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Ralph R. Premdas



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Recovering democracy : problems and solutions to the Guyana quagmire

by Ralph R. PREMDAS¹
Professor of Public Policy
University of the West Indies
St. Augustine
Trinidad and Tobago

In 1992 when free and fair elections were conducted for the first time since 1964 in Guyana, a brief euphoric moment of positive change was simultaneously accompanied by a set of long term difficulties which five years later would return to haunt the nation reducing its democratic prospects to shambles. The Carter Center was the midwife which delivered the electoral triumph overseeing a deeply embedded proclivity of the ruling Peoples National Congress (PNC) to rig elections. While this benefitted Guyanese in restoring democracy, the change failed to alter the fundamentals of the Guyanese institutional order which in the first instance accounted for the communal strife. More specifically, the Carter people in their intense preoccupation with sanitizing the mechanical minutiae of the electoral machinery, lost sight of the perverse political institutions involving zero-sum competition for office which virtually conferred total control of the state to one community denying participation to the defeated other. A new government was erected on an old discredited order akin to an incompetent physician who uses Band-Aid to cure cancer. The facts of the case suggest that the Carter people had enough leverage to

1. Ralph R. Premdas has written extensively on communal conflict. His recent books include *Ethnic Conflict and Development : The Case of Guyana*, Avebury, 1996 and *Ethnic Conflict in Fiji*, Avebury, 1997. His larger work on resolving inter-ethnic conflict has been published in *Ethnic Conflict and Modes of Accommodation : Problems and Possibilities*, Inaugural Lecture, University of the West Indies, 1998.

compel the victor in the elections to initiate meaningful reform of the political system as a condition for ratification of its victory. Rather, a faint undertaking by the Peoples Progressive Party (PPP) to establish a government of national unity and reform the constitution was accepted without the means to enforce these promises. The PPP proceeded merrily to ignore these undertakings, failed to put in place an inclusive cross-party government and engaged in dilatory tactics about constitutional reform. While it did succeed in restoring much health to the economy giving this item first priority, it effectively ignored the political apparatus against which it chafed for decades while out of power. One can therefore argue that what was accomplished in the 1992 elections was simply a change of governing decision-makers from the PNC to the PPP under the same system that had done irreparable harm to the Guyanese people. After the 1997 general elections which the PPP won by successfully mobilising the Indian bloc vote, the chicken came home to roost. The defeated PNC decided to camouflage the fear of its permanent exclusion from power and possible subordination of the African community forever, by contesting the accuracy of the election results and taking to the streets. Following the demonstrations of the PNC which continued to command solid African solidarity, a virtual brokenback state has prevailed with the defeated PNC in control of the main cities, the public bureaucracy and the all of the coercive forces, police and army included. The PPP has the rest but literally governs within the jaws of the Opposition strongholds in the capital city, Georgetown. At one level, it can be argued that the PNC alone is responsible for the stalemate that now has crippled economic investment and placed daily Indian-African relations on a razor's edge. While at this level, there is some truth to this argument, at a more fundamental level, the problem points to the deficiencies of the zero-sum constitutional order which has exacerbated inter-ethnic malaise and crippled the authoritative centers of decision-making undermining their legitimacy in the eyes of one of the two ethnic communities which need to cooperate if the state should survive and prosper. A CARICOM brokered peace has now pointed its attention to reforming the constitutional system. A facilitator has been appointed to ensure that the effort at reform is not strangled by dilatory tactics or partisan obstructionism by either the

PPP or the PNC. This paper offers an analysis of the fundamental problems of the Guyanese political order and suggests directions in which change towards inter-ethnic reconciliation and political consociation may proceed. Before I go on, it will be useful to look briefly at certain theoretical and comparative aspects of resolving communal conflicts generally since this will bear heavily in the outcome of the talks to find a solution to the Guyana quagmire.

The crux of the problem pertains to the establishment of a generally acceptable, just, and democratic government in the midst of deeply distrusting communal components in Guyana and similar states including Trinidad and Suriname in the Caribbean. Implicated in all of this are vexing issues related to status and recognition of the ethno-cultural communities which express fears of discrimination and domination as well as charges of skewed state policies regarding resource allocation. Short of destroying the state, the basic task is to design a framework of government that will accommodate the divergent claims of the respective communities for equity and representation, the way they see it. In part, the point about this paper is precisely to explore the possibilities of designing such a system. There are numerous cases of failed efforts in finding a formula for inter-ethnic accommodation, but there are a few success stories which offer some hope. Insights offered in this paper derive in part from examining these cases. Many of the solutions that work tend to be short term and ad hoc. However there are enough of these to offer insights into what may be done in certain circumstances bearing in mind the limits of cross-cultural transfers of social technology.

In most multi-ethnic states, the mode of regulating communal strife varies over time ranging from periods of oppression to moments of accommodation. Cultural pluralism tends to throw up persistent problems in establishing stable inter-sectional co-existence. Peaceful accommodative practices appear to be rare events and when they do occur they tend to be of relatively short duration. Generally, from the evidence, it is clear that the most prevalent policies and practices that states apply in coping with cultural diversity points to domination and repression. Sometimes drastic measures are employed to destroy « once and for all » rival ethno-cultural divisions through assimilation,

genocide, population expulsion or partition. As a general rule, these modes of ethnic conflict management tend to be counterproductive. Multi-ethnicity and cultural diversity persist and rarely can they be entirely erased or suppressed.

The history of most multi-ethnic states is a veritable repository of varied experiments and experiences in regulating inter-communal living. The solutions span a repertoire ranging from power-sharing and consociation on the conciliatory side of a continuum to communal oppression and exploitation on the domination side. There are many modalities in between as Figure I shows.

FIGURE I

Negative side

[genocide – assimilation – partition – forced population transfer – forced domination/repression – legal hegemonic domination]

Positive side

[consociation – bargaining – decentralization – balance arbitration – multi-culturalism – liberal democracy]

Most polyethnic states have evolved a pattern of inter-communal regulation which, however stable, tends to undergo periodic crises and breakdowns. In a single case history, various modes of ethnic conflict resolution including a wide range of contradictory and inconsistent modalities on the continuum from left to right can be discovered. Very often a multi-ethnic state which searches for a solution to its communal crisis may discover insights from its own experience and history rather than in alien imports. In the case of Guyana, there was a period in 1953 of inter-ethnic accommodation which offers insights into the practical possibilities of reconciliation.

What I am also saying is that in the end whatever policy proposals are recommended to regulate and resolve an inter-ethnic crisis should not be treated as the transfer of mere technical devices that can be conveniently and neutrally inserted in an ethnic conflict to provide a quick fix. Each strategy of ethnic conflict resolution is not only culture specific to a substantial extent but it tends to embody a contest over cultural claims and the distribution of symbolic and material values. This is the fulcrum on which turns issues of equity in claims and counter claims among ethnic communities in conflict². At bottom, the issues and the mode of resolution are political, cultural and ethical. This should point towards a critical process of formulating policy options that are at once cognizant of and sensitive to cultural contexts. Before we proceed to set forth a diagnosis and prescription for Guyana's ethnic malaise, it will be useful to provide a background into the society and its politics.

PART I. - THE MAKING OF AN ETHNIC STATE AND THE STRUCTURING OF COMMUNAL IDENTITIES

Essential to the analysis of Guyana's communal strife is the creation of an « ethnic state », a concept that alludes to the descensus in the social demographic structure created by colonialism. The multi-ethnic state in Guyana, as in many parts of the Third World, was a colonial artifact. State and nation were not co-terminus entities ; rather, the colonial state deliberately spawned an ethnically segmented social and cultural fabric. The role of the state in the creation of the underlying conditions of communal conflict is therefore critical to an understanding of Guyana's difficulties. In looking at the state, attention is focused not only the policies related to the formation of a multi-ethnic society, but also on the political institutional apparatus through which state power is contested. Specifically, this refers to the competitive parliamentary system that was engrafted onto Guyana as

2. See Taylor D. M. and Moghaddam F. M., *Theories of Intergroup Relations*, 2nd edition, New York, Praeger, 1994, pp. 95-118.

part of the state apparatus and that engaged parties in zero-sum struggles for power.

