

The Social Construction Of Race-Ethnic Conflict in Guyana

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Those who see only race/ethnicity in politics in Guyana, as others who see tribe and religion in other countries, are not viewing reality comprehensively, objectively and scientifically. They fail to note that the two major ethnic groups in Guyana are not, in class terms, uni-class; that economics, on the one hand, and politics, ideology, culture and institutions, on the other are inter-related and inter-acting. Race/ethnicity was not the determinant when the 7-unions' candidate, George Daniels, with a minority of delegates won in a secret vote against the PNC-backed presidential candidate. At that time, the struggle at the trade union level was sufficiently advanced to cut across racial lines. So now, the struggle will advance to realize racial-ethnic unity at the political level, as in the 1947-53 period (Cheddi Jagan).

Is there nationwide race-ethnic conflict in Guyana? Is Guyana a deeply divided society? When is a society considered to be deeply divided? Is ethnic conflict happening because it's in the blood? Is ethnic conflict behaviour learned? Is race-ethnic conflict socially constructed and reconstructed? Are ethnic extremists perfecting the construction of race-ethnic conflict? Is the explanation of race-ethnic conflict not devoid of a class analysis? Do we have a dominant ethnic group? Is there ethnic insecurity and ethnic mistrust? Are some politicians and the mass media not influencing the formation of a false reality on ethnic conflict among the masses? Does Guyana have characteristics of race-ethnic conflict similar to Bosnia, Rwanda, and 'Apartheid' South Africa? Is the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) delivering goods and services to all Guyanese? Is there evidence of social marginalization? Only the Guyanese people can genuinely answer these questions.

People in an intensely divided society identify themselves by their ethnic group; where people in those societies experience inequality and discrimination based on ethnicity, those societies have the capacity to explode in hostility and violence. At the very beginning, we need to say that there is a difference between race conflict and ethnic conflict. Race conflict addresses conflicts pertaining to the physical characteristics of the individual, such as, skin colour. Ethnic conflict speaks to conflicts relating to the person's culture, religion, mode of dress, food, beliefs, values, etc. However, in many cases, we may see both ethnic and race conflicts occurring together, and so we can present them as 'race-ethnic' conflict.

The over-zealous personality in its belligerent quest for back-door entrance to political power has produced an over-politicisation of this country through application of the race-ethnic card. Numerous political commentaries claim that racism is rampant in Guyana, and that the elected PPP/C Government only represents Indian interests. What has emerged since the last election says the commentaries, is a sharpened polarization of the races - Africans and Indians. The commentaries recommend power sharing as a solution to this racial and ethnic divide. Allegations of racism constitute the main theme of these political commentaries. The time is now well overdue for presentation of evidence of discriminatory practices. These discussions and emotional outpourings of racism have mainly been projected by fringe elements within the

Indian and African groups. However, Guyana has experienced periodic ethnic violence solely at election times. If we accept that the society is plagued with race-ethnic conflict, the question then that pops up is why this violence is not unleashed throughout time and space. Societies extensively racist exhibit sustained race-ethnic violence between dominant and subordinate groups.

Blood and Culture

This race-ethnic conflict tends to be commonly explained by 'blood' and 'culture'. How authentic is the 'blood' explanation? Are there other explanations?

The CornerHouse Briefing (1999) written by Nicholas Hildyard pointed out that "Blood" and "Culture" have long persisted universally with "commonsense" explanations for race-ethnic conflict. He suggested that hatred between Muslim and Serb or between Hutu and Tutsi must be "in the blood" (Keane, 1996). The same allusion can be made to allege hatred between Indians and Africans in Guyana. But when we inspect below the surface of ethnic conflict, the superficiality and falseness of "blood" or "culture" explanations are soon exposed (Appadurai, 1996). "Tribal hatred" comes not from "nature" or from a primordial "culture", but of "a complex web of politics, economics, history, psychology and a struggle for identity" (Keane, 1996).

Fergal Keane, a BBC Africa correspondent, explains the genocide of one ethnic group by another ethnic group in Rwanda in 1994, thus:

Like many of my colleagues, I drove into believing the short stocky ones had simply decided to turn on the tall thin ones because that was the way it has always been. Yet now, two years later. . . I think the answer is very different. What happened in Rwanda was the result of cynical manipulation by powerful political and military leaders. Faced with the choice of sharing some of their wealth and power with the [insurgent] Rwandan Patriotic Front, they chose to vilify that organization's main support group, the Tutsis . . . The Tutsis were characterized as vermin. Inyenzi in kinyarwanda - cockroaches who should be stamped on without mercy . . . In much the same way as the Nazis exploited latent anti-Semitism in Germany, so did the forces of Hutu extremism identify and whip into murderous frenzy the historical sense of grievance against the Tutsis . . . This was not about tribalism first and foremost but about preserving the concentration of wealth and power in the hands of the elite.

Keane insists that race-ethnic conflict is socially constructed. In Guyana, too, race and race-ethnic conflict are both socially and politically constructed. The race-ethnic conflict is not genetic or inborn and not even inevitable.

False Views of Reality

We define our own reality! Once defined, we live within this reality. But this reality is shaped and determined by the individual in interaction with others, either face-to-face, or through other forms of communication. Remarks by some politicians, the private mass media, hate literature, and significant others, do influence the formation of people's reality.

