

THE CIVIL DISORDERS OF JAN. 12¹ 1998:

Georgetown, Guyana

AETIOLOGY OF AN ETHNIC RIOT

By

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“This perception of the Indian as alien and a problem to be contained after the departure of the Imperial power, has been a major part of the thought and feeling of Black West Indians and a very stubborn conviction among the Black middle layers in Trinidad and Guyana. Indian power, in politics or business, has been regarded as an example of an Indian strategy for conquest.”²

Introduction

In this paper I will be examining the causative factors underlying the civil disorders that occurred in Georgetown on January 12th 1998. We have used the technical term “aetiology”, with its connection to the medical sciences, to signal our conclusion that the violence and other disruptive behaviour unleashed on that day were not “spontaneous” actions, as the Wynn Parry Commission had concluded of the 1962 Black Friday Riots. Rather, they were symptomatic of deeper contradictions immanent in the very fabric of Guyanese society, which were manipulated by the opposition political elite

The two most salient facts that confront us as we review the record of the events of that fateful day is firstly the gratuitous and extensive physical and verbal violence that was inflicted and secondly the exclusivity of the attackers and the attacked: all the attackers were of African origin and all the attacked were either Indians or looked like Indians. The disorders can therefore be more appropriately labeled “racial/ethnic violence”.

If we look at our historical record we would discover that “Jan 12th” is not unique in Guyana – there have been several other ethnic riots. As early as the mid-nineteenth century, there were two major riots between Africans and Portuguese in 1856 and 1889³, apart from numerous minor skirmishes amongst the various other ethnic groups. In this

¹ Guyanese Indian Foundation Trust[GIFT] Symposium on Civil Disorders of Jan. 12th, 1998, Georgetown, Guyana. Submitted June 21st, 1998.

² George Lamming, foreword to Dr Walter Rodney, *A History of the Guyanese Working People 1881-1905*, The John Hopkins Press, Baltimore, 1981.

³ See Mary Noel Menzes, *Scenes from the History of the Portuguese in Guyana*, Victoria Printing Works, Surrey, 1981.

century there were extensive African-Indian riots in 1962 (Georgetown – Black Friday Feb. 16th), 1963 and 1964 (countrywide)⁴ and then again in 1992 in Georgetown⁵.

If we take a comparative approach and examine other multiethnic/multiracial societies similar to Guyana we discover that Guyana is not unique in the occurrence of ethnic conflict and violence. Malaysia, Fiji, Nigeria, Burundi, Rwanda etc. have all had their problems. In fact, because the majority of states in the world today are multi-ethnic, and over the last quarter of a century they have experienced severe inter-ethnic problems, the investigation as to the causes of such ethnic conflict has become a burgeoning field. In view of the wide differences between these societies, we in Guyana must be wary of simplistic explanations for the conflicts such as “Africans are bad”, since a constant (conflict) cannot be explained by a variable (different groups).

The paper looks firstly at the development of Guyanese society socio-historically as a plural society⁶ characterised by racial/ethnic groups rather than class strata, the latter remaining embedded within the former without forming overriding inter-ethnic linkages.

It then considers the independent variables of group comparison and group legitimacy interacting in the several ethnic groups to produce differential value expectations of group entitlement to the national patrimony (especially national power). These value expectations are shown to be evaluated *vis a vis* the groups’ position (present or projected) through the yardstick of relative deprivation to produce satisfaction (+) or discontent (-). The dependent variable of a group’s collective response to the latter (resignation, non-violent protest or violent protest) is considered as a contingency of the group’s assessment of its Social Facilitation Factors (beliefs, traditions, power resources and most importantly, leadership strategies) versus Social Control Factors (sanctions, retribution etc.) of other ethnic groups and or the State.

The above theoretical formulation will be contextualised within the history of Guyana focusing particularly on the period October 5th 1992 through January 12th 1998. Policy suggestions for addressing the problematic of ethnic violence in Guyana, arising out of the premises of the theoretical formulation will be offered in the conclusion.

Ethnicity and its salience

In its present usage, “ethnicity” is a very new term, not even having entered the dictionaries, much less the general vocabulary, until the 50’s and 60’s. This usage, of

⁴ Cheddi Jagan, *The West on Trial*, Seven Seas Books, (Revised edition) Seven Seas Books, Berlin, p.205-339.

⁵ *Stabroek News*, Oct. 6th 1998, p. 1. Headline, “Violence fails to stop elections – Count on” and “Fear transforms the City”, Oct 7th, 1998

⁶ The definition used will be that of Arend Lijphart, *Democracy in Plural Societies*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1977 p.3. “A plural society exists where political divisions follow closely, and especially concern, lines of objective social differentiation, especially those particularly salient in a society.” Segmental cleavages may be of a religious, ideological, linguistic, regional, cultural, racial or ethnic nature. The writer has no intention of entering the academic morass of the dispute between “Stratification Theorists” and “Pluralists” as to which of their formulations best explain Guyanese society save to note that the ethnic entrepreneurs there, who paradoxically called themselves “Marxists”, ignored both sides of the debate.

course, is the categorisation of a social group i.e. one that self-consciously recognises itself, based on a common descent (even if mythical) and common cultural practices.⁷

Guyana is a very good example to demonstrate a salient feature of ethnicity, to wit that if examined historically it will be discerned that ethnic groups are not immutable and in fact they can in many ways, be contextual. Those who are today labeled “Africans” were brought as slaves from various tribes originating from all across West Africa and originally practiced quite divergent cultural forms. Indians also have gone beyond regional (North and South India), caste (all the four castes and “outcastes” were brought in roughly the same proportion as in North India), and religious (Hindu, Muslims and Christians) cleavages to regard themselves by and large, as a single ethnic group.

This process of ethnic consciousness was facilitated by a number of factors acting over the course of time. Firstly, from the beginning of the colonisation of Guyana, ethnicity was a crucial variable: all of the colonisers were white Western Europeans and all the oppressed were from other geographical areas and anthropological cultures. The oppression was separated in space or time, which initially precluded any bonding of groups from different lands. The Amerindians, who were also from many tribes, were deemed unfit for plantation labour and allowed to drift back into the jungle.

After the African slaves were freed in 1838, they decamped the plantations en masse, with only the mostly skilled factory workers remaining, never having much intercourse with the indentures, especially Indians, who replaced them. The smaller number of Portuguese and Chinese also soon found separate occupational niches but concentrated in the urban areas, and interacted much more with the Africans who had also gravitated there. It is apposite to note that the British Whites did not include the Portuguese, who had been brought from the island of Madeira, in their definition of “European”. Portuguese thus are considered a separate ethnic group in Guyana from “Europeans”.

However, even as we have pointed out that ethnic groups can be created, and are not immutable, we have to indicate several features that militate against their disappearance in the modern world. Firstly, the state has become such a dominant feature of society in the allocation of rewards, economic and otherwise, that it is seen as the greatest prize to be captured. Whether peacefully or not, this capture can only be accomplished by the mobilisation of people, thus any grouping, potential or existent, will be galvanised by observant and ambitious politicians. The ethnic group is one such grouping.

Today, “**self determination of peoples**” has become such an accepted international norm since WWI that it is almost impossible to coerce supposedly backward subaltern ethnic groups into abandoning their cultures, as was possible before. A major contributory factor in the generation of conflicts in Guyana as we shall see later, is the perception by Africans that Indians persist in practicing “Indian” culture at the expense of some hypothesised “Guyanese” culture.

⁷ A good definition is found in George De Vos and Lola Romannucci-Ross, eds., *“Ethnic Identity: Cultural Continuities and Change”*, Mayfield Publishing, Palo Alto, Calif., 1975. p. 9, “An ethnic group is a self-perceived group of people who hold a common set of traditions not shared by the others with whom they are in contact. Such traditions typically include “folk” religions, beliefs and practices, language and a sense of historical continuity, and common ancestry or place of origin.” On p. 11, they note that “strictly used, ‘nationality’ is indistinguishable from ‘ethnicity’”.

