



## **ETHNICITY AND DEVELOPMENT: THE CARIBBEAN AND OCEANIA**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The environment of cultural pluralism and ethnic diversity is now grudgingly but generally acknowledged as a critical variable that must be incorporated in designing new strategies for development. There is urgent need to discuss the relationship between ethnicity and development in all its manifold political, economic, and social dimensions. The task is daunting; on its outcome may rest the fruitfulness of many designs of development involving billions of dollars and the fate of millions of poor people. The aim of this paper is to offer some empirical evidence and to generate some theoretical insights into the behavior of the ethnic factor in the development experience of two Third World countries, one in the Caribbean and the other in the Pacific Islands. I believe that systematic data derived from individual case histories can offer important building blocks towards constructing a wider theory on the connection between ethnicity and development.

## **RESUMEN**

El pluralismo cultural y la diversidad étnica son generalmente considerados, aunque de mala gana, como variables críticas que deben ser incorporadas en el diseño de nuevas estrategias para el desarrollo. Hay una necesidad urgente de discutir la relación existente entre la etnicidad y el desarrollo en sus múltiples dimensiones políticas, económicas y sociales. La tarea es aterradora; de sus resultados depende la utilidad de muchos programas de desarrollo, que involucran miles de millones de dólares, así como el destino de millones de gente pobre. El objetivo de este trabajo es ofrecer evidencia empírica y generar algunas observaciones teóricas sobre el papel del factor étnico en la experiencia de desarrollo de dos países del tercer mundo, uno en el Caribe y el otro en las islas del Pacífico. Creo que la existencia de información sistemática sobre estudios de caso particulares puede ofrecer pilares importantes para la construcción de una teoría más general sobre la relación entre etnicidad y desarrollo.



## Introduction

Julius Nyerere once remarked that ultimately development is about what goes on in the head of the citizen for it is under one's hat that there exists the greatest underdeveloped part of the world.<sup>1</sup> The social structure of the typical Third World country is multi-ethnic. In the heads of citizens of this region are ethnic maps that are constituted of the many solidarity communities of the state, intergroup likes and dislikes, and scripts that guide the choice of friends and neighbors. These maps locate the identity of the citizen in the wider framework of the social order. They are critical, for they not only serve as the lenses through which friends and enemies are defined but also, in the political world, to evaluate projects and programs and the actions of governments generally. Indeed, the ethnic map also informs the very attitude that a citizen holds towards those who govern, imparting to the government legitimacy or illegitimacy and correspondingly willingness or unwillingness to cooperate with the ruling regime. The highest loyalty of the citizen is to his/her solidarity community and not to the state. Ethnic group consciousness which suffuses the internalized map in the head tends to emerge and manifest itself most acutely in the drive towards modernization, bringing into contact and competition the diverse groups in the state, each seeking to claim its own rightful part of power and privileges. The ethnic map can be conducive to either intergroup trust or suspicion, positively or negatively affecting efforts aimed at the mobilization of human and material resources for general welfare and development.<sup>2</sup>

Because of the universal arousal of sectional consciousness, especially in the multi-ethnic states of the Third World, planned political change for development cannot succeed unless conceived through the prism of ethnicity. Development change cannot follow a simple unilinear path driven by neutral factors such as capital and technology without being mediated through social processes, especially the recognition of ethnic and communal interests. The ethnic factor is a fundamental force in the Third World environment and must be incorporated into any strategy of development that is adopted. Ethnic pluralism cannot be assumed out of existence; it cannot be reduced to an epiphenomenon that will disappear when economic, technological, and other change transforms the environment. The ethnic factor is integral to the environment; it is at once the subject and object of change. If it is accepted that the ethnic variable is and must be an integral part of the process of planned change, then one would expect to find it occupying a central role in the many strategies of development that have been designed

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<sup>1</sup> J. Nyerere, *Freedom and Development* (Dar-es-Salaam: Oxford University Press, 1966).

<sup>2</sup> For ethnic maps, see Ralph Premdas, "Ethnicity and Nation-Building: The Case of Papua New Guinea," in *Ethnicity and Nation-Building in the Pacific* edited by M. Howard (Tokyo: United Nations University Press, 1989), pp. 244–59.

and implemented in the Third World. Yet this is not the case. In the orthodox models of economic and political development from which strategies of change have been adopted for Third World transformation, the ethnic factor has generally been ignored.

The obstacles that have been identified have come to define the nature of the development task. In the economic sphere, they are lack of capital, entrepreneurial and organizational expertise, infrastructure, etc.; in the political realm, they are problems of participation, power, mobilization, etc.; and in the social field, they focus on institutional structures, minimum standards of education, nutrition, maternity care, housing, etc. Different ideologies of development vary the salience and mixes of these factors in interpreting and facilitating change. Regardless of whether they are founded on Marxist class analysis or capitalist laissez-faire market claims, interpretations of change for transformation tend to consign out of existence or consciousness the political-cultural claims of ethno-national groups, deeming these to be residual factors which would in due course be assimilated or eliminated in the process of developmental change. The evidence against this de-emphasis of the ethno-cultural factor by the different ideologies is devastating. From Lebanon in the Middle East to Guyana on the South American continent, from Northern Ireland to Azerbaijan and Bosnia in Europe to Quebec in North America, from the Sudan and South Africa to Sri Lanka and Malaysia, the assertion of the ethnic factor has made shambles of development objectives and social peace everywhere, on all continents, in both underdeveloped and industrialized societies. But particularly in the multi-ethnic states of the impoverished Third World, the ethnic resurgence, like an unrestrained monster, has devastated all those promising plans for change, built on sophisticated economic and other models. The 'ethnic bomb,' once exploded, has diverted enormous amounts of scarce resources for security and stability. From a neglected and peripheral factor, the ethnic variable has now emerged as one of the paramount forces of Third World change.<sup>3</sup>

The environment of cultural pluralism and ethnic diversity is now grudgingly but generally acknowledged as a critical variable that must be incorporated in designing new strategies for development. There is urgent need to discuss the relationship between ethnicity and development in all its manifold political, economic, and social dimensions. The task is daunting; on its outcome may rest the fruitfulness of many designs of development involving billions of dollars and the fate of millions of poor people. The aim of this presentation is to offer some empirical evidence and to generate some theoretical insights into the behavior of the ethnic factor in the developmental experience of two Third World countries, one in the Caribbean and the

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<sup>3</sup> C. Young, *The Politics of Cultural Pluralism* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1976); C. Enloe, *Ethnic Conflict and Development* (Boston: Little and Brown, 1973); and Melson and Wolpe, "Modernization and the Politics of Communalism," *American Political Science Review*, 64, 1970.

other in the Pacific Islands. I believe that systematic data derived from individual case histories can offer important building blocks towards constructing a wider theory on the connection between ethnicity and development. I must begin however with a brief definition of ethnicity, especially those aspects that are related to the theme of this work.

Ethnicity refers to collective group consciousness that imparts a sense of belonging derived from membership in a community putatively bound by common descent and culture; it pertains to the perception that one at once shares a common identity with a particular group and is in turn so perceived by others. Ethnicity is akin to nationalism, and for this reason ethnic consciousness may be referred to as ethno-nationalism so as to point to the fact that many states contain several subcommunities with a sense of consciousness distinct from that of other similar groups.<sup>4</sup> The second component of ethnicity that facilitates collective consciousness involves certain putative commonalties such as language, religion, region, tradition, etc., or a multiple coincidence of several of these lines of cleavage which together have contributed to deep divisions in a state. It is not important that scientific evidence bear out the accuracy of group claims to these commonly apprehended bases of identity. Neither is it essential that the boundaries of these cleavages be always maintained consistently. What is crucial, as Shibutani and Kwan note, is that an ethnic group consists "of those who conceive of themselves as being alike by virtue of their common ancestry, real or fictitious, and who are so regarded by others."<sup>5</sup> Equally important to note is that ethnic boundaries are socially constructed and reproduced in relation to these symbolic and instrumental needs of a group. As Barth pointed out, they are almost entirely "subjectively held categories of ascription and identification by the actors themselves."<sup>6</sup> The maintenance of the boundaries is situationally determined, may shift over time and context, and generally serves to differentiate members dialectically and oppositionally from other groups in terms of 'we-they' antipathies. The third feature of ethnicity refers the behavioral effects of this variant of group membership. Specifically, ethnic group membership confers symbolic solidarity satisfactions as well as instrumental and material advantages. The important point here is that ethnicity is a politically charged phenomenon whose consciousness is stimulated into existence by certain 'triggers' such as group contact, decolonization, modernization, and policy choices by the state which in turn precipitate defensive group quest as well as initiatives for symbolic and material gains. Consequently, ethnic group formation is expressed behaviorally in rival claims to

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<sup>4</sup> W. Connor, "Nation-Building or Nation-Destroying?" *World Politics*, Vol. 24, No. 3, 1972; Ralph Premdas, "Copper, Ethno-Nationalism and Secession in Bougainville," *Canadian Review of Studies in Nationalism*, 4 (2), 1977, pp. 247-66.