Typical remarks include: why the fuss about Kean Gibson's book; social inequality drives Indian culture; the Indian leadership pursues racial dominance against Africans; Indians do not accept Africans as racially equal; Africans are marginalized; Africans do not trust the Indian political leadership; Indians own and control the wealth of this country; Hinduism is a racist ideology; there is a Hindu plot to marginalize and oppress Africans in Guyana; the current Government is an Indian Government; Africans will be better off with the PNC; only African youngsters are unemployed, etc. These remarks are regurgitated daily on television stations and in the print media, and in principle so they should be, in the interest of freedom of speech. But these remarks, if untrue and biased, should not be presented as if they were legitimate. Most if not all of these remarks are consumed in a high degree of falsity. Some private mass media and politicians believe that all these remarks represent the true picture in Guyana. In the end, the remarks cited above produce false perceptions and a reality filled with untruths.

However, these false perceptions constitute the individual's reality and that individual behaves in accordance with those false beliefs. This is how the social construction of reality starts and the Thomas Theorem amply demonstrates the construction process, thus: "If people define situations as real, they are real in their consequences." The social construction of reality, therefore, is the process where people innovatively fashion reality through social interaction. We can say that people negotiate these remarks to form a view of ethnic dominance, ethnic insecurity and mistrust in Guyana. However, that false reality which, indeed, is true for the individual, may, nevertheless, be false in terms of the objective reality. Clearly, some politicians and private media ubiquitously present this view of race-ethnic conflict and call for new political arrangements to eliminate it. It's as if the politicians create a stage play where they write the script and hope and pray that the masses would use it effectively. Why? In the first place, particular politicians help to fashion this false reality for the masses, and that, in turn, enables them to use the ethnic and race card to further their political advantage. Applying the race and ethnic card makes certain politicians relevant in Guyana's politics.

The efficacy of this race-ethnic construction process will vary with the 'perception' status of ethnic dominance, ethnic insecurity and mistrust. That is to say that the more reduced the perception of ethnic dominance, ethnic insecurity and mistrust, the weaker is the construction process. But ethnic extremists, politically motivated, drive the entire construction process. Several of the aforementioned remarks allude to ethnic insecurity through perceptions of dominance of Indians over Africans and where Africans are discriminated against and marginalized. Clearly, ethnic mistrust will prevail in this environment. We know these perceptions are real for those who internalize them and these false perceptions will largely determine their behavior.

Ethnic Dominance

However, this pattern of Indian dominance and African marginalization is not supported by the evidence, which I have presented in a preliminary study of social marginalization (Misir, 2002). Social marginalization where people are deprived of full participation in the occupational structures, unquestionably, is not a characteristic feature in the Guyana public sector.

A multiethnic society is a rank order of ethnic groups, where each group comprises of people with common cultural or physical characteristics, located in positions of dominance and

disadvantage. This is ethnic stratification. Any dominant ethnic group has total access to the valued resources of society, with disadvantaged ethnic groups picking up only minimum rewards. The dominant ethnic group, generally, sustains its control, power, and privileges through prejudice and discrimination.

Guyana does not have a dominant race-ethnic group, as evidenced through both Indians and Africans' relatively equal access to education and jobs. Spectacular education outcomes and high-level jobs are in the hands of these ethnic groups. We do not see, for instance, only Indians, or only Africans excelling at Caribbean Examination Council (CXC) and Secondary School Entrance Examination (SSEE).

The Socio-Economic Status (SES) of any person largely determines that person's class position in the society. SES is collectively indexed through education, occupation, and income. For instance, an Indian with a low SES will have a low class position, and vice versa. The same line of argument holds for Africans, or any other ethnic group. If we agree that both groups have comparable SES, then this comparability does dilute the marginalization argument, as marginalization, by definition, ensures that only the advantaged will access resources earmarked to improve life chances. Again, if Africans were really victims of large-scale institutional discrimination, then their SES would be considerably lower than that of Indians.

Both Indians and Africans seem to have comparable SES. At each tier of the class structure, both groups in relation to their demographic proportions, are well represented in education, occupation, and income.

Generally, it's useful to review the scores at the Secondary Schools Entrance Examination (SSEE), and the CXC, to determine student learning and educational efficiency (Analysis of CXC results, 1995-2001, NCERD). Passes at the SSEE showed that both Indians and Africans dominated the success picture in 2002. The maximum score attainable at the SSEE in 2002 was 562, and the highest score achieved was 548. Both ethnic groups were in the top three with a score of 548. And among the top 108 students, 54 (50%) were Indians and 52 (48%) were Africans. Marked academic improvements at the SSEE have occurred in both major ethnic groups over the last few years.

The CXC scores in 1992 were abysmally low: 9% in English, 5% in Social Studies, and 18% in Mathematics. At that time, too, the CXC scores did not compare well with some other Caribbean countries, given that only the highest achievers are registered for the CXC.

Today, again, both ethnic groups are doing better at the CXC, and their scores rank well with the other CARICOM CXC students. In addition, the Secondary School Reform Project has now enhanced the equity in high school education for all ethnic groups. In 2000, students with 5 or more Grade Ones at the CXC were from schools with large proportions of both Africans and Indians. These schools were President's College, Berbice High, Anna Regina Multilateral, New Amsterdam Multilateral, Bishop's High, St. Joseph's High, Brickdam Secondary, and Queen's College.

