli, Chief Medical Officer to The Demerara Bauxite Co. Ltd., in British Guiana, and on whose work Jones refers, was particularly

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\(^{101}\) CO 1031/112. Dr Jones' Report of a Medical Survey of Amerindians In British Guiana 1949-51 dated 6.12.52.

\(^{102}\) Ibid.
interested in combating malaria in the hinterland as it was decisive in 'any scheme of colonisation or exploitation of the interior'. Giglioli's report offers us insight into disastrous effects of displacement and encroachment on the Amerindians. Commenting on how the connection between the sites Amerindians chose to build their homes and their avoidance of malaria, Giglioli wrote: 'The aboriginal Indians build their camps on high dry ground, well above swamp level, usually on the top of a sand-hill'. It appears that it was not simply that malaria was not in the Guianese hinterland, but that Amerindians knew how to protect themselves from it. The 'newcomers' to the colony, for a long time, out of necessity arising from the need to be close to their work sites – 'The rest of the population of the population of Guiana, 97 per cent. of the total, build their homesteads in the swamps below, or only a few inches above high tide level'.

Diamond mining, i.e., the colonization of the 'totally unproductive hinterlands' as advocated, for example, by the British Guiana colonization deputation in 1919, brought with it many changes that impacted adversely on Amerindians living in those areas. For example, 'with the opening up of this country by diamond miners, artificial conditions provided by diamond pits favoured the breeding of A. darlingi'. Those mosquitoes, Dr Jones continued, 'presumably following in the wake of the miners [arriving in 1947], invaded this area and, finding favourable artificial conditions bred rapidly resulting in an acute outbreak of malaria amongst the indigenous Patamona'. In addition, with the encroachment into Amerindian territory, their traditional ways of live were disrupted and many sought work in and came to live close to the mines. 'Discovering' the prevalence of malaria among the Amerindians led Jones to conclude that, like the non-Amerindians, Amerindians too, with respect to malaria, formed a 'non-immune population'. Similarly, Richard Schomburgk had written a century earlier, 'many European-introduced diseases [like small pox] ...

104 Ibid. p. 12.
105 Ibid. p. 12.
107 Ibid.
108 Ibid.
have become indigenous amongst the tribes of the interior’.

The bulk of the non-immune population, recall, lived in the urban areas and, drawing on the success of DDT spraying in the Rupununi, Jones further recommended that ‘it is possible to protect such centres as Georgetown [the Capital city of British Guiana] by barrier spraying’.

The creation of such borders of disease marked also the borders of capital. Places such as Georgetown, where capital was managed, required fortification by the creation barriers in the form of sanitized tracts beyond which the polluted business of colonization was carried out. The disjuncture between the ‘actions’ and the ‘avowed principles’ on which capital accumulates cause borders to persist in one form or another.

Aside from sanitization, which was also recommended for tuberculosis, dysentery and intestinal worm infection, immunization, as we know, formed the second prong of attack. The migratory nature of the Amerindians was blamed for Measles, Venereal Diseases and Small Pox. They for giving rise to ‘vaccination campaigns in the Rupununi in 1942 and amongst the Akawaio in 1945’.

The reactions amongst the Makusi’, however, were so severe that they were recorded as saying ‘that they were determined never again to submit to this medicine of the white man’. Immunization was also the recommended treatment for Whooping Cough. The combination of sanitization – as captured in the all-white background of the cartoon reprinted at the start of this chapter – and, to a lesser extent, immunization contributed to rendering the population of ‘British Guiana’, including the ‘insiders,’ i.e., the indigenous, ‘outsiders’. Whereas, in the case of the emigrants to ‘British Guiana’ it was their relocation from one place, India or Africa, that necessitated the focus of medical care on the body, in the case of the Amerindians in contrast, by, in a sense, replacing the ground beneath their feet medical care was also deemed necessary. In both cases it was changes to place that had the effect of rendering the bodies alien.

There was, however, one other disease for which Dr Jones remained less than rigorous in his assessment of its causes and conspicuously silent on its possible cure.

