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## The Effects of British Colonialism in India on Indo-Caribbean Communities

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The Effects of British Colonialism in India on Indo-Caribbean Communities

Senior Project Submitted to  
The Division of Social Studies  
of Bard College

by  
Katherina Wahí

Annandale-on-Hudson, New York

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## Dedication

Before anything is said I would like to thank all the women who came before me, this and everything I do is for you. Thank you for the struggles you endured so you could pass our history down to me. I have never felt the strong presence of your strength until this year when you cheered me on to finish this project for us. This is for all my female ancestors who paved the way so I could walk on this path. Thank you.

### **To Isabella,**

Being your big sister is one of my greatest accomplishments in life and you have given me the push to be a better person for you. Thank you for the million times you picked up my 2 am calls when I was panicking about school. Thank you for the laughter and stupidity that helped me get through rough times. I love you always.



## **To Mommy and Papa**

Mommy and papa, thank you. Without the endurance, struggle, and determination of you both I would never be where I am today. Thank you for dealing with the struggles of being immigrants in a cold and unforgiving world so I could wear a graduation cap and gown. Thank you for the visits you made driving two hours up and two hours back home to check on me. Thank you for listening to my tears and supporting me when things were hard even though you were dealing with much more. Mommy thank you for fighting so I could end up at Bard. If it weren't for you I wouldn't be the young woman I am today. You raised me to always fight for what I want and never take anything less. Papa thank you for planting the seed of my love for history when I was growing up. Thank you for holding open doors, lifting heavy boxes, and working countless overnight shifts so I could cross that stage. I promise to continue carrying the torch for both of you.

## **To Nana and Grandma,**

There aren't enough words for me to express my gratitude, appreciation, and love for both of you. Thank you for the endless amount of support you have given me throughout my time here at Bard. Grandma, I remember when you were the first person to find out that I got accepted into Bard, and Nana you were right there beside her. You both have shaped me into the person I am today and I will always say being your granddaughter is my biggest blessing.

## **To Alex**

Thanks for making the past years here at Bard some amazing ones, I couldn't have done this without you. Missy and I love you

## **To My Advisors**

Thank you for the amount of support you have all given me throughout my time here at Bard. Some of my best memories and classes were made with you. Yuval thank you for always encouraging me to try new classes and ideas even if it meant some stress. Omar thank you for guiding me through my love for history and Sarah thank you for growing my interest in psychology.

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Christina thank you for being my soul sister sister, without you I don't know where I'd be To Faith, I love you so much A+JAM forever. Tina, Emmanuel and Amauri our late night kappa sessions were all worth it love you guys! To Nesto, Anton, Andrew and Jan you all were important figures in my life here at Bard. Thank you!



# Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1
Chapter 1 .....	10
Chapter 2.....	30
Chapter 3.....	50
Conclusion.....	70
Bibliography.....	75





## Introduction

We are the army  
We are the people  
We are Guyana marching for change  
You and I are posterity  
In our veins run atoms of gall  
Atoms of gall<sup>1</sup>

To be a coolie girl you need to be able to do a few things that would solidify your position. You first need to know how to pick the best vegetables at Keyfood or the grocery stands on Saturday morning with your grandmother. You need to know how to tell spices apart just by their smell and know how to cook the basic roti and curries. Don't forget your manners when talking to older people using their language of broken English but still speak proper English in school. The most important thing to know is how to become a keeper for your people, you must learn to hold in the struggles and pain of those around you. You must know how to wear it and bear it well so the others around you can thrive. As a coolie girl you must keep the underrepresented history of the Carribean alive so it isn't lost to time just like the many voices of Indo-Carribean people throughout history. When you have learned to do this you can then become a coolie girl.

When I was growing up I knew who I was, or at least I thought I did. Born to immigrant parents living in Ozone Park, Queens NYC. I was the eldest grandchild to Jai and Shelia,

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<sup>1</sup> Mahadai Das, *A Leaf in the Ear: Selected Poems* (Leeds: Peepal Tree, 2010).

firstborn to Jenny and Rajnish, and sister to Isabella. My weekends were filled with trips to Liberty Ave or better known as Little Guyana with my grandparents and mother. Getting Saturday groceries, spices, and food from the store owners who've known my grandparents since Guyana. Surrounded by Caribbean music, the smell of home-cooked food made, and being around people who were the same as I covered me like a blanket for most of my life. Being Indo-Caribbean specifically Guyanese was not unheard of and just walking down the street I could find someone whose life intersected with mine. Soca music, old Bollywood songs, and food that never lacked spices filled my childhood with a fondness I look back on. During the summertime, there would be parades in my neighborhood with floats representing all of the Caribbean countries. Growing up in the public system I was not the only Indo-Caribbean at my all-girl school in Jamaica Queens. Even my friends from other schools could count on more than one hand the amount of Indo-Caribbean students there. During my senior year of high school when applying to colleges, I knew what PWI<sup>2</sup> schools were but I was confident that there would at least be other people like me.

Arriving at college I was welcomed by students and academics that did not know Indo-Caribbeans or Guyana existed. Mainstream views about the Caribbean were all that was known, and finding another Indo-Caribbean at Bard was one in a million. To those who didn't even know what a Guyanese person was, I was just another brown Indian girl. At Bard, there are numerous student-run clubs and a few infinity ones. CSA or Caribbean Student Association is one of them that advertises itself as being a space for Caribbean students to feel comfortable and supported. But after attending the club for my first two years at Bard it was apparent that the

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<sup>2</sup> PWI is an abbreviation for *Predominantly White Institutions*

Carribbean didn't include Indo-Caribbean people like me. I was the only Indo-Caribbean student in the club and in my class year for a very long time. The blanket of safety that surrounded me during my childhood and the privilege of being seen in the world slowly slipped off of me while I was gaining footing here at Bard. I quickly came to realize that the history and voices of those who came before me were fading away from conversations and becoming a small niche with the only member being myself. I quickly learned that I needed to become the keeper and fighter for Indo-Caribbean history, heritage, and voices both the past and present. That lack of knowledge of Indo-Caribbean history and culture that the general public had given way to the birth of this project.

For most of my life I assumed that even if most people didn't know much about Guyana, they would at least know the country. I assumed that most people would realize that there are different types of people who are of Indian descent. I assumed that most people would know that being in the Caribbean could look like a lot of different things. But my assumptions lead me to nowhere but growing frustrations followed by the desire for representation and education. What angered me the most was thinking about the struggles my grandparents and great-grandparents from Guyana went through just to not have it recognized. The struggles of countless other Indo-Caribbean people seemed to fall into the background simply because being Indo-Caribbean didn't exist. That is the backbone of this senior project, those voices and that history that is forgotten and ignored. This project is not only highlighting the injustices people in the Caribbean went through because of British colonization but giving a platform for voices. It's also bringing light and awareness to a topic in history that is understudied and is presented as unimportant for mainstream academia.

In this project, I am examining the effects that British colonialism had and continues to have on the Caribbean, in order to do so, I am using the context of British Colonialism in India. The reasoning for this decision is that Indo-Caribbean history has been extremely understudied and in this project because I am bringing awareness it is required to discuss India's history. Indo-Caribbean refers to people who are descents of Indian indentured servants who were sent from India to Guyana to work on plantations. If the Indian history of British Colonialism was not included in this study then there would be no context.

Growing up in a Caribbean neighborhood in Queens, NYC I witnessed firsthand issues the Indo-Caribbean community faced. Generational trauma is something that is very real within the community and it has deep roots stemming from Guyana's colonial history. Through this study, I want to acknowledge those forms of trauma but also highlight the resilience of Indo-Caribbean people who have accomplished so much more.

This study is split into two parts, the first being a historical section that discusses the history of British colonialism in India, Guyana, and then Caribbean immigration to the United States. The second section is sociological where I will be examining my research questions on how did British Colonialism affect the lives of the Indo-Caribbean community in relation to gender and race? In this section, I use empirical data from my interviews to support my thesis that British Colonialism affects the lives of the Indo-Caribbean community by creating a more stronger and determined group of people with each generation. Chapter one of section one will discuss the history of India prior to the British involvement followed by the circumstances that

lead to the indentured servitude system. Chapter two will explain the history of Guyana prior to being under complete British authority. This is to give the background context for the next part of the chapter that discusses Guyana's economy in the 1800s under full colonial rule. The chapter will end by examining what life was like under colonial rule for the new Indian migrants.

Chapter one in section two will explain the effects of race and ethnicity on the politics, economics, and society of Guyana. Chapter two will discuss gender in the Carribean, using both western and Carribean theories on feminism and gender. This will then be followed by my conclusion.

## **Chapter 1: *The land of spices***

### *Before the British*

Located in South Asia, India is bordered by the Bay of Bengal, the Arabian Sea, and the Indian Ocean. It is next to modern-day Pakistan and Afghanistan and is surrounded by the Himalayan mountains. India has had a vast and rich history of culture, religion, and outside influences. In 1858 the British crown gained complete and official control over India. Still, to understand how that was possible, it's crucial to know how the British slowly began to move into India. For this study, the periods of 1498 to 1765 are being focused on as the timeline before complete control of the British crown over India. Those dates represent the time when the British had no presence in India and the slow introduction of its authority. There are two critical points in Indian history between 1498-and 1750s that I am focusing on in this section, trade relations, and the growing Mughal administration. I argue that trade brought attention to Indian regions and the developing Mughal power; it essentially held open the door for British colonialization in the latter half of the 18th century.

India had been branded as a place for silk and spices in world trade between India, Africa, China, and Europe, with some regard to its cotton production. The silk road, which spanned from China to central Asia, provided India with an entranceway into international trade by establishing points in northern India. In the early days of trading, Chinese traders would

exchange their silk for Indian precious stones and metals, then Indians would trade the silk with the Romans<sup>3</sup>. India became the middle ground between China and the Roman world, which points out India's recognition in international trade. Spices were a significant commodity for Europeans, with high profit and prices involved. Arabian merchants would make immense profits off-trade as a way for different parts of Europe. However, before the 14th century, Indian spices, in order to reach Central and Northern Europe, would have to travel through Genoa and Venice<sup>4</sup>. By the 12th century, Venice had become the spice trade center, which then propelled the push for other European countries to find a shorter maritime route to India. Sent on behalf of the Portuguese crown Vasco Da Gama was employed to achieve this sometime between 1497-and 1498. He anchored his ships off of Calcutta and on the Malabar coast, which is in the southwestern part of India but based on the hostility of the Indian people living on the beach, the expedition ended.<sup>5</sup> What is crucial about this voyage is that it brought back a way in which journeys to India could be made directly and opened up the path for European maritime exploration. De Gama discovered the new route of going through the Cape of Good Hope in Africa straight into the Indian ocean. This unique travel route would eliminate the need for middle man trading to get goods and spices into Europe. It also put Portugal ahead of creating trade relations with India, which caused issues with England, who had the same goal.

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<sup>3</sup> Behera, Subhakanta. "India's Encounter with the Silk Road." *Economic and Political Weekly* 37, no. 51 (2002): 5077–80. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4412978>.

<sup>4</sup> STONE, B. G. "THE SPICE TRADE." *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts* 112, no. 5097 (1964): 703–13. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41367670>.

<sup>5</sup> Tate, H. R. "A Mediaeval Navigator: Vasco Da Gama." *Journal of the Royal African Society* 43, no. 171 (1944): 61–65. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/717806>.