In addition, both ethnic groups have comparable rates of attendance and graduation from high school. Further, at the tertiary level, a larger number of African than Indian students graduate from the University of Guyana (UG).

Today, with a greater ethnic mix in the public service, and comparable SES between Indians and Africans, the talk of African marginalization is totally absurd. If Indians have dominance in

the society, then we will see the pre-eminence of Indian values in public policies in education, language, law, welfare, and even religion. One can hardly say that Indian values permeate the public institutions of this country. Then, where is Indian dominance? Indeed, the evidence shows that public policies do reflect the beliefs, values, and interests of all ethnic groups.

Misir's study (ibid.) shows that Africans are well represented throughout the public service, and especially in the higher echelons. Africans also predominate among school heads, the State Boards, and receive a disproportionate upward share in budgetary allocations in the Regions.

Both major ethnic groups also are well represented in the professions, especially in the legal, medical and teaching professions. Paradoxically, education once covertly denied to Indians, subsequently, became the instrument of social mobility for them on a grand scale, especially in the medical and legal professions. For instance, today, Guyana has 295 medical practitioners, 148 (50.2%) are Indians, 107 (36.2%) are Africans, and 40 (13.6%) are Others. Among the 50 Medex personnel, 21 (42%) are Indians, 26 (56%) Africans, and 1 (2%) is Others. Among the 9 Sick Nurse/Dispensers, 5 (55.6%) are Indians and 4 (44.4%) are Africans. With 8 Optometrists, 3 (37.5%) are t Indians, 3 (37.5%) Africans and 2 (25%) are Others (The Official Gazette). Today, Judgeships of Indian and African ethnicity are shared equally between the two groups. Among Magistrates, 2 (27%) Indians, 8 (72%) Africans, and 1 (1%) is Others.

The following statistics are drawn from Misir's study on marginalization (op. cit.). Africans predominate in all three types of school – nursery, elementary, and high. The University of Guyana has 40 Indian Faculty members compared to 140 African Faculty members in the Faculties of Agriculture, Arts, Education, Health, Natural Sciences, Social Sciences, and Technology. In the People's National Congress (PNC) Administration, it was not unusual to find on average that 70 percent of the Regional Education Officers (REDOs) were Africans. Today, the ethnic imbalance has been narrowed to the point where about 50% of REDOs are Africans, followed by Indians with 40%.

Table1. 4 :Average Monthly Consumption Expenditure (G\$) by Ethnic Groups, 1993 and 1999

Ethnic Group	1993 \$	1999 \$	% Age Change
Indian	22372	46338	107
African	22072	61708	180
Amerindian	15302	26219	71
Mixed	22350	50212	125
Chinese	35730	64331	80
Portuguese	27635	28459	30
Others	34830	71378	105
All Groups	21967	50353	129

Source: HIES 1993 and 1999 LCS

Both major ethnic groups incurred about the *same* household consumption expenditures in 1993. But in 1999, Africans had a higher household expenditure than Indians. People in Guyana in 1999 compared to 1993, experienced a 129% increase in consumption expenditures. Given Indian and African proportions in the population, Africans' disposable incomes seem to be disproportionately higher than those of Indians, based on their consumption patterns. African

consumption expenditures demonstrate that Africans are not marginalized, for marginalized people, by definition, do not have the resources for high consumption.

Ethnic Security

The concept of ethnic security is not solely about a person's response to criminality. A feeling of security also develops out of a sustained provision of education, health and human services to the masses, regardless of race-ethnicity. However, on the question of combating crime, notwithstanding resource limitations, the PPP/C Administration unleashed considerable crime-fighting measures to reduce 'security' vulnerability for all ethnic groups.

In any case, the first step for crime fighters must involve identifying the nature of the crime. This process of identification incorporates inclusion of a variety of predisposing and contributory variables in the crime-fighting equation. Some of these variables are a Regional crime connection, organized crime, political link to criminality, criminal deportees, and the racial incitement role of the media. President Bharrat Jagdeo's menu of crime-fighting measures, announced in June 2002, included the following: amendments to the crime laws; expediting gun licenses for the business community; establishing a dedicated unit for community policing located in the Police Department; provision of body armour and protective gear; the British Metropolitan Police training for the Guyana Police Force in firearms management and crowd control; Joint Police-Army task forces involved in intelligence gathering and special operations, and in working the highways, villages and back lands; and Public Consultations on Crime.

Again, we need to note that human and social services also impact ethnic security. Note the following with regard to social services. In 1992, only 8% of revenue was allocated to the entire Social Services Sector compared to 30% budgetary provision in 1957-64 through the PPP Administration. Due to adequate management of the debt burden, today, more funds are now available for social services. In 2004, public expenditure on education is 19% (\$14.5 billion) and health 8% (\$6.7 billion) of the National Budget.

In a United Nations Survey 2000, Guyana ranked 19th globally pertaining to direct investment yields compared to the 1988-1990 Economic Recovery Period (ERP) when Guyana was placed at 72nd. Preliminary estimates in 2002 place the total foreign debt at US\$1.2 billion, reduced from US\$2.1 billion in 1992.