Guyana is a multi-ethnic Third World state situated on the north-coast shoulder of South America. Although geographically part of the South American land mass, culturally it falls within the Caribbean insular sphere marked by plantations, monocrop economies, immigrant settlers, and a colour-class system of stratification³. The country is populated by six ethnic solidarity clusters – Africans, East Indians, Amerindians, Portuguese, Chinese and Europeans. A significant « mixed » category also exists, consisting of persons who have any combination of the major groups. Racial and ethnic categories are apprehended in a rather peculiar way among Guyanese. In the popular imagination, everyone is placed within a communal category which, as anthropologist Raymond Smith has noted, « is believed to be a distinct physical type, an entity symbolized by a particular kind of ‘blood’ »⁴.

Hence, even though objectively there is a wide array of racial mixtures, a person is soon stereotyped into one of the existing social categories to which both « blood » and « culture » are assigned a defining role. In a « we-they » dynamic, each person accepts his/her assignment to a communal category which in turn separates and establishes individual and collective identity from other similar groupings. From this, a society of ethno-cultural compartments has emerged with various forms of inter-communal antagonisms of which the African-Indian dichotomy dominates all dimensions of daily life.

3. Wagley Charles, « The Caribbean Culture Area », in *The Caribbean : A Symposium*, edited by V. Rubin, Seattle, Washington University Press, 1980.

4. Smith R. T., « Race, Class, and Political Conflict in a Post-Colonial Society », in *Small States and Segmented Societies*, edited by S.G. Neumann, New York, Praeger, 1976, p. 205.

Table 1.1.

Ethnic Distribution of the Guyanese Population

Ethnic Group	Per Cent of Total
Indians	51,4
Africans	30,5
Mixed Races	11,0
Portuguese & Europeans	1,2
Chinese	0,2
Amerindians	5,3

Source : Ministry of Information : 1980 Census.

Nearly all of Guyana's 850 000 people are concentrated on a 5 to 10 mile belt along the country's 270-mile Atlantic coast. The multi-ethnic population is loosely integrated by an indigenous creole culture which has evolved from the admixture of experiences of the immigrant population during the last two hundred and fifty years of Guyanese history. Sub-cultural patterns of consciousness are dominant in identity formation even while social integrative institutions are not entirely non-existent. In moments of inter-ethnic confrontation and conflict, the strong sub-cultural patterns threaten to burst the society asunder at its ethnic seams. The inter-play of integrative centripetal institutions such as commonly shared schools along with the fissiparous ethnic cultural features such as different religious faiths have created a split national personality.

Slavery and indenture were the twin bases on which successful colonization of the climatically harsh tropical coasts occurred. A work force of culturally divergent immigrants was recruited to labour on plantations in the New World. The different patterns of residence, occupation, and political orientations by the imported groups reinforced the original differences of the settlers laying from the

inception of colonization the foundations of Guyana's multi-ethnic politics.

By the beginning of the 20th century, certain features were clearly embedded in the social system. A communally-oriented, multi-ethnic society was being fashioned and institutionalized. Several layers of cleavage appeared and reinforced each other. Hence, separating East Indians and Africans were religion, race, culture, residence, and occupation. Multiple coinciding divergencies deepened the divisions without the benefit of a sufficiently strong set of countervailing integrative forces. To be sure, most immigrants participated in varying degrees in a commonly shared school system, national laws, colour-class stratification system and experiences in suffering. At an elementary level there was even a measure of shared cross-communal class unity at places where Indians and Africans worked such as certain factories or labour gangs. But these were few and far between. The trajectory of social organization was firmly launched from the multi-layered foundations set in the colonial period. These patterns would be sustained by voluntary associations that were formed.

The logic of the communal society implanted in Guyana pointed to a future of inevitable sectional strife. Not only were many layers of fairly distinct communal divisions erected, but in the absence of equally strong rival overarching integrative institutions, the immigrant groups viewed each other from the perspective of their respective compartments with misinformed fear and much hostility. The colonial pie was small, most of it allocated to the governing European coloniser element occupying the top echelon of the colour-class stratified system. Of the remaining jobs and other opportunities, the non-white segments fought among themselves for a share. African-Indian rivalry for the few scarce values of the colonial order would feature as a fundamental source of inter-communal conflict from the outset of the creation of the multi-tiered communal society. It would be sustained by a deliberate policy of divide and rule but would be mitigated by the urban-rural pattern of residence especially of Africans and Indians respectively. What had evolved assuming the pretensions of a society was an order based on sustained and manipulated communal conflict without any prospect of overcoming these basic divisions in the

foreseeable future. Institutionalised division and embedded conflict were the defining features of the system in perpetuity. Or so it seemed even at the end of the nineteenth century.

The twentieth century would witness the unleashing of new forces which would erode and eliminate the seemingly permanently set colonial structures of dominance in Guyana. The mutual antagonisms shared among the subjugated ethnic elements would be diverted towards a unique opportunity to unite against the plantation society and its rulers. In particular, Indians and Africans under the leadership of sectional charismatic leaders acting in unison under the umbrella of the same political party would commence a shared struggle to uproot the colonial oppressors. Against the trajectory of a divided society consigned to perpetual internal strife dominated by a manipulative coloniser, a new tidal force of unity was unleashed in the independence movement. A common enemy in colonialism impelled the emergence of cross-communal leadership which mobilised non-white workers and others to challenge the plantocracy, the colour-class value system, the unjust distribution of jobs and privileges and all the other iniquitous aspects of the multi-ethnic immigrant society. A multi-ethnic independence movement called the People's Progressive Party (PPP) was formed under the leadership of two charismatic sectional leaders, one an African (Forbes Burnham) and the other, an Indian (Cheddi Jagan). They successfully won the first elections, but almost immediately after victory engaged in a rivalry over sole leadership of the PPP. In the end, this led to a fatal split in the independence movement along ethnic lines. The two leaders parted company, formed their own party, and thereafter Guyana was transposed into a territory riven by deep and destructive ethnic and racial politics.

The moment of opportunity to build a new basis of inter-group relations and a new society was lost when the two sectional leaders parted company, formed their own party and pursued their own ambition for personal acclaim and power. The moment of reconciliation is a rare event in a multi-ethnic state suffused with all sorts of underlying predispositions for ethnically-inspired divisive behaviour. What makes the loss of that opportune moment even more unbearable is the following sequence of events in which the old

divisions embedded in the social structure were exploited and exacerbated by a new form of mass politics. A new type of party emerged constructed on the discrete ethnic fragments into which the old unified party had broken. Mass politics invited rival mass organizations to capitalize on ethnic loyalties for votes. The new system of politics was adopted from a model of political competition derived from European contexts marked by an underlying unity and consensus. Many colonies with fragmented ethnic sections were bequeathed political institutions designed around adversarial zero-sum politics. The new parties in Guyana were encouraged to design vote-getting campaign strategies aimed at capturing a government and vanquishing an opponent as in a war of all against all. To win is to conquer ; to lose is to die. Ethnic conflicts that are organized and acted out in an arena of partisan competition bound by zero-sum rules of rivalry tend to exacerbate the underlying deep divisions of the society. Party organization and electoral competition together consign an ethnically multi-layered polity to a route destined to self-destruction. It seems that once the moment of reconciliation is lost, the ethnic monster is unleashed in the theatre of mass politics wrecking uncontrolled havoc negating all efforts at development.

Political Parties, Apanjaat Politics and Civil War

In Guyana, like other Third World multi-ethnic states, competitive parties formed around a nucleus of members from one or another sub-system, do not serve to unify the society or to establish legitimate authority. In those societies which are relatively well integrated already bound by a widely shared body of basic values, political parties have served as effective linkages between the identity of citizens and the policies of decision-makers at all levels of government. Competitive parties that are formed from exclusive ethnic blocs in internally fragmented states such as Guyana do not serve as agents of national integration and do not mobilise energies and scarce resources for national development. Instead, they exacerbate the underlying cleavages and sectionalism. The way they organize their lives and those of their constituents in a competitive arena of zero-sum

stakes results in the wreckage of all human endeavour aimed at developmental amelioration. The new competitive parties in Guyana illustrate this well.