<sup>5</sup> T. Shibutani and K.M. Kwan, *Ethnic Stratification* (New York: MacMillan, 1965), p. 47.

<sup>6</sup> F. Barth, "Introduction," in *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries* (New York: Litle and Brown, 1969).

those of other groups. Ethnic group identity is relational and conflictual.<sup>7</sup> It is often marked in the pursuit of an objective by an intensity of emotion that is community-building when moderately expressed and self-annihilating when fanatically followed.<sup>8</sup> Ethnic solidarity sentiments bear their own internal logic, compelled by their own formative needs, and once they pick up momentum, they can rarely be denied. To some they are a marauding monster while to others they embody the finest creative spirit of a community. They easily ignite into uncontrollable violence out of all proportion to the rational goals that impelled them to act in the first place. Critical to this phenomenon from a behavioral perspective is the element of comparison and competition that is found in the irrational behavior of ethnic groups. Social psychologist Henry Tajfel pointed to the propensity for group loyalty to be sustained intensely and irrationally not for “greater profit in absolute terms” but in order “to achieve relatively higher profit for members of their in-group as compared with members of the out-group.”<sup>9</sup>

In part, I want to show in the discussion of the two cases how extensive the political costs of the ethnic conflict in Guyana and Fiji have been, including the loss of regime legitimacy, the destruction of democracy, pervasive human rights violations, the fracturing of society into polarized parts, and persistent instability. Once ethnic consciousness became the animating force that defined competition for the values and resources of the state, all political institutions—parties, voluntary associations, the electoral system, parliament, the civil service, judiciary, diplomatic services, the army and police—became infected by it. It is as if the twisted contours of ethnic preference, expressed antagonistically against other similar solidarity groups, possessed such irresistible power that every political structure derived its form and practice from their governing principles. Ethnic hate was not confined to a few select practices and separated from others; allowed to grow in the crucible of continuing electoral competition, it slowly extended its tentacles to all institutions. The entire imported parliamentary apparatus was subverted and transformed into structures of ethnicity, dividing one citizen from another by claims to narrow communal interests, failing to offer any form of unity to the state.

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<sup>7</sup> See D.M. Taylor and F.M. Moghaddam, *Theories of Intergroup Relations* (New York: Praeger, 1994).

<sup>8</sup> C. Young, “The Dialectics of Cultural Pluralism,” in *The Rising Tide of Culturalism* edited by C. Young (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993).

<sup>9</sup> H. Tajfel, “Social Identity and Intergroup Behavior,” *Social Science Information*, Vol. 13, No. 2, April, 1974.



## I. Guyana

### 1. The Origins of a Multi-Ethnic Structure

I will begin by tracing the origins of Guyana's multi-ethnic structure from colonial conquest when the indigenous population was subdued to resettlement by an influx of Europeans, Africans, and Asians. In the creation of the state, the different ethnic components were separated residentially, occupationally, and culturally. The multiple cleavages of race, religion, residence, and culture reinforced each other, and in the context of a colonial policy of divide and rule the divisions became deep and persistent. The colonial state was ethnically riven, and with the communal clusters deeply distrustful of each other, sharing few institutions, a legacy was bequeathed that would come to bedevil efforts at nation-building in the postcolonial era. Following World War II, in the wake of a worldwide movement towards decolonization, democratic politics on a mass scale was introduced to Guyana. Except for a brief period, this almost inevitably led to the formation of ethnically based parties which competitively mobilized the mutually distrustful communal segments against each other. Organized down to the grassroots, the communally bound parties appealed to ethnic fears and exacerbated the divisions, bringing the state to the brink of civil war.

Guyana is a multi-ethnic Third World state situated on the north-coast shoulder of South America. Although geographically part of the South American land mass, culturally it falls within the Caribbean insular sphere marked by plantations, monocrop economies, immigrant settlers, and a color-class system of stratification. The country is populated by six ethnic solidarity clusters—Africans, East Indians, Amerindians, Portuguese, Chinese, and Europeans. A significant 'mixed' category also exists, consisting of persons who have any combination of the major groups. Racial and ethnic categories are apprehended in a rather peculiar way among Guyanese. In the popular imagination, everyone is placed within a communal category that, as anthropologist Raymond Smith has noted, "is believed to be a distinct physical type, an entity symbolized by a particular kind of 'blood.'"<sup>10</sup> Hence, even though objectively there is a wide array of racial mixtures, a person is soon stereotyped into one of the existing social categories in which both 'blood' and 'culture' are assigned a defining role. In a 'we-they' dynamic, each person accepts his/her assignment to a communal category which in turn establishes individual and collective identity separate from those of other similar groupings. From this, a society of ethno-

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<sup>10</sup> R. Smith, "Race, Class, and Political Conflict in a Post-Colonial Society," in *Small States and Segmented Societies* edited by S.G. Neumann (New York: Praeger, 1976), p. 205.

cultural compartments has emerged with various forms of intercommunal antagonisms of which the African-Indian dichotomy dominates all dimensions of daily life.<sup>11</sup>

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**TABLE 1**

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**Ethnic Distribution of the Guyanese Population**

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Ethnic Group	Percent of Total
Indians	51.4
Africans	30.5
Mixed Races	11.0
Portuguese & Europeans	1.2
Chinese	0.2
Amerindians	5.3

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Source: Ministry of Information, 1980 Census

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

The Dutch were the first European settlers; they established plantation production of coffee, cotton, and sugar. Importation of Africans, East Indians, Portuguese, Chinese, and 'poor Whites' into Guyana resulted from the nature of the plantation system which required massive amounts of cheap labor. In the Caribbean, including Guyana, the establishment of plantations witnessed the introduction of massive numbers of African slaves, after earlier experiments with the Amerindians and 'Poor Whites.' The British took control of the colony from the Dutch in 1803. In 1807 the British slave trade with Africa was halted and in 1833 slavery was abolished.

Few Africans returned to the sugar plantations, for their place was taken gradually by the arrival of indentured laborers. Over the years, government activities in urban centers proliferated to cope with the administrative complexity of postemancipation Guyana, however. Employment in urban centers attracted many Africans who, at this time, were the non-Europeans group most

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<sup>11</sup> Ralph Premdas, *Ethnicity and Development: The Case of Guyana* (Geneva: UNRISD, 1991).

capable of filling the government vacancies. Migration to the cities proceeded apace so that the African population as a percentage of urban dwellers became a majority. Paralleling their concentration in urban centers, Africans increasingly provided the staff for government service. Leo Despres observed that "by 1950, the Africans dominated every department of the Civil Service."<sup>12</sup> In 1960 some 73.5 percent of the Security Forces, 53.05 percent of the Civil Service, 62.29 percent of the Government Agencies and Undertakings, and 58.87 percent of teachers in primary education were Africans.<sup>13</sup> The ascendancy of Africans to positions of dominance in the Guyanese governmental bureaucracy was due substantially to their adoption of British cultural patterns. Centuries of close contact with Europeans, urban dwellings, ready attendance at British schools, all contributed to make this possible.

Labor shortages following emancipation of the Africans explain the addition after 1833 of Chinese, Portuguese, and Indians (from the Indian subcontinent, including Hindus and some Muslims) to the already existing ethnic groups in Guyana. The anticipated dearth of labor after the freeing of the slaves prompted the planters to seek new sources of manpower. Once again the Old World was tapped. Between 1835 and 1840 experiments were made with small batches of German, Portuguese, Irish, English, Indian, and Maltese laborers.<sup>14</sup> During 1853 Chinese were tried. In the end, Asian Indians proved most adaptable, economical, and available, although Chinese and Portuguese immigrants trickled in for over half a century. Nearly all the Indians, Portuguese, and Chinese who were imported to replace African slaves came under contract indentures which required their labor for a five-year period.