Today, with over 50,000 house lots allocated, more Guyanese than ever before are homeowners. In 1976/77, 50% of children under 5 experienced malnutrition, an increase of 31% since 1973. Today, according to the World Bank Group, the malnutrition rate for children under 5 is 12%. Student achievement is an important criterion used to assess and evaluate an education system's performance. The SSEE and CXC results over recent years have been very encouraging for all ethnic groups, as shown above.

Clearly, then, ethnic security is associated with multiple variables as crime, social, and human services. But the status of ethnic security, generally, is politically presented and politically motivated as having a sole relationship with the level of crime, due to the persistent false remarks pervading the public domain.

Given the limited resources available for crime-fighting and the regional and organized crime connections to local crimes, this approach to connect the formation of ethnic security only with crime, is not surprising because it provides greater ammunition for political acolytes to push the

race-ethnic card. Note, too, that minimal discussion centres on the correlation between ethnic security and the provision of social and human services. Clearly, improvements in social and human services for all ethnics have happened over the recent years. This is good governance. Ultimately, no party should apologize for ensuring good governance through demonstrably providing due process, equity and justice for all ethnic groups. This perspective of good governance must become mandatory for all democratic multiethnic societies. The application of good governance through formulating and implementing policies for all ethnic groups must not be confused with a racial motivation for providing services. This confusion facilitates the construction of ethnic conflict and a deconstruction of ethnic solidarity and alliance.

Ethnic Alliances

At any rate, Guyanese history is not inundated with racial conflict but ethnic alliances. But some politicians and the private mass media want us to believe that race-ethnic conflict pervades this land. Rodney makes the point that the case advanced of highly prevalent racial conflict in the society is inaccurate. This is what he has to say:

...my contention is that the case for the dominant role of racial division in the historical sphere has been overstated, and that scholarship on the subject has accepted without due scrutiny the proposition that Indians and Africans existed in mutually exclusive compartments. The problems of interpretation lie not only in the marshalling of the evidence, but, more fundamentally, in the historical methodology that is applied (Rodney1982: 188).

Let us now look at a few facts supporting this notion that Guyana's history is not ridden with racial conflict.

- The Commonwealth Commission commenting on the disturbances in 1962 stated: "We found little evidence of any racial segregation in the social life of the country...East Indians and Africans seemed to mix and associate with one another on terms of the greatest cordiality..."
- There is the alliance between Indians and Africans under Critchlow's leadership in the fight for better wages, and an 8-hour working day.
- The union of Indian and African forces unleashed against colonial hegemony is another case in point, e.g., the frequent criticisms launched by the Indian Opinion, the organ of the British Guiana Indian Association, against the colonial government; Africans challenging the anti-education principles directed against Indians in the 1876 Education law; the demand for Indian languages to be introduced in schools; and the Court of Policy comprising members from many ethnic groups made crown lands available to both Indians and Africans.
- The emergence of institutional working-class unity in 1946 that became solidified in 1950 with the formation of the PPP and manifested by its victory at the 1953 polls.
- H.J.M. Hubbard, a trade unionist in addressing whether Guyana is ridden with racial conflict said: "It is by any standards a remarkable fact that in a competitive semi-feudal

society such as British Guiana with restricted social and economic opportunities and less jobs than potential workers, very few serious physical inter-racial conflicts arose between the ethnic groups constituting the population” (Hubbard 1969:27).

Particular politicians and some private media, not only do not see ethnic alliances, but they also fail to see that race-ethnicity-class is lived-in simultaneously.

Race-Ethnicity-Class

A dynamic relation among the sources of inequality and ethnic conflict- race, ethnicity, and class - exists. All intergroup relations inclusive of ethnic conflict and ethnic insecurity are conjunctively shaped by race, the class structure, and multiethnicity. All societies are characterized by some inequality. Class is an open type of stratification system in that it enables movement of people to different levels of the society. In fact, in a class system, people do have opportunities to move to a higher level, to a lower level, or remain at the same level in society. If race were the dominant variable and the fact that it is a closed stratification system, then Indians and Africans would not have a comparable SES. This implies that race is not dominant in enabling access to the society's rewards; other influencing variables are class and ethnicity. Further, this being the case, then contradictions in the Guyana society are manifested through an interaction of race, ethnicity, and class, and not one or the other. Surgical removal of any dimension of stratification from the analysis in Guyana will yield a false reality, as the society is not controlled through race, but through an interaction among race, class, and ethnicity.

Clearly, people of different races and ethnicities are found at different class levels. We, therefore, can say that both Africans and Indians in Guyana, are dispersed at the upper class, upper middle class, lower middle class, working class, lower class, and the underclass levels. Further, each ethnic group has its own class structure. For instance, within the Indian group, there is an upper class, upper middle class, lower middle class, working class, lower class, and the underclass. The African group also contains this type of class stratification. What exists, then, are intra-ethnic and inter-ethnic class stratification. Given that a person's class position, both within his/her ethnicity and among ethnic groups, is determined by education, occupation, and income, then class and not race becomes the more significant defining feature of a person's permanent life chances. Rothman (1999:145) suggests that:

the concept of life chances focuses on the quality of life and the way that class position expands or limits access to desirable experiences such as good physical and mental health.