In the British Caribbean, of which Guyana has historically been a part, it is an article of faith amongst ethnic Africans, that the Caribbean is an “African” nation. As George Lamming, the Barbadian African intellectual wrote and is quoted in the epigraph, “This perception of the Indian as alien and a problem to be contained after the departure of the Imperial power, has been a major part of the thought and feeling of Black West Indians and a very stubborn conviction among the Black middle layers in Trinidad and Guyana. Indian power, in politics or business, has been regarded as an example of an Indian strategy for conquest.”

Then, there is the even more pervasive international norm of “**equality**” to which everyone now aspires and which no one is willing to be accused of denying. Frequently, and certainly not fortuitously, in the development of the present state-system, different ethnic groups ended up in unequal positions – whether it is economic, social or political equality. Since the ethnic group in the seat of power would tend to support the status quo, the underdog groups are forced to mobilise qua ethnic groups. Ethnicity thus can become a strategic necessity to secure justice by attempting to rectify unequal power relations.

Another feature that makes ethnicity here in Guyana so resilient is that the distinct geographical origins and cultures of the several groups are reinforced by other exclusive attributes. The Africans may have converted into the same religion as the British and Europeans, but their phenotypical characteristics of skin colour and hair texture kept them distinct. Their skin colour, as well as their religions of Hinduism and Islam, distinguished the Indians from the Whites, with the last two possessions also marking them off from all other groups in the society. Thus the cleavages reinforced each other, resulting in a situation, unlike that of many other ethnically plural societies, where is no doubt as to the identities of the various ethnic groups.

Lastly, the ethnic group, being based on culture and origins, is tied up with the individual’s conception of “self”. An individual’s personality or self is a construction, and almost a reflection of his social world.⁸ His perception of the worth of his group, to a marked degree, shapes the self-esteem of the individual. Man seeks transcendence in this transitory world; in identifying with the accomplishments of his ethnic group, he partially accomplishes this. When an ethnic group has a poor image, some of its members will work to improve that image even if for their egos. And the ethnic group will survive.

Thus, while ethnicity is contextual, it is not infinitely so. Certain conditions in society, which we will examine further, in tandem with certain imperatives in man, determine both the salience and intensity of ethnicity.

Ethnicity and Class

In their struggle against British colonialism, both the major parties, the Peoples Progressive Party (PPP) and the Peoples National Congress (PNC) utilised as their theoretical weapon, the analysis and worldview of Marxism. This orientation persisted and in fact deepened after “Independence” when the PPP declared itself a Marxist-Leninist party in 1969, and the PNC followed suit with their “Declaration of Sophia” in 1974. The other major party (between 1974-1992), the Working Peoples Alliance, (WPA), was also ideologically, Marxist dominated. This meant that presumably, most of

⁸ See Peter Berger and Thomas Luckman, *The Social Construction of Reality*, Penguin Books, Hammonds worth, 1973.

our politicians analysed Guyanese society and formulated their goals from Marxist perspectives. What did this imply for political mobilisation and group consciousness in Guyana?

Classes

To our politicians, “classes” were the fundamental categories within which all members of society find themselves and individuals’ particular class position should define their interests. Classes, according to Marx, were economically based groups, defined by their relationships to the means of production. Thus, we were told that in Guyana, there were capitalists such as the sugar conglomerate Bookers and the industrialist Peter D’Aguiar etc., that owned the means of production and bought the labour of their employees who formed the “working class”. The presence of professionals, landlords and peasants were discerned and positioned in procrustean fashion on one or the other side of the capitalist-working class dichotomy. The existence of ethnic groups were also acknowledged but disparaged as symptomatic of “false consciousness” in their misguided adherents and which would soon disappear after the inevitable victory of the working class.

During the Anti-colonialist struggle, the capitalists were either, we were informed, British/Western interests, such as the aforementioned Bookers or the Canadian Bauxite multinational Alcoa’s subsidiary Demba, or their local benighted representatives such as D’Aguiar (the comprador bourgeois). All other Guyanese were exhorted to join the exploited working class and throw out the oppressive capitalists. Yet in the 1957, 1961 and 1964 General Elections, each election was increasingly determined by ethnic, not class cleavages. In fact, the 1964 elections, following communal riots between Africans and Indians, had a turnout of 96.9% and has appropriately been called a “racial/ethnic census”. After 28 years of the PNC’s dictatorship, the election of October 5th, 1992, deemed “free and fair”, was again dominated by the ethnic vote. And of course, voting once again typified by ethnic orientation precipitated the riots of January 12th 1998 that we are examining. Ethnicity continued to supersede class, contrary to all the protestations of our politicians. What happened?

Guyana is not alone in demonstrating the dominance of ethnicity over class. In fact as we have mentioned, ethnic interests now energise practically all political struggles in multiethnic states, which implies the vast majority of states in the world system. The ubiquity of the phenomena suggests that there must be strong structural underpinnings to the submergence of class by ethnicity.

Firstly, our politicians frequently confused “class” as an analytic category with “class” as a social group. Objectively, we can formulate a category of six-toed people, but we cannot assume that they will so define their interests i.e. that they have formed a self-conscious social group. Similarly lumping together all people who sell their labour, as “working class” does not mean that they will be self conscious as a social group. The politicians in Guyana were never able to raise class-consciousness beyond bread and butter issues and then only on industry specific issues, which coincided with specific ethnic employment.

Marx himself recognised this phenomenon and distinguished between “classes in themselves” (analytic categories) and “classes for themselves” (social groups). In Guyana, our “objective” classes, by and large do not see their interests in common, but

are subsumed within their ethnic blocs. Bauxite workers may have gone on strike at the same time as sugar workers in 1989, but that is a far cry from asserting, as some have done, that they had identical interests vis a vis the legitimacy of the PNC government. Most African Bauxite workers were primarily concerned with their economic interests, while the Indian sugar workers thought that the political implications on the African PNC Government were just as important.

Vulgar Marxists believe that class consciousness will be forged amongst a populace simply by the fact of its objective existence and its instrumentalist function – a more equitable and just distribution of the nation's wealth. The imperative for an expressive facet to satisfy the need of "class" members to belong, to feel as part of a whole, to be emotionally connected, escapes them. In the older industrialised states, there were efforts to build this emotional solidarity through songs, literature, myths, etc. but these soon fizzled out, as they also did in Guyana.

IN Guyana, there were several other reasons for class solidarity across the ethnic divides to be stillborn – psychological and historical/structural.

Psychological

We have asserted that the strength of "class" lies in the economic interests of its members, but that it fails to satisfy the affective, emotional need of man to belong to a wider collectivity. The salience of ethnicity is based on its accomplishment of both tasks – it is simultaneously instrumental and expressive. A person is born into an ethnic group and especially if it is simultaneously a racial group, he really cannot leave. If he attempts to do so, he risks great psychic damage to his "self" because so much of his personal identity is enmeshed with his ethnic identity. On the other hand, his ethnic group is the home, the womb; to which he can always return, and from which he cannot be turned away. It is the only social grouping that accepts him for what he is and not for what he does. This reflection of the group's ethnic identity in the individual's identity has several consequences.

Firstly, attacks on the group are equated with attacks on the self. Every Indian winces when he hears, "Indians can't fight" even though he may be a Karate black-belt champion. But accolades on the group also elicit similar identification reactions. It is for this reason that lower class members of an ethnic group are the most vociferous supporters of the ethnic politics of their upper classes. For in addition to promising the economic rewards, (the instrumental purpose of ethnicity), which may or may not be delivered, there is the psychological boost which will certainly be delivered in knowing that his group is ruling. Class cannot give this affective, psychological boost, unless it has been transformed into a "class in itself".

In the modern world therefore, ethnicity is particularly susceptible to politicization. In a world of scarce resources and powerful all-pervasive states, ethnic political entrepreneurs do not find it difficult to persuade fellow group members that their economic interest are better served if **their** ethnic group controls the state. The affirmation of themselves as a people and the economic interests served, mutually reinforce each other.