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111 Ibid.
112 Ibid.
113 Ibid.
Jones identified ‘Inheritance’, as he named this peculiar disease among Amerindians, and described it as follows:

High degree of inbreeding, particularly amongst close relatives, may lead to the accumulation of unfavourable recessive genes. Amongst Amerindians, with their limited numbers and frequent cross-cousin marriages, the only inherited defect that has been encountered is deaf-mutism. Almost all the cases are to be found amongst the Makusi in the neighbourhood of Karasabai. At Karasabai Village two sons and two daughters of one family were congenitally deaf and dumb.\(^{114}\)

In the colonial imagination, colonial decimation of Amerindians promoted among them a disease that rendered them unable to collectively speak (their distress) and incapable of hearing (its cure): capitalism had here, in effect, produced its ideal subject. Jones, in an epiphanic reversal of history, has contributed immensely to enriching the meaning and extending the application of such terms as ‘biopower’ and ‘biopolitics’.

CONCLUSION.

Having convinced at least themselves that medical question – i.e., the effects of colonisation on the Amerindian body – had indeed been acted upon, the question of displacement, of land persisted. As one colonial official put it: ‘The protection of the Amerindian rights to land is the nub of the matter’.\(^{115}\) While admitting that ‘certainly all our experience in this territory seems to show that we have found the protection and advancement of these interior Amerindians a pretty difficult burden’, there was also the ‘fear that to put this to them – i.e. to say to them that we think their interests are best protected by our doing nothing – might not be very convincing’.\(^{116}\) Whereas, under colonial rule, in the interests of ‘protection’, land had to be taken away from the Amerindians, the issue now was how to give it back. In a flash of wisdom that eluded colonial officials for centuries, colonial authorities in the 1960s finally understood that ‘to allow the Amerindians to lose their land would imperil the next and future generations as well, and there could be no justification for that’.\(^{117}\) Amerindians, it should be recalled, as per Stephen Campbell’s 1962 petition, lived in ‘villages scattered over approximately 68,000 square miles, which is about 78% of British

\(^{114}\) Ibid.
\(^{116}\) Ibid.
\(^{117}\) Ibid. Minutes by J.W. Stacppole, 14 November 1963.
Guiana’s total land area’. The resolution of the Amerindian land question, as we shall see in the subsequent section, took a different turn in 1969, after ‘British Guiana’ became independent. What Campbell’s petition to the Queen managed to produce in the interim was a sphere through which Amerindians could participate in the structures of governance, if only to a limited extent and, as we shall see, paternalistic to the core. As the Queen’s reply advised, Amerindian leaders and people were to ‘fit themselves’ to

> take an active part in their own Government through the councils which have been or may hereafter be established for them, and to make their needs and wishes known to the British Guiana Government through Constitutional channels, and to prepare themselves to play a part in the Government of the whole country through their representatives.\(^\text{118}\)

Amerindian participation in apparatuses of the state also signalled the inauguration of a self-reproducing ‘modern’ Amerindian middle-class. In other words, the petition, intended to secure themselves from the ‘expropriation’ of their lands, was appropriated and used instead as an opportunity to assimilate Amerindians. While there was a tremendous show of concern for securing Amerindian land rights, the British did indeed ‘come with the Bible and leave with the diamonds’.\(^\text{119}\)

Caught in a fundamental contradiction of their own deliberate making making the British failed to see that what they took was ‘land’ while what they were anguished about returning was ‘real estate’. As such, the question of how to give back Amerindian land baffled the outgoing rulers to such an extent, that in the end they agreed to do nothing and instead hope for the best: ‘There seems, therefore, [based on their small population and the abundance of land] to be no reason to expect trouble from leaving the Amerindian situation much as at present’.\(^\text{120}\) Like Richard Schomburgk earlier, they too were wrong.\(^\text{121}\)

\(^{118}\) CO 1031/5028. Despatch to the Governor of British Guiana. 1963.


\(^{120}\) CO 1031/5028. Note from L. Branney, 27th May 1963.

\(^{121}\) Richard Schomburk had predicted that the Amerindians would eventually disappear. Richard Schomburk, *Travels*, p. 54.
II. (b) RUPUNUNI 1969

My own awareness of the history of Guyana in the colonial period is that the colonial regime trembled whenever the African workers and the Indian workers moved together, and on the basis of that and many other facts that can be adduced I would say that, when the African workers and the Indian workers move together the local exploiting class will have a very short lease of life. – Walter Rodney, historian and political activist, in the 1981 documentary film, In the Sky's Wild Noise.