The 15th century following the discovery of a new route marked a turning point in trade relations with India and the rest of the world. Dutch merchants, despite hostility with the Portuguese, started voyages to India. The English crown then began making attempts to insert themselves into the trade. In 1527, Robert Thorne, an English merchant, sent a proposition to Henry VIII about a project to sail to India. He claimed he gained knowledge about the route the Portuguese had found. Two ventures were made under Henry VIII that did not produce any success. Later in 1580, Captin Drake, after an expedition around the world, brought back information to the crown that travel by the cape to India was possible, which led to two more voyages<sup>6</sup>. A group of English merchants called the *Merchant Adventurers* sent a group of traders to India in 1583 to take inventory of what goods were available for trade, one of the traders being Ralph Fitch. Once reaching India through Syria, Fitch and other traders were captured, which resulted in Fitch collecting information about the trade. While Fitch was in captivity, Sir James Lancaster, in 1591, traveled to India on the Cape of Good Hope and returned, making it the first successful expedition using the cape. This success was enough for the *Merchant Adventurers*. They created a joint-stock merchant company, “a fund subscribed, which amounted to 30,133 1. 6s. Sd., and consisted of 101 shares; the subscriptions of individuals varying from 100 1. to 3,000<sup>7</sup>”. The new company appealed to the crown. In 1600, it received a royal charter from the Queen of England, becoming the *Governor and Company of Merchants of London Trading into the East Indies* (which would later become the East India Company). Once gaining a royal charter, the East India Company (EIC) began developing a permanent English footprint in India.

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<sup>6</sup> Mukherjee, Ramakrishna. *The Rise and Fall of the East India Company* (Monthly Review Press, 1974), 60-61

<sup>7</sup> Mukherjee, *The Rise and Fall*, 65

For the East India Company to establish itself in India, it needed to have developed relationships with the ruling authority in India at the time. That ruling authority was the Mughal Empire, and it's necessary to discuss their rise in India as an empire because they allowed the EIC to enter India.

Seven centuries after the fall of the Gupta Empire between the 13th and 16th centuries, a large majority of Northern India was under the rule of the Delhi Sultanate. The Delhi Sultanate was an Islamic empire that spanned five dynasties, the Mamluks, Khalj, Tughlaqs, Sayyids, and the Lodi. Under the Sultanate and its respective dynasties, Islamic art and architecture thrived, creating a cosmopolitan culture in the later years. During the Lodi dynasty and the 1500s, India was introduced to the early comings of the Mughal dynasty. The dynasty was initially started by the Turkish Sultan Zahir-ud-din Muhammed Babur, renowned for his military strategies and royal lineage that dated back to Genghis Khan. In attempts to expand his empire, he sought out control of Hindustan, which was under Sultan Ibrahim Lodi's territory. In 1526 from modern-day Kabul, Babur launched an attack on Sultan Lodi, and despite the lack of a larger army, he was still thriving in his conquest. Babur utilized the power of canons and artillery, which had not yet become a military tactic for India at the time, and worked to his advantage gaining him control over Punjab<sup>8</sup>. The victory of the battle of Panipat gave an entranceway into Indian territory, and Babur moved forward and established Agra as the new capital city. India during this time was not under one complete unified rule; alongside the Delhi, Sultanate were Rajput principalities. The Rajputs were princely states that had origins from warrior clans and were located in the

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<sup>8</sup> John F. Richards, *The New Cambridge History of India* (Cambridge University Press, 1995).

historical region of Rajputana<sup>9</sup>. They were mainly Hindus who had control over North India and some parts of modern-day Pakistan. When Babur began his military descent into Northern Indian, the Rajput state of Mewar, controlled by Maharana Sangram Singh (Rana Sangram), proved to be a challenge. Suppose Babur could take over Mewar, which gave him an access point into the Rajput political world, allowing him to gain control entirely. According to Babur's memoir *Babur Nama*, the issue with Rana Sangram ran more profound than just wanting his territory but stems back to when Babur was launching his attack on Sultan Lodi. He claims that Rana Sangram offered his aid to Babur and his army, but when they arrived near Delhi and took Agra, he was not there<sup>10</sup>. Babur later defeated Rana Sangram and other Rajput leaders, which destroyed the idea of Rajput insurgence for the future and therefore established, I argue, concrete Mughal rule and presence in India. After Babur died in 1530, the Mughal empire continued to gain territory, and under Akbar, the third Mughal ruler, the conglomerate controlled almost all of Rajasthan.

Under the Mughal empire and during Akbar's reign, early developments of English and Indian relations began. The Mughal empire was why English involvement in India existed the magnitude. Before the EIC was given a royal charter, the Queen had sent John Mildenhall as an ambassador to India in the hopes of speaking with Akbar about future trade relations. With a letter from the Queen to Akbar, Mildenhall went to India and returned in 1607 with a royal order from Akbar's successor Jahangir agreeing to English trade in India<sup>11</sup>. After the royal charter was

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<sup>9</sup> This translated to "land of the Rajputs" but it now modern day Rajasthan

<sup>10</sup> Waddington, Charles. *Memoirs of Zehir-Ed-Din Muhammed Baber: Emperor of Hindustan*. United Kingdom: Longman, Rees, Orme, Brown, and Green, 1826.

<sup>11</sup> Mukherjee, *The Rise and Fall*, 65

granted, the first voyage under the EIC occurred in 1608, and the English arrived in Surat a city in the state of Gujrat, which had come under Mughal control. The Mughal empire granted the EIC authority over Surat and the company set up its factory<sup>12</sup>. Emperor Jahangir also had the company authority over the ports of Broach and Cambay. Between 1615-and 1618, Sir Thomas Rhode served as an ambassador to the court of Jahangir, where he was able to negotiate a deal between the Mughal empire and the company. The company would have rights to factories and trade in exchange for protecting the Mughal state by the English navy against the Portuguese. The company's trading in the Bay of Bengal led to the settlement of trading factories in Madras that allowed for control of the territory there in 1646<sup>13</sup>. English presence and authority were becoming more and more aggressive towards the end of the 1600s while the Mughal empire was starting to decline. In 1682 on behalf of the EIC, Willam Hedges was sent to speak with Shaista Khan, the governor of Bengal, on the kingdom, giving the EIC a *farman*<sup>14</sup>. The EIC had already been granted tax and custom reductions on certain traded goods, which angered the Mughal state. Sir Josiah Child, an English merchant and economist, joined in on the negotiations with Hedges. However that created tensions with Shaista Khan, who then raised customs duty from 2% to 3.5% for the EIC<sup>15</sup> When the company's goods came to Bengal, the Mughal authority demanded

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<sup>12</sup> SEN, AMRITA. "Searching for the Indian in the English East India Company Archives: The Case of Jadow the Broker and Early Seventeenth-Century Anglo-Mughal Trade." *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies* 17, no. 3 (2017): 37–58. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/90020549>.

<sup>13</sup> Webster, Anthony. "THE ORIGINS OF THE EAST INDIA COMPANY AND THE RISE OF NON-COMPANY COMMERCIAL INTERESTS IN BRITAIN, INDIA AND ASIA, 1600–1793." In *The Twilight of the East India Company: The Evolution of Anglo-Asian Commerce and Politics, 1790-1860*, 3:18–38. Boydell & Brewer, 2009. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7722/j.ctt81f81.5>.

<sup>14</sup> A *farman* was a royal decree that would allow the EIC trading privileges such as tax free trade

<sup>15</sup> Hasan, Farhat. "Conflict and Cooperation in Anglo-Mughal Trade Relations during the Reign of Aurangzeb." *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 34, no. 4 (1991): 351–60. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3632456>.

custom payments and told port officers not to accept any compensation in place of the custom payment<sup>16</sup>. This resulted in built-up tensions between the EIC and Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb, and the Anglo-Mughal war broke out between 1686-and 1690. The Mughal empire gained victory over the EIC, who had to pay a fine and were only left with the territories of Madras and Bombay. In the same year of 1690, Job Charnock, a member of the EIC, gained control over the city of Calcutta, where it flourished as a city with a growing population. Although the war was a victory for the empire, the Mughal state was beginning to decline, facing threats within their empire. There were brewing tensions between Sikhs and Muslims and the growing threat of the Maratha confederacy. Moving towards the 1750s, the EIC had become more radical in the number of territories they were gaining from the failing Mughal empire. With their growing authority, the Nawab (governor) of Bengal in 1752 took issue with the EIC's presence. In 1756, the nawab's successor Siraj-ud-Daulah attacked and took back control of Calcutta from the EIC. In response, Robert Clive leading an army for the EIC decided that as long as Siraj-ud-Daulah was the nawab, the company would not be secure in Bengal<sup>17</sup> and attacked in 1757. The Battle of Plassey marked the turning point for total English involvement in India. Siraj-ud-Daulah joined forces with France against Clive but failed, which no longer made France a threat to the English. A few years later, after The Battle of Baxur in 1764, "the Treaty of Allahabad confirmed the company's political supremacy in Bengal,"<sup>18</sup> and the EIC won a diwani. A diwani allowed them to collect tax revenue and civil administration throughout the province of Bengal. This

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<sup>16</sup> Hasan, *Conflict and Cooperation*, 358

<sup>17</sup> MARSHALL, P. J. "BRITISH EXPANSION IN INDIA IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY: A HISTORICAL REVISION." *History* 60, no. 198 (1975): 28–43. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24409217>.

<sup>18</sup> Andrew Phillips, *How the East Was Won: Barbarian Conquerors, Universal Conquest and the Making of Modern Asia* (Cambridge und 4 weitere: Cambridge University Press, 2021).

essentially gave England, through the EIC, a firm hand in Indian politics, and as the Mughal empire fell, the British began to step in.

### *The British Raj*

After the EIC gained control of Bengal, it created the foundations for the British crown to enter into Indian politics. Not only did the EIC have certain territories, but it also had established an English presence in Indian society, with the cities growing and trade booming. It set the vision for the British crown to enter India as a ruling colonial power. With all the accomplishments and growth of the EIC, the company was still under the royal charter, which was only renewed every twenty years. They were not wholly independent from British authority, and I would even go as far as to say that they would not have been able to survive without the crown's help. When the mutiny of 1857 occurred, it was a marker for the loss of power in the case of the EIC. Rebels saw the company as a threat to Indian society and wanted to remove all British authority from India<sup>19</sup>. Delhi, Kanpur, and Lucknow were involved in the fighting, and Lucknow had the most significant casualties and most violence. The British crown sent troops to put down the riots, and after the fighting ended, there was a move toward removing power from the EIC to the British crown. The Government Act of India in 1858 proclaimed that the territories and control that the East India Company had gained on behalf of the crown would legally be transferred over the rule

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<sup>19</sup> YADAV, SANJAY. "THE INDIAN MUTINY OF 1857: WHY BRITAIN SUCCEEDED AND THE REBELS FAILED." *Journal of Asian History* 28, no. 2 (1994): 136–53. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41930953>.

of the British crown<sup>20</sup>. India then became an official colonial of the British, which is where I can now segway into the discussion of how and why the indentured servitude system came to exist.

While being involved in India, the British had been deeply invested in Caribbean colonies with sugar and cotton plantations. When the British began to establish colonies in the Caribbean, they relied on enslaved people from Africa to fill the labor gap. When slavery was abolished in 1833 through the Slavery Abolition Act, the British needed to find another way to get laborers on the plantations. Rather than working out wages with formerly enslaved people, they began to employ Indians from India to send to the Caribbean colonies. What were the push and pulled factors for people moving to the Caribbean? It is beneficial to understand those circumstances to fully grasp the hardships and horrors the British caused for later Indo-Caribbean communities.