The first batch of Indians (396) arrived in the colony during May 1838. With the exception of a brief interruption in the early 1840s, Indian immigration continued at the average pace of two or three shiploads annually until the indentureship system was abolished in 1917. Between 1838 and 1917, approximately 238,960 Indian indentured laborers arrived in Guyana.<sup>15</sup> An additional 707 Indians were imported as free settlers between 1917 and 1926. At the expiration of their indentures, nearly two-thirds of the colony's Indian population opted to remain as permanent residents. Indians who remained in Guyana at first continued some sort of association with the sugar plantations. Many acquired farm land contiguous to the estates in exchange for giving up their contractual right to return to India. Gradually, however, many Indians moved away from the sugar estates, first sharing their labor between their farm plots and the plantation, then turning

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<sup>12</sup> L. Despres, *Nationalist Politics and Cultural Pluralism in British Guiana* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1966), p. 52.

<sup>13</sup> *Report of the British Guiana Commission of Inquiry into Racial Problems in the Public Service* (Geneva: International Commission of Jurists, 1965), p. 33.

<sup>14</sup> R. Smith, *British Guiana* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1962), pp. 43–44.

<sup>15</sup> D. Nath, *A History of Indians in British Guiana* (London: Nelson and Sons, 1950), pp. 179–80.

completely to peasant farming, often on lands separate from the plantations. A series of Indian villages sprang up, mainly within a radius of ten to fifteen miles of plantation lands. By 1911 the gradual but steady movement of Indians away from the plantations resulted in less than half of them remaining on the sugar estates. In the 1960s, 25.5 percent of the Indian population was on the sugar plantations, 13.4 percent in urban centers, with the remaining 61.1 percent found in villages. Guyana's Indians are still therefore predominantly rural dwellers, living mainly in Indian villages and on land adjacent to the sugar plantations.

Indians, known for their thrift, invested their savings in small businesses and in the education of their children. Increasingly after World War I they began to compete for places in the civil service and the teaching profession, but prior to World War II Indian participation in government bureaucracies was negligible. By 1964, when Indians constituted slightly over half the country's population, their social, political, and economic condition had improved so dramatically that they constituted 33.16 percent of the Civil Service, 27.17 percent of government agencies and undertakings, and 41.49 percent of teaches in primary education. The involvement of many Indians in government bureaucracies suggests that they had assimilated at least some British values and become partly 'creolised.' But this should not distract attention from the persistence of a subculture of Indian norms that set them apart in significant ways from their non-Indian compatriots. Most Indians worship in Hindu temples and Muslim mosques, marry according to Hindu and Muslim rites, celebrate Hindu and Muslim festivals, and practice their respective religious rituals. Indians not only regard themselves as a separate community in Guyana but are perceived by other Guyanese as a distinct entity.

Portuguese also were imported as indentured laborers to serve on plantations. Between 1834 and 1890, the period of Portuguese immigration, over 32,000 Portuguese from Madeira arrived in Guyana. Some Portuguese returned home with savings after serving their indentures, but most stayed in the colony. Those who remained immediately abandoned the estates and entered the retail trades, pawn-broking, the professions, and big business. The Portuguese immigrant came to Guyana with a culture different from the prevailing white one. Although he/she was white, his/her alien ways, Catholic religion, indentured condition, and subsequent petty shop-keeping activities denied him/her the high status that most other Europeans were accorded.

Chinese were the last of the indentured laborers brought to Guyana. The first Chinese immigrants landed in 1853; by 1880 a total of only 13,533 had arrived.<sup>16</sup> The Chinese did not choose to stay with agriculture; most entered the petty retail business as shop-keepers. By 1960 about 72.2 percent of them had moved to urban centers where they engaged mainly in the

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<sup>16</sup> M. Fried, "Some Observations on the Chinese in British Guiana," *Social and Economic Studies*, Vol. 15, March, 1956.

restaurant, laundry, and supermarket businesses. A number were also found in the professions and government bureaucracies. Culturally, most Chinese in Guyana speak English, wear Western clothes, and are losing their Chinese names. Although their numbers were replenished in recent years by immigrants from Mainland China, their living patterns and economic activities appear comparable to urban Guyanese of similar socioeconomic status.

Finally, there are the 'Coloreds,' a mixed category mainly the product of European-African miscegenation, although mixes of any light skinned group with persons of African descent could produce a person of 'color.' Unlike in the United States, in Guyana Coloreds are not considered Negroes but are perceived and treated as a separate group. Their relatively light skin has placed them in an intermediate position in the social status system, provided them with greater educational opportunities, and generally accorded them intermediate white-collar and administrative jobs. The very light skinned Colored is likely to occupy a position of greater responsibility and pay than a Colored of medium light pigmentation. Most Coloreds are privileged, English-speaking, and enjoy middle- to upper-middle-class socioeconomic status. Coloreds act and behave as a separate group, although many still identify with the Europeans in economic and political matters. Coloreds constitute about 11 percent of the total population, live mainly in urban centers, and are dispersed occupationally in the Civil Service, the professions, and business.

Thus, then, would a multi-ethnic plural society be formed consisting of East Indians, Africans, Amerindians, Coloreds, Portuguese, Europeans, and Chinese. (Table I gives the ethnic distribution of the population). Slavery and indenture were the twin bases on which successful colonization of the climatically harsh tropical coasts occurred. A work force of culturally divergent immigrants was recruited to labor on plantations in the New World. The different patterns of residence, occupation, and political orientations of the imported groups reinforced the original differences of the settlers, laying from the inception of colonization the foundations of Guyana's multi-ethnic politics.

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

## **2: The Structuring of Communal Identities**

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

The twentieth century would witness the unleashing of new forces that would erode and eliminate the seemingly permanently set colonial structures of dominance in Guyana. A multi-ethnic independence movement called the People's Progressive Party (PPP) was formed under the leadership of two charismatic sectional leaders, one an African (Forbes Burnham) and the other an Indian (Cheddi Jagan). They successfully won the first elections but almost immediately after victory engaged in a rivalry over sole leadership of the PPP. In the end, this led to a fatal split in the independence movement along ethnic lines. The two leaders parted company, formed their own parties, and thereafter Guyana was transposed into a territory riven by deep and destructive ethnic and racial politics. The moment of opportunity to build a new basis of intergroup relations and a new society was lost when the two sectional leaders parted company, formed their own parties, and pursued their own ambitions for personal acclaim and power. A new type of party emerged, constructed of the discrete ethnic fragments into which the old unified party had broken. Mass politics invited rival mass organizations to capitalize on ethnic loyalties for votes. The new parties in Guyana were encouraged to design vote-getting campaign strategies aimed at capturing a government and vanquishing an opponent in a war of all against all. To win is to conquer; to lose is to die. Ethnic conflicts that are organized and acted out in an arena of partisan competition bound by zero-sum rules of rivalry tend to exacerbate the underlying deep divisions of the society. Party organization and electoral competition together consign an

ethnically multilayered polity to a route of self-destruction. It seems that once the moment of reconciliation is lost, the ethnic monster is unleashed in the theater of mass politics, wreaking uncontrolled havoc and negating all efforts at development. The fateful fall into the spiral of intensifying ethnic politics will also be hastened by the role of voluntary associations after the 1955 leadership split of the independence movement. Thereafter the relationship between political parties and voluntary associations accentuated the continued ethnic bifurcation in the Guyanese cultural system. All major economic and cultural intermediate associations became affiliated directly or indirectly with one or another of the political parties in Guyana. The rigidity of this close affiliation was underlined by the consistent similarity of policy positions on issues of public concern between particular parties and specific interest groups. To a substantial extent this was inevitable, since historically each section gravitated to and developed around a particular occupation. The large economic organizations such as trade unions and the more important cultural groups such as religious associations are identified today by the public as belonging to the 'blackman,' the 'Coolie,' or the 'Potagee.' From 1955 onwards, the period that coincides with the Jagan-Burnham split, the parties succeeded in capturing all the major voluntary organizations in Guyana.