The land question erupted in 1969. That it took a violent turn appears to have caught everyone, the British and the then independent Guyanese government, off guard. The last letter written by Campbell to the British authorities in 1963 contained no indication of this possibility. On the letterhead of the Mount Royal Hotel in Marble Arch at which he was staying, Campbell made what was to be the last plea on behalf of the Amerindians for a settlement of the land question. He wrote,

my people, a simple and trusting folk, look to Britain for protection....
In the days of slavery, they were used and exploited by the British in the capture and control of runaways. This did not mean that they hated the Africans, but that they were simple people doing what they were told to do by the ruling race. Today, with their greater knowledge of events outside their forests, they realise that the memory of what they did in the past lingers on, and they fear what the future may bring in a country already divided by racial hatreds.
As the indigenous inhabitants, surely they have at least this right of self-determination and to demand that special provision be made for them which cannot be altered whatever Government comes to power. My people may in due course, as the country develops, become integrated into the general pattern, but at this time they are isolated from the bulk of Guianese and live a totally different life. So long as this difference persists, and it may be for a long time, they must be protected in the way the North American Indian is, and however difficult it may be constitutionally, my people would prefer this protection to continue as a purely British responsibility.
Britain cannot abdicate this responsibility, since she took it upon herself without our having asked her to do so. 122

The reference in both this letter and the petition submitted a year earlier by Campbell that provisions be made such that Amerindians be allowed to exist, after independence, outside of the purview of the state, brings to the fore once again the spatial and temporal importance of place.

The outgoing colonial officials, with the magnanimity of someone who has gotten away with murder, in the focus of the discussions that resulted from the Amerindian

petitions, showed that they understood this. These discussions strongly emphasised two things: the final shift in the meaning of ‘protection,’ and linked to that the need for ‘effective provision for their security in their land.’

The ‘protection’ to which Campbell refers and of which he reminds Britain that ‘she took … upon herself without our having asked her to do so’, has a long history. As we saw in the case of Billy William, it was believed that if left to live according to the ‘traditionary maxims’ of their tribes the Amerindians would self-extirpate, as a result the British felt the need to protect the Amerindians from themselves. Earlier, during the 18th century, the decline in the Amerindian population of ‘British Guiana’, was credited, according to the British, to predatory wars. Protection was then necessary to ‘protect’ the non-warlike tribes from the ‘warlike ones’ as the ‘Arawak, Akowoi and the Warrau tribes suffered considerably from the attacks of the more warlike Caribs’. In the 1830s, however, Robert Schomburgk, looking to justify the need to define the boundaries of ‘British Guiana’, and thereby to secure state support for his own boundary surveys provided another force against which protection was needed: other colonial powers.

Schomburgk, after almost one year of traveling in the interiors of ‘British Guiana’, arrived at the Rio Branco in August of 1838. He spent the night of August 16, in a small abandoned settlement called Santa Isabel, deep in the heart of the disputed ‘British Guiana’, in the home of the ‘coloured woman, a certain Senhora Liberada, who had lately commenced farming there’. The house of our hostess, Schomburgk wrote in his diary, consisted of a large building, wattled and plastered over with clay, and the roof thatched with Mauritia leaves. In one corner stood a crude hand-loom, at

which a young Indian girl was weaving the coarse cotton cloths in general use. These cottons are coloured with the clays and ochres of the country, as well as with the juices of plants, as Chica, Roucou, and the juice of a Bignonia, which colours blue. A species of Salicornia, called Poluyo, is used as a mordant for all dyes.\textsuperscript{127}

After a night’s rest, Schomburgk’s team left and ‘directed [their] course towards a large flock of birds’.\textsuperscript{128} Upon abandoning their search for the origin of the Caricatua island, known ‘in the Lingua Geral [sic.] as Left Island’. They then ‘entered the stream at the foot of the Serra Grande, and there found three fine canoes secured to its banks’ only to discover that they belonged ‘to the press-gang, a most villainous-looking body, lately sent by the Brazilian authorities to press Indians for the navy’.\textsuperscript{129} After a few hours of strong paddling, Schomburgk’s team landed at Andres Miguel’s, considered ‘the patriarch of the Vaqueiros’ with whom they ascended Mount Caruma’. The rains were heavy and after halting for some hours at the Igarapé da Serra Grande, they returned to Senhora Liberada’s ‘hut’ at 11 a.m. on August 20.