### *The faces of Indentured Servitude*

India was going through a series of famines towards the end of the 1800s into the start of the 1900s. Severe famines plagued India in 1897, then later in 1907-1908<sup>21</sup> which the British capitalized on to attract people to move. Alongside issues with starvation, lower and working-class people were experiencing economic struggles from 1813 to 1833. The East India Company was granted some aspects of free trade and no longer had to pay tariffs or compete only in private trade. The industrial revolution now meant that products were being produced faster and cheaper. The new charter disadvantaged local artisans and craftsmen in India because

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<sup>20</sup> “Extracts from the Better Government of India Bill, Passed by the British Parliament in 1858,” The National Archives, accessed May 2022, <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/empire/transcript/g2cs4s4ts.htm>.

<sup>21</sup> Sen, Sunanda. “Indentured Labour from India in the Age of Empire.” *Social Scientist* 44, no. 1/2 (2016): 35–74. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24890231>.

of their goods were selling at lower prices in England, lowering their profit margin. Economies built on producing pottery, furniture, silk, and embroidery could not compete with British manufactured goods<sup>22</sup>. In addition to free trade, the British introduced two systems of taxation that made life for the lower class difficult. The *zamindari* system introduced in Bengal in 1793 allowed for a local chief or elite to collect taxes as long as he gave a portion back to the authorities<sup>23</sup>. The *ryotwari* system of 1812 is where the government ordered the tariffs directly, which didn't help the peasantry because they were subjected to high rates<sup>24</sup>. Another push factor was the class structure of India which became more prevalent with the involvement of the British. Indian society subscribed to the caste system, which left no room for social mobility, the caste you were born in was the caste you'd remain. Being in the lower caste system brought different job opportunities and different social reactions to communities. As mentioned earlier, India experienced a mutiny in 1857 that resulted in 27,779 people migrating from Calcutta to flee the violence and tensions<sup>25</sup>. I would like to note here about finding statistical data about the number of people who left from what region. There is an alarming amount of conflicting information due to the lack of record-keeping by British officials. Finding an accurate number of people who migrated is near impossible which hindered my ability to find a source. In 1847, an economic crisis hit the market due to the country pumping money into railroad development. Then there was an agricultural downfall due to crop failure that brought on a food shortage, which caused

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<sup>22</sup> Roopnarine, Lomarsh. "East Indian Indentured Emigration to the Caribbean: Beyond the Push and Pull Model." *Caribbean Studies* 31, no. 2 (2003): 97–134. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25613409>.

<sup>23</sup> Look Walton Lai and Sidney W. Mintz, *Indentured Labor, Caribbean Sugar: Chinese and Indian Migrants to the British West Indies, 1838-1918* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004).

<sup>24</sup> Lai, Look Walton, and Sidney W. Mintz. *Indentured Labor, Caribbean Sugar: Chinese and Indian Migrants to the British West Indies, 1838-1918*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004.

<sup>25</sup> Roopnarine, *Emigration to the Caribbean*, 115



railroad costs to drop. In India, due to British attempts to move Indian towards a more industrialized society with the “Permanent Settlement of Bengal” in 1793 which

“(1) The establishment of a land revenue and taxation system that imposed greater hardships. (2) the introduction of the notion of private property in land, paving the way for the vast expansion of of vast intermediary landlord class (3) the imposition of trade and tariff policies that guaranteed free entry of British products in Indian but levid prohibitive duties on Indian products entering Britain”<sup>26</sup>

What did going to the Carribean offer people? Migrants were told that better opportunities were waiting in the Carribean and just a better quality of life. People were also told that if they were to stay in the Carribean, they would be given their land, which appealed to the struggling lower class population. In actuality, the indentured servitude system bound people to a five or three-year contract with a fixed daily wage<sup>27</sup>. However, in the Carribean, new migrants faced an unequal, violent and brutal life. The next chapter will record and examine what those experiences looked like.

## *Discussion*

The British used trade as a medium to enter Indian politics and society to establish control and domination. The spice trade brought attention to India, encouraging the race to find

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<sup>26</sup> Lai, *Indentured Labor* pg 21

<sup>27</sup> Roopnarine, *Emigration to the Caribbean*, 115

the fastest and most direct way to Indian ports. This resulted in the discovery of the Cape of Good Hope, followed by a wave of foreign influences in India. If the spice trade was not as massive and as prominent as it was, I argue that the English would not have interfered to their level. Being pulled in by the prospect of trade profit, the English rushed to secure legal standing in India under the Mughal empire. The Mughal emperors such as Akbar and his predecessor were the ones who allowed the English into India. The Mughal state continued to work and make deals with the English through the EIC, only allowing the roots of colonialism to grow deeper into Indian soil. It set the English up with the perfect chance to gain complete control over India, which they did in 1858. I want to highlight that the Mughal empire continued to set life up to include the English. This meant that when the British later needed populations of people to fill a labor gap, the officials did not have to look very far. The indentured servitude period was only made possible by the British involvement in India which trade is responsible.

People lived in an unfair system from the time the British entered India in the 1500s to now in modern-day times. The harsh treatment Indians faced in the Carribean stayed with the future generations living in Guyana and then passed down to ones in America. In my next section, I will examine the treatment of Indian migrants in the Carribean colonies to point out the suffering they faced and how horrid British colonialism was.

## Chapter Two: *Land of Many Waters*

### *Introduction*

Known as the land of many waters, the Cooperative Republic of Guyana is a mixing pot of many cultures and populations. Located on South America's North Atlantic coast between Venezuela and Suriname, it experienced colonial influence until receiving independence in 1966. Although demographically part of South America, it has adopted Caribbean cultures and customs and is regarded as the Carribean. This chapter will discuss the history of early colonial involvement and the early years of colonial influence from 1498 up until the 1800s. It will then lead into how England gained complete control and then discuss the circumstances of when Indians were sent to Guyana through indentured servitude. It is important to note that historical evidence and sources on Guyana prior to any colonial influence are minimal. I started this chapter with early colonialism in Guyana and not prior. Guyana as an independent country has only existed for less than one hundred years as colonial rule has been a marker for the development of politics, economics, and society. Understanding the history of Guyana lays down the foundations for the next sociological section.

### *Early Years of Colonial Involvement*

Guyana, before colonization, was separated by native tribes known as the Amerindians. These people were a hunter-gatherer society and lived near swampy low coastal lands or sea regions. A few select groups lived deeper into the Guyana jungle and remained relatively isolated, and survived during the period when the Spaniards first arrived as they were inaccessible.

During the 1400s, European exploration was slowly beginning to develop but before that, Guyana as a territory remained isolated. However, in 1498 Christopher Columbus, while on a sailing expedition, sailed and arrived on the coast of Guyana but did not go further in. In 1499, Alonzo de Ojeda and Amerigo Vespucci sailed in the South American region. They went deeper into the coast of Guyana which brought the newly discovered land into the world of territory politics. Alonzo de Ojeda, in his expedition, discovered what is now called the Essequibo River, which he named “Río Dulce,”<sup>28</sup> but the swampy coastal area made it inaccessible for further exploration. When Ojeda and Vespucci brought back the information on the existence of the new territory to which, King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella petitioned for the territory to be claimed by the Spanish. The Spanish were engaged in territorial disputes with Portugal, and after consulting with the pope, the Treaty of Tordesillas was signed. This divided up territory between Spain and Portugal which now “By the year 1500, the coast from the Amazon to the Orinoco began to be referred to as Guyana,”<sup>29</sup> putting this newly discovered area on the map. According to estimates by historical evidence, the first settlement in Guyana occurred in 1616 under Dutch

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<sup>28</sup> Reyner, Anthony S., and Walter B. Hope. “Guyana’s Disputed Borders: A Factual Background.” *World Affairs* 130, no. 2 (1967): 107–13. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20670900>.

<sup>29</sup> Ishmael M A Odeen, *The Guyana Story: From Earliest Times to Independence* (Bloomington, IN: Xlibris, 2014).

authority located on the Essequibo river, hence earning it the name Essequibo. A short while after 1621, the West India Company was founded as joint-stock cooperation just like the EIC back in India. They received a royal charter which allowed a 24-year monopoly on trade and colonization. This means that they have full authority over Essequibo or the possibility of starting a new colony which they did in 1627 on the Berbice River. After the settlement of Berbice was founded, a trading post in Demerara<sup>30</sup> was enacted under the jurisdiction of the West India Trading Company. Colonization by the Dutch, Guyana started moving towards settled communities, and slavery was introduced, developing the economy on a larger scale. The transatlantic slave trade supplied labor which contributed to the rise of the number of plantations and stabilized the new growing economy. Berbice, Essequibo, and Demerara were the leading slave ports. With the rising slave population, the “second half of the century saw the establishment of a plantation economy in Guyana based on African slave labor,”<sup>31</sup> making sugar production the most profitable item. Just under the French and Dutch alone, Guyana started to develop a large population of enslaved people, “by 1762, the Berbice plantations had a population of 4,423, comprising 346 whites, 244 Amerindians, and 3,833 enslaved Africans<sup>32</sup>. In 1712, Berbice was attacked by the French under Jacques Cassard who claimed the colony for France. Berbice had an already flourishing economy with sugar plantations bringing in large amounts of revenue. Another aspect of trade also brought the Dutch and French immense profits, that being the transatlantic slave trade. The British began to slowly integrate their presence in Guyana towards the end of the 1700s and had become investors in sugar plantations. In 1803 war broke out between Britain and France which resulted in supplies from Holland and Britain to

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<sup>30</sup> Ishe, *Guyana Story*, 56

<sup>31</sup> Ishe, 103

<sup>32</sup> Ishe, *Guyana Story*, 60

Guyana<sup>33</sup>. To order to protect their financial interests, in 1803 the British invaded Guyana. From 1803- to 1831 ownership of the three colonies changed hands between the British and the Dutch. At the London Convention of 1814, “the British were confirmed in their possession of the captured Dutch settlements of Demerara, Berbice, and Essequibo in western Guiana; the French regained their feeble posts in eastern Guiana; while to the Dutch remained only Surinam, an indefinite territory lying between British and French spheres of influence”<sup>34</sup> which was a focal turning point in Guyana history. In 1831 King William IV issued a commission that united Essequibo, Demerara, and Berbice as a colony of British Guiana<sup>35</sup>. Under British rule, Guyana’s stable plantation economy faced issues that disrupted the traditional form of income.

### *The beginnings of the Indentured Servitude System*

After coming under British rule, sugar and cotton plantations continued to grow in the three colonies. So did the number of enslaved people, which some historians have argued is evidence showing the importance of the colonies’ sugar production<sup>36</sup>. Guyana’s economy relied on the production of sugar, which was dependent on the labor available. The labor general was enslaved people, which also brought in revenue for the British. The sugar industry had proven to be profitable for the British “end of the eighteenth-century sugar was entrenched in the Guyana

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<sup>33</sup> Ishel, *Guyana Story*, 129

<sup>34</sup> Sluiter 4-5

<sup>35</sup> Ishel, *Guyana Story*, 131

<sup>36</sup> Alston, David. “‘The Habits of These Creatures in Clinging One to the Other’: Enslaved Africans, Scots and the Plantations of Guyana.” In *Recovering Scotland’s Slavery Past: The Caribbean Connection*, edited by T. M. Devine, 99–123. Edinburgh University Press, 2015. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3366/j.ctt1bgzchg.13>.

colonies<sup>37</sup>.” However, working conditions because they subscribed to plantation systems that involved slave labor began to cause hostilities. The anti-slavery movement took a stronghold in British politics, and riots occurred within Guyanese plantations, such as the slave revolts in East Demerara in 1823. Enslaved people aided by anti-slavery officials stormed plantations killing white officials, which triggered other plantation riots like Bee Hive Plantation. 1833 brought the emancipation of all enslaved British people to where ex-slaves were seen as “apprentices” required to still work on plantations which many did not. Plantation production was on a decline, “there were about 38,000 ex-slaves still on the plantations in the mid-1840s, 43 percent of the work at Emancipation. Between 1832 and 1852, the plantation workforce fell from 88 percent of the employed population to 43 percent,”<sup>38</sup> and in 1846 British Parliament passed the Sugar Duties Act. This act removed protection for West Indian sugar and allowed all sugar, even if not from the British Empire, to be on the market. The stock value of Caribbean sugar decreased in combination with the increased cost of materials.