The spiral of intensifying ethnic conflict—slowly but inexorably exacerbated by the way the political parties organized the lives of their constituents, the manner in which election campaigns were waged, and the method by which voluntary associations were enlisted in the struggle for communal ascendancy—led almost inevitably to cataclysmic inter-ethnic confrontation and civil war. Between 1961 and 1965, the screws of communal conflict were slowly tightened so that few persons could escape being co-opted participants in a system of mutual communal hate. In particular, inter-ethnic relations between Africans and Indians were increasingly marked by covert contempt and deceptive distrust. The elements of an impending explosion were registered first in Africans' fear of ethnic domination by Indians and vice versa. A new drama was unfolding in which the main motif was a struggle for ethnic ascendancy compounded by a politically instigated terror of internal communal colonization. While inter-ethnic interaction still carried on in the familiar routine of daily life, the same persons in the privacy of their homes and communities enacted a script of racist and communal antipathy, drawing every day perilously close to open conflagration. In public, the political drums continued surreptitiously to beat on the theme of ethnic claims and exclusivity; in public interaction each side had contrived a set of secret intracommunal symbols, idioms, and nuanced expressions to silently communicate group solidarity erected on an understanding of collective contempt for the other side. Dual roles and schizophrenic personalities dwelt simultaneously in an ethnically split society. Forced to live together by the designs of a colonial conqueror, the sectional elements possessed no experience of intercommunal accommodation. Once introduced, mass politics was betrayed by

sectional leaders jockeying for power. A moment of opportunity for reconciliation and reconstruction was squandered and the innocence of legitimate inter-ethnic suspicion was nurtured into a monster obsessed with the fear of communal dominance. One cleavage after another that separated the ethnic segments—race, traditional values, religion, residence, and occupation—was reinforced by a mode of modern mass ethnonationalist politics that drove the society to the brink of self-destruction.

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

The PNC reconstituted the Electoral Commission, staffing it with its own sympathizers and changing the procedures of administering the elections.<sup>17</sup> In 1968, in what would be established incontrovertibly as rigged elections involving tens of thousands of fictitious votes, an astounded UF and PPP witnessed a PNC 'victory' at the polls. We refer to the 1968 elections as 'a seizure of power.' From the mid-1968 onwards Burnham would preside over a minority government kept in office by repeated electoral fraud and a politicized and ethnically sanitized army and police. Needless to point out, democracy was now dead; its crucial vehicle of representation through fair elections had been tampered with. Legitimacy was lost; the state's coercive machinery was the main guardian of the illegal PNC regime. A minority party seized power.

The 'seizure of power' in 1968 was a watershed in ethnic relations in Guyana. In a multi-ethnic society the PNC, representing a minority group (32 percent), grabbed the government. To avert internal disruption, the PNC government embarked on purging its critical power base—the coercive forces and the civil service—of most of its non-African elements. Many of those communal malcontents who did not strike and demonstrate migrated to Europe and North America, especially the Europeans, Chinese, and Portuguese. The massive migration of this group from Guyana left a society predominantly polarized between Africans and Indians. Towards the end of 1969, then, the PNC regime proclaimed a socialist framework for Guyana's

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<sup>17</sup> "Have Guyana's Elections Already Been Decided?" *Sunday Times* (London), 15 December 1968, p. 1.



reconstruction. In 1970 Guyana was declared a 'Cooperative Republic.' Instead of private enterprise, the economy was to be founded on cooperatives as the main instrument of production, distribution, and consumption. But crises continued to bedevil the regime. The government ran the gauntlet of high unemployment (30 percent), underemployment (36-40 percent), double-digit inflation, demonstrations, boycotts, strikes, and later on, as a result of the Arab-Israeli war, prohibitive fuel costs. A vicious circle of poverty was created by a pattern of polarized and unstable ethnic politics beneath the salve of socialist rhetoric and programmatic justifications.

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

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

## II. Fiji

### 1. The Making of a Multi-Ethnic Mosaic

Communal relations in Fiji are marked by pervasive malaise. Expressions of mutual contempt by Fijians and Indians are restrained but periodically spill over into public discourse. Practically no one in Fiji's multi-ethnic social setting is free from the corrosive ravages of the inter-ethnic stereotyping that attends cross-cultural interaction. Paradoxically, no one disagrees about the harm that the atmosphere of tension creates for intercommunity cooperation. But the same person who openly condemns the prejudices displayed in routine intercommunal exchanges proceeds in the privacy of his or her own home and community to participate in its enactment. Hypocritical professions of concern for one's cross-communal compatriot are as endemic in the system as racism itself. It is a deadly game of serious self-deception. More than once in recent years, collective ethnic violence threatened to spill over into the public arena and envelope the entire fragile system in conflagration. The fear that one day all restraints would be removed in a confrontation has haunted communal leaders even though they were weak-willed in forging a formula for peaceful coexistence. It finally happened in May 1987 when the Fiji military forces executed a coup d'état, the first in Fiji's history, which removed the duly elected government of Dr. Timoci Bavadra. Widespread ethnic violence followed. Lt. Colonel Sitiveni Rabuka, the architect of the coup d'état, cried "Fiji for Fijians" in removing the predominantly Indian-backed Labor Federation Party from power.

Politics in Fiji have a built-in potential for recurrent instability, stimulated in part by its ethnically plural sociocultural structure (see Table 2). Two groups, indigenous Fijians and Indians, constitute over 94 percent of the total population. They live side by side but each is hostile to the other. They do not share basic cultural institutions and neither is economically independent. Their economic resources are different but complementary, rendering economic exchange necessary. Until independence was granted in October 1970, the two cultural sections were kept together in outward harmony by the colonial government which served as an 'umpire.' Since independence, they have engaged in deeply divisive disputes concerned with the issue of ethnic domination.

Fiji is an archipelago of some 844 islands lying at the center of the South Pacific. Fiji was colonized on 10 October 1874 under a Deed of Cession that bound Britain to preserve the Fijian way of life. To halt the steady decline of Fijian customs, three policies were initiated that laid the cornerstone of communalism. First, all land that was not yet alienated to Europeans, consisting of nearly 90 percent of the country, was to remain under Fijian ownership. This policy curtailed economic development of the islands because growth depended on the availability of Fijian land

TABLE 2

## Ethnic Distribution of the Fijian Population – 1987

Ethnic Group	Percent of Total	Numbers
Fijian	46	322,920
Indian	48	336,960
European	01	7,020
Part-European	02	14,040
Chinese and Part-Chinese	01	7,020
Other Pacific Islanders	02	14,040
Total	100	545,205

Source: *Pacific Island Economies*, Vol. II, *Country Surveys*, World Bank: Washington, DC, 1991, p.20

for commercial exploitation. Land, then, became an issue. The second policy was the importation of labor to substitute for Fijians as a means of protecting the Fijian way of life. This policy meant that Fiji required an alternative source of labor which was recruited from India. From 1879 when a labor indentureship was inaugurated to 1916 when it was terminated, about 60,537 Indians were introduced into Fiji.<sup>18</sup> The final policy was the establishment of a separate Native Fijian Administration through which the British governed the Fijians indirectly. While this policy substantially preserved the traditional Fijian culture by virtually establishing a state within a state, it so protected the Fijian that he/she would be almost wholly unprepared to compete with the Europeans and Indians once his/her circle of interaction had enlarged beyond the village. The upshot was the institutionalization of Fijian economic inferiority. By the mid-1980s, some 40 percent of the Fijians still subsisted mainly from villages. Fijians who no longer rely on their villages for their income are employed mainly by the government. Fijians regard the government bureaucracy as their pre-eminent domain much as many Indians regard the commercial and sugar sectors. Fijian penetration of the business sector has been generally unsuccessful.<sup>19</sup>

Most Indian immigrants to Fiji came as indentured laborers. By the end of World War II, some 80 percent of cane farmers were Indians. However, most of the lands are leased from Fijians, rendering what would normally be a powerful political base into a tinderbox of communal conflict. Sugar is the most significant crop in the economy, providing more than half of Fiji's

<sup>18</sup> A. Ali, "The Indians of Fiji," *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 8, No. 36, 1973, p. 1655.