Secondly, if it is felt that the ethnic group's interest is threatened, the individual can be motivated to defend it at almost any cost, since to him, it is also a matter of his own survival. It is for this reason that ethnic conflicts are so intense. This was the source of

the danger posed to the society when some groups such as the Working People's Alliance, immediately after the PPP/c's electoral victory on October 5th, 1992, began to peddle the pernicious lie that now that the PPP were in office, African Guyanese would have "lost it all".⁹

Thirdly, an individual can rise out of his economic class, but not from his ethnic group, which makes the former not an inescapable fate. This very openness of "class" makes its hold on members very tenuous. Every poverty-stricken individual has a dream of "striking it rich", not as a member of the "blessed" poor, but on his own. Class position is one of the several social roles an individual performs on a quotidian basis, and the greater the possibility of the individual escaping his class position, the lesser will be his class identification. It is an article of faith in the Indian community, for instance, that if they work hard and the government does not discriminate against them, they can rise in class position. Even if this possibility is only a myth for most, as in the US, class loosens its hold.

Fourthly, a person's conception of self is formed to a large extent, by the socialisation provided by his primary (read ethnic) contacts during his early years. Thus by the time the individual enters the wider world of economic and wider societal concerns as a young adult, the new influences are much more diffuse, with the class role etc., typically not as intense as the ethnic one.

The dominance of race over class does not imply that class, or for that matter any other orientations, affiliations, segmentations, differentiations etc. have disappeared: within each ethnic group they are alive and well. In **this** sense, class is more fundamental. Class and ethnicity both exist objectively, and the subjective preponderance of one over the other depends on the situation and context as the two interact dynamically within the nexus of the personality of individuals. In multi-ethnic, multi-class societies such as Guyana, situations that appear to threaten unrelieved domination by one ethnic group over another will trigger "ethnic" responses. On the other hand, in local "bread and butter" issues, class interests may supercede. Thus while Indian sugar workers may strike for higher wages, this does not mean that will strike to bring down a PPP government on that issue.

Historical/Structural

The fact that our working people were brought to Guyana in sequential waves also had implications for non recognition of objective class interests: almost invariably each group ended up in distinct, separate economic niches which militated against the formation of social blocs. The freed Africans formed villages where they practiced subsistence agriculture, or drifted to the cities where they became servants, dock workers etc, or went into the interior as "porkknockers. They embraced European education, which allowed them to fill many of the lower positions in the civil service and the new small manufacturing and retailing operations, as well as the professions of law and medicine. The newer indentured African plantation workers brought in from Africa and the WI, were housed separately (Bajan quarters) and worked in separate gangs from the (in chronological order of arrival) Portuguese, Indian and Chinese, because of different work

⁹ *Stabroek News*, 9-10-93, In the WPA's full-page advertisement, Africans were advised to "organize your survival" after the PPP's victory.

habits and social differences. Thus the different anthropological cultures which gave birth to the various ethnic groups have been sustained by the quondam condition of relative mutual isolation.

The Portuguese and Chinese, right after their period indentureship went into the retail trade and soon displaced the few Africans and Mulattos who had entered that trade. While it has been claimed that the former groups received preferential credit facilities and other favours from the European businesses, it is as likely that the greater economic drive and frugality of immigrants the world over, was a more significant factor. They were also, from a business standpoint, better credit risks. Tensions between Africans and the Portuguese erupted into the first interethnic riots in Guyana's history – in 1856 and again in 1889.

Even during indentureship the Indian ex-indentures went into rice farming on land obtained from the planters, in exchange for their return passage to India. This undertaking, while allowing them to bolster their abysmal wages on the plantations to survive, further served to keep them sequestered in the countryside. After the abolition of indentureship in 1917, as the Indians entered the educational institutions in increasing numbers and attempted to join the rest of the economy, they found that most economic niches were closed off. The “old boy” referral system in the civil service and physical requirements to join the Police Force, were only two of the disabilities they confronted. The Indians were thus forced to seek further survival in non-state, independent avenues such as rice farming, gold smithing, saw milling, petty retailing, and the independent professions of law and medicine, which apart from the last two, however further militated against “assimilation”. This historical pressure for Indians to strike out on their own for survival further buttressed their cultural trait to seek to uplift themselves by their own efforts. The state and other institutions thus became perceived as a lesser vehicle for improving his lot.

With this confluence of ethnic economic specialisation, cultural retentions and spatial separation, when calls for unity along class lines were made, they reverberated within ethnic enclaves. For instance, when in 1905, Plantation workers joined city workers in protesting the wage structure, the Indian workers were totally uninvolved, and in fact their alleged role in lowering the national wage scale was bemoaned in the African press.¹⁰ The membership of the British Guiana Labour Union (BGLU) organised by Nathaniel Critchlow in 1919 was almost totally African in its membership, not through any nefarious plan but because the dockworkers he organised were all Africans. The one joint action the BGLU launched with Indian sugar workers (Ruimveldt 1924) ended with 13 deaths (12 Indians and 1 African), mutual recrimination and mutual confusion. Similarly, when Ayube Edun launched the grandiosely named Man Power Citizens Association (MPCA) amongst the sugar workers, his membership was inevitably primarily the Indian field workers. The mostly African factory workers formed their own unions or associations.

With a severely restricted franchise based on income and ownership of land, political negotiation with the colonial Powers was conducted by the firmly middle-class League of Coloured People and the British Guiana East Indian Association, or their proxies, until

¹⁰ The Creole, Georgetown, Dec. 30, 1905; Jan. 27, 1906; April 28, 1906.

1947. The former group, composed primarily of the “mixed” elements plus the most educated of the African segment, played a very ambivalent role vis a vis the ordinary African. On one hand, they exploited the need for pride in the ordinary African as for instance when they introduced the “vote for your own” element into Guyanese politics by organizing a country-wide tour in 1953, before the first universal franchise general elections, for the US based, Harvard graduate, Nigerian Prince, Eze Ogueri,¹¹ but on the other hand continued to stress distinctions which denigrated the lower class Africans.

It is not surprising then, but rather ironic, that when the first mass party the PPP, was organised by the Marxist Dr. Cheddi Jagan in 1950 in anticipation of the introduction of the universal franchise (which occurred in 1953), he found it necessary to arrange for the Party’s executive to have leaders from every ethnic group in Guyana. As a matter of fact, the fateful decision to appoint LFS Burnham as chairman of the party in favour of Ashton Chase was made because it was felt that Burnham, because of his educational attainments, would be a more attractive leader to Africans.

The mobilisation strategy of the PPP from the onset emphasized the ethnic factor, with Burnham concentrating on the urban African and Jagan working amongst the predominantly rural Indian. With the split in the party in 1955 and the subsequent departure of Africans such as Sydney King (now Eusi Kwayana) who were strong with rural Africans, joining Burnham, the ethnic orientation entered Guyanese politics in the 1957 general election. King had concluded after a December 1956 speech by Dr. Jagan to the PPP Congress, that Dr. Jagan’s plans would mean the peripheralisation of Africans in Guyana. The PNC was formed by the coalition of the United Democratic Party (of the League of Coloured People interests), Burnham’s faction of the PPP and the indomitable Mr. King who was determined to save the Africans from the spectre of the PPP.

The singular achievement of Dr. Jagan, as early as 1943 on his return to Guyana from the US, was to discern that with the inevitable introduction of the universal franchise, the ignored Indian would be a crucial constituency. In organising them to be conscious of their lack of political power, he was not only unwittingly reinforcing their ethnicity, but catapulting them, because of their numbers, over many, such as the Coloureds and Africans, who had a head start in political participation. He effectively challenged the existent power relations.

The buildup to the 1961 election, which was to have decided which party would lead Guyana to independence, saw an intensification of racial/ethnic politics, with the PNC in all fora, but especially through their New Nation, its editor Eusi Kwayana, launching strident accusations of the PPP practicing anti-African racial politics. Guyana has never really moved forward from the mind set created in 1961 that a PPP government meant, in the words of as conservative an individual as the Nobel Prize winning economist Sir Arthur Lewis, that Africans would be “liquidated”.

