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Race Consciousness and the Formation of National Identity in Modern Guyana

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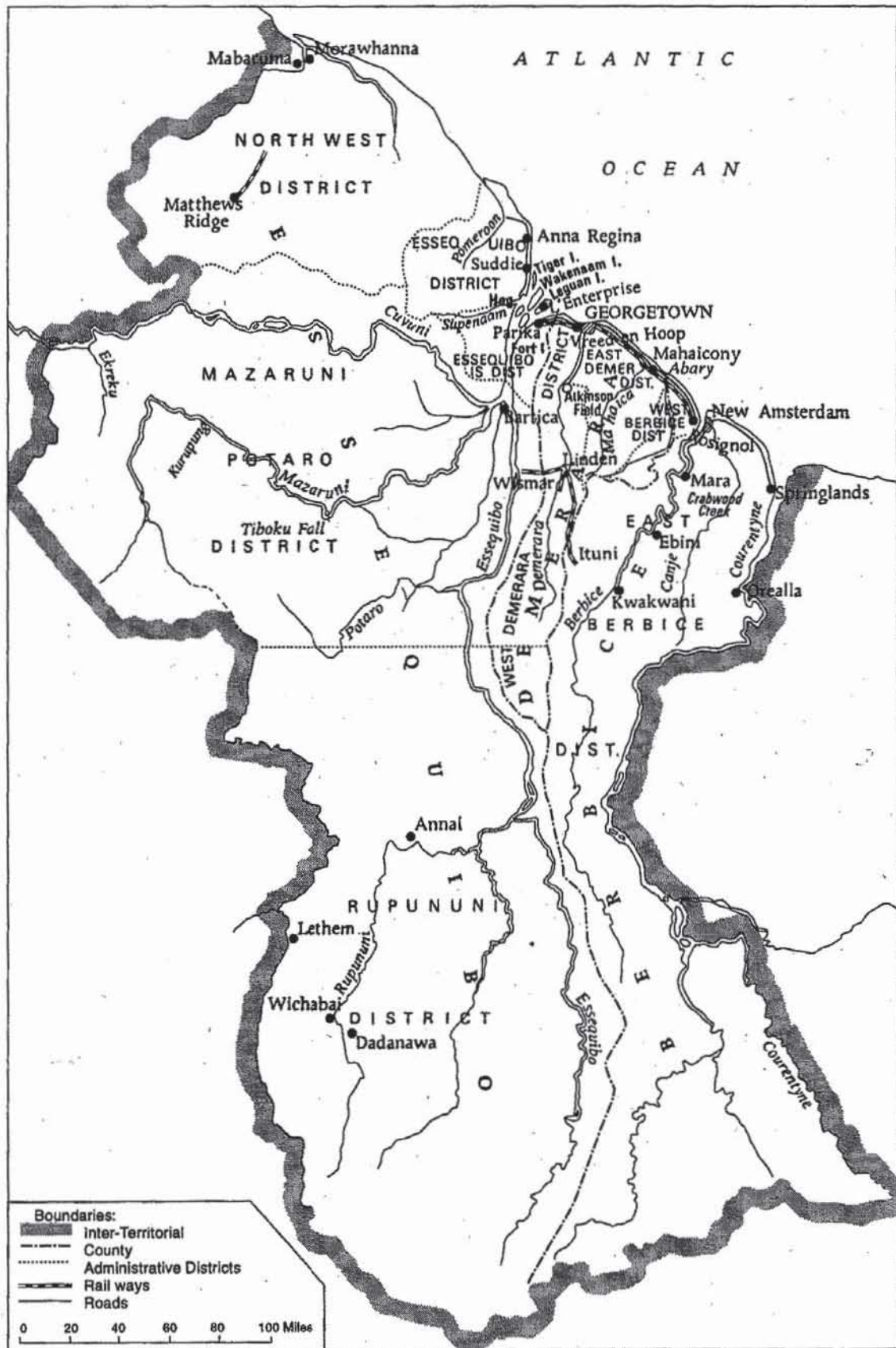
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Guyana is notorious for the racial violence between 'Africans' and 'Indians.' Such conflicts have been not only associated with competition for limited resources and for political and economic power but also with issues of ethnic and national identity, and cultural representation. 'Racialised politics' rose to prominence during the de-colonisation period. The racial riots of the early 1960s have not only affected people's memories and imaginations but also racialised interpretations of politico-economic and socio-cultural issues, and their views towards the 'Other' in particular. Though a common national identity has been officially promulgated, many Guyanese have preferred cultural pluralism, and feel that national identity must be built upon the affirmation of racial/ethnic identity. The 28 year regime of the People's National Congress (PNC) made Guyanese national identity 'Afrocentric' and largely displaced 'Indianness' from political and cultural exposure at the national level, to ensure the monopoly of socio-economic interests and power by the PNC. Such policies reduced the country from relative prosperity to absolute poverty, and from viable multi-racialism to vicious bi-racialism. A process of genuine reconciliation and integration is now necessary to form a non-racialist national identity. This must build on the wisdom of the joint struggle for independence and the recognition that Guyanese history resonates with dynamic creolisation processes. Essentialist models of racial and cultural authenticity dangerously ignore diversity and hybridity. Appreciation of the ambiguity of racial/ethnic boundaries and the richness of marginalised voices will generate more positive and tolerant inter-racial/ethnic relationships.