The reverse is true, however, only if power holders of any society exert extensive control through racism, as through the apartheid program in South Africa. Guyana does not have anything resembling an apartheid program.

Therefore, class, race and ethnicity are lived simultaneously (Andersen & Collins, 1992:xxi) to create stratification systems, and they conjunctively interact to facilitate or thwart access to social and economic rewards (Rothman, 1999:15-16). Rothman argues that the connection of class, race and ethnicity can be illustrated through the distribution of income. In effect, then,

those Indians and Africans who comprise the working class will share similar occupation, income, and education characteristics. This similarity is observed for all class levels that include the major racial and ethnic groups of the society, in that middle-class Indians and Africans will share middle-class education, occupation, and income features; upper-class Africans and Indians will embrace upper-class education, occupation, and income characteristics.

Recently, we have witnessed an historical interpretation of the formation of race-ethnic class solidarity in Guyana. A popular mistaken view is that the formation of the working-class alliance in the ruling PNC era, to which Jagan referred in the opening quote, had nothing to do with the PPP and others' earlier efforts. In fact, this commentary espouses the mistaken view that the meeting point of the multiracial mobilization of the Working People's Alliance (WPA) and PNC's authoritarian rule, created this working-class alliance. The overwhelming historical evidence refutes this invalid statement, as the conclusion is devoid of a sense of history.

We must remind ourselves of the following:

- The embryonic seeds of race-ethnic class solidarity were implanted way back in the 19th century with African and Indian resistance against the White planters and in their united support of Critchlow's fight for better wages and an 8-hour workday in the early 20th century.
- H. Snell, M.P., addressing national unity in the London Weekly on March 19, 1927, noted, "That the Colony has been able to reduce these complexities to something like a working plan and succeeded in creating a basis of unity in the common love of their country on the part of African, Hindu and Chinese alike is itself a great achievement, and one that offers bright promise for the future. These separate races do, in fact, live side by side with each other, respect each other's ideals and prejudices, acknowledge allegiance to communal laws and work together for the good of the Colony..." How much of this description of working-class unity has changed? How is it imperilled today?
- The PPP was united for the 1953 election and the Robertson Commission (1954) ably captured this working-class unity thus, "It was largely by the efforts of Dr. and Mrs. Jagan that PPP was built up and KEPT UNITED...In this way racial dissension between African and East Indian elements was minimized and by the time of the election campaign in 1953 a useful political instrument was forged...the PPP could count on a substantial number of supporters among all races and all classes in British Guiana, with the bulk of its supporters naturally to be found among the ordinary working people."
- The 1961 election results showed that despite the 1955 Jagan-Burnham split, the PPP captured somewhere between 15% to 20% of its votes from African workers. T. McKitterick in analysing the 1961 election results said that if race were the determining factor, the PPP would have lost the election. McKitterick found that in about 5 of the PPP-won constituencies, Indians were not in the majority.
- Working-class racial unity also was evidenced in 1978 through an intense alliance among GAWU, CCWU, UGSA, NAACIE, and OWP, close group effort between the PPP and WPA, the PPP's proposal for a National Patriotic Front Government, and the Patriotic Coalition for Democracy, among others. GAWU, CCWU, UGSA, NAACIE, and OWP in 1978 together represented about 50% of the urban, rural, African and Indian workers. Based on this evidence, we can hardly say then that it was solely the WPA that created a

working-class alliance; it's an alliance that already was created, but with different form and content at different points in Guyana's history.

Any notion, therefore, of suggesting that the working-class alliance in 1984 was born out of this interplay only between WPA's multiracial mobilization and the PNC's authoritarianism, is ignoring the historical roots of race-ethnic class solidarity in Guyana, as evidenced in the aforementioned historical points, among others. If we agree that the past and the present create an unspoiled web, then it is only the arrogant presumption of the power of human reason that makes some people believe that they can fashion some new form of society. Human reasoning must carry conjunctively the architecture of history in any analysis. In many cases, this human reason should be tinged with adjustments as human history unfolds. Unfortunately, some believe that the power of human reason is static, so they constantly apply this 'unchanging' logic to their analysis, even as the solidarity changes its form and content.

At any rate, race-ethnic class solidarity has had a chequered evolutionary history, starting with the dialectic to become created, then graduating to its being a reality, next experiencing a lag, then moving to its current antithesis in a struggle to reach synthesis. However, race-ethnic class solidarity does not merely follow a linear progression in its developmental process; at any time, it can revert to a previous form and content. When this reversion or any other change occurs in race-ethnic class solidarity, our reasoning has to adjust accordingly to give meaning to its new form and content. We should keep in mind that sometimes "The very shaping of history now outpaces the ability of men to orient themselves in accordance with cherished values...that newer beginnings are ambiguous to the point of moral stasis" (Mills 1959). In all of this, we purport that no individual or group can claim to have monopoly over the creation and life of solidarity; this class solidarity is the product of several social groups and their intersection with history. Applying this method will reveal any static human reasoning that fuels the social construction and reconstruction process of false race-ethnic conflict and insecurity. We have discussed possible manifestations of ethnic conflict as, ethnic dominance, ethnic insecurity and ethnic mistrust. Another significant driver of race-ethnic conflict is ethnic extremism.