Shortly after, the canoes of the press-gang arrived; and who can describe my horror when I found out that of the 40 slaves there were only nine men, three of whom were upwards of 60 years old, and that the rest consisted of thirteen women, and eighteen children under 12 years, six of them infants?\textsuperscript{130}

True to the surveyor in him, Schomburgk, before following them downriver to Fort Saõ Joaquim, quickly made the ‘strictest inquiry whether the gang had crossed the Rupununi’ River. His inquiry yielded two disappointing results. First, it appears as though the gang had not crossed the Rupununi. Until this time, in the mind of the man who to a large extent would decide ‘British Guiana’s’ present shape, the territory between the Rupununi and the Rio Branco, like the Serra Yauina at its centre, was even more of a terra incognita to Schomburgk than, as he claimed, it was to both to the Brazilians and the Indians. Though by 1842 Schomburgk would clearly mark this area as falling in the territory of Brazil, in 1838 he was unsure. The curious feature to be noted between the two maps Schomburgk produced in 1839 and 1842 of the same region is the disappearance of names. When in 1838 Schomburgk was unsure about the boundary of ‘British Guiana’ this region was densely named. After, in 1842, it fell outside the ‘British Guiana’ boundary and into Brazil, Schomburgk, acknowledging

\textsuperscript{128} Ibid. p. 183.
\textsuperscript{129} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{130} Ibid. p. 188.
the significance of naming and possibly respecting the sovereignty of nations, removed many of his (Amerindian) names.

As ‘the Brazilians left the fort with their spoil of human merchandise on the 25 of August’, Schomburgk consoled himself by claiming, ‘Alas! my hands were tied in that respect as much as theirs [i.e., the Amerindians] as they were led from their burning huts’. He did not leave, however, before recording a personal plea for the future protection of the Amerindians:

“Where Britain’s power is felt, Mankind will feel her blessings too.”

May the moment soon arrive when the boundaries of the rich and productive colony of British Guayana shall be decided by a Government survey! then only can peace and happiness be insured to those who settle on the British side of the frontier.131

Schomburgk’s second disappointment came after his inquiry into the Aroaki Slave Expedition revealed that some of those who composed the press-gang were relations of his hostess, Senhora Liberada.132 Five years later, in 1843, Schomburgk would unexpectedly meet in the Rupununi the young Indian girl who in 1838 worked on the loom in Liberada’s hut. ‘She spoke the language [Portuguese] well enough to inform me that, disappointed with her employer, she had left her and come to this village; the chieftain’s wife, a Paravelhaha by birth, being a relation of hers’.133

Only centuries of colonial attack and resistance to it could have led colonial authorities, on the eve of their departure from ‘British Guiana’, to conclude that what was needed now was ‘protection from governmental interference’.134 This, as would have been noticed from the Queen’s response to the first Amerindian petition quoted above, was to come from the constitution. By taking an active part in their own Government through the councils, by making their needs and wishes known to the British Guiana Government through Constitutional channels, and by influencing the Government of the whole country through their representatives, the Amerindians would thus help build a Government which, in an independent Guyana, would watch

131 Ibid. p. 190.
132 Ibid. p. 189.
over their interests as vigilantly as they had been watched over in the past.\textsuperscript{135} The Queen had, however, never visited ‘British Guiana’ and even if she had had cause to see any of Schomburgk’s maps or read his diaries, she too may have said, as he did 130 years earlier, ‘Alas! my hands were tied in that respect as much as theirs’. The advice of her agents, negotiating the independence of ‘British Guiana,’ was more informed. ‘In this world of sovereign and omni-competent governments,’ one of them wrote, ‘I think one’s liberty is often best preserved by being unnoticd, if not forgotten.’\textsuperscript{136}

It is one thing to be the agent of your own disappearance and quite another to be ignored. The Amerindians, as reflected in their petitions, in some senses, wanted to effect their own disappearance, if not from the gaze of the Queen, at least from that of the Guyanese state: the ‘neglect’ Amerindians received from the Queen, they seem to be saying, was preferable to the neglect they anticipated would come from the independent government.