Conciencia racial y la formación de la identidad nacional en la Guayana moderna

Palabras claves: raza, identidad nacional, criollización, pluralismo cultural, Guayana

La Guayana es notoria por la violencia racial entre "africanos" e "indios" (hindúes). Tales conflictos están asociados no sólo con la competición por el uso



de unos recursos limitados y por el poder político y económico, sino también con problemas de identidad étnica y nacional y de representación cultural. La "política racial" llegó a ser prominente durante el período de descolonización. Los motines raciales de los primeros años 1960 no sólo han afectado a la memoria e imaginación populares, sino que han racializado las interpretaciones de problemas político-económicos y socio-culturales y la visión de los "otros" en particular. Aunque una identidad nacional común se ha promulgado oficialmente, muchos guayaneses han preferido pluralismo cultural y sienten que la identidad nacional debe ser construida sobre la afirmación de la identidad racial y étnica. Los 28 años de régimen del PNC han cambiado la identidad nacional guayanesa en "afrocéntrica," desplazando a nivel nacional lo "indio" (hindú) de la vida política y cultural, para asegurar el monopolio político y socio-cultural para el PNC. Tales premisas redujeron al país de una prosperidad relativa a la pobreza más absoluta, y de una sociedad multi-racial viable a un bi-racialismo maligno. Ahora es necesario acometer un proceso genuino de reconciliación e integración para formar una identidad nacional no racista. Éste debe ser construido sobre la base de la sabiduría de la lucha conjunta para la independencia y el reconocimiento de que la historia de la Guayana resuena con un proceso dinámico de criollización. Los modelos de autenticidad cultural de los esencialistas desairan peligrosamente la diversidad y lo híbrido. La apreciación de la ambigüedad de los límites raciales y étnicos y la riqueza de las voces marginales engendrará unas relaciones raciales y étnicas más positivas y tolerantes.

INTRODUCTION: GUYANA AND RACIAL ISSUES

In the Caribbean, only Guyana,¹ Trinidad² and Surinam have a sizeable 'Indian'³ population. But Guyana alone is particularly notorious for racial antagonism and violence between 'Africans'⁴ and 'Indians.' Racial rivalry and polarisation have been aggravated whenever political consciousness has been

¹ In this paper I use "Guyana" after independence and "Guiana" for the colonial period (Dutch Guiana and British Guiana).

² Trinidad and Tobago is the official state. While the population of Tobago is predominantly 'African,' Trinidad has more diverse ethnicity apart from 'Africans' and 'Indians,' e.g., Spanish, British, French, Portuguese, Lebanese, Chinese, and descendants of native Americans (mainly Caribs).

³ In this paper, I use 'Indians' for those whose ancestors came from Indian Sub-continent after the abolition of slavery, primarily as indentured labourers. In the Caribbean they are also often called 'East Indians' to distinguish from 'West Indians' and 'Amerindians' (native/indigenous Indians). In some occasions, 'Indo-Guyanese' (as well as Afro-Guyanese for 'Africans'/Blacks) is used, but in Guyana, just 'Indians' is the most commonly used.

⁴ In this paper, I use 'Africans' for those whose ancestors came from Africa both during slavery (as slaves) and after (mainly as indentured labourers).

heightened.