Following the historic split of the national independence party, the PPP, two new factional parties emerged around the leadership of Dr. Jagan and Mr. Burnham. Each claimed the mantle of the old popular and victorious PPP so that at least temporarily there was a Burnhamite and a Jaganite PPP. Later, the Burnhamite faction would alter its name to the People's National congress (PNC hereafter), while the Jaganite faction retained the PPP label (PPP for Jagan's faction hereafter). After the 1955 split, a general scramble commenced between the Jaganite and Burnhamite factions to ensure that Indians and Africans respectively stayed with their ethnic leaders. This occurred at the same time that each partisan grouping proclaimed its adherence to socialist ideals and programmes.

Notwithstanding the appeals of the PPP and PNC for supporters in all classes and from all communities, the reality was that each party attracted virtually only Indians or only Africans. With the historic split in 1955, the coalition of African and Indian votes that supported the old PPP was destroyed. Progressively from 1955 to the present, Africans and Indians not only consolidated and completed their move to the Burnham (later Hoyte) and Jagan respectively, but also, and most importantly, ethnic declarations for these leaders and their personalistically – led parties by the Indian and African communities became overt and vociferous.

Sectional identification with the two major parties became a fundamental fact of contemporary Guyanese politics. Paradoxically, in a political field of self-declared socialist parties, class criteria as a determinant of party identification was practically negligible or absent. *Apanjaat*, the local colloquial term for « vote for your own kind », was the dominant factor which governed the political choices of nearly all Guyanese. Everyone expected an Indian to support and vote for the PPP and an African for the PNC.

The fateful fall into the spiral of intensifying ethnic politics will also be facilitated by the role of voluntary associations after the 1955

leadership split of the independence movement. Thereafter the relationship between political parties and voluntary associations accentuated the continued ethnic bifurcation in the Guyanese cultural system. All major economic and cultural intermediate associations became affiliated directly or indirectly with one or another of the political parties in Guyana. The rigidity of this close affiliation was underlined by the consistent similarity of policy positions on issues of public concern between particular parties and specific interest groups. To a substantial extent this was inevitable, since historically each section gravitated to and developed around a particular occupation. The large economic organizations such as trade unions and the more important cultural groups such as religious associations are identified today by the public as belonging to the « blackman », the « Coolie », or the « Potagee ».

The spiral of intensifying ethnic conflict slowly but inexorably exacerbated by the way the political parties organized the lives of their constituents, the manner in which election campaigns were waged, and the method by which voluntary associations were enlisted in the struggle for communal ascendancy, led almost inevitably to cataclysmic inter-ethnic confrontation and civil war. Between 1961 and 1965, the screws of communal conflict were slowly tightened so that few persons could escape being a coopted participant in a system of mutual communal hate. Inter-ethnic relations especially between Africans and Indians were increasingly marked by covert contempt and deceptive distrust. The elements of an impending explosion were registered first in the fear of ethnic domination of Indians by Africans and of Africans by Indians. A new drama was unfolding in which the main motif was a struggle for ethnic ascendancy compounded by a politically instigated terror of internal communal colonisation. While inter-ethnic interaction was still carried on in the familiar routine of daily life, the same persons in the privacy of their homes and communities enacted a script of racist and communal antipathy drawing every day perilously close to open conflagration. In public, the political drums continued surreptitiously to beat on the theme of ethnic claims and exclusivity ; in public interaction each side had contrived a set of secret intra-communal symbols, idioms and nuanced expressions to silently communicate group solidarity erected on an understanding

of collective contempt for the other side. Dual roles and schizophrenic personalities dwelt simultaneously in an ethnically split society. Forced to live together by the designs of a colonial conqueror, the sectional elements possessed no experience for inter-communal accommodation. Introduced mass politics was betrayed by sectional leaders jockeying for power. A moment of opportunity for reconciliation and reconstruction was squandered and the innocence of legitimate inter-ethnic suspicion was nurtured into a monster obsessed with the fear of communal dominance. One cleavage after another that separated the ethnic segments – race, traditional values, religion, residence and occupation – was reinforced by a mode of modern mass ethno-nationalist politics that drove the society to the brink of self-destruction.

After the 1961 elections, in the aftermath of an intensively organized ethnicised election campaign and with the promise of independence soon thereafter, the victory by Cheddi Jagan's Indian – based PPP posed a fundamental threat to the survival of Africans, Mixed Races, Europeans, Amerindians, Chinese and Portuguese. The system of electoral politics enabled the victor in a zero-sum game of competition to assume complete control of the resources of the government. The chance – even a slim one – that this power could be perversely applied to systematically and permanently exclude political and communal opponents was all that was necessary to mobilise massive and crippling opposition to any ethnically-based government. In the multi-layered communal order established by the colonial power, an inter-dependent economy of specialised parts, each part dominated by one ethnic group, was institutionalised. No ethnic group could live without the other.

The PNC Regime and the Institutionalising of Ethnic Domination

After the historic 1964 elections which witnessed the defeat of Jagan's PPP, the new coalition of Forbes Burnham and Peter D'Aguiar acceded to power. No attempt was made by the two largest sectional

parties, the PPP and the PNC, to forge a grand coalition in a new government of national unity. Neither Burnham nor Jagan would serve in a subordinate role to each other even though a grand coalition needs not involve a hierarchy of leaders. The trajectory of events after the 1955 leadership split clearly indicated that Jagan and Burnham held irreconcilable personal and programmatic differences. The upshot was a re-affirmation of the plural society expectation if not prescription of a system of government based on ethnic domination. It would not be until the middle 1970s that the two leaders would be forced by circumstances to come close to reconciliation.

From mid-1968 onwards, Burnham would preside over a minority government kept in office by repeated electoral fraudulence and a politicized and ethnically sanitized army and police. Needless to point out, democracy was now dead; its crucial vehicle of representation through fair elections, was tampered with. Legitimacy was lost; the state coercive machinery was the main guardian of the illegal PNC regime. A minority party seized power. No colonial or external power had aided the PNG in rigging the 1968 elections. The colonial precedents of manipulating democratic devices to serve imperial interests were well learnt by the Burnham government. Guyana had come full circle from colonial domination, to freedom and back to domination, this time of one non-white group dominating another.

Towards the end of 1969, then, the PNC regime proclaimed a socialist framework for Guyana's reconstruction. In 1970, Guyana was declared a « Cooperative Republic ». From private enterprise, the economy was to be founded on cooperatives as the main instrument of production, distribution, and consumption. But crises continued to bedevil the regime. The government ran a gauntlet besieged by high unemployment (30 %), under-employment (36 - 40 %), double-digit inflation, demonstrations, boycotts, strikes, and later on as a result of the Arab-Israeli war, prohibitive fuel costs. A vicious cycle of poverty was created by a pattern of polarised and unstable ethnic politics inter-mixed with the salve of socialist rhetoric and programmatic justifications.

Between 1971 and 1976, the government nationalised nearly all foreign firms bringing 80 % of the economy under state control. This unwieldy public sector supplied the job opportunities necessary to quell the increasing demands of PNC supporters for equitable participation in the economy. State corporations proliferated but most were placed under an umbrella state agency called GUYSTAC which controlled twenty-nine corporations and several companies valued at (G) \$ 500 million. Government ministries increased from twelve in 1968 to twenty-one in 1977. The government also ran five banks, three bauxite companies, and a gigantic sugar corporation which at one time dominated the country's entire economy. These public agencies were staffed overwhelmingly by the regime's communal supporters. The police, security and armed forces, in particular, were expanded to protect the besieged PNC government.

The judiciary also came under the PNC's regime's direct influence. The appointment of judges and magistrates was routinely based on party loyalty. Thus, the use of the courts to challenge the legality and constitutionality of decisions of the regime was futile. The overall policy output of the PNC regime, even if it were to be interpreted foremost in socialist terms, pointed indisputably to ethnic favouritism and preference. The polarisation of the two main ethnic races was probably attributable as much to ethnic chauvinism among PNC activists as to PPP boycotts and strikes against the government. The economic situation had deteriorated so badly that towards the end of the 1970s, the impact reverberated adversely on everyone alike, regardless of ethnic membership. Strikes and demonstrations and other challenges to Burnham's power increasingly came from all ethnic segments including Africans. The arsenal of coercive powers previously used against Indians was now used against African dissidents also.

The Critical Elections of 1992 and a Change of Regime

After three decades of struggle by an array of forces, the ruling PNC government was forced to hold free and fair elections in 1992.