While the ideological opposition of the US to the PPP may have facilitated the riots and ethnic violence of 1962-64 to install the PNC into power, they would not have been as directed and intense without the undercurrent of ethnic hostility. This hostility, while bound up with the personal quest for meaning and belonging, is ultimately grounded on

¹¹ Compiled by the League of Coloured People, *Seven Amazing Days (in the life of Eze A. Ogueri 11, House of Edinboro , Boston, 1954.*

the perception of unequal power relation between the groups and a change in the old power relations. Capture of the state becomes the prize. The Indians were upsetting the status quo by their successes.

The policies of the Burnhamite dictatorship between 1964-1992 discriminated against Indians consistently to such an extent that an Indian who supported the PNC would be seen as a traitor to that group, much as African supporters of the PPP were seen after 1961. The ethnically oriented stage was thus set for the elections of 1992, which was to be the first “free and fair” election since 1964, all due to the efforts of the US ex-President Jimmy Carter, who may have been arranging a US mea culpa for their excesses in the 60’s.

The sources of Ethnic Conflict¹²

Donald Horowitz summarized his version of the social-psychological theory of ethnic conflict in a succinct formula:

$$\text{Group Worth} + \text{Group Legitimacy} = \text{Group Entitlement}$$

Group Comparison

It is a given of human existence that his powers of apprehension arises out of the fact of difference in our environment: if everything were identical we would be the ineffable unity that so many seek. We appear to have carried this drive to distinguish and identify, by seeking distinctions at new levels - in our social lives. Inextricably linked to the comparison process is an evaluative component. The psychologist Leon Festinger has postulated a “Social Comparison Process” as a human drive in individuals, to evaluate our abilities by comparing them with the abilities of others. When discrepancies are manifested by performance, efforts are made to reduce discrepancies by either improving performance or by controlling the superior performance of a competitor.

Later, experimentalists such as Henri Tajfel demonstrated experimentally what we all know from our own experiences; that we form groups based on sometimes arbitrary criteria and then deal with one’s own group and the other groups in markedly different fashion. Many of us have grown up in small villages where the “first street” folks were quite set against second street people for absolutely no other reason than they were from another street. What the experiments demonstrated was that the various groups always strove for the maximal differential between groups even when acting cooperatively would have meant greater benefits.

In the modern state, which is distinguished by the presence of different ethnic groups (there are only about four mono-ethnic states in the world), we find, therefore, that between groups the process of comparison is a constant and ever-present reality. This becomes a source of conflict as the comparisons are inevitably evaluated from the standpoint of the “inalienable right of equality” or from whatever standard each group decides is “just”. What we are saying is that social groups can only be evaluated

¹² The author follows the social-psychological model proposed by Donald Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1985.

comparatively and that this produces competition that may not necessarily be for material rewards, but to merely distinguish themselves from each other. This is not to imply that questions of power differentials are obviated: the “worth” of a group is itself an indicia of the group’s position on the power spectrum. Much of the heat in ethnic interactions is generated from questions of self-worth, which is inextricably tied up with group worth as was mentioned before. The argument as to the relative worth of one group thus becomes infused by great emotion. This process was made more extreme by the colonising experience that was shared by all that now live in Guyana.

In Guyana this comparison between the ethnic groups that people the country started from the moment the colony was formed in the 17th century and the evaluative aspect produced a status system that was the structural manifestation of the power relations in the society. The Europeans had evaluated themselves as infinitely superior culturally to the Amerindians and later to the African slaves they brought to work on the plantations. In fact there were serious debates amongst Europeans as to whether the Africans could be said to have possessed any culture at all: the conclusion by the white masters was that they did not and this conclusion, of course justified slavery, during which “culture” could be imparted. From the period of “seasoning” of the slaves as they were brought from Africa, to the end of their lives, the denigration of the native African culture was never to let up. Most of the slaves and more so the Mulatto, accepted the idea of the superiority of European culture and all worked valiantly to master its forms, if not necessarily its substance. The conquest of the minds of the slave was an economically conscious enterprise since the hegemonised slave was more pliant and in fact begged for and treasured his mental chains.

This hegemonising process accelerated after the abolition of slavery in 1834 when schools were opened to “educate the Africans” and churches expanded their reach in tandem with the schools they ran. The Mulattos were mostly illegitimate offsprings of Whites males and African slave women and were treated favourably by their fathers and given their freedom. They were a schizophrenic group, defined as “Mixed”, rebuffed by White society but holding themselves above the Africans. They kept themselves aloof from Africans up to the anticolonial struggles of the 1960’s. Through education and occupation some full-blooded Africans were allowed to join their ranks. The Mulattos generally despised the black blood in themselves and made sure Africans knew it. The hybrid culture formed, where everything was evaluated with the White and his culture deemed to be the standard, was dubbed “Creole Culture”.

Thus, when the other groups were introduced into the colony to replace the slaves, they were quickly evaluated by the latter through the values they had inculcated from the Europeans. The Portuguese and Chinese were derided mercilessly but as soon as they reached the towns, towards which they gravitated after their indenture, they quickly joined the rush to acculturate according to the standards of the White/Creole society. Even though the Portuguese kept their Roman Catholic practices in all other ways they fitted in, as did the Chinese, who became staunch Protestants.

Sociologically, if not totally anthropologically, the Portuguese and Chinese blended in with the Mulatto mixed category, to the extent of practicing widespread intermarriage. Their success in business and the professions made them into exclusive, small sections. However, before the Portuguese were accepted they were the butt of much hostility

engendered right after their indenturship, by their commercial successes as compared to the Africans as we pointed out above. The Portuguese consider themselves the superiors of Africans, up to the present. In the 1960's there were some interesting maneuvers arising out of this feeling of superiority when negotiations for a coalition were opened up between the PNC of Forbes Burnham and the United Force (UF) of the Portuguese industrialist Peter D'Aguiar. The Portuguese pretensions were derided as late as the 1990's by the present leader of the PNC, Desmond Hoyte who claimed that there was a "Putagee Mafia" operating in Guyana which sought to run the country from behind the scenes.

The Africans and the Indians

By Dwarka Nath's figures, 239,756 Indians were brought to Guyana between 1838-1917, 75,792 returned to India leaving 163,964 here. When one compares either figure to the 101, 843 other individuals, mainly Africans, Portuguese and Chinese who were brought as indentures and also remained, it certainly does not lead to the conclusion that only Indians undercut the bargaining power of the freed 88,000 African slaves. But that is the evaluation that the indentureship of Indians engendered from its beginning amongst the freed slave; buttressing the scorn they heaped on the "coolie" for being willing to do "slave work". The Indian was placed by the rest of the society at the bottom of the social ladder.

This comparison has persisted to the present and appeared in the press during the period 1992-1997 as well as after the elections of December 1997. Unfortunately, the comparison is built on a myth. It was not Indian labour that broke the back of African attempts to wrest higher wages from the planters. Rather, if labour were to be "blamed", it was more the Portuguese and, ironically, fellow Africans from both the WI and Africa, who played key roles. The ex-slaves called the strike of 1847-48 at a point of financial crisis for the planters who, encouraged by the indentureship of 15,848 Portuguese, 12,898 Africans from the WI and 6,957 Africans from Africa¹³ compared with only 8,692 Indians, held off the demands for higher wages. After 1848, the unskilled ex-slaves, by and large, decided to make their living off the plantations because even though Indian indenture was suspended between 1848-1851 there was no movement back to the plantation by the Africans, nor was there any increase in the wage scale. However this comparison to suggest that the exploited Indian indenture had undercut African aspirations, is now being used in 1998 to justify African "resentments" against Indians.