<sup>19</sup> R.F. Watters, *Koro: Economic Development and Social Change in Fiji* (London: Clarendon Press, 1969), pp. 1–48.

foreign reserves. About 3 to 6 percent of the Indians, mainly Gujaratis, came as free settlers. They established businesses but were later joined by other Indians who left the sugar fields to start small stores and trade shops. In contemporary Fiji, most small and intermediate-sized commercial operations are in Indian hands. In the professions—law, medicine, engineering, etc.—Indian incursion into traditional European areas also became significant. Many Indians and Fijians have moved to urban areas such as Suva and Lautoka. As in the rural areas where Indians and Fijians live apart (Fijians live in small concentrated nucleated villages while Indian farming units are dispersed on sprawling leased *matagali* land), in the towns such as Suva ethnic residential self-selectivity occurs, thereby rendering city wards predominantly Fijian or Indian. Census reports revealed that in four-fifths of the enumerated areas on the two main islands, 70 percent were either predominantly Indian or Fijian. Cultural features also separate the two major communities. While English is the cross-communal lingua franca, Indians speak Hindustani among themselves and Fijians their indigenous languages. The radio stations carry separate programs in Hindustani and Fijian, and until recently the educational institutions were segregated. Finally, most voluntary social and economic organizations such as sports clubs and trade unions are predominantly uni-ethnic. Inter-marriage between Fijians and Indians is practically nonexistent. Europeans, although numerically insignificant, have dominated the direction of the colony. Consequently, Europeans are overrepresented as managers, supervisors, professional, and skilled workers generally. Many big businesses remain in the hands of Europeans and European-owned companies. Apart from indigenous Fijians and Indians, the remaining population categories are the Chinese, Mixed Races, and other Pacific Islanders. The Chinese are mainly small businessmen and skilled professional workers. The other Pacific Islanders are mainly Rotumans who belong to the adjacent island, Rotuma, which is part of Fiji's territory, and Solomon Islanders and other nearby island groups who were originally recruited to serve on European plantations.

How did the ethnic elements regulate their lives? To answer this question, a number of issue areas will be examined in detail to see how the contest for resources and policy favors was conducted among the ethnic elements in Fiji. To understand how ethnic claims to privileges and power are legitimated, it is crucial to look at the concept of balance. Not a written constitutional law, the idea of balance had been embedded in Fiji's multiracial politics by practice whereby sectoral pre-eminence is distributed as follows: 1) The Fijians controlled the government, in particular, the Prime Minister's office. They also owned 83 percent of all the land. 2) The Indians dominated the sugar industry and intermediate-sized businesses. And 3) the Europeans owned the very large businesses, such as banks, hotels, factories, etc. This distributive sectoral 'balance' was not a rigid formula for the sharing of power in all its detail. Room existed for one ethnic group to penetrate and participate in another group's domain. For instance, the Alliance Government (1970–87) used subsidies to encourage the entry of Fijians into businesses, while the Prime

Minister, a Fijian, deliberately appointed several Indians to his Cabinet. Fijians leased their land to Indians and others. In the end, this limited 'mix' had moderated the sharp edges and virtual monopoly rights of the 'balancing' concept. At various times in recent Fiji history, the balance was in danger of being upset, leading to efforts to rectify the disequilibrium. For example, when Indian population growth threatened to overwhelm the demographic balance, the government informally initiated two effective policies to offset it: 1) a vigorous birth control and family planning program more oriented to the Indian than the Fijian population, and 2) a policy enabling Indians to emigrate from Fiji taking their assets with them.

'Balance' assumed asymmetrical areas of dominance and sustained equality by requiring reciprocity. Such exchanges were, however, not imposed by sentiments of love for another community but were informed by self-interest. Each group needed the resources of the other group to survive and maintain its standard of living. Each group was its brother's keeper in a mundane, practical, self-interested sense. It was no more in the interest of the Fijians to deny Indians access to land than for Indians not to pay taxes to the Fijian-dominated government. 'Balance' had been an evolving act constantly needing nurture from intercommunal consultation and cooperation. It was not a rigid or written agreement but a dynamic concept that required revisions and adaptations informed by contemplation of changes in society. However, 'balance' could only be a short-term solution for intercommunal conflict and its sustenance depended upon amicable relations among intersectional elites. The balancing act was bound to face assault sooner or later by chauvinistic outbidders who, at a moment of opportunity, wanted to instigate nationalist adherents to stop accepting part of the pie and to seize all of it. 'Balance' in such a situation would be displaced by 'hegemony' and all the consequences this entailed, or the assault could trigger civil strife that destroyed the society. In the face of rapid social change, 'balance' was not easily applied to new areas of activities. Cross-communal coalitions could emerge to challenge the balancing concept, or technological breakthroughs could bestow overwhelming benefits on one ethnic group leaving others behind.

## **2. Triggering Issues: Representation, Land, and Jobs**

In the making of Fiji's multi-ethnic mosaic, several perennial problems were thrown up, bedeviling relations between Fijians and Indians. In particular, communal conflict evolved around issues of 1) representation, as the British colonial authorities introduced popular participation in collective decision-making; 2) insecurities over the ownership and leasing of land; and 3) the distribution of public service jobs and budgetary allocations for development projects. In this section, I examine these issues, showing why they evolved into the incendiary materials that ignited communal conflict between Fijians and Indians. I shall also show how this was resolved in

the independence constitution of 1970. Underlying the issues was a fierce but subdued contest between Fijians and Indians for the protection of their communal interests. Frequently, this struggle assumed the form of a threat of ethnic domination. Fijians propounded a doctrine of paramountcy to safeguard their interests. Indians sought a system of equality under which they could obtain fair access to the values of the society. The struggle was often cast in zero-sum terms so that the ethnic strife that was triggered seemed intractable. At various times, an informal balancing accord in the distribution of communal claims was struck. At other times, intercommunal understandings were challenged and ethnic conflict loomed large and imminent.

### **a. Representation and the Demand for Fijian Political Paramountcy**

To understand this issue it is necessary return to 1874 when Fiji was annexed by Britain. Fijians read into the Deed of Cession a claim of 'paramountcy.' The word itself is not mentioned in the Deed, but repeatedly invoked, 'paramountcy' evolved into a mystical doctrine of Fijian supremacy. In the twentieth century, it was asserted as a counterclaim to the perceived threat of Indian domination. It has since retained this particularistic ethnicized connotation.

In the 1960s when universal suffrage was introduced, a full-blown party system came into existence consisting of two major parties, the National Federation Party (NFP), supported predominantly by Indians, and the Alliance Party, supported mainly by Fijians but also including Europeans, Chinese, and others. Essentially, as self-government approached, the contest for power shifted to a bipolar Indian versus Fijian confrontation. How the new emergent local leaders reconciled Indian claims for common roll against the 'paramount' rights of the Fijians had to be ironed out through the political process of bargaining and compromise. Between August 1969 and March 1970, the representatives of the NFP and Alliance met to work out a constitutional solution for Fiji. On the system of representation, the Alliance accepted the common roll as a long-term objective but in the meanwhile communal and cross-communal voting continued.

Parity of representation was accorded the Fijians and Indian communities, while the European, part-European, and Chinese sectors referred to as 'General Electors,' although constituting only 3.5 percent of the population, continued to be overrepresented with 15.4 percent of the seats. On paramount rights for Fijians, the NFP conceded that additional 'weightage' should be allocated to Fijian interests. The device through which this was to be implemented was a second chamber, a Senate.

The power of the Senate resided not only in the representation of superior numbers of Fijians but in the amending procedure that entrenched Fijian land and custom. This it did by requiring a two-thirds majority in each chamber for altering the constitution. Here it must be noted that the Fijian Great Council of Chiefs had 8 out of 22 seats in the Senate, that is, more than a third of the seats and was thus capable of blocking any constitutional change to which it did not

consent. On the issue of citizenship, the Indian negotiators successfully won acceptance of full Indian citizenship. To underscore that this citizenship implied equality and freedom from discrimination, a Bill of Rights was agreed upon to prohibit discrimination on “grounds of race, place of origin, political opinions, color or creed.” In exchange, it was agreed 1) that after independence Fiji would retain dominion status within the Commonwealth; and 2) that there be a definite reference to the Deed of Cession in the constitution so that “if there was a threat to their position through constitutional changes, they [the Fijians] would invoke the Deed.”

### **b. The Safeguarding of Fijian Land**

The land issue is perhaps the most significant triggering point of Fijian-Indian conflict. Fijians own most of the country’s land under a system of traditional communal tenure which prohibits private individual alienation to non-Fijians. In a modern cash economy dominated by Europeans and Indians, land constitutes the Fijians’ most powerful pillar of political bargaining. Being mainly farmers and since alternative avenues of employment are limited, Indians view land as the indispensable means for their survival. Since they own very little of it, however, they require predictable access to land use. The struggle, then, between Fijian owners and Indian lessees is cast in terms of vital needs over a very limited resource, generating unusual emotional intensity around the issue.

The freezing of the tenure pattern has bequeathed a legacy of wide disparities in land ownership.<sup>20</sup> Fijians, who constitute about 47 percent of the population, retain ownership over 83.8 percent; less than 10 percent of this is cultivable. Europeans, who constitute about 1 percent of the population, own in freehold 5.5 percent of prime commercial land. Indians, about 48 percent of the population, own only 1.7 percent. The overwhelming majority of Indians are tenants and sub-tenants who depend on Fijians for leased land. About 62 percent of the leases issued by Fijians are held by Indians. Indians utilize the land mainly for sugar farming; about 80 percent of the sugar farmers are Indians who continue to demand more land.