Forbes Burnham had died in the early 1980s and was succeeded by Desmond Hoyte who continued the practice of rigging elections. This was however brought to an abrupt halt in 1992. The Atlanta Carter Center For Democratic elections was mainly responsible for persuading the PNC regime to submit itself to the voice of the electorate. In previous elections, the ruling regime was virtually permitted to rig elections since this assured the West of a loyal ally in the Cold War context. With the advent of Gorbachev and *perestroika*, however, and the subsequent disintegration of the USSR, the PNC government was shorn of its Cold War shield of protection. In a new international order of human rights and democracy, the United States and the West abandoned their support of authoritarian anti-communist regimes and actively promoted governments based on free and fair elections. PNC was coerced by its Western backers to convene free and fair elections. On October 5, 1992, after two postponements that prolonged the constitutional life of the PNC government by two years, the elections were finally held. The outcome was dramatic. The PPP in coalition with a minor party defeated the PNC bringing to a close nearly three decades of illegitimate rule in Guyana.

The 1992 elections were about the elections – its authenticity and its honesty. President Hoyte had argued that previous elections in which the PNC had declared itself the victor were fair and honest and he therefore had no doubt of the PNC being returned to power in new elections. It was this claim that stood at the centre of the elections, that is, that the PNC had always acquired power legitimately. The opposition parties however equated free and fair elections with the defeat of the PNC and argued for the role of an external adjudicator to oversee new elections in Guyana. In a series of prolonged challenges to the machinery that the PNC had utilised to retain power in the past, ranging from the control of the Electoral Commission to the printing of ballot boxes and the counting of the votes at centralised locations, the PNC grudgingly made concessions and lost control of the election machinery. Shred by shred, integrity was restored to the electoral process. In the struggle for procedures to ensure free elections, the issue of free elections transparently conducted under the scrutiny of international observers became prominently internationalised. President Hoyte was cornered by his boast that the PNC was not afraid

of free and fair elections. Eventually it was too late and even though there was attempt to disrupt the elections at the very last minute, free elections were conducted and the outcome was the defeat of the PNC.

The October 5, 1992 elections attracted eleven contesting parties of which the three most significant were the PNC, the PPP, and the Working Peoples' Alliance [WPA]. The Guyanese electorate consisted of 385 000 voters. The voters were organised into ten regions and on election day, they cast their ballots for both the national parliament and the ten regional councils. The two elections were entwined because the sixty-five member unicameral national legislature was constituted of fifty three seats elected nationally and the remainder elected by the regional councils. Voting was conducted along a system of proportional representation.

As the campaign unfurled, ethnic polarisation of voter preference became evident. The results of the elections confirmed the pattern of communal voter choice. Given another opportunity, the Guyanese electorate decided to allow their choice of parties to be dictated by race and ethnicity. The WPA which was a descendant of the cross-communal coalition that Walter Rodney had mobilised in the 1970s to oppose the PNC dictatorship was literally decimated at the polls in the reassertion of ethnic voter preference on October 5. It obtained only one seat from the national poll and another from the regional councils for a total of two seats in parliament. The victorious PPP-Civic coalition garnered 36 seats in parliament. The defeated PNC obtained 26 seats in parliament. One seat was held by the United Force.

When the Jagan-led government moved into office, everyone had expected it to share power with the other opposition parties such as the WPA. This did not happen however in part because, the PPP in command of an absolute majority of seats in parliament, did not see it fit to distribute a significant ministerial portfolio to anyone. It preferred to keep control over its cabinet and the direction of the government. In the end, the WPA which had done so much to remove the PNC from power was entirely excluded from power. This meant that the PPP, representing almost entirely the Indian electorate, on acceding to office, virtually represented only one section of the multi-ethnic fabric

of Guyana. In a very real sense, the elections of 1992 did not succeed in structurally altering the proclivity for ethnic politics in Guyana. In the victory of the PPP, cross-communal legitimacy was not achieved. A broken public will fractured ethnically entails a dark future for the PPP regime. Had the PPP sought to recruit the WPA to its fold, it would have conferred on itself a measure of cross-communal legitimacy. The Jagan-led PPP stands unmistakably as an Indian party with Africans, like the Indians under PNC rule, effectively excluded. It would be only a matter of time when the African-based PNC would submit the PPP to the same sort of acts of non-cooperation that the PNC endured at the hands of the PPP in the past.

The 1997 general elections would provide the occasion and opportunity for the PNC confrontation with the PPP.

The Trauma of the 1996 Elections and the Ensuing Quagmire

The PPP lasted in power for five years up to December 1997, an event which many thought was not too likely. It lost its leader, Cheddi Jagan, who died of a heart attack in 1996 and was temporarily succeeded by Prime Minister Hinds. Much of the economy was brought back to health with stability in the currency restored and economic growth steady. In the economic area then, the PPP had performed with excellence given the bankrupt state of the economy upon acceding to power in 1992. What the PPP failed to achieve happened in the political arena in bringing the two ethnic communities together. Governing by the new Jagan-led government was made relatively easy because of the fact that the Afro-Guyanese community was thrown into disarray upon the PPP gaining victory. Its ranks were sundered when the PNC split apart into a Desmond Hoyte faction and a Hamilton Green faction. For much of the first few years of PPP rule, the PNC was impotent to seriously distract the government. Hamilton Green, a former deputy leader of the PNC, was ejected by Hoyte from the PNC and he proceeded to form a separate party which would enter into a loose alliance with the ruling PPP.

The main area of PPP failure resided in forming a government of national unity across the ethnic divide that separated Indians from Africans. The PPP had promised to form such a government during the historic campaign to oust the PNC from power in 1992. On winning, as pointed out, the PPP made few concessions to its erstwhile ally, the WPA which had succeeded in winning only two seats in Parliament. Yet, it was the WPA which spearheaded much of the opposition to the PNC during the latter's long repressive rule. The WPA, the PPP, and several other groupings cooperated to bring down the PNC regime. Upon acquiring office, the PPP however failed to share power with its erstwhile electoral allies. From the outset, then, the PPP lost many influential Guyanese by relying mainly on its own party apparatus and a so-called « civic group » to administer the state. To add to the loss of the WPA, the PPP dragged its feet in reforming the « imperial constitution » against which it inveighed for the past decade and a half. The PPP focused instead on reforming the economy which it successfully achieved.

The neglect of the political aspects of power in the reconciliation of PPP and PNC followers came back to haunt the PPP after five years in power. Hoyte had weathered the challenge from the Hamilton Green section of the old PNC following gaining complete control of the African population which was now mobilized against the PPP. Without Cheddi Jagan but under the leadership of his widow, Janet Jagan, the PPP mounted a powerful campaign to gain office again in 1997. The PNC having recouped knew that even if it succeeded in mobilizing the vast majority of Africans, it would in all likelihood still fail to win a majority of seats in Parliament. The PPP benefitted from a decisive demographic shift in favor of an Indian majority and the persistence of communal sentiments in shaping voter preference. In effect, the PNC and its followers faced a permanent minority condition in a polity and society that was deeply polarized and with main ethnic communities unwaveringly distrustful of each other.

The 1997 elections saw a PPP victory which the PNC was unwilling to accept on a variety of subterfuges. The PNC supporters practically seized Georgetown claiming that they had in fact won the elections which the PPP had rigged. Independent recounts showed that

the PNC supporters were wrong ; the PNC did lose. But, what was at stake was not merely an arithmetic count of ballots but the fate of a section of the Guyanese people who felt that they were doomed to permanent discrimination under a PPP dispensation. The facts of the PPP term in office suggested that on balance the PPP was did not overly discriminate against Afro-Guyanese. The facts were irrelevant however ; the PNC interpreted the facts for its supporters and these facts portrayed the PPP as a racist Government. Controlling Georgetown and the loyalty of the public service and the coercive forces. the PNC was in a position to nullify the election results of 1997 unless it could gain some access to power. Hovering over the PNC intransigence was a fact that made reconciliation very difficult. During its demonstrations and riots to nullify the results of the elections, widespread violence against Indians eventuated. It was in some ways reminiscent of the 1963-64 period when communal violence wreaked havoc on the country's social fabric leaving deep scars and memories of hurt. In 1998, the violence was also very injurious to continued communal amity. Intersectional distrust had regained the upperhand in daily interethnic discourse.