Progressive and Backward/Progressive and Regressive Groups

The colonial experience also left a more pervasive basis of comparison between the Africans and the Indians. The Christian missionaries, who always followed the Colonial flag, fuelled the scorn of the ex-slaves for the indentureds by defining the latter as "heathens" in addition to the general "uncivilised" tag. As Christians and "cultured", the African was persuaded that his status, beneath the Whites, Coloureds, Portuguese and Chinese, was acceptable since he could now look down on the "Coolie". In a pattern that continues to the present the colonised were using the categories of the coloniser to form his judgements. The rest of Guyanese society defined the Indian as "backward" and deserving of nothing but contempt: his culture, non-western and mocked by the coloureds

¹³ Rescued from slave ships of other slave trading nations.

and ex-slaves, was derided as being primitive and outlandish. This view is still prevalent in those communities.

In addition to being willing to perform “slave” labour, the Indian was lambasted for being docile. Ironically, the other attributed stereotypical characteristics – money-hungry, shrewd, stingy, cunning, energetic, resourceful, miserly, ambitious, avaricious, crafty, clannish, etc. indicated that the Africans in reality were labeling as a group that was in reality an advanced one rather than backward. It was just that the progressive attributes were given a negative cast.

From the beginning of his indentureship, however, the Indian in defense, rejected the denigration of his group and postponed his entry into the dominant Creole culture. For instance, because the schools were all controlled by the various Christian denominations (even though the salaries were paid for by the state), the Indians held back on enrolling their children for fear of the children being converted by the Christian proselytisation efforts which were rampant in the schools. The educational rates lagged but so did the conversion rates. He engaged in his own evaluations of the African with some of the European’s evaluation thrown in for good measure. The African, he asserted, was lazy, hedonistic, violent and bereft of his own culture. By the end of indentureship the Indian had moved very far towards re-evaluating his caste system and incorporating all castes into a unitary system of “nation” or “jati” and allocating the outcaste position to the African. To mix and mingle with the African, much less “combine”, was beyond the pale in this scheme.

Part of the present problem between the Africans and Indians stems from the recognition by Africans that the very traits they had derided and denigrated as backward in Indians only so recently, are actually the traits that confer success in the modern world. This came out very clearly at the “Conference on the Plight of the African Guyanese” organised by the African Cultural Development Association (ACDA) on March 16 1997. African leaders from across the social, economic and political spectrum recommended to fellow Africans the old disparaged “Indian” qualities, in their positive incarnation, and compared the African position with that of the Indians’. Dr. C.Y. Thomas, a leader of the WPA and ACDA, in his presentation, compared the economic picture of the African very unfavourably with that of the Indian in present day Guyana.

What this implied, as we informed Dr. Thomas in a letter to the press, was that a “...feeling of deprivation is exacerbated when, as in Guyana, the group which is perceived to be moving ahead (Indians) was categorised as “backward” by the group which is now told it is lagging (Africans). In the colonial era the criteria for status (position on the social ladder) in Creole society were primarily European education, European cultural imitation, professional and civil service jobs. The agitation by the League of Coloured People in the 30’s, 40’s, and 50’s that Indians were invading the Civil Service, provided the mindset for the disturbances of the 1960’s.

What Dr. Thomas is doing in the 90’s is to widen the arena of possible conflicts between Africans and Indians, by introducing new criteria whereby Africans should measure their position – employment and sectoral dominance and this *vis a vis* Indians. However, by selecting the previously despised group (Indians) as the standard for comparison (and by implication, emulation), Dr. Thomas, while providing Africans with a scapegoat, is further damaging the African psyche and creating a mindset for extreme behaviour.”

Comparative studies have shown that when exhortations such as the above are made, they exacerbate the humiliation of the colonial experience (much less the slave experience) of the backward group by signalling that the group they had despised had now actually mastered the modern skills necessary for success more completely than they. Such groups do not typically yield power when it is in their grasp and are frequently initiators of ethnic violence. Burnham and the PNC were allowed to construct a minority dictatorship because of such fears in many “respectable” Africans. And it is why Desmond Hoyte was criticised by many in the African community for relinquishing power on October 5th 1992. With the present mindset of the Africans, it will be very unlikely that the PNC will relinquish power if they manage to get it back into their grasp.

Reflecting demographic insecurity, such groups are paranoid about being swamped, subordinated and actually made extinct by the previously despised group. While the reactions may be out of proportion as opposed to the actual threats, they could very well be **projections** of “solutions” they themselves may be harbouring in an effort to resolve the cognitive dissonances created by the new dispensation. The behaviour of the PNC and their supporters must be evaluated from this background, as should the almost monolithic support in the African community Mr. Desmond Hoyte has been able to muster. And hence the numbing silence to the violence against Indians on Jan 12 in Georgetown: not a single Black leader has condemned it while many including Mr. Hoyte have denied that it even occurred.

Group Legitimacy

With the spread of the norm of equality across the globe, we described it as one of the key factors in fuelling the demands of groups for self-determination. The powers of the modern state, however, are so extensive and the symbolism of who “rules” is so vital to group worth, that some groups appeal to other moral standards in an effort to claim a greater right to the state’s patrimony than other groups in the society. They thus try to justify departure from the principle of strict equality. This claim to a prior and greater right to the country is labelled “legitimacy” and invariably provides the mindset in the group that asserts legitimacy, for denying other fellow citizens equality.

In Guyana, Africans have long used the argument that their **suffering** during slavery was greater than that of all the other groups and that this, *ipso facto* gave them greater legitimacy to the country. Their suffering is also cause for demanding reparations from the White slave owning ex-colonial states. Towards this end there was a “Pan African Conference on Reparations” held in 1993 in Nigeria in which several Guyanese Pan-Africanists participated.

Notwithstanding this plan, the local head of the Pan African Movement in Guyana recently announced that because of the sacrifice of the Africans for Guyana, Africans were justified in their post Dec 15 activities, including presumably, the violence of Jan 12, 1998. And in addition to greater right to the country, reparations, he claimed, must be provided from Indians. While this position is extreme it well illustrates the proclivity to make demands by those who claim greater legitimacy.

In some other plural societies such as Fiji and Malaysia, **the Melanesians and Malays have used indigenism to demand and receive greater rights** over respectively Fijian Indians and Chinese/Indians. These two societies have had a coup and riots

respectively to back up their demands for greater rights. In Guyana, while there has been some acknowledgement of this principle on behalf of the Amerindians, Africans have piggy backed on it to demand greater equity because of **prior arrival**. Some African leaders have strategically championed the Amerindian cause for indigenoussness because of the latter reason.

Africans also act as if there were some sort of implied contract with the departed colonial masters that declared, upon the latter's departure, Africans would step into their shoes as rulers of Guyana. All the previously mentioned qualifications achieved by acquiring European culture are produced to justify this claim. A corollary to this claim is that since Africans were the first teachers and midwives etc, after the Colonials, the other groups such as Indians ought to concede greater legitimacy to them because of their "altruism" in sharing these skills and knowledge. That they were paid wages, and received great status for their labour, is irrelevant.

The Caribbean as a whole, including Guyana, has been defined by its African section as an African nation and other groups are expected to assimilate into the prevalent Creole culture. After Independence in the 60's, the African-derived component has been accentuated and other expressions such as the Indians' are considered anomalous. In Guyana, which has an Indian population of over 50%, the "Caribbean Nation" concept is emphasised to delegitimise the demand of the Indians for recognition of their culture as valid as any other's. The educational system in Guyana reinforces the claims of the African segment as a given and it due to this reinforcement that many Guyanese accept, implicitly or explicitly, Africans' greater legitimacy. Indian counter assertions that they have rescued and built the country as a viable proposition after the abolition of slavery are given short shrift.

To the extent that Indians concede the African's claims of greater legitimacy, in common with most "out-groups", they tend towards moderation in claims of greater rights over others while the Africans as the "in-groups" will typically resort to extreme measures to protect, what they consider as their "extra rights". Hence the PNC's truculence and the widespread support from the African community for that stance.