### **c. Competition for Jobs in the Public Services**

Employment, especially in the public sector, emerged as a arena in which competitive claims for ethnic shares attained a special intensity. While the two areas, representation and land, were bound by colonial precedent and yielded to formal compromises, jobs from the modern commercial sector and from the public bureaucracy, both spheres expanding significantly in the post–World War II period, were left widely open for competition among the ethnic communities. The civil service, the professions, and private business represented the modern monetary

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<sup>20</sup> O.K.H. Spate, *The Fijian People* (Suva: Legislative Council Paper 13, 1959).

sectors in Fiji. Successful quests for these positions by Fijians and Indians conferred status not only to individuals but also to their respective communities. The public service, including the education service, became the largest single source of employment in Fiji. Until independence the highest posts were occupied by European personnel. To gain access the nonwhite population needed European education and training. Under the Education Ordinances of 1916, schools were ethnically segregated with European schools better equipped and staffed. Because of their lack of land and insecure leases, Indians compensated by spending heavily on upgrading their schools. Indian expenditures in education were reflected after World War II in the steady incremental displacement of many Europeans in position that required skills. Fijian educational achievement was retarded by comparison, in part because of their rural isolation and teacher shortages. By Independence in 1970, large numbers of Indians and Fijians were attending elementary and secondary schools, but Indians predominated. Fijian students suffered a greater rate of attrition also as they moved to high grades in school. It was almost inevitable, then, given the trend in Indian education, that most university positions went to Indians.

As the public bureaucracy expanded in a scheme where merit determined appointments, Indians pressed for positions. But the concept of balance entered into the picture. After independence, a Fijian-dominated government decided to offset Indian preponderance in the private business sector by higher Fijian employment in the public bureaucracy.<sup>21</sup> Fijians slightly outnumbered Indians in the civil service and police force. In the armed forces, Fijian over-representation was almost complete.

### **3. Erosion of the Balance and a Government of National Unity**

The 1970 constitution embodied a set of delicate compromises by the main communal interests in Fiji's multi-ethnic society.

However, the honeymoon that followed did not last long. Soon a basic challenge to the entire constitutional process emerged, and while it would be deftly if temporarily suppressed, it laid the foundation for a more powerful movement for a revision, indeed, a rejection of the entire inter-ethnic accord written in the constitution. This came from the newly organized Fijian Nationalist Party, led by Sakiasi Butadroka, which took aim at all of the major concessions constitutionally given to the Indian section, even challenging the very continued presence of Indians in Fiji.<sup>22</sup> But equally significantly, it caused the Alliance's moderate multicultural posture to

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<sup>21</sup> R.S. Milne, *Politics in Ethnically Bipolar States* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1982), p. 182.

<sup>22</sup> See Ralph R. Premdas, "Constitutional Challenge and Nationalist Politics in Fiji," *Pacific Perspective*, Vol. 9, No. 2, 1980.



change. The motto "Fiji is for Fijians" became the platform of Butadroka's new party. Moderate party leaders who attempt to maintain ethnic harmony are always threatened by 'outbidders' such as Butadroka, who seek to assert chauvinist claims to the entire national pie. However, the success of an outbidder partly derives in part from the existence of legitimate complaints.

Disparities in living standards between the races in Fiji constitute the objective basis of Fijian discontent. The rural Fijian with a highly urban-stimulated expectation level lacks the economic means to satisfy at least some of those needs. By contrast the typical Indian family, more disciplined by insecurity, has more cash to save and spend. Over the years, these difference in work habits accumulate so that one communal section conspicuously appears materially better off than the other.

Elections were bitterly fought and exacerbated ethnic relations between Fijians and Indians. In the 1983 elections when the NFP came close to winning over the Alliance, the Great Council of Chiefs threatened that "blood will flow" if Indians persisted in their quest for political power. The 1986 elections would actually bring things to a test. Whereas in March–April 1977 and in the 1983 elections NFP victory was barely within reach, in the 1987 elections the NFP objective would actually be attained. What is significant for us is that the failure of the Alliance government to accede to electoral reform so as to satisfy Indian demands for electoral equity led in part to a zero-sum struggle to win control over the government. While Fijians thought doctrine of political paramountcy legitimized future claims to govern in perpetuity, to Indians and other aggrieved Fiji citizens, the electoral mechanism had to be altered to force the Alliance out of power. In elections, a life and death outcome was now attached. Towards the end of the 1970s, the effects of outbidder sniping had their desired results. Ratu Mara, the Prime Minister and leader of the Fijians, and Siddiq Koya, leader of the Indian opposition, had attacked each other bitterly to counter the 'sold out' charges against them. The rift between Mara and Koya grew and was never repaired. The comity factor that sustained the formal legal compromises in the constitution was destroyed. Like a set of falling dominoes, thereafter all cross-communal agreements were functionally nullified as open hostility marked intercommunal relations. To be sure, the 1970 constitution remained formally intact, but it lacked the legitimacy and vibrancy that came from intercommunal support, especially among the leadership elite whose behavior structured Fijian-Indian mass relations.

The main premise of our argument is that by the mid-1980s, the stage leading up to the first military intervention, the set of deals and compromises that the constitutional makers struck in 1970 had been eroded so thoroughly that only a bare constitutional skeleton devoid of its spirit continued to exist. Comity between the Fijian and Indian political elites had been destroyed. Balance in the distribution of power and privileges was superseded by a fierce zero-sum struggle

for dominance of the state. The military intervention of 1987 merely made formal a constitutional funeral that was long overdue.

### **III. Ethnicity and Development**

#### **1. The Political Dimension**

Having examined the course that ethnic conflict has taken in Guyana and Fiji, it is now our task to evaluate the impact that persistent communal strife has had on the development of the state and its citizens. The concept of development must first be defined in relation to the environment of cultural pluralism. In the Third World, the condition of multi-ethnicity is an embedded dimension that must be incorporated into any explication of the development idea. The Guyana and Fiji cases demonstrate that all designs for economic and political development are ultimately entwined in the communal interests and claims of citizens who tend to measure a proposal for amelioration primarily from the perspective of its communal connotations. Individual interests are consciously or unconsciously subsumed under the wider umbrella of collective communal claims. In essence, this implies that planned change is made doubly difficult by the presence of the pervasive ethnic factor rendering all ordinary political and economic calculations more complex, if not more irrational and intractable. Put differently, development plans and strategies must be designed in contemplation of the interests of communal constituencies, regardless of whether such claims tend to increase costs, protract solutions, and involve 'irrational and wasteful' allocation of scarce resources. In the multi-ethnic states, policies that win legitimacy and stand a chance of implementation engage and incorporate divergent communal claims. Policies are perceived and appraised through the ethnic prism. Nearly all available theories of development take little cognizance of the ethos of ethnicity in the typical Third World environment, often relegating it to the scrap heap as an aberrant nuisance that will in time dissolve and disappear.

From our perspective, a number of issues and aims of political development are identified as significant. It is these that we shall utilize for our own analyses, giving them particular interpretations in the context of Guyana's and Fiji's multi-ethnic environment. The inter-related categories and criteria pertain to legitimacy, unity, order, minority and human rights, as well as to institutions and various mechanisms of ethnic conflict resolution.

#### **a. The Political Implications of Ethnic Conflict in Guyana and Fiji**

The political costs of the ethnic conflict in Guyana and Fiji have included the loss of regime legitimacy, the crippling of democracy, infringement of human rights, the fracturing of the

societies into polarized parts, and chronic instability. Ethnic consciousness has pervaded all political institutions—parties, voluntary associations, the electoral system, parliament, the civil service, the judiciary, the diplomatic services, and the army and police. Ethnic hate has dominated political life and slowly extended its tentacles to all institutions, dividing one citizen from another.

The first political difficulty that a multi-ethnic state such as Fiji or Guyana experiences in its effort aimed at development pertains to regime legitimacy. In turn, this idea is locked into and located at the very founding of the state. In their ethno-genesis, communalism cleaved the soul of both these states and almost preordained a future fraught with issues of legitimacy. Democratic governments are erected on the intangible factor of moral consent. The term 'legitimacy' embodies this idea; it simply suggests that governments derive their right to rule and can expect citizen compliance and cooperation when, and only when, the accepted rules of establishing and administering government are followed. Legitimacy refers then not only to propriety in the acquisition of power but also to the practices of administering the state consonant with prevailing procedures and concepts of equity. Clearly, legitimacy is wrapped in the cultural and moral values of the society. In Guyana and Fiji the colonial system of government lacked all these legitimizing norms from the outset.