The stalemate as pointed out in the introduction of this paper led to the appointment of an external facilitator to assist Guyanese political leaders in re-doing their constitution so as to establish an equitable regime in which everyone will feel at home and identify with. In the remaining parts of this paper I take up this theme offering an analysis and advancing recommendations to establish a political order that can restore confidence and democracy in a government for Guyana.

Guyana can rescue itself from the ravages of ethnic instability only by altering the zero-sum exclusionary features of its political system. On this subject, much will be said in the concluding chapter.

PART II. - DIAGNOSIS AND PRESCRIPTION

a. - A Zero-Sum Competitive Parliamentary System

When Guyana obtained independence, the state apparatus that was bequeathed to the local rulers was the most highly articulated and developed set of institutions in the entire society. However, it was trammelled by an institutional political apparatus that tended to accentuate the ethnic segmentation in the society. A particular variant of the imported parliamentary system fashioned on the zero-sum electoral and party system in Britain played a major role in structuring and institutionalizing ethnic conflict and competition in the state. In Britain, a body of consensual values had evolved nationally serving as a means to moderate rivalry over the values of the state. Guyana lacked such a system of settlement over basic issues. The rival parties, linked to discrete ethnic clusters, confronted each other in a manner similar to military warfare over fundamental issues on the form of the society, economy and polity. The salient issue was that the mode of conflict resolution in collective decision-making that was adopted tended to encourage the formation of ethnic groupings which in turn competed for outright control of all the values of the state. Zero-sum parliamentary contests do not encourage sharing or fixed proportions. This meant that the stakes were high in the contest for political power and victory viewed as conquest. A system of pre-arranged results with guaranteed minimum rewards would have tended to depoliticise the intensity and stakes in the contests enabling the defeated a share in the polity and society. This is particularly important in a setting where the constituent elements in the population are cultural communities which share few overarching traditions and institutions. There is controversy, to be sure, over the prescription of pre-established shares as a device to regulate ethnic conflict, but this tends to occur in societies such as the United States and Canada which are already relatively integrated. The social structure of these societies bear little resemblance to the fissiparous features which characterize the plural societies in the Third World.

The zero-sum parliamentary contest takes place in the electoral process resulting in a rising crescendo of ethnic tensions over

successive elections thereby exacerbating the sectional divisions that already exist. But this not the full extent of zero-sum competition for power. The repercussions permeate all aspects of inter-group relations in spheres of social inter-action and daily cross communal communications which previously were benign. The zero-sum electoral struggle, in effect, spills over into and permeates all areas of life adding to communal fear, suspicion and stereotyping. To contain the competition over power by eliminating zero-sum electoral struggles is to constrain and contain the ravages of ethnic strife in a strategic area of political life.

Could not the system of zero-sum competition for exclusive control of the state be supplanted by an alternative order based on power-sharing ? The post-WW II history of Guyana shows how this option availed itself and was lost. In the independence movement, the opportunity was created for a formula for sharing office. The PPP headed by Jagan and Burnham was however too preoccupied with winning the first general elections under universal adult suffrage than with inventing a formula for sharing power. Besides, it was not clear that the PPP would win the elections. Moreover, while the popular euphoria in political campaigning submerged all fears and anxieties between Africans and Indians, it was probably unwise to open the potentially contentious issue of power-sharing and resource allocation and invite unnecessary internal friction in the independence movement.

For all of these reasons, no attempt was made to develop a formula for the sharing of power. This is a familiar situation which was also enacted in many multi-ethnic Third World countries that mounted unified struggles for independence. In Guyana, almost immediately after virtual victory over the antecedent colonial regime, the independence party was riven by divisive squabbles over power. Because the jockeying was between the two major charismatic ethnic leaders, Cheddi Jagan and Forbes Burnham, the rivalry assumed a communalist connotation to followers. As the internal struggle continued, correspondingly the inter-ethnic mass following was fractured. Inter-elite intransigence triggered a situation that they literally lost control over. The opportunity to establish a stable formula

for power sharing was overcome by events. Once fed into popular emotions, the chance of rational solution was greatly diminished.

In Guyana, the opportunity for power sharing was lost to a new order marked by open zero-sum rivalry. After this, the fear of ethnic domination became part of the vocabulary of inter-ethnic interaction. Stated in this way, the stakes in the competition became co-terminus with both the survival of an ethnic group and the state itself. Through a few fortuitous events, one section acquired power and retained it through the armed forces and fraudulent elections. Thereafter, ethnic repression and discrimination ensued and was met by collective ethnic retaliation. A spiral of violence and counter-violence had created a situation in which all prosperity ceased.

b. - Resource Allocation

Apart from the fact that the state was created and marked by a system of ethnic stratification from the outset and at independence lacked a consensus over its basic institutions, it was also in its totality the most well-equipped and endowed apparatus in the society. In many ways, the state was larger than the society. Anyone who captured it could overwhelm the society bringing it to the service of its own particular interests. Civilian institutions were weak and fragmented and could not rival the state as a countervailing force. The ecclesiastical bodies were divided, the political parties were polarized and the voluntary associations weak and dependent. The main rival political parties, each representing one or the other of the major ethnic groups, recognized the value of capturing the government in its entirety. State power was so overwhelmingly powerful concentrated and centralized that it could be used as an instrument for promoting personal ambition as well as ethnic domination, even genocide. It was this sort of predisposing situation in which basic institutional consensus was absent and in which ethnic mass parties operated that invited ethnic politics in its extreme pathological form.

The cultural pluralism, the absence of overarching values and institutions, and the implanting of zero-sum political competitive

institutions can together be conceived as the predisposing factors that laid the foundation of ethnic conflict in the state with its attendant destructive effects on all development efforts. The factors that triggered ethnic conflict were clearly identifiable but occurred at different times during the evolution of the problem. These factors were : (1) colonial manipulation ; (2) introduction of mass democratic politics ; and (3) rivalry over resource allocation. It is necessary to conceive of the problem cumulatively in which these factors at different points served as precipitating « triggers ». At various times, a particular triggering factor deposited a layer of division which in turn provided the next step for the deposit of a new layer of forces to the accumulating crisis. However, these accumulations could have been neutralized if not entirely reversed by some form of deliberate state intervention. There was nothing inevitable or automatic about the transition from one stage to the next. To be sure, it would appear that after a number of successive reinforcing deposits of divisive forces, a critical mass in momentum had been attained so that every ethnically related issue became magnified and inflammable.

Despite this, many opportunities for change from this compartmentalised stranglehold often avail themselves. There is nothing inevitable that the colonially-derived communal system should be permanent. Ethnic boundaries are notoriously fluid in rapidly changing environments ; ethnically communalized life can be modified so as to submit sectional claims to regulation. Deliberate state intervention can moderate the combusive properties of ethnic mobilisation which ethno-nationalist leaders strive on. One such area of planned intervention relates to the allocation of shares and benefits bestowed by the state.

It is difficult to locate precisely the time when the question of ethnic shares became an issue in the struggle among the communal sections in Guyana. In a sense, the entire colonial pyramidal ethnic structure not only embodied resource allocation but explained its existence. The colonial state in Guyana was constituted of a hierarchical ranking of ethnic groups with the European section occupying the dominant position. Through a colour-class system of stratification, the skewed distribution of values and statuses was

rationalized and regulated. As long as the European retained his pre-eminent position, African-Indian rivalry was restrained. Besides, the separate ethnic compartments provided territorial zones and a buffer against direct rivalry. Inter-ethnic suspicion and fear however materialised from the moment of Indian entry into the society and their subsequent migration from rural areas to towns for government jobs. Indians were cast in the role of a late-comer who diluted the entitlement of the African. When Africans became acculturated to English ways and accepted Christianity and the English school system, this gave them strategic entry into public service positions and to many urban-based jobs in the private sector. Indian acquisition of English education came relatively late only after Africans had already consolidated their hold on the lower-level echelon positions available to them in the public and teaching services. Indian-African conflict can therefore be explained by this competition over public jobs and generally public resource allocation.

As independence approached, it became evident that the European section would lose its preeminence. How Indians would relate to Africans became a source of anxiety. Already Indians had started to acquire westernized skills and education. Some had commenced to claim jobs in the public and teaching services. Intimations of inter-sectional conflict were already appearing in the immediate post WW II period. Especially, rivalry between middle class Africans and Indians reared its head at various points in the conflict.