Continuing from my previous chapter’s questioning about what life looked like for these migrants, upon arriving in India, they were faced with brutality upon arriving in India. There were tensions between the different groups of Indian migrants, with regional-cultural frictions ending in large group clashes<sup>39</sup>. Workers were liable for arrest even after completing their required work; if they left the estate, they had a contract. Contracts were initially offered only to the men and were binding for a full five years with a daily wage that in Guyana was worth 1

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<sup>37</sup> Michael DaCosta, “Colonial Origins, Institutions and Economic Performance in the Caribbean: Guyana and Barbados,” *IMF Working Papers* 07, no. 43 (2007): p. 1, <https://doi.org/10.5089/9781451866070.001>.

<sup>38</sup> Lai pg 6-7

<sup>39</sup> Lai, *Indentured Labor*, 122

shilling in Guyana. While there, the individual was not allowed to make any other standing contracts with outside colonies “prohibited the making of labor contracts outside the colonies where such labor was to be utilized and effectively limited to the duration of such contracts”<sup>40</sup>, and there were extreme stipulations to the job itself. Individuals were caught leaving their work or did not want to work; they were liable for prison time, whipping, and withheld wages. Individuals were often lied to when inquiring about the passage, and occupations open. Women faced an exciting predicament in the colonies as they were more likely to be subjected to abuse and violence. An internalization of violence within the family resulted in a stereotype of Indian men being “wife murders.” Between 1872-and 1898, out of 109 murders committed, 63 were of wives by their husbands in Trinidad & Tobago. From 1886-to 1890, out of 31 murders of women, 25 were against wives by their husbands<sup>41</sup>. . In Guyana, women were often the target of abuse as there was a significantly lower ratio of women to men. Child and forced marriages were a common faith young girls faced, and even if reported, the British authorities would not. Hindu marriages were not recognized in the British court system, and therefore a man would not be held for abuse. Married women were given no protection from the law. In my examination of the treatment of Indian migrants in the Carribbean, I found one type of source that had an overwhelming amount of scholarly evidence. Anthologies. While I recognize that they are not traditionally used as academic sources, I believe that they are more than needed in the case of this senior project. The migrants that left India were typically uneducated and didn’t have the chance to write down whatever their experiences were. But what they did have was their voice which they used to pass down their struggles, experiences, and hardships. This study honors and

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<sup>40</sup> Lai pg 53

<sup>41</sup> Lai, *Indentured Labor*, 144



represents those same voices and makes sure they live on through another generation. Scholarly work about the experiences of Indian migrants has been limited. But the oral history of those people is not, so I have chosen to use anthologies as support. In *The Rebel* by Kevin Jared Hosein, he writes from the perspective of a child whose family are new arrivals in the Caribbean. The child is awoken by his sibling, who takes him to a spot where he sees a body with its head chopped off. The body is of a young woman who worked on the same plantation as the child's parents. The sibling explains that he saw the young girl's husband chop her head off. What is revealing about this story is how the other community members react. The men have no different reaction than blame the woman for how she must have acted, while the women have no response other than locking their doors. In *Mother Wounds* by Gitan Djeli, the narrator is told the life of a woman named Gouna who traveled from India to the Caribbean alone. She experiences domestic violence, lack of proper health care, and unsafe working conditions. The narrator then goes on a journey to find photos or any information she can about Gouna. She finds that Gouna's trauma lived on through her children and their children. But what she also finds out is the resilience of Gouna, who is determined to have her family survive. Out of a collection of anthologies, these two stories share one thing with all of the rest. They share both the struggles those first Indian migrants experienced and their resilience to survive in an unlivable place. They highlight women's strength to sacrifice and still have to provide for their families. My next chapter is a sociological analysis of interviews that I conducted with Indo-Caribbean participants from NYC. Their experiences mirror this resilience that I discuss above.

## *Discussion*

With the abolishment of slavery in the Carribean, the British turned toward the Indian people as a way to fill that labor gap. What is more alarming is the circumstances migrants had been living in a while in India, and then when they arrived in the colonies. This shows the systematic way British colonialism worked against the Indian people both in India and then in the Carribean. In India, people were running away from famine and economic instability, but they were running from abuse and hardships in the Carribean. British colonialism affected the lives of the Indian people because it forced them to run from one bad situation right into the next. In the next section, I will be examining how the actions of British officials still affect generations of people in today's modern time.

## *Research Methods*

For this study, to understand the effects of British colonialism on the Caribbean people, both past and present, I conducted interviews. This decision was that the last ship from India to the Caribbean was in the 1930s, meaning that the next generation of those migrants was still alive. They would have witnessed what life was like for those original migrants and what life was like under British colonial rule before independence in 1966. There is limited research and information currently available on this topic. Because I live in one of the largest Caribbean communities in NYC, collecting data on my own was more feasible. Ten interviews were conducted with individuals fifty years and older. However, my target age group was sixty-five to eighty, but I had to extend it to fifty due to a lack of participants in that age range. To recruit participants, I reached out to members of my community that I knew fit the age range and interviewed a few family members. Individuals then passed on information about others they thought would be a good fit for this study or who would be willing to participate.

### *Participants Interviewed*

<b>Name</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Current Location</b>	<b>Place of Origin</b>
Johnny	77	Male	Queens, NY	Guyana
Vicky	72	Female	Queens, NY	Guyana
Martin	54	Male	Queens, NY	Guyana
Jack	80	Male	Queens, NY	Guyana
Shelly	60	Female	Queens, NY	Guyana
Francis	76	Female	Queens, NY	Guyana
Reba	54	Female	Brooklyn, NY	Guyana
Veronica	52	Female	Queens, NY	Trinidad & Tobago
Dennis	54	Male	Queens, NY	Trinidad & Tobago
Dana	51	Female	Queens, NY	Guyana

*Table 1: Participant's names were changed to protect their identity*

After submitting the required documents for approval to the IRB board, I conducted these interviews on the phone in one session with participants. During this process, I interviewed individuals who later told me that they would no longer like their information to be used. To protect the safety of the participants, their names and any other identifying information would not be used. The phone calls were recorded on my laptop and then put into a password-protected file to ensure confidentiality. Participants signed a consent form or gave verbal consent to be interviewed. The following questions shown in the table below were asked to each participant.

1. How old are you?
2. Where were you born and raised?
3. What region of the United States are you living in now?
4. How old were you when you left your country and how old were you when you arrived in the United States?
5. Can you tell me about relationships among family members?
6. What was your family's socioeconomic status?
7. Were there hardships in your family?
8. Was there anything that affected the way you interacted with your family?
9. Can you tell me what your childhood was like?
10. What do you wish that you had a child growing up or was done differently?
11. Were there hardships growing up as a child?
12. Were there any tensions when you were living in your country?
13. How did other groups of people treat you in your country? This is referring to groups of people from different races, religions, or backgrounds like you and your family?
14. Why did you leave your country?
15. What were some struggles and challenges you experienced while being in the United States?
16. What were some struggles and challenges you experienced while being in the United States?
17. How were you treated as an immigrant when you arrived?
18. Can you tell me what your family relationships were like when you left your country and when you first arrived in the United States?
19. Was moving to the United States worth everything you went through?
20. What are some of your biggest accomplishments that make having immigrated worth the struggles?
21. What is something that you want future generations of Indo-Caribbean people to know both in the United States and back in your country?

1. How old are you?
2. Where were you born and raised?
3. What region of the United States are you living in now?
4. How old were you when you left your country and how old were you when you arrived in the United States?
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11. Were there hardships growing up as a child?
12. Were there any tensions when you were living in your country?
13. How did other groups of people treat you in your country? This is referring to groups of people from different races, religions, or backgrounds like you and your family?
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15? What were some struggles and challenges you experienced while being in the United States?
16. What were some struggles and challenges you experienced while being in the United States?
17. How were you treated as an immigrant when you arrived?
18. Can you tell me what your family relationships were like when you left your country and when you first arrived in the United States?
19. Was moving to the United States worth everything you went through?
20. What are some of your biggest accomplishments that make having immigrated worth the struggles?

21. What is something that you want future generations of Indo-Caribbean people to know both in the United States and back in your country?
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*Table 2: The above chart displays every question that each participant was asked*

Each interview lasted for over an hour, and some participants were willing to talk in extreme detail about most things while others were not. In the case of some interviews, the participant requested that specific information was not recorded on my laptop, but I could still use the data. The data consisted of interviews conducted with individuals born in the Caribbean and then immigrated to the United States in the last twenty years. Both men and women were interviewed with no particular order or preference. Each participant was asked the same twenty questions, but I asked a clarifying question if needed. If the participant did not understand the question being asked, I did rephrase the question in simpler terms. The participants were under no obligation to answer all of the questions, nor were they told they had to talk for a certain amount of time.

## Chapter Two: *Gender*

### *Introduction*

Among the many control systems, gender inequality stands out when discussing the Indo-Caribbean experience and history. It has determined the treatment of Indo-Caribbean women both during and postcolonialism. *Gender* concerning this paper is defined as "complex systems of personal and social relationships through which women and men are socially created and maintained and through which they gain access to, or are allocated, status, power and material resources within society<sup>42</sup> ." This chapter will first have a literature review of the theoretical frameworks of gender inequality using both western and Caribbean theories. I then apply these frameworks to the discourse of gender inequality that Indo-Caribbean women have and continue to experience in the Caribbean and the United States. The chapter then ends with analyzing the information and experiences of my participants related to their gender to help prove and highlight the oppression colonialism had played in the Caribbean.

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<sup>42</sup> Violet Eudine Barriteau, "Gender and Development Planning in the Postcolonial Caribbean: Female Entrepreneurs and the Barbadian State" (dissertation, 1994).



## *Literature Review*

### *Western Ideology*

From a western perspective, gender can be defined as "The attitudes, behaviors, norms, and roles that a society or culture associates with an individual's sex<sup>43</sup> ." Gender has been conceptualized by both feminist theories and a Marxist perspective to explain its systematic effect. Judith Butler, an American gender theorist, argues that gender is a performative social construct rather than biological. To do gender is something taught and not inherently human but rather prescribed by the ruling social system and order. Specific actions create gender (we as a larger society determine what constitutes that action as being of that gender), and without those actions, then gender could not exist<sup>44</sup>. Framing gender as a socially determined construct alludes to the bigger picture of gender becoming a system of control and how people organize their lives<sup>45</sup>. Women are placed at the bottom within the system of gender control. Butler's stance on gender relates to the theory of symbolic interaction theory that was developed by George Herbert Mead but later mainly expanded on by Herbert Blumer. Mead believed that humans used symbols to think and communicate with others; he conceptualized this by questioning how symbols create order. Continuing with Mead's development, Blumer claimed that we make "meaning" in two ways as humans. The first is something given to objects or events, and the second is physical attachments provided by humans<sup>46</sup>. Meaning is created due to interactions

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<sup>43</sup> Bell, Kenton, ed. 2013. "gender." In *Open Education Sociology Dictionary*

<sup>44</sup> Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory," *Theatre Journal* 40, no. 4 (1988): p. 519, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3207893>.

<sup>45</sup> Judith Lorber, *Paradoxes of Gender* (Yale University Press, 1995).