In many plural societies, these questions of "group worth" and "group legitimacy" translate into a politics of entitlement i.e. some groups will demand greater entitlement to the national patrimony. With the state as the arbiter of the authoritative allocation of values (who gets what, when and how), the perception of being denied their "earned greater share" precipitates a struggle to control the state. Where the group that has severe questions as to its group worth, (that it may be backward), is also the group that has entrenched claims to group legitimacy but this claim is contested by the other groups, there the potential for extreme behaviour is greatest. The claim is contested most often when the groups are of comparable size as in Malaysia, or when the assertive groups are minorities as in Fiji or Guyana. Minority groups without pretensions of superseding legitimacy will typically align themselves with the dominant group in power as have the Portuguese or Chinese.

The assertion of greater legitimacy is the dominant posture of the African community in Guyana today. Normally such groups will demand greater educational or business opportunities but the real problem arises when such groups do not concede the right of any other group than themselves to govern. They will insist on departing from the

majoritarian principle of democracy and in fact would even go as far as imposing a minority dictatorship. This is the position of the PNC, on behalf of the African community in Guyana since its formation in 1958. Such groups will resort to extreme measures to obtain and maintain power.

Indians and Africans in Guyana do not only view those who are the rulers from an instrumental standpoint, but from a symbolic perspective that is at the heart of “group worth”. It is not the individual per se who is important, but which group he is seen to symbolise or represent. Power thus becomes an end in itself: “I may starve but I will not have any coolie ruling me”, is a refrain that epitomises the African dilemma. Because of the experience of the domination and humiliations by the previous masters, much emotion is invested into the identity of ruler: the symbolism is crucial. This process is magnified in the instance of Africans who had been enslaved. The reaction of the Indians is not as extreme since, as pointed out above, they do not evaluate their legitimacy as high as the African and also because his sense of worth is buttressed to a far greater extent by an immigrant ideology of self-upliftment.

The PNC has done a great disservice by not pointing out to its African supporters that Africans still control most of the bases of power in Guyana: the Disciplined Forces, the Bureaucracy, the Judiciary and control of the capital of Georgetown. By implying that the office of the Presidency (the Executive) possesses all power, they are inciting into their supporters, the predisposition to violence to recapture their “birthright”.

The “group entitlements” can also be labelled “value expectations” which can be usefully defined as any goods and conditions collectively sought – economic, psychosocial, political, etc, and to which each group believe they are justifiably entitled. The particular values for a group, which may predominate, is historically determined. These will normally be evaluated versus the “value capabilities” i.e.; the conditions in the society that determine each group’s chances of getting what they believe they are legitimately entitled. The conditions are the degree to which the attainment of goals are seen to be facilitated or hindered and their deprivation should have been the gap between their value expectations and their value capabilities. The problem arises from the human constant we have already identified: the propensity to compare and the predilection to categorise the actions of “out groups” negatively. Groups therefore do not judge their position in absolute terms and by intrinsic criteria, but by how well or not their opponents are doing.

Groups judge their deprivation relatively: Relative Deprivation

The corollary to the above is what we pointed out earlier in reference to experiments of group comparison: that various groups always strive for the widest gap between themselves even when, in absolute terms, acting co-operatively would have produced greater rewards. We can see this operating in Guyana where the PPP/C government’s economic and social programs satisfied the expectations of most objective observers, but yet they were unable to make a dent in the PNC’s African base in the Dec. 15, 1997 general elections. This was due to the operation of the relative deprivation factor where Africans and Indians will always evaluate their circumstances vis a vis each other and blame their opponent for hindering goal attainment. Even though the PPP/C may have pursued facially neutral policies in economic development, and in fact had spent more in African regions on a per capita basis, on account of the fact that Indians were so excluded by the PNC between 1964-1992, any inclusion of them in the present development plans

should have been expected to precipitate accusations of “ethnic favouritism” from the African segment.

In fact, the political leaders of the Africans did not wait until the PPP had quite taken over the Ministerial buildings before the PNC launched its attack by accusing the PPP of victimising PNC ex-bureaucrats when demanding an accounting of government assets. The PNC touched every African social base during 1992-1997 as it waged a propaganda war that convinced every African that their birthright was being seized by the PPP and handed over to the Indians.

The PPP’s actions in reference to the middle-class African in the Bureaucracy was described as “ethnic cleansing” and “blatant sectionalism”. The ordinary African in the countryside was informed that their “patrimonial land” was being seized and handed over to Indians. Mr. Hoyte advised African farmers at Boeraserie on the East Bank Essequibo, that to defend their land against Indian invaders, they had the right of “killing the destroyer”. House lots were suddenly “only being given to Indians” while Hoyte warned of PPP arming their vigilante supporters and of being “obsessed to stockpile arms”. Hamilton Green, ex-PM in Hoyte’s administration, competing with Hoyte for the PNC’s leadership, outdid himself by calling for civil disobedience and violence on the grounds of PPP’s actions against Africans.

Two years later, Mr. Green succinctly summarised the African’s case against the PPP. He claimed that the PPP was pursuing racist policies by mounting a subtle and relentless attack on the Afro-Guyanese business community and the Public Service. It also practised discrimination in its land allocation program at Hope Estate and West Demerara. The PPP was favouring supporters in the awarding of contracts and he was alarmed at the President’s message that the GDF should reflect the make up of the nation in terms of race. He concluded that the PPP had called on Indians “to rise up”.

In our response to Dr.CY Thomas mentioned earlier, at the conference organised by the African Cultural and Development Association (ACDA), on the “Plight of the African Guyanese, we had also pointed out that his claims that Indians were doing better than Africans because of PPP’s policies was misguided because, “in plural societies it is the perception of relative deprivation that leads the aggrieved group to resort to violence and this is what makes his presentation dangerous.”

It appears that this apocalyptic prognosis for the African Guyanese is the WPA’s position for their Presidential candidate Dr. Rupert Roopnarine has stated it publicly even more starkly. He stated ... that the “dispossession” of the African in favour of the Indian is the result of present governmental policies and warned of violent repercussions.” This stricture applied to all the African leaders.

The no-win situation posed for politicians across the ethnic divide is exemplified by the African Guyanese reaction to a comment that President Cheddi Jagan made in Toronto on Oct 30, 1996 to a mixed audience about “Blacks people are generally in the lowest scale of the social ladder”. So much furore was created that Dr. Jagan was forced to make an apology. Now here was a man who gave short shrift to racial nuances, but whose only fault was that he believed in the “one people” mantra, and was criticised throughout his life for “giving in too much to Black people.” Dr. Jagan was merely stating where he thought Africans were at, not where they ought to be but the African community

denounced him for being a racist. The organisers of the ACDA, all of who had earlier vociferously castigated Dr. Jagan, apparently did not find the topic of their conference ironic.

When some Indians began demanding that there should be more Indian music on the airwaves this precipitated a fierce debate that there was a move afoot to “Indianise” the “Guyanese” culture. The PPP’s Minister of Information, Mr. Moses Nagamootoo quickly warned Indians that, “People (sic) must not be swept away by sentiments of Indian culturalism.” Before the presentation of the first Budget in 1993, the Public Service Unions, which are overwhelmingly African in membership, issued its first warning over wage demands that was to prove an annual feature of brinkmanship between it and the Government. Invariably the issue is cast in ethnic terms by the leadership of the unions and their allies, the PNC and other Afro-centric groups. With the stated aim “to promote the African Guyanese cause on a national level” an African Guyanese Council was launched in May 1995. It was composed of fourteen “Afro-centric” groups.

The politics of entitlement and conflict

Combining group esteem needs [see ch. 4] with competing claims for legitimacy yields the dynamic of ethnic politics: a politics of entitlement [i.e. an argument about who will be represented and how].

Response

It is a fact of the human condition that when an individual’s expectations are unfulfilled, a frustration situating is created. This frustration is sometimes unrecognised and inchoate and the individual is said to be frustrated only when he becomes aware of the capabilities or forces that are preventing him from achieving his goals. In general, the emotional response to frustration is **anger**. The individual in an attempt to remove to remove his frustrations may intensify his attempts to achieve his goals, or try alternative methods or even substitute new goals. When the frustrating situation affects many or all members of a particular group, a group response may be elicited. Much depends on the coherence and strategy of the group’s leadership

The *strength* of the anger instigated by the frustration varies directly with the perceived opportunities for goal-attainment which were anticipated but not achieved due to perceived interference by the above mentioned instigating variables. It will also be dependent on the likelihood and opportunities for attaining the thwarted goal. When as in Guyana, the African, who has been predisposed historically to look at the Indian with suspicion, is bombarded with an unending litany by their leaders claiming that Indian are taking over what was rightfully Africans’ it could not but produce a sense of deep frustration in the minds of most Africans, by Dec.15th 1997. The Africans had been promised the return of their birthright to rule Guyana. The PNC assured them that the PPP had illegally stymied their right.