How power and privileges should be distributed between these two dominant groups was, in some ways, an open issue. The transfer of the British political institutional model meant open competition on merit for the allocation of public service jobs. In the long run this was bound to challenge African hold on the public service and, given the rapid growth and education of the Indian population, convert an unranked African-Indian ethnic system into one that was ranked⁵. It would have lent itself not a system of regulated sharing but to a new

5. Horowitz D., *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1985.

hierarchical system of ethnic differentiation. Such an eventuality was, however, not inevitable.

It is easy to overestimate the importance of the material basis of ethnic conflict by making it the single most significant factor in communal strife as the Marxist-Leninist political economy school does. If it were true that this material basis was the main explanation of communal conflict, then one would expect that with enough jobs being created, this competition and conflict would diminish and disappear. The evidence from the Guyana case suggests that in many occupational sectors where jobs were available in plentiful supply, African-Indian antagonisms persisted. Transposed overseas and no longer in competition with each other over jobs and resources, Guyanese Africans and Indians continue the ethnic feud with even greater intensity. It is therefore necessary to place this resource allocation variable in a facilitating role that can be significant but not determinative of the outcome of communal conflict. Put differently, the regulation of resource competition can act as a significant brake on the movement of the society into polarised warring camps.

c. - Need for Capability to Suppress Inter-ethnic Violence

Ethic violence seems to have a special combustive property to overwhelm all rationality and engulf the entire society in total war of all against all. For this reason, control of ethnic strife to non-physician disagreements is essential to the prospect of restoring harmony. Besides, open warfare tends to add a new almost indelible encrustment of complaints and grievances that drive communities farther apart.

To be sure, there was considerable ethnic tension among Guyana's communal sections, but much of this during the colonial period was regulated by rituals of interaction that confined and concealed the strains. For all practical purposes, Guyana like many ethnically segmented societies, was quietly but perpetually at war with itself. Surrogates for physical violence suffused the system. These encompassed such forms as rivalry around the celebration of their respective religious holidays, competition in business and government,

etc. Stereotypes which tended to belittle and depreciate entire communal sections nevertheless served as a defense mechanism that offered a private and quiet victory of the mind over the communal opponent. However, they also tended to dehumanize ethnic enemies setting the stage for violence. When democratic politics and mass parties were introduced and ethnically-based parties emerged, these underlying stereotypical antipathies were harnessed to them. The new collective forces accentuated ethnic hostilities. Competition at elections tended to provide the occasion for these antagonisms to be vented openly ; often political campaigns seemed like military engagements. All of this always kept the society unstable lingering on the brink of violence.

Collective ethnic violence occurred in civil war proportions in Guyana in the 1963-64 period as the two major political parties confronted each other over the control of the government. In many ethnically-mixed villages where a preponderance of either Indians or Africans resided, ethnic violence or its threat occurred against the minority group. This sort of « ethnic cleansing » led to the migration of these minorities from these villages adding to the concentration of self-segregated communal residential settlements in Guyana. For many months protracted ethnic violence convulsed the small multi-ethnic state until foreign British troops were called into restore order.

For many Guyanese, the civil war marked by ethnic violence was a traumatic event that led to irreversible commitment to communal solidarity. While it was true that throughout Guyanese history, Africans and Indians maintained tense relations marked by mutual suspicion and covert hostility, the outbreak of physical violence seemed to have crossed a psychological threshold of no return to cross-cultural cordiality.

A new level of ethnically oriented physical violence was unleashed in Guyana when in 1968 the African-based PNC government, with police and army support, rigged the elections. The legitimacy of the government was lost and opposition challenges mounted. Over the next decade the size of the coercive forces expanded dramatically. Expenditures for them increased by over a thousand times. What emerged was a state apparatus, having lost its

legitimacy, that sought to maintain its power and control by repressing its communal enemies. The Burnham regime, however, did not go about physically exterminating its ethnic enemies. Rather, a system of non-violent terror was established to control the behaviour of its opponents. State institutions such as the courts were ethnically politicized and converted into instruments of communal discrimination.

State terror and threat of violence were met by Indians' response in the sabotage of the economy. Since the economic system during colonial times was crafted so that there was a coincidence of economic specialization and ethnic concentration, this meant that unless all segments cooperated, the economy could fall apart. Hence, African control of the public service was utilized as the lever to destabilise the Indian-based Jagan government, while Indian control of the sugar and rice industries was used to sabotage the African-led Burnham government. Economic inter-dependence invited mutual sabotage.

The impact of persistent Indian strikes and boycotts in their economic sector accompanied by mass migration and the loss of essential skills from Guyana reverberated adversely on all ethnic groups alike. Economic collapse imparted universal suffering. African workers, who like Indian workers under the Jagan government that supported discriminatory policies, soon felt the full brunt of the diminishing economy and a bankrupt government. When they went out on strike for more pay and for job security, the state apparatus turned its coercive arsenal against them. When the regime unleashed its violence against its own communal members, it did so as if they were misguided and that they betrayed an ethnic trust. The communal members of the regime who opposed the government were made special objects of terror and violence. They were treated as traitors with a sort of passion and hate that only brothers could concoct against each other.

The state in this instance did become strong to contain dissent especially that which came from its ethnic adversaries. Clearly, capability to contain violence is not the unqualified prescription to regulate violence in multi-ethnic states. One additional ingredient is vital. That is the institution charged with administering law and order

including the police and the judiciary should be multi-ethnic in composition. In some ways this is almost an impossibility to implement because those who govern are likely to have relied on the ethnic composition of the coercive institutions in bringing them to power. To alter the composition of these institutions may be tantamount to committing political suicide. There is however no way around this kind of a policing force apart from one supplied by an external mediator such as the United Nations. In the end this can only be a temporary device albeit one that can recruit and train a multi-ethnic force so as to detribalise it and render it neutral and formidably effective in controlling all outbreaks of ethnic violence.

C. - Will and Compromise

One of the grievous harms caused by persistent and protracted strife in a multi-ethnic society, is the loss of will and capability to reconcile. After many years of ongoing communal struggle, it would appear that a sentiment of fatalism enters through the backdoor of consciousness compelling the battered psyche to accept the ethnic battle lines and many adaptations to it as inevitable and permanent. A new socio-cultural architecture of human settlement and communal interaction had emerged with ethnic roles and social institutions defined in neat niches of unholy compromises and concordances. Usually, while the struggle continues, an odd sort of social stability in personal and group relations emerges and persists. It is, in effect, a dual-level social structure, one marked by clever cordiality, the other more subterranean, marked by communal anger, hate, plots and silent violence.

A broken will, enfeebled and unprepared for reconciliation, emerges reinforced by countless symbols of old battles, won and lost, as well by organizations and interests which institutionalize and structure the conflict. To be sure, at any earlier time, the leaders and elites in the various ethnic communities were able to communicate and beat out compromises for inter-communal co-existence. But as the conflict continues and deepens, even this upper layer becomes a victim

of inter-communal intransigence. The ethnic monster devours everyone in the end.

Compromise and cooperation are the very heart of the developmental process. This is true of all social structures, integrated and divided alike. The democratic fabric itself is constituted of not only substantive give and take in beating out public policy, but this is undergirded by a culture and psychology of mutual trust in exchanges. The mortar of cooperation and compromise maintains the integrity of the edifice of society. In the multi-ethnic states of the Third World, the tension in working out mutually satisfactory exchanges is often overstrained by the fact the cleavages and differences are ethnicised. Protracted institutional ethnic conflict is the stuff out of which a culture and psychology of cooperation is undermined rendering collective development difficult if not impossible.

Compromise and cooperation are embodied in devices for conflict resolution. In Guyana, compromise and cooperation came alive and was implemented in the first unified independence movement under the original PPP. Internal differences accompanied by external manipulation torpedoed the coalition of personalities and interests that held the PPP together. Thereafter, even in the midst of the ethnic division that ensued, there have been many efforts at restoring the old compromises in unity, but as one party captured power and especially after it maintained it by electoral fraudulence, the two ethnic groups drew farther apart and the periodical talk of a government of national unity assumed the air of a mechanical public relations exercise. Each group settled into its own ugly niche in an ethnically-influenced structure, that in a weird way sustains each other. With the will to compromise broken, the new forms of conflict resolution assume the form of a divorce.