<sup>46</sup> Nilgun Aksan et al., "Symbolic Interaction Theory," *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences* 1, no. 1 (2009): pp. 902-904, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2009.01.160>.

with people and is a way to produce an understanding of something. Applying the theory of symbolic interaction to gender being a social construct, people in society apply meaning to what it is to be a gender. Those physical traits and actions are the meanings of that gender. In discussing gender and how that applies to being a system of control, conflict theory developed by Karl Marx can be used. Conflict theory believes that every society comprises conflicts between two groups, the dominant and the minority. These conflicts stem from the unequal distribution of resources and power, resulting in the minority group revolting and creating a restructured society<sup>47</sup>. As modes of production, resources, and labor become owned and controlled by the dominant group, with the minority group working under them in society, it lays the foundation for a capitalist society. Inequality then starts to become associated with capitalism. One of Marx's famous points regarding this theory is that the bourgeoisie (the dominant group) will be overthrown by the proletariat (the minority group). This theory can be applied to gender through the work of Fredrick Engels, who discusses the family structure in a society of conflict. For Engel, this power dynamic of the dominant versus the submissive exists in the household structure because of the struggle for resources and later capitalism. In pre-modern societies, both men and women were equal standings as the competition for resources did not exist. However, new forms of wealth and production modes changed the division of labor within the family. Men became the dominant workers owning cattle or enslaved people, which encouraged the end of the matrilineal order of inheritance<sup>48</sup>. Engels claims that ending the matriarchal system was the

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<sup>47</sup> Turner, Jonathan H. "Marx and Simmel Revisited: Reassessing the Foundations of Conflict Theory." *Social Forces* 53, no. 4 (1975): 618–27. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2576477>.

<sup>48</sup> Trat, Josette. "Engels and the Emancipation of Women." *Science & Society* 62, no. 1 (1998): 88–105. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40403689>.

defeat of women<sup>49</sup>. Women were subjected to men's social and economic submission, and their roles changed to staying and working within the household. That now assigned gender roles to women and men, with the woman's role not allowing her independence or security without a man. The conflicts in society resulted in a gendered system of labor and then social rules for men and women to live by.

Having established what gender is and how it has worked as a system of oppression, it is possible to use feminist theories to explain further how women have been impacted. Standpoint theory rose out of the growing movement of feminist thought during the 70s in the US. This theory came out in response to their wanting to be more representation of women in sociology. The theory is based on the idea that members of society who are oppressed are less likely to have access to and produce knowledge that is of the same quality as those who are socially privileged<sup>50</sup>. Leading sociologists of this theory like Nancy Hartsock connect standpoint theory back to Marx and Engel's work on the division of labor between men and women in a capitalist society. Women contribute to the production of wages and goods just like men; however, their production is only within the home. Unlike men, their institutional value lies within the home sphere and dictates their importance in the social system of society<sup>51</sup>. So when male sociologists then try to examine women's lives, they do not consider the more extensive procedure in which a woman's value is placed. Another aspect of standpoint theory developed by Sandra Harding is that those in

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<sup>49</sup> Carver, Terrell. "ENGELS'S FEMINISM." *History of Political Thought* 6, no. 3 (1985): 479–89. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26212414>.

<sup>50</sup> Intemann, Kristen. "Feminist Standpoint Theory." In *SAGE Research Methods Foundations*, edited by Paul Atkinson, Sara Delamont, Alexandru Cernat, Joseph W. Sakshaug, and Richard A. Williams. London: SAGE Publications Ltd., 2019. <https://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781526421036747550>.

<sup>51</sup> Sandra G. Harding, *The Feminist Standpoint Theory Reader: Intellectual and Political Controversies* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2004).

the dominating groups become disconnected from social reality. This then impedes how studies and research gets conducted about marginalized groups. In her study of black women and black feminism, Patricia Hill Collins highlights how standpoint theory provides to be true. She discusses how black women in academia are not representative of reality as they are a marginalized group. Another feminist theory that relates to gender and the oppression of women is materialist feminism. Materialist feminism originated from historical materialism, aiming to make sense of society under capitalism and that the production of life is systematic<sup>52</sup>. Further developing this theory and taking a Marxist influence, materialist feminists look at subjectivity and how that affects discourses about women on an institutional level. Gender and the subjectivity surrounding it are shaped by the institutions and power systems that oppress women. Essentially, this theory says that material<sup>53</sup> produced on gender is biased because, in a capitalist society, a whole system works to oppress women. (This relates to the earlier points on how capitalism resulted in the division of labor, which created gendered norms). Women ended up being in the home while men worked and had control over the finances, limiting a woman's possibilities and oppressing her). These theories speak to how the oppression of women based on gender is systematic in a capitalist society. The theories work as an excellent introduction to examining how influential and oppressive gender is in the case of women. Nevertheless, these theories and works by western feminists do not apply to Indo-Caribbean. For example, with standpoint theory, women were grouped and discussed as if they all shared the same experiences

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<sup>52</sup> Rosemary Hennessy, *Materialist Feminism: A Reader in Class, Difference, and Women's Lives* (New York: Routledge, 1997).

<sup>53</sup> Material is referring to knowledge

<sup>54</sup>. In addition, the social realities of countries differ from one another, especially when it comes to debating a postcolonial society like Guyana. Continuing on that point, western feminist theories do not consider the realities of a postcolonial society, nor does it consider the differing cultures or races. Even in the case of Patricia Hill Collins, her study on black women and black feminism is limited to cases in the western society of America. To further discuss how gender affects Indo-Caribbean, it is crucial to examine the writings of Caribbean authors and scholars whose works acknowledge and address the society at focus.

### *Caribbean Theory*

To talk about Caribbean theories on gender and how it applies to the oppression of women, using the framework of post-colonial thought helps to give an understanding logistically. Post-Colonial theory/thought believes that you cannot understand the current modern-day without understanding the relationships between the imperial world and colonialism<sup>55</sup>. Western theories on gender, feminism, and systems come from the background of the then-new developing industrial society. It focuses on developing a society not shaped by colonial influence, lacking understanding and representation. Not to mention that there is a vast cultural difference between the western world and areas affected by colonialism. Postcolonial feminist theories were developed out of the new field of Post-Colonial theory and claimed that western feminism sees women in third world countries as the same. Sociologist Chandra Talpade

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<sup>54</sup> Stoezler, Marcel, and Nira Yuval-Davis. "Standpoint Theory, Situated Knowledge and the Situated Imagination." *Feminist Theory* 3, no. 3 (December 2002): 315–33. <https://doi.org/10.1177/146470002762492024>.

<sup>55</sup> Elam, J. Daniel. "Postcolonial theory." *Literary and Critical Theory. Recuperado em* 10 (2019): 9780190221911-0069.

Mohanty argues that Western feminism places third-world women into the same “third world” collective. Mohanty claims that this prevents those women from achieving unity or support. She defines colonialism as a “relation of structural domination, and a suppression. . . of the heterogeneity of the subject(s) in question” (Barriteau, 2003). To understand the cross-cultural experiences of women through feminist thought needs to be aware of the contexts, subjectivity, global economic systems, and processes surrounding lives<sup>56</sup>. That related to the larger stem of colonialism and how that affected the systems women were subject to live by. Mirinalini Sinha’s criticism of Katherine Mayo’s piece *Mother India* argues that British, Indian, and American feminists often argued against each other despite the intention of trying to aid one other<sup>57</sup> because they come from the backgrounds of national and imperial identity. I agree with Mohanty’s point that feminism needs to acknowledge the differences between non-western societies and women. The experiences of Indo-Caribbean women based on their gender do not fit into the solidarity of the western feminism framework, especially in politics and culture. Using the framework of post-colonial theory and post-colonial feminism, I can introduce Caribbean scholarship on gender and feminism.

In my previous historical section<sup>58</sup>, I explained how Indians left India for the Caribbean under the indentured servitude system. There is large intersectionality between gender and the indentured servitude of women. When in the Caribbean, indentured women were paid less as men

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<sup>56</sup> Mohanty, Chandra Talpade. “‘Under Western Eyes’ Revisited: Feminist Solidarity through Anticapitalist Struggles.” *Signs* 28, no. 2 (2003): 499–535. <https://doi.org/10.1086/342914>.

<sup>57</sup> Ghosh, Durba. “Gender and Colonialism: Expansion or Marginalization?” *The Historical Journal* 47, no. 3 (2004): 737–55. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4091763>.

<sup>58</sup> See chapter on Guyana

were paid one shilling per week while they received nine pence.<sup>59</sup> In addition to the gendered wage gap, Indian women were subjected to a gendered division of labor, much like Engels argued in the western ideology section. The British colonial rule implemented the western capitalist society's way of gender division. However, Indian women were not restricted to the home as wives like women in western society but instead required to work on plantations like men due to the need for field labor on plantations<sup>60</sup>. Indian women who were not under the indentured servitude contract struggled to find employment compared to men. In the case of Jamaica during the indentured period, Indian women who did not register their marriages couldn't inherit money or property from their husbands<sup>61</sup>. This exemplifies how gender was an inhibitor for indentured women to earn liveable wages, have fair, equal employment, and even legal standings. Despite the indentured servitude system ending, women still faced oppression rooted in gender. After WW1, when there was discussion on ending the indentured system but keeping Indian workers on the plantations, there was a move to civil contracts. Men were allowed civil contracts reduced to three years (which was shorter than the number of years in indentured servitude contracts), yet women with young children were exempted from them<sup>62</sup>. Gender played a crucial role in the treatment of Indian indentured women by creating a society built around unequal conditions for women. The gender inequality during the indentured period only created gender inequality in other aspects of life, I would argue.

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<sup>59</sup> Amba Pande, *Indentured and Post-Indentured Experiences of Women in the Indian Diaspora* (Singapore: Springer Nature, 2020).

<sup>60</sup> Patricia Mohammed and Verene A. Shepherd, "Constructing Visibility Indian Women in the Jamaican Segment of the Indian Diaspora," in *Gendered Realities: Essays in Caribbean Feminist Thought* (Mona: University of the West Indies Press, Centre for Gender and Development Studies, 2006), pp. 107-128.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid*

The modern-day education system of the Caribbean has shown a gender disparity in certain subjects between boys and girls. There is stereotyping in matters as being traditionally for girls or boys. In a society conducted by Peter Whiteley, he analyzed examination scoring and attendance of stem subjects in Jamaica, Trinidad & Tobago, and Barbados. His results showed more male students with degrees in medical sciences, natural sciences, and engineering than female<sup>63</sup>. In testing children in primary and secondary schools, Whitney finds that boys start with stem subjects a lot earlier than girls, who later start biology. He relates his findings to the gender stereotypes in society on education as it is traditionally believed boys go into science and stem while females do not in the Caribbean. When examining the professions male and female students went into after college, he found more male doctors and engineers than women. This is even after the students attended a stem-based education college. Interestingly enough, he also relates his findings to the possibility of a lack of role models for young girls in science in the Caribbean, unlike in the United States<sup>64</sup>.