In general, however, the anger could have been expressed in a reaction continuum of apparent resignation, non-violent protest or civil violence, depending on the interplay of the mediating variables of “Social Control” which are factors that serve to inhibit the expression of anger into violence and “Social Facilitation” factors that serve to encourage violent expressions.

Social Control

Retribution

A major factor in the likelihood of an aggrieved group choosing violence to achieve its thwarted goals is its perception of the retribution, which may be unleashed against it. The retribution may be physical injury, insults, ostracism, and deprivation of goods or freedom. In terms of the target group or societal response, it is not the actual use of violence but their capacity to use it that is important. This recourse to violence, of course is one part of the Aristotelian triad of force, education and reward that is available to all groups in conflict.

In Guyana the PNC has repeatedly declared that the members of the Disciplined Forces which were built up and staffed during their dictatorial regime, are its “kith and kin”. Its strategy has been to test the Forces through escalating forays and protests marches so as to expose the troops to the fact that the protesters are actually and literally their “kith and kin”. The PNC knows also that if frustration and anger are addressed only by sanctions or fear of retribution, in a feedback effect, these only increase and reinforce the quondam violence-prone condition and that eventually the troops will refuse to use violence against their “own”.

The leadership of the PNC is also apparently acting on the premise that the leadership of the PPP in addition to not possessing the capacity to use violence does not even possess the will to do so. The PNC’s leader is on record that the PPP only responds to “force and pressure”. They expect no retribution for their violent and illegal behaviour; the PPP’s response to date has not disappointed them. The PPP has called upon its supporters to “stay calm” and not to retaliate so that the PNC has been assured that they have nothing to fear from this quarter. The PNC’s leadership has, in addition, convinced their supporters that the whole world is against them and with the creation of this siege mentality, Africans have been noticeably oblivious to insults or ostracism from other groups.

Institutionalised Displacement

The frustration and resultant anger, if not expressed or if there is a desire to deflect its effects, can be externalised into other activities or other objects, which will enable the potential aggressor to believe he has countered his frustrater. Some leaders and groups displace the anger on scapegoat groups in the society, as the Chinese in Indonesia, or the Asians in East Africa or Jews in Germany.

In Guyana, especially during political conflict, even though the Indians are the majority group, because of the historical circumstances explained above, Africans use Indians as scapegoats to vent their frustrations. Since the Indian is a supporter of the PPP, venting their anger on Indians, especially helpless women, allow Africans to feel that they have taken revenge on the PPP. The recent genocidal excesses in Rwanda and Bosnia in this decade of the 1990’s should give pause to strategies that hold out violence as a “solutions” to perceived dispossession. It would be a pyrrhic victory indeed.

Anger can also be displaced into non-violent channels such as, alternative means of goal attainment, religious activism, or even carnivals or sports etc. Most importantly, the group can be directed to become more effective in achieving their goals on their own efforts rather than attempting to bring down the other group, perceived as more

successful. Some leaders respond with “rewards” to outside groups with a view towards “dividing and rule” by attempting to form allies in the aggrieved group. Burnham tried this tactic across the board by buying out Indian leaders in the trade unions, religious organisations, political parties etc. Ultimately these leaders were discredited and all have disappeared. It is a technique that will fail in ethnically divided societies.

Very often, and this is the case with the PNC, the leaders take the easy way out and encourage the use of scapegoats on which anger can be vented rather than engaging in the, admittedly more strenuous task of their followers’ self-development. African leadership in Guyana have followed the WEB Du Bois strategy of focusing on political agitation for pursuing Black interests and rejecting the Booker T. Washington’s strategy of stressing economic development. One wonders why they see the two as mutually exclusive. Displacement mechanisms are much more effective than violence and repression. This is the area, which all leaders ought to be exploring since it is doubtful that any multiethnic society can survive the tit-for-tat responses that violence.

Social Facilitation

Cognitive Factors

If the group’s traditions include a history of violence and protests to achieve thwarted goals, then they are more easily mobilised on that path. In Guyana, Africans have carefully nurtured a tradition of resistance through violence. The PNC installed as the National Hero, Cuffy the slave who led a violent rebellion against the Dutch in 1763. As was mentioned earlier, the newly freed Africans rioted against the Portuguese in the 19th century. In 1905 the tradition was continued with urban and rural Africans rioting violently for higher wages. During this riot, the lumpen elements, labelled “centipedes” consisting of both males and females featured prominently in the robberies and infliction of violence. In 1962-1964 and 1992, the targets were the Indians and their businesses and the pattern of African lumpen elements dominating the violence, held.

Thus, it is useless for the PNC to argue that it was not their members per se who rioted and attacked Indians on Jan 12th, 1998. Based on the history of the urban riots whether the PNC’s claim is true or not it is irrelevant since they knew what would eventually occur. Every day that their marches in the city continue, we are on the precipice of another riot directed against Indians by lumpen PNC African elements.

In addition to the nurtured tradition of revolt, African socialisation patterns predispose them into aggressive habits and frustrating situations elicit aggressive responses even against authority figures i.e. there is a normative support for violence in the African community. The Indian on the other hand, is conditioned to repress his anger especially when the frustrating situation involves authority figures. Thus, unlike the African who is predisposed towards externalising his anger, the Indian internalises his, into a retroflexive anger pattern that is eventually unleashed upon himself. The Indian society experiences self-destructive behaviour such as alcoholism, spousal and child battering and suicide far in excess of the African Guyanese. In two recent studies on suicide in Guyana both show that the rate of suicide amongst Indian Guyanese was eight times that of African Guyanese. It is not that Indians are not violent: they unleash their violence on themselves and on each other. They demonstrate resignation towards their sources of frustration.

Resources

In addition to the physical resources of power mentioned earlier, such as the Army etc., the knowledge that one's group can be depended to provide at any time, individuals who will riot, burn loot and create general mayhem gives that group a very potent power called "disruptive" or "pressure" power. The PNC has been able to intimidate the PPP from day one of the latter's governance, of the efficacy of this base of power. This power was unleashed after Dec. 15, 1997.

In addition to the African tradition of rebellion which the educational system fosters, there is also a more diffused, generalised belief amongst Africans that they can bully the Indian and get away with it. This has been nurtured by the authority figures in the society where application of sanctions through the Police Force, has traditionally been African dominated. The image of the Indians as docile has been supported by the complete absence of their history of struggle either in Indian or Guyana. That Indians were shot and killed in 1870, 1896, 1903, 1913, 1924, 1939, 1948, and 1973, which would have demonstrated a great history of violent struggle for justice in Guyana is assiduously kept from the general population. As a point of fact almost every painful step out of colonialism into independence has been earned at the expense of Indian blood.

Group Support

The setting has a great influence on the probability of violence occurring out of pent-up frustrations. All studies have confirmed that individuals act differently in crowds than when alone. Crowds have their own effect on persons in stimulating violence: it is thus not a fortuitous circumstance that almost all the major riots have occurred in Georgetown. The fact that Georgetown is a predominantly African city ensures that the PNC can always count on massing a crowd, especially from the lumpen elements whom acts as the catalyst to precipitate the violence. The PNC can then encourage mob psychology to take over, especially when "kith and kin" policemen, who are not highly trained to begin with, confront the mobs. Crowds can trigger violence because they give their members normative support, protection from retribution, and cues for violence.

When the discontented individuals are massed into a crowd, they are obviously more aware of each other and can communicate their dissatisfactions to each other. Their aggressive behaviours are encouraged and given normative support by each other especially if they are directed at a common source, which they believe denies them of their expected values or goods.