The Guyana Anti-Model

Theorists must be willing to examine both failed and successful cases in ethnic conflict to adduce evidence towards a framework of ethnic conflict resolution. In this regard, the Guyana case can be

conceived as « an anti-model ». It tells more of what not to do since Guyana committed many of the critical false steps that catapulted the state towards a disastrous destination. As an « anti-model », the Guyana case points to the destructive role of leaders who pursued private ambition before the long term interests of citizens in a unified state. The leadership factor is clearly critical ; it almost alone was accountable for both successful communal mobilisation of each section making it possible to pressure the colonial power out of Guyana, and at the same time it was primarily culpable in launching the state into an irretrievable tailspin of ethnically-ignited passions that led to collective catastrophe.

If it is true that in the actions of the main communal leaders after they won the elections of 1953 they led Guyana down the road to communal self-immolation, it is equally accurate to assert that in the immediate pre-1953 elections period they had discovered a formula for inter-ethnic unity. This was incorporated in the organization of the independence movement itself. The lessons show that multi-ethnicity is not inevitably destructive. It can be harnessed for constructive ends. In Guyana, ethnic sentiments were mobilised during the independence movement and harnessed to a multi-ethnic mass party that promised to mobilise the collective energies of citizens from the culturally diverse communities towards the development and transformation of the state. In the successful effort at cross-communal accommodation between 1950-53 resides suggestive ingredients for a theory of consolidation. How did a broadly-based cross-communal party emerge ? What factors featured in the amalgam and which ones were critical and peripheral in the process ? Can the process be replicated and generalised to other multi-ethnic states ? The Guyana case from 1950 to 1953 does generate some important insights such as the role of recognising the identity and interests of the separate communities ; the importance of leaders in the different communities to subordinate their private ambitions to the larger goal of maintaining peace in a just distribution of values ; the value of compromise and a mechanism to resolve ongoing disputes free from the immediate pressures of outbidders and mass passions ; the search for a mutually agreeable formula for sharing jobs, titles, and political offices ; the need to exclude external actors who tend to intervene for their own goals ; and the importance of

evolving institutions and practices for a shared citizenship. The presence of some of these factors but the absence of others together caused the independence movement disintegrate into discrete ethno-nationalist parts. The Guyana « anti-model » also points to the lack of understanding of the dynamics of the ethnic factor once it has been aroused and directed to promote rival communal claims for jobs, self-protection and self-assertion. It was clear that the communal leaders while cultivating and feeding the ethnic monster for practical gain could not constrain it to rational appeal and national reconstruction thereafter. They became victim to a monster of their own creation : Did they understand that the nature of the ethnic creature was as uncontrollable and volatile as it turned out to be so that they were not masters of it but were in time captured by it instead ? The Guyana case describes the descent into a vertigo of self-reinforcing ethnically-charged forces once ethnic solidarity was entertained for narrow political gain. Political leaders in multi-ethnic states can learn from the Guyana « anti-model » as well as from similar cases about the irrational features of the ethnic factor. Ethnic solidarity can contribute to identity formation and energize a state towards development when properly harnessed but when antagonistically attached, as almost inevitably tends to be the case, to rival communities occupying the same territory and government, it can wreak irreparable harm and havoc.

The Guyana « anti-model » has its institutional lessons. While on one hand it can be argued that a participant democratic system is essential for the establishment of legitimate authority and for the mobilisation of citizens for development challenges, it is clear from the Guyana case that an institutional competition party system with its zero-sum implications for the distribution of power and privileges is inappropriate for the maintenance of elementary order and stability in multi-ethnic states. After the leadership split between the two communal leaders in 1955, probably more than any other factor, successive electoral campaigns conducted in a zero-sum warlike combat, exacerbated ethnic strife in Guyana.

In the Guyana experience between 1950 and 1953, an example of consociation and accommodation was successfully experimented

with. Institutional engineering can seek to depoliticise many areas of contention such as minority rights, distribution of jobs and contracts, and the protection of cultural identity, etc. In the consociational arrangement set forth by Arend Lijphart, the main ingredients of an accommodation are a coalition government and a system of proportional sharing of values⁶. A coalition is clearly required and its forms and variations can be many. Its main limitation pertains to the secret diplomacy that accompanies the deliberations of sectional elites in working out the terms of a compromise package for rule. The « proportionality principle » in the Lijphart model of consociation pertains directly to problems in the Guyana « anti-model ». A familiar interpretation of the ethnic conflict in Guyana coming from Marxists in the political economy school argues that the struggle for material rewards explains the struggle. Put differently, if the issue of rewards can be settled or depoliticised, then the conflict will disappear. The Guyana « anti-model » case illustrates the limitations of the « politics of preference » or « resource allocation » school. It aptly points to the irrational nature of ethnic conflict showing that even where material resources cease to be a variable, in the context of the shared poverty of both Indians and Africans, the communal strife persisted. To be sure, resource allocation has served as a major instigator of ethnic conflict in Guyana especially among the middle classes of both Indians and Africans. When Indians and Africans migrated to overseas destinations and became well-off and were no longer in competition with each other for scarce resources, they continued their communal antipathies and animosities.

Perhaps what better explains the persistence of the ethnic conflict from a materialist and a resource allocation perspective is the idea of « comparative advantage ». Even when ethnic communities identified with a particular regime have been impoverished, they would continue to support « heir government » simply to keep out an alternative regime with a better potential for performance but associated with an ethnic community. The role of this comparison

6. Lijphart A., *Democracy in Plural Societies*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1977.

factor in interethnic relations has been usefully located within what social psychologists call « social identity theory ». In this explanation, the theory begins by affirming the need of the human creature and an ethnic community for a distinctive positive social identity in a process of social differentiation and categorization. Society is perceived as a place of conflict rather than cohesion. The theory attempts to explain inter-group behavior through psychological processes such as identification, social comparison, and the need for distinctiveness. Social psychologists Taylor and Moghaddam strike the significance of this pattern of behavior for inter-ethnic group relations underscoring the importance of comparison in this process : « Since only through social comparison is social identity meaningful, it is the relative position of groups that is important. Therefore, competition and conflict are seen as essential aspect of the intergroup situation »⁷. In this scheme, it is postulated that the individuals seek positive evaluations of themselves and « through intergroup comparisons, individuals will come to view their own group as psychologically distinct and, in relation to relevant comparison groups, they will try to make the in-group more favorable »⁸. This critical ethnocentrist idea underscores the need for identity to be established and asserted by favorable comparisons leading to discriminatory inter-group behavior in quest not merely of parity but superiority.

Social psychologists have pointed to a critical aspect of the comparison factor that explains the propensity of group loyalty to be sustained intensely and irrationally not for « greater profit in absolute terms » but in order « to achieve relatively higher profit for members of their ingroup as compared with members of the outgroup »⁹. Put differently, and in part this explanation addresses some of the intransigence and excesses in Guyana, Bosnia, and other places with recurrent communal conflicts, it is not important that a group sees that rationally its behavior in a conflict is inimical to its interests but what

7. *Ibid.*

8. *Ibid.*

9. Tajfel H., « Social Identity and Intergroup Behavior », *Social Science Information*, Vol. 13, n° 2, April 1974.

is more salient is that its adversary not be advantaged over it. Much of the claims for recognition and equity seem to be elucidated to this dynamic. Often occurring in a context where the conflicting groups shared the same territorial state and in which a particular distribution of statuses and resources prevailed, the struggle pivots around an unwillingness of one party to permit the other profit advantageously by its actions. The comparison factor assumes a logic of its own witnessing and wreaking, as if infused by jealousy, incredible havoc and harm on all parties in a policy of mutual denial.