Gender-based violence against Caribbean women has grown within the last few decades, with an evident rise. Between 2016-and 2019, a survey was conducted on behalf of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, United Nations Development Programme, United States Agency for International Development, Caribbean Development Bank, and Inter-American Development Bank to measure the rates of violence. In partnership with Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, Suriname, and Trinidad & Tobago, they surveyed women, asking them about four types of violence, intimate partner (IPV). Results showed that

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<sup>63</sup> Patricia Mohammed and Peter Whiteley, "Gender Issues in Science Education ," in *Gendered Realities: Essays in Caribbean Feminist Thought* (Mona: University of the West Indies Press, Centre for Gender and Development Studies, 2006), pp. 183-201.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid*



for IPV, 55 percent of Guyanese women, 39 percent Grenadian, 39 percent Jamaican, 44 percent Trinidadian, and 48 percent of women from Grenada would experience it in their lifetimes<sup>65</sup>. In a study conducted on gender-based violence among adolescent boys and girls, researchers found that heteronormative gender role beliefs contributed to violence<sup>66</sup>. Researchers used 36 participants from low to middle-income families with a mixture of parents, teachers, boys, and girls. They asked them a range of questions centering around gender, race, class and sexuality, and opinions on specific topics. Information from participants showed that there was pressure placed on young girls' bodies to stay “pure,” and girls should not be sleeping around. Male participants said that it was alright for them to have multiple sexual partners as a boy. Yet they shamed girls for the same thing. There was an emphasis on the gendered belief that girls are supposed to get married and have children before being sexually active. A girl’s clothing was related to violence as based on what they wore it was used to judge them in an abusive relationship<sup>67</sup>. Using violence to establish masculinity wasn’t conceptualized as violence for some male participants as they saw it as ensuring women carried out their gendered obligations and duties<sup>68</sup>. This study was published in 2021, doing the work it did recently and revealing gender oppression in the Caribbean. At the end of the study, researchers credit some of the results back to colonial rule, which had only emphasized and institutionalized the gender oppression of women.

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<sup>65</sup> “Caribbean Women Count: VAWG Data Hub,” Caribbean Women Count: Ending Violence against Women and Girls Data Hub, accessed May 1, 2022, <https://caribbeanwomenscount.unwomen.org/>.

<sup>66</sup> Rodney, Ruth, Denise Gastaldo, D. Alissa Trotz, and Claire V. Crooks. “Sex as Boys’ Fame, But Girls’ Shame: Adversarial Adolescent Gender Roles and Gender-Based Violence in Guyana.” *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, (September 2021). <https://doi.org/10.1177/088626052111043585>.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid*

Caribbean feminist scholarship on gender and feminism takes on different beliefs and perspectives. Some schools of feminist thinkers argue that viewing Indian women during and after indentured servitude as being oppressed *only* is detrimental to the field of study. In an analysis of Indo-Trinidadian women post-indentureship, Patricia Mohammed argues that women found ways to challenge the new emerging gender system. They used their newly given wage-earning status and sexuality to engage in gender negotiations<sup>69</sup>. Gender negotiations are defined as “gender negotiation as an accretional process of compromises, arguments, collusions, compromises, resistance, and subversions over time, changing circumstances, sites of contestation, and sources of power available Indo-Trinidadian women” (Hosein, Outar 2017, 7). Feminist Nesha Haniff criticized the Caribbean feminist movement for its false depiction of indentured women as just secondary figures. She claims that they instead created the opening for modern-day grass-root feminism<sup>70</sup> and essentially modern-day Caribbean feminism.

Another point in Caribbean feminist thinking is the belief that the field is now facing a “third wave.” Due to that, feminism is currently transforming from just being a shared collective of ideas and advocating for women's rights. But instead, a new focus on gender consciousness has been diffused through society<sup>71</sup>. Gender consciousness is the self-awareness of rights, oppressions, and privileges for males and females in society to realize potential.<sup>72</sup> Mohammed claims that being a feminist now requires informed and transparent ideas on achieving gender

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<sup>69</sup> Gabrielle Jamela Hosein and Lisa Outar, eds., *Indo-Caribbean Feminist Thought: Genealogies, Theories, Enactments*, 1st ed. (Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

<sup>70</sup> Brinda J. Mehta, *Diasporic (Dis)Locations: Indo-Caribbean Women Writers Negotiate the Kala Pani* (Jamaica: University of the West Indies Press, 2004).

<sup>71</sup> Mohammed, Patricia. “LIKE SUGAR IN COFFEE: THIRD WAVE FEMINISM AND THE CARIBBEAN.” *Social and Economic Studies* 52, no. 3 (2003): 5–30. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27865339>.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid*

equality rather than just talking. This point of feminism now needs to move towards education so the younger generation of women can form their own gender identity and understand the systems of gender.

Transgressive storytelling has emerged as necessary in Caribbean feminist thought and gender as it allows for a visual representation of women's struggles. Indentured women had little to no access to methods of recording their stories and history. Novels about indentured women work to preserve folklore, oral histories, and family history (as the writing is dependent on those mediums), which would cease to exist without them<sup>73</sup>. In analyzing the literary works of Mahadai Das and Rajkumari Singh, Anita Baksh argues that the texts are early representations of Indo-Caribbean feminism. The texts reveal information about the lives of the working class, indentureship, nationalism, and the politics of women that would otherwise fade out of view. Baksh frames the two women authors as redefining the traditional ideas of women as the keepers of heritage by "suggesting that Indo-Guyanese women must create and disseminate knowledge about Indo-Guyanese history through oral and written history forms" (Baksh 2017,87). This displaying information helps to show how deeply feminism is rooted in indentureship and gender, and identity.

Having displayed the current scholarship on gender being an oppressive factor against Caribbean women, we will examine the gender-based experiences of my participants to understand how it has affected the lives of Caribbean women.

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<sup>73</sup> Alison Klein, "Seeing Greater Distances: An Interview with Peggy Mohan on the Voyages of Indo-Caribbean Women," in *Indo-Caribbean Feminist Thought: Genealogies, Theories, Enactments* (PALGRAVE MACMILLAN, 2017), pp. 63-72.

## *Findings*

Any information related to gender came from the female participants who, when asked questions regarding hardships or things they wished were done differently, answered in a form related to gender. Most of the responses relate to the lack of opportunities for girls living in the Carribean and living within regulations or rules.

Vicky is a 72-year-old woman living in Queens, NY, born and raised in Guyana but came to America in her late 40s. When asked what she wished she had done as a child that was done differently or growing up, Vicky mentioned her regrets about education.

*“I was one out of eight children, so I went to live with my older sister and her husband when I was really little, that’s how I was able to go to school. My parents didn’t believe in sending me to school past grade school. In high school my strongest subject was math, and I even received the highest score out of the Island! I got a certificate all the way from the British grading board in England because we were under their education system. However, I never got to go to college because my parents thought I should be getting married as a young girl. They were okay if I wanted to be a teacher in a grade school teaching English or sewing because that was what women should be doing, not math. I would have wanted to be a math professor, but girls back then couldn’t have even dreamed of such a thing.”*

For Vicky, she experienced a difference in education based on gender as stem-related subjects were for boys and not girls. She was not expected to continue very far in school because she was a girl, but some of her brothers were encouraged to as they were boys. This represents Whiteley's findings in boys being pushed towards science and stem professions over girls. A few of my few female participants also echoed similar experiences to Vicky about the lack of opportunities for their education. Almost all of them mentioned that their decision to immigrate to the United States was partially based on wanting their children to receive an education no matter what. Female participants with daughters especially emphasized wanting their children to get the best education.

Some of the older female participants recalled not being able to get an education and were stuck doing household chores and jobs because they were meant for girls. When asked about any hardships in her family, Francis responded,

*“Things got tough when my mother got very sick when I was still a young girl. I had to stay home and take care of her along with the cooking, cleaning and washing. That responsibility fell onto me.”*

Vicky also recalled having to do gender-based labor and actions deemed for females.

*“When I got married, I did all the cooking, cleaning and later taking care of two children. Shopping and taking care of my husband's family was also my job too. The men would come back*

*from work and I would take care of them along with my sister-in-laws. My day would end after everyone else's and start before anyone got up cooking or cleaning."*

When asked about anything that affected how she interacted with her family, Vicky alluded to gender-based violence between her parents. She highlighted that her mother did not have other opportunities to stay with her father because women were stuck.

*"My parents were rice farmers, my father use to go out into the rice fields sometimes with my mother if not she would stay home. On the days when my father would come home and had beend drinking us little kids would run and hide because he would argue with my mother. I remember my mother crying and yelling, but what could she do? She had kids and her parents wouldn't just take her back. Women were supposed to stay with their husbands."*

Although Vicky was the only participant that alluded to gender-based violence, another participant named Dana mentioned gender distinctions between males and females. Dana is a 51-year-old woman living in Queens, is married, and has two daughters. When asked, "What do you wish that you had as a child growing up or was done differently?" she answered with,

*"I wish my mother had taught me how to stand up for myself as a young girl. She always would tell us to avoid doing things that girls weren't suppose to do or at least in her eyes. She never encouraged me or my sister to do anything that traditionally girls didn't do like running in school races or playing sports. I remember she didn't let us wear certain clothes or play outside*

*because we had to stay home and cook or help with housework. My father also didn't let us hang out after a certain time even though our male cousins could because he said it wasn't appropriate for girls. They didn't encourage us to get an education either because girls were suppose to get married and have a family. As girls we were told no, and the boys were always told yes. I wish they did because I would be independent right now."*

Dana mentioned that as a mother of daughters, she made it her goal to allow her children everything without putting restrictions on gender. She also discussed that her mother, who was born and raised in Guyana, never spoke against her husband or men, and she felt that as a mother, she did not encourage her children to stand up to men.

*"My mother never stood up to my father which as young girls made me and my sister think that as women we weren't allowed to speak or have a voice. My father worked while my mother stayed home, she was completely independent on him for everything. She would tell us that women were meant to stay home and even if we wanted to work, jobs wouldn't pay us enough to like a man. If my mother had shown my sister and I that girls could be independent from men, then I wouldn't still be married right now. That's why I push my daughters to get an education so they won't have to depend on a man."*

In answering how she was treated as an immigrant when she first arrived in the United States, Dana recounted her shock about how the different genders were treated. Dana did attend

some school before having to drop out and work, where she got to see how girls were treated compared to the boys.

*“I was so surprised to see the type of clothing some of my girlfriends wore, short skirts, shorts and tank tops. They were allowed to wear that outside of the house! My parents never let me do that in Guyana and when we first arrived to the Bronx my mother and I would always fight about the clothes I wore. Girls were able to go to parties at night without their parents, hang around boys and even drink alcohol! None of them had to rush home after school to go to work and then go home to do the cooking or cleaning like me. As a teenager my mother would often tell me “those are American girls, so they can do that, not you,” which made it hard for me to fit in at school. I got into fights constantly with my parents because I wanted to be free like the American girls.”*

Shelly is a 60-year-old woman living in Queens, NY, born and raised in Guyana with a different circumstance than the other female participants. She attended primary schooling and then graduated college to become a machinist and worked two jobs. This is vastly different from the general experiences of other females who weren't allowed to work or told that certain professions were for men. Unlike other participants, she mentions wanting to be financially secure, which is different from participants' lives who depended on the males to provide.

*“We were different, we didn't fall into the thing of working with the rice fields we both went and had education. Normally kids these kids that work with their parents in the rice field and so, they*



*don't go to school that far like we went. We wanted like a profession, we felt that when you had a profession you have a salary every week, that is guaranteed... I was lucky that the estate was giving this scholarship and there was entrance exams and I aced it even the interview I aced. I was happy you know? It was a very proud moment to be honest with you, because I was the second batch of females that went to that technical school because it was an all male school because they think the profession they were offering was male dominated because they thought women could not do those things."*

What is also interesting is that Shelly had the support of others than herself. She recalled the reactions of those around her, being a woman in a typically male-dominated field and even receiving an education.

*"People were so proud of me doing that. I had a good education I was so much admired and so many people were proud of me being a girl doing this. My cousins, even strangers would come look at me working these machines because it was amazing seeing a woman doing these things you know?"*

However, interestingly enough, when arriving in the United States with her husband when she was 36, Shelly was subjected to the gender division of labor that Engels discussed.