Ethnic Extremism

An evil, at present seeking political legitimacy, has been for some time now stalking this land. This evil is ethnic and racial extremism. We seem surprised that such evil could be committed. But history has documented the usual suspects of the pantheon of this arch-villainy. The history of both ethnic extremism and the reaction to it must be unravelled to understand its significance. The notion that ethnic extremist actions are really a regression to ancient forms of evil is related to the thinking that human nature is basically benign. But I want to propose here that ethnic extremism is not merely something that has ancient roots but that those roots have been shaped and refined to meet its goals over the historical period. In effect, the human nature that gives rise to ethnic extremism is not fixed but changes over time and space. This human nature or individualism like so many phenomena has a historical trajectory. Therefore, methods to eliminate ethnic extremism must vary with its different formats at different historical moments. And, indeed, ethnic extremism is really an unlimited war on the psychological front.

Clausewitz, an exponent of the rationalist perspective of conflict, has described war as a continuation of politics by other means. But Spencer argues that this formula can be reversed to read as: politics is a continuation of war by other means. Ordinary politics that could produce war is a rational politics of compromise, bargaining, and limits. In effect, Clausewitzian war is a limited war because it accepts that unpalatable squealed may be generated by an absolute war. Limited wars are grounded in a temperance of ends to means, that is, where costs and consequences are assessed. Those engaged in extremism behaviour do not consider costs and consequences, that is, their actions are absolute. Their absolute actions carried over into politics, are based on zero temperance of ends to means. Ethnic extremists, generally, are on the fringes of politics; they really are fringe politicians. They are completely opposed to bargaining, compromise, and politics as the art of the possible. However, ethnic extremists' entry into democratic politics is dangerous for a multiethnic society and to their own fringe group, for their focus on absolute ends may diminish or even eliminate the goals of groups who are not part of the ethnic extremists' agenda and in the final analysis will destroy the very foundations of their own support group.

Sometimes as Guyanese, we forget the pluralist culture that has shaped so many of our lives. Since multicultural societies are vulnerable to racial and ethnic extremism, let's invoke the richness and intensity of our ethnic diversity to withstand ethnic excesses. However, safeguarding Guyana's cultural diversity would require an understanding of ethnic extremism.

A variety of inter group patterns develop when people of different ethnicity are thrown together. What you have, under these circumstances, is a multiethnic society, such as, Guyana. Four major types of inter group relations in this multiethnic landscape can be discerned. First, we have amalgamation where all groups combine their cultures to produce one common culture and a singular ethnicity. Under amalgamated social relations, each person in the given society, loses his/her ethnicity, and becomes part of this singular ethnicity. A new ethnicity is born, and all groups become clothed in the new culture. Amalgamation represents a loss of culture to all persons in the society. Second, we can talk about assimilation where every person is expected to take on the culture of the dominant group. Here, everyone loses his/her culture, except the dominant group of the society; the subordinate sections of the society internalise the beliefs and values of the dominant group. Third, there is segregation where minority groups are separated from the dominant group with regard to access to wealth, power, and prestige. In some cases, the minority not only lives a separate existence from those who control the levers of economic and political power, but are denied access to the rewards of society. A final pattern that develops in a multiethnic context is pluralism where a mutual acceptance of each ethnic group's culture is the norm.

In pluralism, different cultures coexist, and may be unequal to each other. Pluralism enables an ethnic group to practice its culture and still involve itself in the mainstream society. In a multiethnic society, pluralism is generally accepted as a pattern that makes for progressive race and ethnic relations. Any of the previous three patterns spells disaster for race relations. A multiethnic society, by definition, encompassing many cultures vying for political power, provides fertile ingredients for the development of ethnic extremism.

Ethnic extremism is the promotion and protection of an ethnic group's interests to the detriment and disadvantage of another ethnic group. So ethnic extremism, by definition, does

not allow for mutual acceptance of different people's culture, and therefore, eliminates the usefulness of pluralism. Forced assimilation and forced segregation are two intergroup relations where the dominant group exhibits ethnic extremism. Improved relations in a multiethnic scenario are hindered with forced assimilation and forced segregation, products of ethnic extremism.

In Guyana, we have seen many ethnic organizations, like the League of Colour People, ASCRIA, GCIO, GIFT, ACDA, GIHA. The Guyanese people will have to be the judge as to whether these ethnic organizations worked/work to promote their own ethnic interests to the detriment and disadvantage of other ethnic groups. If they have, then they display ethnic extremism. If they reinforce their own ethnic interests, while accepting the cultures of other ethnic groups, then they are not ethnic extremists.

Clearly, any race and ethnic group has a fundamental right to establish organizations that work to protect and enhance the interests of its own group. But we have to be mindful that our operations do not impede the growth of other ethnic groups in a multiethnic society. A final point is that as we seek to establish ethnic organizations that are not extremists, we must engage other ethnic groups in meaningful social interaction. This condition is necessary to advance progressive race and ethnic relations in the society. Ethnic extremism, if effective, becomes dominant against other ethnic groups, and in most cases, historically, demands forced assimilation and forced segregation patterns in the society. But we need to note that one group's engagement in ethnic extremism breeds other ethnic groups' extremism, which could also be effective against your own ethnicity; in which case, they, also, would exact forced assimilation and forced segregation, resulting in a loss of your culture.