What happened in the Rupununi Savannahs in early January 1969 has been described as a secessionist uprising precipitated by ‘the fact ... that for many decades the Amerindian population have had very little to thank the Government for, while they have had ample reason to resent the various forms of encroachment which have taken place on their lands’.\textsuperscript{137} It was further called an uprising that involved ‘Guyana’s indigenous Amerindian population’ in an effort to ‘seize the 20,000-square-mile hinterland territory and proclaim it the Rupununi Republic’.\textsuperscript{138} On the other hand, the government of Guyana, in a conference with Amerindian Captains,\textsuperscript{139} held as a result of those events, declared, though Amerindians were ‘used in it’, ‘we know it was not the Amerindians who started the uprising in the Rupununi’.\textsuperscript{140} The opposition parties also voiced their opinion. To the press, Mr. Peter D’Aguiar, leader of the United

\textsuperscript{135} Ibld. Despatch to the Governor of British Guiana. 1963.
\textsuperscript{136} Ibid. Note from L. Branney, 27\textsuperscript{th} May 1963.
\textsuperscript{137} FCO 63/11. Internal Memo.
\textsuperscript{138} Ibid. Guyana: Political Affairs (Internal) The Rupununi Uprising [Article in] The Scotsman, 8 January 1969 ‘Guyana cattlemen’s last round-up.’
\textsuperscript{139} The earlier designation ‘Owl’, used for and by Amerindian leaders, was gradually replaced by ‘Chief’ and finally ‘Captain’.
\textsuperscript{140} Forbes Burnham, “A New Era... For our Amerindian Brothers: Address by the Prime Minister Mr. Forbes Burnham at the closing session of the Conference of Amerindian Leaders held ...February 28, to March 3, 1969” A Government of Guyana Publication. p. 5.
Force Guyana, made the following statement, 'While the Amerindians and others have genuine grievances, particularly concerning their title to land which must be settled, I can only deplore the resort to force to remedy this'. The opposition People's Progressive Party, led by Dr. Cheddi Jagan, issued 'a statement deploring Venezuela's part in the uprising and calling on the Government to take all necessary steps to ensure the country's territorial integrity.'

In the Prime Minister's speech to the Amerindian Conference, he paid tribute to the 'only Amerindian who died in the uprising, Victor Hernandez, who according to the Prime Minister was 'slain by one of the rebels'. Not only does Victor Hernandez's name complicate this story further but so does the identity of the so-called 'rebels'.

As the *Scottish Sunday Express* in January 1969 reported, John McKillop, seen below, was recruited to work on the Dadanawa Ranch in the Rupununi, because of the ranch's 'strong Scottish connections'.

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141 This is the party of Stephen Campbell, who filed the two earlier mentioned petitions to the Queen. Also, Valerie Hart, who we shall meet shortly, was a member until her expulsion for her role in the uprising.

142 FCO 63/111. telegram dated 8 January 1969, Document 33: an article for Reuters press by Hubert Williams.

143 On this occasion a 'resolution of loyalty' was passed by the 174 Amerindians Captains and each of them was awarded an 'Independence medal' for being 'loyal citizens of Guyana'. "A New Era", 1969. pp. 20-21.

144 As per Williams' Reuters article, "Nine people were killed and an unknown number wounded in the fighting."


146 FCO 63/112. The full headline reads: "Love of Horses lures 'cowboy' John from bride-to-be." In *Scottish Sunday Express Glasgow* January 12, 1969. p. 5. John the report says was trained in the Army in Borneo. For this reason he came under suspicion from the Guyanese government and was deported.
Those connections apparently went back to the ‘eighteen nineties when a Scottish gold prospector, H. P. C. Melville, set up there as a [cattle] rancher. He also took Indian [Wapisiani] wives and fathered a clan which is an important element in the population today’. The extent and diversity of the Melville ‘clan’ is famous in Guyana. One of them, Kenneth Melville, also seen below, in the immediate aftermath of the uprising, was chosen by the Prime Minister, as a ‘loyal Amerindian’, to sit on the Interior Development Committee.