The second facilitating effect of crowds is the apparent protection from retaliation that they provide. This is generated from the shield of anonymity where individuals feel liberated from the bonds of societal-constricting norms. A common feature of riots, (and this includes the Jan 12 riots), was the sense of abandonment that is exhibited by the often young rioters. Then there is the feeling of strength when one's puny self is augmented by masses of others who feel like one does and is willing to act likewise.

Jan 12 was also characterised by the roving **bands** that descended on the hapless individuals; single rioters never assaulted even lone Indian women. The presence of leaders who direct things and are there to "take the blame" is another factor in mob psychology and it is for this reason that contrary to the protestations of the PNC, during the violence there were observed known activists amongst the rioters.

Violence or aggression seldom follows from the stimulation of the individual to anger; very often further violence releasing cues from the social environment are necessary. These cues are facilitated by crowds. Punishment of a potential or actual aggressor is a potent cue and it is for this reason during the street protests by the PNC so many of the group leaders literally dared the Police to shoot or use violent countermeasures. The woman who pretended that her baby had been teargassed and the woman who stripped herself then claimed that it was the Police who committed the act, are only two of the cues that were used in the effort of the PNC to precipitate greater violence during their protests.

The news or sight of violence against ones' friends or comrades is also an effective cue, as is the invocation of the tradition of resistance through violence. This was the role that the PNC's T.V. station Channel 9 played; and played it very effectively. The ritual of massing under the statue of Cuffy, the original African bloody liberator, is redolent of symbolism meant to remind the PNC supporters of the violent path to overcome frustrations and injustices.

The most effective cue, however, is the confrontation of the potential aggressor with the source of the frustration, real or purported. The Indian merchants of Regent Street, through the assiduous efforts of African leaders since the 1960's have become a metaphor for Indian greed, avariciousness and inhumanity to Africans. The present mayor, Mr Hamilton Green has on numerous occasions, when asked about the presence of criminals in Georgetown, has responded by contrasting them to the "white collar criminals of Regent Street". And this is why in the '62 riots, the '92 riots, the Jan 12 riots and in any future riots, Regent Street will be a prime target.

Crowds then, are the primary reason why the PNC has not been able to have countrywide riots; they have not been able to muster the necessary critical mass in the rural areas.

Leadership Strategies

In the modern multi-ethnic societies, we have seen that ethnic relations are essentially group power-contests. In these contests the role of leadership is crucial as well as inevitable. In fact, there are those who claim that ethnic contests are no more than the Machiavellian intrigues of some power-hungry politicians: this is a popular view in Guyana. One often hears the refrain that "Burnham and Jagan caused all this trouble." The truth has to a bit more complex than this however for leaders can never lead followers where the latter have no predisposition to go. And it does not explain why the most successful and the least successful are often the most vociferous supporters of the ethnic enterprise.

The reality in Guyana is that politics has been ethnicised and it is for this reason that the strategies employed by the leaders of the various ethnic blocs have such importance. By not understanding, or not accepting the ethnic impact of each policy decision or, for that matter every proposal for action, leaders may aggravate the situation as much as by what they do as what they do not do. Leaders have to appreciate the power implications on each ethnic group of every act that they perform.

Power has two major attributes – resources and their mobilisation. The resources of the group include the group's total numbers, physical and financial assets, social organisation, culture and belief system, and education and skills. But especially, in the

third world, the control of the armed forces and Bureaucracy and the other state institutions are key resources.

Mobilisation capabilities have to be defined in more behavioral terms and include the group's morale, motivation, cohesiveness and strategic ability to cope with new situations. All of these of course are summarised by the word "leadership". One group may possess superior resources but given ineffective leadership, it cannot mobilise its resources against another group possessing fewer resources but superior mobilisational capabilities.

In Guyana where there are two groups of almost equal size, Africans and Indians, the PNC the leaders of the African group, apparently after assessing their resources, believe that they can achieve power through violent confrontation and intimidation. The temptation to consolidate ethnic leadership by aggravating conflict and appealing to violence appears easier, swifter and seems especially attractive if it fits in with the group's mindset. With the inter-twining of Group worth and Group entitlement in the African society, and their demographic ethnic fear of being swamped, the PNC understands that most Africans will support it fully in its efforts to seize total power. This, in their view, is their "birthright".

Burnham exploited this fear when he mobilised Africans in the sixties. He constructed a racist, almost totalitarian state, and augmented the power resources of the African segment by building a massive armed force and nationalising 80% of the economy that he proceeded to staff with Africans. He was determined to use the "control" option of holding on to power. His successor, Hugh Desmond Hoyte, attempted to hold on to power but also to rebuild the shattered economy. His "opening up" of the economy to private enterprise was still dominated by ethnic concerns: the three largest foreign inputs into the Guyanese economy all, not so coincidentally hired predominantly, African work-forces – the first, as a former Government entity came with the appropriate staff requirement.

Hoyte lost power because he did not have the chutzpah to face down the US who had no communist threat by 1990, as Burnham would have done. He agreed to "free and fair" elections that he lost in 1992; he has not been totally forgiven by the African population for this indiscretion. Hoyte does not appear to be a very creative leader but he appears to have become emboldened by the US's notoriously short attention span on third world politics, especially if they have no economic or strategic interests as they do not in Guyana. He seems determined to recapture power by imitating the violent destabilisation tactics that his mentor Burnham used in the early sixties.

Hoyte is cynically exploiting the ethnic security fears of the African segment as analysed above. Politically insecure leaders like Hoyte are more apt to opt for a rigid and aggressive stance to protect themselves from flank group leaders; the Guyanese people must not be allowed to suffer because of the inadequacies of Mr. Hoyte.

The PPP, under Dr. Jagan in 1964, concluded that the forces arrayed against them by the alliance of the US, Britain and the PNC, as demonstrated during the ethnic riots of that year, would lead to the slaughter of his supporters. The PPP never attempted to alter this conclusion between 1964-1992, and as Dr. Jagan conceded after his electoral victory in

1992, the change in fortunes was all due to President Carter who brokered the agreement with the PNC to demit office.

Between 1992-1997, the PPP, in line with its Marxist-Leninist slant, appeared unwilling to concede that Guyanese politics was ethnic-based and insisted that economic development would resolve the ethnic and other contradictions in the society. The rest, as they say is history. Driven to the bargaining table by the violence of the PNC after the elections of Dec. 15 1997, the PPP has agreed to “Constitutional reform” which they have signalled means “power-sharing” with the PNC. The PNC by its continued protests has rejected these and appears determined to push for complete control.

Conclusions

January 12th was a message to all Guyanese that politics as usual is over in Guyana. We have presented what we consider to be the underlying causes of an event of such terrifying brutality that we are still groping for a word to describe it. The solution obviously, will not be simple. Bold measures will have to be taken; a first step will have to be an acknowledgement that we have a racial/ethnic problem in Guyana. When demands arise out of a people’s sense of self, they will not be wished away. When demands arise out of a denial of one’s humanity, they will not be washed away. Our leaders will have to be courageous: one does not jump across a chasm in several leaps.

Proposals

1. The invidious comparison that is at the base of ethnic conflict is the most intractable. Guyana is fortunate that because of the historical pattern of settlement, the three major ethnic groups dominate in different parts of the country. A Federalised system of governance offers the greatest set of benefits to Guyana in terms of a disengagement so that the areas of comparison are lessened. (See Appendix 1: Federal Republic of Guyana for a fuller treatment of this proposal.)
2. The perception by Africans that there will be no sanctions for riotous behaviour by a PPP government creates an unstable situation. The Disciplined Forces should reflect the ethnic makeup of Guyanese society.
3. To thwart the inevitable criticisms of any government program, the ethnic impact of any Government policy must be assessed ahead of implementation, as for instance, environmental impacts are evaluated.
4. A Race Relations Commission, Equal Employment Occupation Commission and Anti-Discrimination laws must be promulgated.