As a phenomenon locked into the cultural system of society, legitimacy is easily established in those polities that are undergirded and integrated by a body of shared institutions and customs. But this does not necessarily mean that legitimacy cannot be established without value consensus. These unifying values facilitate, not guarantee, consent and acceptance of a government and its right to rule. It is quite conceivable that in a state with a diversity of cultural systems, legitimacy can be forged through a commonly agreed upon political regime. In such culturally fragmented situations it is more difficult to establish legitimate governments, but not impossible. If the cultural cleavages are constrained by systems of intercommunal cooperation at the level of the polity, then a stable and legitimate political order can be enthroned. If these culturally diverse states are permitted, on the other hand, to evolve so that they are marked by internal ethnically infused antagonistic relationships, then legitimacy is bound to be lost in the attempt to erect governmental order. All of this suggests that at the outset, it is necessary to address the way in which the colonial state implicates the ethnic issue in the formation of the state.

#### **b. Guyana: Ethnogenesis and the State**

Several policies of the state founded a society that was unintegrated and conflictual. Four main insights on the role of the state should be highlighted. First, the conquest of the territory was by force; this gave to those who ruled an order that did not seek consent for its legitimacy or survival. Second, the colonial state deliberately imported a multicommunal population and settled the groups in a manner that pitched each against the other. Third, the state anchored its routines

and stability on a color-based stratification system that ignored the interests of most of the population. Finally, the state was rendered into a dependent appendage of the European metropolitan centre for its survival and prosperity. In sum, the state utilized its monopoly of violence to bring into being a multi-ethnic society to promote the minority planter interests. The colonial authorities had no interest in establishing or encouraging cross-communal understandings or institutions. On the contrary, they deliberately instigated intersectional suspicion and fear as a mode of governing.

The single most salient factor that induces the condition of intercultural antagonism is pervasive ethnic consciousness in the state. Ethnic consciousness means at once group solidarity and intergroup antagonism and conflict. Ethnic consciousness is a relational phenomenon built on the premise of the presence of contenders for limited territory, privileges, power, etc. In itself, ethnic consciousness is not a divisive force. Once aroused, at an early stage it can nevertheless be diverted into peaceful intergroup routines and exchanges without seriously destroying the state. However, if it is actively encouraged and protracted without much restraint, such as occurs in zero-sum electoral systems in which communally organized mass parties compete for power and privileges, then ethnic consciousness tends to become a destructive monster. Fed and reinforced by fear of domination, ethnic group activities lose all objectivity and rationality. These propositions apply as much to Guyana and Fiji as to other multi-ethnic states.

In this regard, it is important to underscore the idea of 'predisposing' and 'triggering' factors and forces in the evolution of 'the ethnic state.' In order to understand why all of the factors that came into play at different points in the evolution of the communal conflict could be classified as 'triggering,' it is necessary to conceive of the problem cumulatively. At various times, a particular triggering factor deposited a layer of division which in turn provided the next step for the deposit of a new layer of forces to the accumulating crisis. At various points these accumulations could have been neutralized if not entirely reversed. It is for this reason that the idea of a trigger is suggested for each stage of the evolving crisis situation. The idea is that there was nothing automatic about the transition to the next stage. To be sure, it would appear that after a number of successive reinforcing deposits of divisive forces, a critical mass in momentum had been attained so that every issue became inflammable. The state was then in perpetual crisis, expressed in perennial ongoing tensions which periodically exploded into ethnic confrontation and violence. This was often quelled and a normal poise of peaceful tension resumed until it exploded again. Ethnic conflict in Guyana and Fiji, as elsewhere, seems to be underlaid with ongoing tensions which periodically explode into violence.

The theory advanced here, then, postulates that at an early stage, group consciousness can actually be restrained and made into a positive force of identity formation and group solidarity.

But if it is nurtured and systematically sustained by personal ambition, elite interests, and institutional practices, a momentum in its evolution then occurs, which spreads over a widening array of institutions, and a threshold of virtually uncontrollable intergroup mass behavior is reached. This 'critical mass' is what imparts its first political casualty on the legitimacy of the ruling regime. The spiral of deepening ethnic conflict is not always sustained in its momentum by internal group factors. In a number of cases, including Guyana, external actors with an agenda of their own may add fuel to the fire of ethnic strife.

In Guyana the polarization of the state into an ethnically bifurcated structure laid the foundation for the loss of regime legitimacy. When it had got to the stage that neither Indians nor Africans trusted each other, the enthronement of a government preponderantly based on one or the other communally based party invited immediate nonrecognition by the 'conquered' out group. In turn this led to acts of noncooperation and persistent challenges to the authority of the governing regime. In Guyana acts of noncooperation involved industrial strikes and mass communal demonstrations which destabilized the government. This happened in the case of both the Indian-based PPP and the African-based PNC. The fact that the economy was characterized by specialized parts, each dominated by a particular ethnic group, meant that each ethnic community could sabotage the entire production effort as well as the political order. The loss of legitimacy was followed, therefore, by endemic instability and violence. This required the ruling regime to recruit new police and coercive forces which created an environment in which systematic human rights infringement occurred. A major political cost of the modern post-World War II ethnic conflict in Guyana has been the erosion of national unity in the creation of a deeply divided bifurcated state. In a sense this divisive factor, laid at the outset of the founding of the Guyanese state, institutionalized ethnic strife that adversely affected all subsequent effort at development. Postcolonial politics perpetuated the fragmented ethnic structure of the state and made development doubly difficult.

### **c. Fiji: Ethnogenesis and the State**

Several policies of the state founded a society that was unintegrated and conflictual. First, the colonial state deliberately implanted a multicomunal population and settled the groups in a manner that pitched them against each other. Second, the state anchored its routines and stability around a communal system of representation that ignored the interests of most of the population. From the inception of the colonial state in Fiji, its operations were converted into an instrument in the service of alien planter and imperial interests. The state that was created was neither neutral nor representative. It became imbued with the priority accorded European and imperial interests and the stratification system that was implanted was plainly ethnocentric as well

as racist. It presided over an order that was unequal and unjust, but more significantly, it institutionalized practices that laid the cornerstone of communal conflict.

Finally, the state was rendered into a dependent appendage of the European metropolitan center for its survival and prosperity. In sum, the state utilized its monopoly of violence to enforce an economic, social, cultural and political order to promote the needs of the minority European interests. It would enthrone a capitalist state with the pre-eminence of Eurocentric values as the measure of achievement and rewards. All of this was achieved through a system of ethnic manipulation that pitched Fijians against Indians. The claims of Europeans to superordinate power could not be sustained over time; they were replaced by Fijian claims to political paramountcy but not by an arrangement that sought to reconcile Fijian, Indian, and European interests. To be sure, a 'balance' in the distribution of spheres of influence and rewards was informally put in place, but it was unable to withstand the challenge from outbidders.

With the promulgation of the new constitution in 1990, marked by discriminatory and inegalitarian features, the ethnic and communal conflict in Fiji became fully institutionalized. The new constitution, however, only marks a particular moment in the evolution of the ethnic strife. Throughout its evolutionary history, which culminated with the first military coup in 1987, the seeds of collective sectional conflict were planted in the very making of the multi-ethnic state. In the immediate postcoup period, the political costs of the ethnic conflict have proven to be extensive, including the loss of regime legitimacy, the destruction of democracy, pervasive human rights violations, and persistent instability. Many of these costs emerged as the multitiered ethnic fabric of the society was being established after the signing of the Deed of Cession in 1874, especially when this was followed by the mass importation of Indian indentured laborers. When an element of popular representation was first introduced in 1904, it was communally structured. Europeans as a collective group were assigned a disproportionately large number of the seats in the earliest colonial councils. The principles of collective communal representation served to increase the separation among Europeans, Fijians, and Indians. Fijians were not allowed to directly select their representatives and Indians were offered representation significantly below what their numbers warranted. This communal structure in colonial representative institutions not only divided the population but fostered intersectional fears. Fijians came to see Indians as a threat to their paramountcy in their own country. Indians viewed Europeans as usurpers who instigated Indian-Fijian rivalry and suspicion. Soon the entire society was communally compartmentalized and collective ethnic consciousness with its antagonistic propensities became pervasive.