*"Then my husband decided it was time for me to stay home. So I am home now, I'm just a housewife."*

Despite being equally educated, Shelly was responsible for staying within the home while her husband worked. What is unique about Shelly's case is that she was educated in Guyana during the same time when women weren't given those opportunities (much like what other participants faced). Yet, upon arriving in America, she was subjected to gender norms of having to stay home while the man worked. Vicky, while in Guyana, was not allowed to work; however, it was only upon arriving in the United States that she got a job. This was due to her need to make money for her newly immigrated family, which was undocumented. She even continued to work after her children were married and had their own families till retiring recently. It could be assumed that it was not necessary for Shelly to bring in an income in her case. But she mentions later on in the interview that she and her husband struggled financially for a while as her husband could not find employment quickly. The likely answer for this decision could be based on the belief that women traditionally are meant to stay home while the men work and provide.

## *Discussion*

The interviews with my participants reveal how gender-based oppression still affects Caribbean women today. All the women were still subjected to a gender system where the woman stayed home while the man worked. Even in the case of Shelly, who was able to receive an education. The gender-based disparity in the Caribbean education system is also revealing because it shows that the experiences of women who are fifty and older still align with

modern-day women. My findings also are in conjunction with those of Marx and Engels on the gendered division of labor where women end up being put to work in the home while the man goes out and works. However, I would like to highlight how it shows the resilience of the participants who were able to accomplish all that they did with a lack of education. Or the women who were subjected to gender-based violence. All of the participants came from the Carribean to the United States decades ago and still turned out to be successful and have a sense of pride. I would like to highlight a point made by Patricia Mohammed in that women found ways to challenge the gendered system they were a part of. These participants worked to the best of their abilities with whatever they had and now when they recall their life in the interview, they were able to say all that they experienced was worth it.

## *Chapter Two: The Multi Sidness of Race*

### *Introduction*

Race and ethnicity determine social, political, and economic decisions for individuals living in Guyana. This point is reflected in both the accounts of the participants and existing literature. It is important to note that current literature on race and ethnicity in Guyana is limited due to most of the sources holding biases that can not be used for the sake of this project. These sources were written between the 1960s-and 1980s, which was a time of political and historical turmoil, shown through the authors' stance and points. To remain as unbiased and accurate as possible, I have omitted these sources, including sources that aren't specifically about Guyana's society. This chapter will analyze the effects that race and ethnic identity had on Guyana's politics, economics, and society, accompanied by the content analysis of the interviews conducted.

### *Literature Review*

#### *Relationship between Race and Ethnicity*

Before getting into more dept about the effects of race and ethnic identity on politics, the economy, and society, it is worth discussing the relationship between the two variables. This way

it will demonstrate how they worked in conjunction with one another. Race by definition refers to “any one of the groups that humans are often divided into based on physical traits regarded as common among people of shared ancestry,”<sup>74</sup> and ethnicity by definition is “a social group that shares a common and distinctive culture, religion, language”<sup>75</sup>. While both race and ethnicity share the difference of one being based on physical traits and the other being the bases of a shared culture, they both share the same central point. Both are socially constructed to differentiate and separate groups of people. Floya Anthias, a sociologist, argues that these two variables are discourses for collectivity, belongingness and serve diverse political agendas which incorporate class and national identity.<sup>76</sup> Anthias argues that racism relies not only on actual race but instead on ethnic categories; race is the building block but not a product of ethnic difference. Racism occurs when ethnic categorization is backed up by practices of subordination and inferiority, resulting in denying people and groups participation in economics, politics, and social life<sup>77</sup>. She also writes that racial remarks and actions are thought to be justifiable based on negative connotations surrounding culture or ethnic identity. Race and ethnicity are entangled, with race as the starting point, but ethnicity is the mode of segregation and oppression.

Roger Brubaker, a British sociologist, also writes about the relationship between race and ethnicity and what they imply on a larger scale against the backdrop of society. He also connects them to the sense of nationalism which is relevant in the case of Guyana’s politics. Brubaker

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<sup>74</sup> Definition from Merriam Webster Dictionary

<sup>75</sup> Definition from Dictionary.com

<sup>76</sup> Anthias, Floya. “CONNECTING ‘RACE’ AND ETHNIC PHENOMENA.” *Sociology* 26, no. 3 (1992): 421–38. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/42855068>.

<sup>77</sup> *ID*

writes that previous studies in sociology are fragmented when discussing race and ethnicity, which is the opposite of his approach. He argues that while they are not the same, they share similar roots and intersect with each other much like what Floya Anthias points out. In Brubaker's argument, ethnicity, race, and nationalism are cognitive perspectives as they are not things in the world but views *on* the world<sup>78</sup>. This includes ways of identification, systems of classification, and, as Brubaker puts it, the “basic principles of vision and division” of the social world” (Brubaker, 2009 pg 32). Nationalism in Guyana is deeply rooted in politics surrounding ethnicity and race, and cognitive perspective aligns with the ways different groups see each other.

After establishing the relationship between race, ethnicity, and nationalism as devices of separation and exclusion, we can now move toward applying them to Guyana's politics, economics, and social life.

## *Society*

Guyana’s population mainly includes East Indians, Blacks, Chinese, White, Portuguese, Amerindian, and tiny mixed groups. According to the 2016 Guyana census, the population's makeup was 39.8 percent East Indian, 29.2 percent African Descent, 19.9 percent mixed heritage, 10.5 percent Amerindian, 0.06 percent White, 0.18 percent Chinese, and 0.26 Portuguese<sup>79</sup>. This gives way to a racial and ethnically diverse community that presents its issues

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<sup>78</sup> Brubaker, Rogers. “Ethnicity, Race, and Nationalism.” *Annual Review of Sociology* 35 (2009): 21–42. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27800067>.

<sup>79</sup> Bureau of Statistics, Guyana. “1831 Census the Census Road - Statisticsguyana.gov.gy,” June 2016. [https://statisticsguyana.gov.gy/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Final\\_2012\\_Census\\_Compndium2.pdf](https://statisticsguyana.gov.gy/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Final_2012_Census_Compndium2.pdf).

and conflict. These conflicts have roots in the times before independence, and I will argue that they stem from the period of slavery in Guyana.

The Dutch and British Guyana, formally known as Guiana, subscribed to the plantation system in which enslaved Africans were brought through the slave trade to work on private and government plantations. Originally Guyana was meant to be an *exploitation* colony<sup>80</sup> based on only a farming base rather than a colony for people to escape religious persecution, famine, etc. It was meant to be temporary and for economic profit only, and as Roy Arthur Glasgow argues in his analysis, there was no regard for building stable social institutions. With the demand for labor and failing negotiations with the Amerindian populations, the Dutch and later the British turned towards slave labor as an efficient solution. Groups such as the Andras, Dongos, Nachos, Millais, and Guiambo made up a part of the high numbers of the slave trade, the majority of people coming from modern-day Ghana<sup>81</sup>. The plantation system of Guyana was a capitalistic agriculture organization that was dependent on the international market, with slave labor being the specialty<sup>82</sup>. Within the plantation structure, a new social structure was built by assigning a rank to foreign-born individuals, house slaves, creole born, and field enslaved people. The social structure was also embedded in colorism, where the bottom was mainly black groups, and the upper class was the whites. The concept of “high color and low color” is developed where there is favoritism towards lighter-skinned than darker-skinned individuals. Willam Sewell points out that the further away a person was from their African origins, the higher they would be found in social rank. When emancipation occurred, the labor gap was filled with Indians being sent from

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<sup>80</sup> Glasgow, Roy Arthur. *Guyana: Race and Politics among Africans and East Indians*. The Hague, 1970.

<sup>81</sup> Glasgow, Roy Arthur. *Guyana: Race and Politics among Africans and East Indians*. The Hague, 1970.

<sup>82</sup> Gray, Lewis C. *History of Agriculture in the Southern United States to 1860*. Clifton N.J.: A.M. Kelley, 1973

India to Guyana to work on the plantations under the indentured servitude system. This provided the British with cheap labor and robbed the formerly enslaved black population of an opportunity to elevate themselves through bargaining for fair wages, conditions, etc. British officials did not attempt to try and bridge a connection between the two races now living in the colony. Rather they played upon the developing tensions which ensured their dominion over both groups. Race was used as a determining factor in the oppression of black individuals in Guyana during slavery by the British. Then it was amplified and translated over to the dynamic between the black and new Indians.

In Guyana, the newly arrived Indians who filled agricultural-based jobs stayed in the rural areas while the black community moved into towns for job opportunities. Even after the indentured servitude period ended, most stayed in those occupations and areas. From that, most became involved in the retail business while black communities moved towards more urban areas<sup>83</sup>. They took up public servant, civil service, army positions, and teaching positions there. This dynamic of what type of occupations and what group mainly held gave way to the development of ethnic identity. It also allowed for social and ethnic identity questions, which are critical components of Guyanese society today.

Ethnicity references cultural identity, and in a new country, the question of ethnic identity for Indians emerged. As Lommarsh Roopnarine explains, ethnic identity can be broken down into

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<sup>83</sup> Singh, Chaitram. "ETHNICITY AND DEMOCRACY IN GUYANA." *Journal of Third World Studies* 11, no. 1 (1994): 405–22. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/45193516>.



four categories; ethno-local, ethno-national, ethno-trans-Caribbean, and ethno-universal<sup>84</sup>.

Ethno-local identity is based on retaining aspects of ancestral customs, ethno-national identity is still holding on to ancestral customs and seeing oneself as part of a separate group but still sharing some cultural characteristics of the new area. Ethno-trans-Caribbean identity is not viewing yourself as not belonging to the Caribbean but rather a more specific region. Finally, ethno-universal identity does not identify with the area and community you live in but somewhat somewhere else. In the case of Guyana and the Indian migrants, as Roopnarine argues, some of them still saw themselves as connected to the ethnic identity of Indians living in India, not the Caribbean. These different ethnic identities that the new Indian migrants had to place themselves in and the black community changed Guyana's social structure into a plural society.

Plural society is a theory developed by British author John Sydenham Furnivall in examining colonial rules and policy in Burma and the Caribbean. This theory states that different parts of a community live right next to each other within a plural society under the same political structure or group. However, they also live separately from one another<sup>85</sup> and groups typically have their particular occupations. Furnivall states that the groups intermingle, yet union is imposed by colonial power and economic circumstances. A plural society is only possible because of colonial power without a common social will, and the voluntary union isn't enough to keep order together<sup>86</sup>. The whole theory of plural society believes that race is a determining

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<sup>84</sup> ROOPNARINE, LOMARSH. "Indo-Caribbean Social Identity." *Caribbean Quarterly* 52, no. 1 (2006): 1–11. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40654531>.

<sup>85</sup> Furnivall, J. S. (1956). *Colonial Policy and practice: A comparative policy and practice*. New York University Press.

<sup>86</sup> LEE, "Furnivall's Plural Society and Leach's Political Systems of Highland Burma."

factor for the grouping of people within the society that brings its restrictions and practices. The union comes from economic needs like in the marketplace, for example, that overshadowed the needs for social welfare<sup>87</sup> which is the reason for problems in formerly colonized areas. Gordon Lewis, a Welsh historian, argued the same point in saying that modes of social relations, even forms of social thought, are shaped everywhere by modes of production”<sup>88</sup> who adapted it from Elsa Goveia’s beliefs on the British and slavery. Jamaican anthropologist M.G. Smith further develops this theory by saying that plural societies are under the political rule of the dominant demographic and that as race becomes more apparent, so does racial tensions. He also writes that the binding relationship between these groups is *competition*<sup>89</sup> which results from the impact of colonial rule. Both M.G Smith and Furnivall used the theory of social pluralism in being against colonial presence and intervention in the Caribbean and Burma. Sociologists believe that a plural society is unstable for a country because of the component that racial groups are separated from each other. Lee Hock Guan states that no ordinary social will bring together the different ethnic and racial groups.