The Guyana « anti-model » also contains abundant materials on the process of withdrawal and escape mainly through mass migration. Engaged in an intense struggle that damages the well-being of both of the ethnic communities economically and psychologically, Guyanese sought refuge everywhere and anywhere. Some left for adjacent Suriname, Venezuela, and Brazil, while most migrated legally and illegally to North America. They voted with their feet literally having lost the franchise at home. The important part has been in the loss of the best resource in the country adding to the impoverishment of the Guyanese people. To those who ruled and who survived as opposition politicians, the lesson was clear. Population loss means the debilitating destruction of the state in an area that defines the very viability of its existence – the loss of people in haemorrhaging proportions. The people who left, many middle class, were however the very people who espoused ethnic attachment but who now found it convenient to escape from the very abode that they had lit afire. The paradox of the situation underscores the larger point that the ethnic monster consumes its own children and makes a mockery of ethno-nationalist pretences to *patria* and group loyalty. In the end, everyone wants out. The highest aspiration of the Guyanese child is not to be physician or professor but simply to escape by migration. This aspect of the « anti-model » has created among Guyanese as a whole much cross-communal cynicism of politicians and the polity. The very « outbidders » who appealed to ethnic sentiment and mobilised followers to hate and violate the ethnic enemy runs away from the holocaust that he/she ignites. The true believer in ethnic solidarity becomes nauseated to the extent that he/she takes flight. Ethnic loyalty and fanaticism spawns its own disloyalty and alienation. Another feature of generalisable use that can

be derived from the Guyana « anti-model » refers to the manner in which early initial and limited ethnic actions progressively spreads like a cancer to take over and reorganise the entire state into communal compartments. At all levels, parties, unions, associations, parliaments, the public service, private businesses, corporations, armies, churches, etc., the entire system and all its institutions are suffused by the ethnic toxin. To be sure in early colonial times, the seeds of division were laid so that residential, occupational, and value cleavages separated the communities. What the ethnicisation of a state entails is the release of the arsenal of latent prejudices into active hate and discrimination, erecting a garrison state of ethnic encampments and armies. Little room for tolerance and cross-communal institutions exists thereafter. The system is choked to death by its own arteries filled with hate. The Guyana « anti-model » teaches that the ethnic factor is appropriately likened to the embrace of a hostile octopus. Some of the tentacles spread everywhere and squeeze the state into paralysis. At the same time that the ethnic sectors are consolidated and fossilised by the ethno-nationalist parties and leaders, hypocritical talk of cross-communal amity increases among the very politicians who promote ethnic loyalty.

This brings in the element of « hypocrisy » displayed in the Guyana « anti-model ». Both the ruling and opposition parties in Guyana's ethnically bipolar state openly professed to be Marxist with class-based interests but were in fact preponderantly ethnically-based groupings. They spun out an elaborate system to parade a picture of representing and promoting cross-sectional interests. They decorated their organisations with a facade of officers from the other cultural community. They sported Marxist-Leninist jargon *ad nauseam* and in public conducted their debate as if ideological issues were most significant. Overseas observers bought into this cynical circus but not local citizens who knew what the game was about. This practice of deliberately camouflaging the colour of partisan politics is probably a pattern of public denial that is found in democratic politics in other multi-ethnic Third World countries. What the Guyana « anti-model » suggests is that the leaders are quite aware of what course of action is morally correct but cleverly seek to conceal their defiance of this moral ethic by engaging in repugnant hypocritical behaviour. The ethnic

monster is seen by all as loathsome yet it is indulged. Ethno-nationalist leaders are allowed to parade before the international community not as pariahs who pander to ethnic and racial sentiments but as persons pretentiously in genuine pursuit of toleration and cross-communal nation-building. The Guyana « anti-model » suggests the need for a critical monitoring of such hypocritical behaviour and the exposure of them internationally. That apart, the Guyana case points to a moral dilemma that ethno-nationalist leaders face on one hand needing to pander to ethnic appeals to retain sectional popularity and on the other needing cross-communal endorsement to obtain regime legitimacy and to govern effectively.

Yet another perspective that can be derived from the Guyana « anti-model » pertains to the role of international actors in exacerbating the internal divisions in a multi-ethnic state. External actors, be they other states or private groups, have their own interests to pursue. They are sometimes economic predators such as those multi-national corporations which see some benefit from taking one side or the other in the communal conflict. There are also political predators such as regional states which may have geo-political designs in entering an ethnically-ignited internal fray. Also, and very frequently, there are diaspora communities that spilled over from the ethnic conflict and have been created in enclaves in other countries. In North America, many Guyanese citizens have settled in ethnic ghettos and engage in support roles in sustaining the ethnic conflict at home. The Guyana case points to the internationalisation aspects of the ethnic conflict in all of its diverse dimensions. The Cold War actors found surrogate partisan support in the ethnically split Guyanese state. This was a main force in exacerbating communal tensions. The regional geo-political factor was played by Venezuela and Suriname. And even today the diaspora Guyana communities in North America and Britain play an active part providing funds in persistence of ethnic strife in Guyana. In effect, the Guyana anti-model draws attention to the proposition that internal ethnic conflicts tend to invite external actors which may add fuel to the ethnic division in the state. This is not to argue that the impact of external actors is always negative. Sometimes, external intervention is required to prevent genocide or even to offer third party assistance in conflict resolution. On balance however, as the

Guyana case suggests, the persistence if not exacerbation of the ethnic strife is often caused by the role of external actors in the internationalisation of the conflict.

Finally, the Guyana « anti-model » suggests an examination of the related issues of partition and secession. At one time, partition seemed to be a desirable solution and on one occasion an Amerindian group sought secession from Guyana in order to join Venezuela. The Guyana case shows the potential, probably not as well as other cases such as Nigeria and Yugoslavia, of ethno-nationalist movements mutating into separatist claims. Often this is either a consequence of attempted genocide or an invitation to genocide. In either case, partition, secession and genocide all carry ethnic conflict to the brink of no-return in reaching reconciliation. Once civil war has broken out, secession sought, and genocide committed a new qualitative stage in the ethnic conflict has been reached.

Together, and in other ways, the Guyana « anti-model » is pregnant with lessons of what not to do lest disaster in manifold economic, political, and psychological dimensions be courted. The Guyana case raises anew the familiar question of what makes a society cohere and makes a society truly a society. Through colonial rule and arbitrary boundary-drawing and population transfers, most of the multi-ethnic Third World states have been created. They face the problem of designing an appropriate political system to accommodate the rival claims of their terminal ethno-nationalist communities. The record in this regard is one replete with the wreckage of Third World states which have instead succumbed to communal violence and instability, ethnic domination and repression, and instances of genocide and secession. This can be avoided. First the ethno-nationalist force must be understood in its workings and dynamics, and second the knowledge can be applied at ethnic conflict resolution and inter-communal co-existence. Without this first step, there can be no development. The Guyana case offers insights into the challenge of national-reconciliation and nation-building and national development in the Third World.

Résumé

Cette étude propose une analyse des problèmes fondamentaux du système politique guyanais, et suggère des orientations susceptibles de générer une évolution vers une réconciliation inter-ethnique et une consociation politique. Le nœud du problème réside dans l'établissement d'un gouvernement généralement acceptable, juste et démocratique, et ce dans un contexte où les composantes communautaires sont profondément méfiantes, tant en Guyane que dans des Etats similaires des Caraïbes comme Trinidad et le Surinam. La situation actuelle englobe des problématiques sensibles relatives au statut et à la reconnaissance des communautés ethno-culturelles : ces dernières expriment des craintes de discrimination et de domination, et des soupçons quant à l'équité des politiques étatiques en matière d'allocation des ressources. Sauf à détruire l'Etat, la tâche fondamentale est de concevoir un modèle de gouvernement qui satisfasse les revendications divergentes formulées par les différentes communautés en matière d'équité et de représentation, la manière dont elles voient les choses. Pour partie, l'objet de la présente étude est précisément d'explorer les possibilités de mettre au point un tel système.

Mots-clés

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 Ethnies – Gouvernement –
 Communauté – Consociation politique

Abstract

This paper offers an analysis of the fundamental problems of the Guyanese political order and suggests directions in which change towards interethnic reconciliation and political consociation may proceed. The crux of the problem pertains to the establishment of a generally acceptable, just, and democratic government in the midst of deeply distrusting communal components in Guyana and similar states including Trinidad and Suriname in the Caribbean. Implicated in all of this are vexing issues related to status and recognition of the ethno-cultural communities which express fears of discrimination and domination as well as charges of skewed state policies regarding resource allocation. Short of destroying the state, the basic task is to design a framework of government that will accommodate the divergent claims of the respective communities for equity and representation, the way they see it. In part, the point about this paper is precisely to explore the possibilities of designing such a system.

Keys-words

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 Ethnies – Community –
 Government – Political consociation