#### **d. The Political Institutions and Practices of the State**

Essential to the analysis of Guyana and Fiji's communal strife is the role of political institutions and certain practices in the creation of an 'ethnic state.' As noted in the previous section, the multi-ethnic state in Guyana and Fiji, as in many parts of the Third World, was a colonial artifact. State and nation were not coterminous entities; rather, the colonial state deliberately wove an ethnically segmented social and cultural fabric. The role of the state in the establishment of certain structural conditions of communal conflict is therefore critical to an understanding of Guyana's and Fiji's difficulties. In looking at the state, attention is focused not only on the policies related to the formation of a multi-ethnic society but also on the political institutional apparatus through which state power is contested. Specifically, this refers to the competitive parliamentary system that was engrafted onto Guyana and Fiji as part of the state apparatus and that engaged parties in zero-sum struggles for power.

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

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

## **2. Resource Allocation**

Apart from the fact that the state in both cases was created and marked by a system of ethnic stratification from the outset and at independence lacked a consensus over its basic institutions, it was also in its totality the most well-equipped and best endowed apparatus in the society. In many ways, the state was larger than the society. Anyone who captured it could overwhelm the society, bringing it to the service of its own particular interests. Civil institutions were weak and fragmented and could not rival the state as a countervailing force. The colonial state in Guyana was constituted of a hierarchical ranking of ethnic groups with the European section occupying the dominant position. Through a color-class system of stratification, the skewed distribution of values and statuses was rationalized and regulated. As long as the Europeans retained their pre-eminent position, African-Indian rivalry was restrained. Besides, the separate ethnic compartments provided territorial zones and a buffer against direct rivalry. Inter-ethnic suspicion and fear, however, materialized from the moment of Indians' entry into the society and their subsequent migration from rural areas to towns for government jobs. Indians were cast in the role of late-comers who diluted the entitlement of the Africans. When Africans became acculturated to English ways and accepted Christianity and the English school system, this gave them prior and strategic entry into public service positions and many urban-based jobs in the private sector. Indian acquisition of English education came relatively late, only after Africans had already consolidated their hold on the lower-level echelon positions available to them in the public and teaching services. Indian-African conflict can therefore be explained by this competition over public jobs and public resource allocation generally.

As independence approached, it became evident that the European section would lose its preeminence. How Indians would relate to Africans became a source of anxiety. Already Indians had started to acquire westernized skills and education. Some had begun to claim jobs in the public and teaching services. Intimations of intersectional conflict were already appearing in



the immediate post–World War II period. Rivalry between middle-class Africans and Indians in particular reared its head at various points in the conflict.

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

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

The Fiji case bears striking resemblance to that of Guyana in regard to the issue of resource allocation. Apart from the fact that the state was created and marked by a system of ethnic stratification from the outset and at independence lacked a consensus over its basic institutions, it was also in its totality the repository of jobs, contracts, and other policy opportunities. Any communal party that captured it could overwhelm the others, bringing the state to the service of its own particular interests. This in fact occurred in Fiji with Indians claiming discrimination. The main rival political parties, each representing one or the other of the major ethnic groups, recognized the value of capturing the government in its entirety. State power was so overwhelmingly powerful, concentrated and centralized that it could be used as an instrument for promoting personal ambition as well as ethnic domination, even genocide. In the postcoup period, all of these features assumed reality.

The cultural pluralism, the absence of overarching values and institutions, and the implanting of zero-sum political competitive institutions can together be conceived as the predisposing factors that laid the foundation of ethnic conflict in Fiji, with its attendant destructive effects on all development efforts. The factors that triggered ethnic conflict were clearly

identifiable but occurred at different times during the evolution of the problem. Among these factors was resource allocation.

It is difficult to locate precisely the time when the question of ethnic shares became an issue in the struggle between the Fiji and Indian communal sections. In a sense, the entire colonially constructed ethnic pyramid not only embodied resource allocation but explained its existence. This is credible in relation to the early European dominance of the state. However, the relations between Fijians and Indians in their later conflictual expression cannot be easily dismissed as derived from competition over scarce resources. If the argument is made that material economic factors explain Indian-Fijian antipathy, the evidence to buttress this position comes abundantly from claims to jobs and privileges that Fijians and Indians have made against each other in the postindependence period. Fijians had claimed the public bureaucracy as their own preserve, while the concept of 'balance' cast Indians in the role of sugar workers and business owners. As increasing numbers of Indians learnt the English language and began to pass qualifying examinations, this gave them advantageous access to the public service and to many urban-based jobs and professions. Fijians had already come to regard the public services as their own preserve. In this context Indian-Fijian strife may be explained by struggles over the allocation of public jobs. The Indian entry in significant numbers into the public service was seen as an unwarranted intrusion into the Fijian domain. It is clear that scarce resources and competition over jobs did play a role as a triggering factor in sustaining intercommunal conflict. It would seem justified in the light of the evidence to place this material factor in an important but not sole or dominant explanatory category in relation to the genesis and sustenance of the ethnic state.

### **3. Will and Comprise**

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

A broken will, enfeebled and unprepared for reconciliation, is further debilitated by countless symbols of old battles, won and lost, as well by organizations and interests that institutionalize and structure the conflict. To be sure, at an earlier time prior to the open outbreak of hostilities, the leaders and elites in the various ethnic communities were able to communicate and beat out compromises for intercommunal coexistence. But as the conflict continues and deepens, even this upper social stratum falls victim to intercommunal intransigence. The ethnic monster devours everyone in the end.

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

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

Thus, the ethnic state was created on the anvil of a combination of predisposing and triggering factors. From the very outset a politically distorted state was fashioned. The cornerstone of the society was not laid with developmental aims in mind. The ethnic factor, founded at the outset of the Guyanese and Fiji states, fed into all issues and institutions in the postindependence period. Could not the communal state be reversed by a system of power-sharing? One of the deleterious effects of ethnic conflict in Guyana and Fiji has been the loss of opportunity for cross-communal cooperation in government and the emergence of systematic ethnic domination and violence. This cost of ethnic conflict needs to be isolated analytically for separate but brief examination since it is related to the undermining of those preferred values of

political development. Put differently, cooperation across communities, especially where the cleavage is marked by cultural differentiation, is an aspect of the environment vital to all efforts aimed at development. To what extent have cooperative efforts been undertaken in Guyana and Fiji? Once ethnic strife has become persistent, even institutionalized in the social structure and embedded in individual behavior, can cooperation efforts still flourish? There are moments in what would appear to be an inexorable move towards establishing a tightly organized and compartmentalized communal order when opportunities for change present themselves. It is not inevitable that the colonially derived communal system should be permanent. Ethnic boundaries are notoriously fluid in rapidly changing environments; ethnically oriented organization of life can at least be modified so as to submit communal claims to cross-pressures from functional class interests. In Fiji in the early 1960s, a small effort was made by Fijian and Indian leaders to form a multi-ethnic party. This failed, and a system of communally based parties was launched and has persisted to the present. At independence, the two ethnically based parties, the Alliance Party and the National Federation Party, were drawn into very close fraternal relations. It was a moment of opportunity to recast, at least at the political level, the dominant role of ethnicity in giving shape to political organization and mobilization. Once the political levers were wrestled away from the colonial power, it was possible to recast institutions and practices so as to encourage cross-communal cooperation and coexistence. The direction of public policy under a cross-communal party could move away from the ethnically inspired employment and resource allocation practices that prevailed under the colonial power. Much of this, however, could only be achieved by a unified inter-ethnic leadership in a new popular mass-party committed to alternative paths of development. The task would be gargantuan, flying in the face at every point of old communal habits and structural dispositions. But it could have been done. It required a vision of cross-communal unity to establish cross-communal organizations and policies that would modify and restrain the role of sectionalism in political life. This rare moment of opportunity was allowed to lapse. Shortly thereafter ethnic outbidders appeared and exacerbated the communal divisions, driving the two major parties apart. The *modus vivendi* succumbed to a deepening pattern of ethnic priorities that drew the state towards political disaster.

In the case of Guyana, following the first effort at establishing cross-communal solidarity in 1953, there were several opportunities for reconciliation that presented themselves over the next twenty years. However, progressively other forces were allowed to wean the two communities away from each other so that it became difficult to bridge the yawning gap. In a real sense, the problem turned on the issue of will and compromise in the leadership of the two major communities. There was nothing fatalistically inevitable about the drift into self-annihilation.