Being a plural society created challenges for Guyanese politics after independence, as their political and economic decisions reflected the social tensions rooted in ethnicity and race.

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<sup>87</sup> Pham, “J. S. Furnivall and Fabianism.”

<sup>88</sup> Lewis, Gordon K., and Anthony P. Maingot. *Main Currents in Caribbean Thought: The Historical Evolution of Caribbean Society in Its Ideological Aspects, 1492-1900*. University of Nebraska Press, 1983.

<sup>89</sup> Bryce-Laporte, “M. G. Smith’s Version of Pluralism - The Questions It Raises.”

The following segments will further discuss how politics and economics were altered based on ethnic and racial membership.

### *Politics and Economics*

After world war two, there was a strong push for independence from the British across the Carribean colonies. In 1950 the PPP or *People's Progressive Party* was formed running on the platform of independence and economic growth for Guyana by Cheddi Jagan and Forbes Burnham. Jagan represented the Indian population in Guyana, while Burnham stood for the black population. In 1955 the party split and Burnham formed the PNC party or *People's National Congress*, which ran in opposition to the PPP. Racial tension between Jagan and Burnham is seen as a significant factor in the split, as their party's politics were based on the racial support of its group. Both the PPP and PNC aimed to represent the working class; however, Jagan took a strong Marxist stance against capitalism and colonialism, while Burnham supported foreign trade and the elite. Due to Jagan's solid Marxist stance and the Cold War looming over, the United States was worried there would be an attempt to bring communism forth in Guyana. Burnham favored Western politics, but in Guyana, the PPP had the majority support of the Indian people. Between 1962-and 1964, many riots, strikes, and disturbances ensued that pressured the British government to set a date for an election and set in place an election by proportional representation<sup>90</sup>. This was in recognition of the growing racial political party divides and an

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<sup>90</sup> Hendrickson, Embert. "New Directions for Republican Guyana." *The World Today* 27, no. 1 (1971): 33–39. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40394419>.

attempt to stop further racial tensions. On May 26th, 1966, Guyana gained independence from the United Kingdom, becoming its republic and joining the commonwealth.

In 1969, the PNC won the election in the following two years, placing Burnham in the prime minister seat and Arthur Chung as president. After Arthur Chung's presidency, Burnham and Jagan ran against each other. During the presidential elections between Burnham and Jagan, riots occurred where each group (Indo-Caribbean and Afro-Caribbean) targetted the other. Under the Burnham administration, politician Walter Rodney claimed that the regime was using the same tactics that the British had initially been doing on enslaved Black people to oppress them<sup>91</sup>. Rodney would later create another left-wing political group called the *WPA* or Working People's Alliance that tried to bridge the racial and ethnic tension between Afro-Caribbeans and Indo-Caribbeans. It was run on the platform of creating better rights and conditions for the working class regardless of ethnic and racial membership (this was the ideal principle). Burnham won the election, which brought on violence and rioting claims that the election was rigged. Under Brunham's presidency, he applied policies to better foreign trade and relations, especially with the United States. There was more funding for civil servants and governmental jobs. Burnham did put rations on certain food items with explicit reasoning unclear. After Burnham's term was over, Desmond Hoyte went into the office, followed by Jagan.

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<sup>91</sup> Hossein, Caroline Shenaz. "The Exclusion of Afro-Guyanese Hucksters in Micro-Banking." *Revista Europea de Estudios Latinoamericanos y Del Caribe / European Review of Latin American and Caribbean Studies*, no. 96 (2014): 75–98. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23722435>.

After winning independence, the new President Jagan began to divert political funding, and attention to agriculture-based programs discussed above were mainly dominated by Indians. He then began to divert government resources towards housing opportunities and loans to the rural areas, primarily Indo-Caribbean<sup>92</sup>. Following an election in 1968, when Forbes Burnham won the presidency, racial tensions increased. Each political party made decisions that benefitted the group they were representing. Under Burnham's presidency, the state decreased funding for agriculture funding, which amounted to 15 percent of development expenditures, while under Jagan, 43 percent went to agriculture<sup>93</sup>.

It is clear to see just how much ethnic and racial membership affected the politics of Guyana through the political parties that quite literally ran on those platforms. Depending on what someone was racial and ethnically, it reflected more than likely their political affiliation and how well they fit into the state's politics. It determined what groups (and their respective parties) could participate in governmental affairs. At the same time, it also was a determining factor in who public politics and economic decisions would favor. Now that the social, political, and economic factors have been explained in conjunction with race and ethnicity, we can examine participants' responses.

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<sup>92</sup> Hossein, Caroline Shenaz. "The Exclusion of Afro-Guyanese Hucksters in Micro-Banking." *Revista Europea de Estudios Latinoamericanos y Del Caribe / European Review of Latin American and Caribbean Studies*, no. 96 (2014): 75–98. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23722435>.

<sup>93</sup> FERKISS, VICTOR C., and BARBARA FERKISS. "RACE AND POLITICS IN TRINIDAD AND GUYANA." *World Affairs*, vol. 134, no. 1, World Affairs Institute, 1971, pp. 5–23, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20671264>.

## *Interview Segments*

My interviews show how prevalent the social, political, and economic racial tensions were. The participants shared their experiences growing up in Guyana and how their life views stemmed from the racial beliefs of the other group. It also reveals the type of knowledge passed down from them to the next generation, which connects back to my original question of current-day effects.

When asked about how other groups of people treated them, referring to different races, religions, or backgrounds, most participants began to discuss race. Recalling the participant Vicky from the previous gender section, she was born into a lower-middle-class family and raised by her older sister. Her family was rice farmers, and her mother and sisters would sew to make extra money. She recounted that racial biases were tied up in those transactions when it came time to sell the rice grown for the year.

*“When it would come time for us to sell in the market we would go stand up from early in the morning to late in the evening. Only Indian people every bought from us because black people didn’t want to. They only wanted to help their own people, they would also try and cheat from us so my brother never sold to them. “*

Vicky also referenced what life was like under Burnham’s presidency and how it made life for Indian people harder (in her opinion).

*“Those times were hard, there were days when we didn’t have enough of anything to make a proper meal, but I tried my best because I had two small children and a husband. I would get up around 4 am to get in line for food, and we would watch as the black people laughed at us. Why wouldn’t they? It was their government that put the rations on flour because they know us Indian people use flour to cook roti.”*

Other participants mentioned similar shared experiences under the Burnham presidency in struggling with the new political policies. Jack is an 80-year-old man who currently lives in Queens, NY, and left Guyana under the Burnham presidency. He recalled,

*“I left Guyana because it was politically unstable, there were tensions between the blacks and Indians. When Burnham became president, I remember the rioting that happened, Indian businesses were targeted, and lot’s of Indian people ended up getting hurt. I didn’t want to raise my kids in an environment like that. We lived in a mainly black area and after Burnham was elected, life was hard. He cut off flour into Guyana because Indians cooked with it.”*

In the case of Reba, who lives in Brooklyn, NY but is originally from Guyana, and she remembers the racial tensions between the Indian and black communities from a unique perspective. She left Guyana when she was pretty young before fully understanding racial issues. Reba acknowledges that she always knew there were problems as a child, but she didn’t judge people based on their race. For her, the racial tensions meant nothing more than feeling unsafe, so her responses did not encompass any racial hatred.

*“I was too young to understand all the specifics; as a kid you just want to run around and play with whoever you know? My father was a cop so I would overhear him talking about the rioting and lootings going on. At night my older boy cousins would take turns guarding the house, which would scare me as a child. I didn’t have any other feelings like hatred towards black people or Indians, I was just scared something would happen to our family.”*

Along with talking about life under Burnham’s presidency, some participants talked more about how the different racial and ethnic identities affected their interactions with people. Dana, a previously discussed participant like Reba, was still pretty young when she left Guyana. However, she was old enough to comprehend some of the racial distinctions.

*“I was treated differently in school because I didn’t only want to play with the other little girls like me. Some of my friends were black and the other Indian girls judged me and wouldn’t want anything to do with me. I wouldn’t tell anyone at home because I know how my parents felt about black people. When every we use to go places my mother would always make comments about black people on what they did or how they acted. It didn’t stop me from playing with my friends in private though.”*

For Dana, race dictates the social spaces she was allowed to be in and shaped her attitude and beliefs toward black individuals. Those beliefs and attitudes were shared by both her parents,



alluding to the fact that part of it was being passed down to her. That demonstrates how the ideas and beliefs were passed down from generation to generation. Dana reported making an effort to raise her kids with an open heart for all different people because she didn't want them to be close-minded.

*“I have always taught my kids to be nice to everyone regardless of race, which is something my parents didn't teach us growing up. I have never restricted them from playing with other kids based on their race. My parents even up till now still say some pretty mean racist things about black people. But I try and keep my kids away from that nonsense.”*

Two participants did not mention any racial issues when living in their country. Veronica and Dennis have both been born and raised in Trinidad and Tobago. When asked if any tensions were living in their country, Dennis stated,

*“No, everything was fairly fine, the only big thing we eva had was someone trying to stage a coup on the government. But it wasn't successful.”*

Veronica answered the question by saying,

*“I remember there was this one muslim man who tried to take over the government but that didn't cause such a problem. Trinidad never had problems with black and Indian people like*

*Guyana did. I grew up being friends with both black and Indian children just fine, we was all like family.”*

The reason for mentioning Veronica and Dennis’s responses is because they show a different life living in the Caribbean, one that, unlike most participants, wasn’t touched by race. What is also interesting is that Veronica makes a clear distinction between Trinidadian and Guyanese society when it comes down to race.

Almost all of the participants' responses to race (except four) reveal some form of solidarity with their ethnic group. This connects back to Furnivall and Smith’s points on plural societies in the Caribbean.

## *Conclusions*

Before discussing any findings, I need to make this note to the reader about the contents of this chapter. Some of the participants use certain types of language that in today’s modern society come off racist. I do not deny that point, but I am also not going to take away an opportunity in which the participants have a chance to share their stories. They lived in a different time and society, not the United States in 2022. The circumstances that they grew up is part of what shaped their answers, and their experiences resulted from a heavily racist society. These findings do align with the point of

Furnivall and his theory of a plural society and Lee Hock Guan's argument that no commonality will connect the social groups. Despite living under a colonial authority simultaneously, the two dominating groups in Guyana still hold tensions.

## *Conclusion*

If it weren't for the British involvement in the Indian trade, then the indentured servitude system would not have been possible. British colonial rule in India was the result of the spice trade and the political relations with the Mughal state. The Mughal emperors created methods by which the EIC could continue to thrive in India despite the empire going on a decline itself. As a result of that, it led to over a few thousand people having to become migrants and move to a new country. There they faced violence, abuse, and even death. What was the ripple effect of this on the Indo-Caribbean community? It helped to create a hardened, and segregated society through racial tensions and gender. My participant's responses are proof of that.

But I didn't include all of their responses out of the interest of time and to stay on topic which when you combine everything they had to say together it produces something different. My participants all talked about how their biggest accomplishments in life were being able to see their children graduate, buy a house, and never have to worry about the things they did. They seemed overjoyed to tell me all about little victories they've had even when times were devastating. That shows me the strength of a community that has been displaced and unrepresented. It shows me that the Indo-Caribbean community is one that will continue to thrive despite the trauma surrounding gender and race.

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