The political function of any extremist group, in the case of Guyana, is to attract popular support of their own ethnic kind from the respective mainstream parties, perceived to be ethnically rooted. Their strategy is racist as it must be. The extremist, in order to survive, continues to falsely demonstrate why the mainstream parties are no longer looking out for their ethnic kith and kin.

Fringe-minded people steeped in sustaining their self-interests and extremists use such remarks as kith and kin to create perceptions of ethnic conflict. These are prejudiced people who thrive on other people's frustrations and even manufacture and drive these aggravations. These highly prejudiced people carry an authoritarian or totalitarian personality. They perceive numerous threats to their world, really insist that situations are either right or wrong, and are affected by ambiguity. Constructing and reconstructing race-ethnic conflict are functional for fringe elements in the society because for them, this conflict is the only feasible conduit to gain backdoor entrance to political power.

Wilcox (1996) concludes generally that extremists tend to distort reality, by presenting feeling-based rather than evidence-based data; they attempt to repel critical examination of their beliefs; extremists have a Manichean world view whereby they perceive all issues as moral issues of good and bad, and right and wrong; and they tend to assume moral superiority over others.

In pursuit of their false moral high ground and their incisive penchant to set society's moral goals, extremists thrive on racial and ethnic insecurity and instability which provide them with the best chances of scoring political points. During election periods, their visibility, obnoxious

aggression, and intentional distortions, become quite manifest. Generally, ethnic extremism thrives under conditions of instability.

Racial and ethnic extremists appeal to a perceived relationship between prejudice and discrimination, heaped upon their own ethnic kinfolks, kinfolks that they see as their own, not evidenced by any legitimacy provided by these kinfolks; and as moral guardians for their ethnic kind in a multiethnic society. Little do they know, or maybe they do, that prejudice is not always followed by discrimination.

The Indian extremist's argument could be that Indians must be protected against Africans because African prejudice can only lead to discrimination. The same argument is used for the African extremist. Manifestations of discrimination could include loss of job, harassment, and ethnic violence in any situation. It's as if there is a strong relationship between prejudice and discrimination. Such a correlation does not hold consistently. Merton (1949) demonstrates that there is no necessary relationship between prejudice and discrimination. Let's further explore this relationship.

Merton presented four scenarios, as follows:

- Unprejudiced nondiscriminator: people who accept the idea of social equality, and refrain from prejudice and discrimination
- Prejudiced discriminator: people who turn their prejudice into discriminatory behavior
- Prejudiced nondiscriminator: prejudiced, but circumstances do not allow for discriminatory behavior
- Unprejudiced discriminator: people who are not prejudiced, but social norms or rules require discriminatory behavior.

Clearly, prejudice and discrimination may not be related to each other, but vary according to the individual's social contexts. Ethnic extremists, however, do not consider the possible dissociation of prejudice and discrimination. Extremists will be effective when there is a reliable relationship between prejudice and discrimination. But extremists could also create and recreate a fictional correlation between prejudice and discrimination. If you can accept that there is no consistent linkage between prejudice and discrimination, then you would be able to reject any ethnic extremists' propaganda and their constant assumption of being morally superior.

Let's not confuse ethnic extremism with the fight for an ethnic group's rights. They are different. History has demonstrated that ethnic extremists as leaders are evil and self-serving and so are unable to gain anything for their support group; in fact, in the end, they destroy the goals and humanity of their support base. Individuals must have the right and be afforded the opportunity to be a vigilante for their cultures, but their vigilance must not be affected to the detriment of another's way of life.

Conflict Management and Conflict Resolution

The proposition is regularly made that if the PPP/C has most of its support among Indians and the People's National Congress Reform (PNCR) finds its support among Africans, then we have a racist scenario. This suggestion may not be necessarily true, as no weighting is attributed to crossover voting, however small. Another interpretation of this proposition is that since the

PNCR won 42% of the votes in the 2001 election, then it must have a voice in policies affecting this 42%. I am not aware that any Political Party requested a change in the electoral rules of engagement prior to and during the 2001 election campaign. Under the electoral system, the rules were clear and accepted by all contesting Political Parties, namely, that the Party with 51% of the total votes forms the government. Under the current electoral arrangements, the PPP/C won.

In a multiethnic society like Guyana, what we need to do, among other things, is to evaluate the impact of the Government's policies on all ethnic groups since 1992, to establish whether or not, there is the presence of equity, justice, and fair play for all in its policy formulation and implementation. We need concrete evidence on these matters and not rhetoric.

However, since placed in the throes of governance, the PPP/C Administration has continued to implement the principle of inclusivity with the Opposition through dialog/constructive engagement, constitutional amendments, constitutional commissions, and the innovative parliamentary committee system. Current discussions of new political arrangements have a place in public debate that must include the masses and not confined to the exclusive preserve of some elected representatives. When left only to the body politic, some politicians invoke the race-ethnic card to pursue electoral advantage. The masses must demand participation in any discussion to introduce new political arrangements. But such discussions should not impede the present elected Government's activities in pursuing its legitimate mandate to administer the nation's business. Part of this nation's business involves addressing the issue of race-ethnic conflict.

The recently established Ethnic Relations Commission (ERC) would, as a priority, need to provide considerable empirical data on the state of race-ethnic conflict in Guyana. To achieve this objective, researchers would need to address these four questions, as outlined by Marger (1997): What are the types of inter group relations among ethnics? What is the ranking system of ethnic groups? Is there a dominant ethnic group? What are the long-term outcomes of relations among these ethnic groups? The answers would play an immense role in management and resolution of race-ethnic conflict.

The rate of recurrence of ethnic diversity and inequality may require management of ethnic tensions and hostilities rather than their elimination. According to Darby, "The use of violence marks the failure of normal and functional means of conflict resolution – political exchange, negotiation, compromise...The real issue is not the existence of conflict, but how it is regulated." Generally, ethnic conflict is controlled and limited; it is episodic. And of course, ethnic conflict is not always ethnic violence. But it still has to be addressed. How has this been affected through the (PPP/C)?

The PPP/C Government has had a historic track record of promoting conflict management and equality before the law for all persons, regardless of their race, ethnicity, class, colour, religion, sex, age, disability, or national origin; and has made discrimination against people on the basis of their race, ethnicity, class, colour, religion, sex, age, disability, or national origin, unlawful.

The PPP/C continues to address the question of diversity management and the building of national unity, racial unity, and working people's unity within a strong human rights environment in Guyana. Some achievements and proposals in these areas include:

- The Representation of the People's Amendment Bill, No. 1 of 2001 – to proscribe incitement of racial or ethnic violence or hatred.
- The Constitution (Amendment) (No. 6) Act 2001. The Constitution was amended at Article 119A. The Amendment provides for the establishment of a Parliamentary Standing Committee for Constitutional Reform.
- The Constitution (Amendment) (No. 4) Act 2001. This Amendment repealed and re-enacted Article 13 of the Constitution. The Amendment provides for the political system of the state to set up an inclusionary democracy, enabling citizen participation.
- The Constitution (Amendment) (No. 2) Act 2001. Article 71 of the Constitution was altered to enable local government to engage many people in governance.
- The Constitution {Amendment} {No.2} Act 2000. This Amendment created five {5} Constitution Commissions - the Ethnic Relations Commission (ERC), Indigenous People's Commission, Commission for the Rights of the Child, Commission for Human Rights, and Women and Gender Equality Commission.
- The Constitution (Amendment) (No. 2) Act 2000 amends the Constitution by inserting immediately after Article 212, a number of Articles from 212A through 212F, establishing the ERC, composition, a Tribunal, functions, annual report, and rules.
- The Constitution was amended at Article 119B. This Amendment provides for the establishment of Parliamentary Sectoral Committees, providing oversight to Government policy and administration, including natural resources; economic services; foreign relations; and social services.
- Article 78B was inserted in the Constitution. The electoral system below the Regional Democratic Councils provides for the participation, representation, and accountability of individuals and voluntary groups to the voters.
- Prevention of Discrimination Act 1997 - focuses on prevention of discrimination on grounds of race, sex, and gender, particularly relating to employment.
- The optional Protocol on the UN Covenant on Civil and Political Rights endorsed; Guyana was not a signatory under the PNC Administration.
- A Race Relations Committee was established in the 1990s.
- International Instruments supported in principle, in order to enforce the sanctity and protection of human rights of all Guyanese:

- International Labour Organisation (ILO) Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention ILO 111
 - Convention on the Rights of the Child
 - Declaration of the Rights of the Child
 - Declaration on the Rights of Disabled Persons
 - Declaration on the Rights of Mentally Retarded Persons
 - Declaration on the Elimination of all Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief.
- Activism of the Women Affairs Bureau whose mission is to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women, to promote development of their full potential, and to ensure their integration in the national development of the country.
 - The setting up of the President's Youth Choice Initiative, concentrating on youth development in all ten Regions.

In any multiethnic society, a democratic ruling party has to demonstrate that all ethnic groups are addressed and served with due process, equity, and justice. This kind of demonstration, indeed, is integral to good governance, and not a response to race-ethnic insecurity problems. In fact, good governance calls for this, that is, governments must demonstrably treat all groups equitably. If we disagree with this role of government, then we are opposed to good governance. In the spirit of good governance, the PPP/C must show that its outcomes are intended for the advantage of all, and this willingness to show impartiality has everything to do with good governance, and nothing to do with making a patronizing response to camouflage ethnic insecurity and conflict.

Clearly, on the Guyana front, some politicians, private media, and hate literature promote and power race-ethnic conflict and ethnic polarization. The masses are not players in the social construction of race-ethnic conflict. This unholy group of some politicians, private media, and hate literati, lead the people at large to believe that those ethnically different are a threat to their survival. In this scenario of local group conflicts, Bowen (1996) argues that in this situation, three mistaken assumptions are applied: ethnic identities are static; ethnic identities drive people to hate and create instability; and ethnic diversity produces ethnic violence. The unholy group utilizes these erroneous assumptions to create race-ethnic conflict through use of the race card.

The history of human rights experiences and the periodic solidarity between Indians and Africans, demonstrate a fundamental unity of their interests. This underlying unity reveals the importance of dismantling the planters' legacy of race and human rights infractions as well as the contemporaneous local 'racial incitement' activities, in order to construct a national unity where all cultures coexist and are recognized.

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