The majority of the Caribbean societies are dominated by 'Africans' or Blacks, the descendants of African black slaves and their mixed offspring. Therefore, discussion of issues such as race, ethnicity and national identity almost always has focussed on how Blacks/ 'Africans' as a majority were, and to some extent still are, collectively under-represented and marginalised. Guyana's situation was much the same before the progressive introduction of indentured labourers from the Indian Subcontinent, following the abolition of slavery in 1834. Now 'Indians' comprise 51% of the population and 'Africans' comprise only 43% (1998 U.N. estimate). Together they constitute well over 90% of the total population. From the introduction of the indenture system in 1838 till its cessation in 1917, a total of 238,909 Indians came to British Guiana (Laurence 1994: 522-523; Cross 1996: 17-18),⁵ forming the largest 'Indian' community in the Caribbean. The period between 1891 and 1911 was a turning point for British Guiana since the ratio between 'Africans' and 'Indians' was reversed.⁶ Since then the majority of the population has been 'Indians.' Guyana has nevertheless been called "the land of six peoples" (Swan 1957), indicating its ethnic diversity, but 'Indians' and 'Africans' have been the dominant protagonists of the nation-building drama in post-colonial Guyana.⁷ The other ethnic minorities are categorised as follows: 'Whites' (mainly of Dutch and British origin), Portuguese (mainly from Madeira and other dependent islands), Chinese, Amerindians (Akawaio, Patamona, Arekuna, Makusi, Waiwai, Wapisiana), and 'Mixed Races.'⁸

By comparison, although Trinidad also has a large 'Indian' element relative to 'Africans' (each comprises 41% of the population), it has shown more positive signs for building a peaceful multiracial/multiethnic nation. In Trinidad, ethnic and

⁵ In some years no Indians were brought. For the annual number of importation of Indians, see Laurence (1994: 522-523); Cross (1996: 17-18). Nath has the figures of both sexes and children, with mortality figures, and the name of the plantations they were sent to, especially for the first voyages (Nath 1970: 10-11, 20-21) : Dabydeen and Samaroo also quote the same figure as Cross in their Introduction to their edited book (Dabydeen and Samaroo 1996: 1). Premdas puts the total figures of Indian indentured labourers as 238,960 (Premdas 1996: 42).

⁶ In 1891, 'Indians' comprised 37.85%, and 'Africans' 41.05% of the total population. However in 1911, 'Indians' turned out to be 42.74%, and 'Africans,' 39.01%. Between 1891 and 1968, 'Indians' increased from 37.85% to 50.41% of the population, whilst 'Africans' decreased from 41.05% to 31.09%.

⁷ Of course this does not say other ethnic minorities did not contribute to it.

⁸ According to the 1980 census, out of a total of just under 760,000, Indians comprise 51.38% (389,760), African 30.49% (231,330), Mixed 11.04% (83,763), Amerindian 5.20% (39,867), Portuguese 0.004% (2,975), Chinese 0.003% (1,842), Others (Europeans other than Portuguese, Syrian, Lebanese, etc.) 1.20% (9,082).

cultural pluralism has been more strongly discouraged than in Guyana, and social stratification is based more on merit and achievement, with resulting higher mobility up the social ladder.

Another Caribbean neighbour with a large number of 'Indians' is Surinam. Here, Creoles ('Africans') comprise 35%,⁹ and 'Indians' (often called Hindustanis) 33%, together again composing the majority of the total population. The Surinamese political and cultural scene is distinctive for its "pluralism" (cf. Furnivall 1948; Smith 1965; Despres 1967). And yet, competition and antagonism between Creoles and 'Indians' have never been as devastating as in Guyana.

In both Trinidad and Surinam, there are sizeable other ethnic groups that have functioned as buffers and mitigated antagonism and polarisation between 'Indians' and 'Africans.'¹⁰ In Guyana, however, the minorities have remained too small to make a significant difference.

In Anglophone Caribbean literature and popular discourse, the term 'race' rather than 'ethnicity' or 'ethnic group' has been generally used, maintaining the memory of the historical imbalance of power among the 'racially' categorised population within the hierarchically stratified social structure where skin colour and other phenotypical characteristics matter. Emphasis was generally laid on the stark physical (biological) contrast between white Europeans as the invader/master/ruler and black Africans as the enslaved/ruled. 'Coloured' mixed offspring soon emerged, transgressing what was meant to be a clear physical boundary with a negative designation and ambivalent position in society. New terms were coined such as 'mulatto,' 'coloured' etc. to bracket such 'mixed' people as a residual.

Thus I use 'race' as a locally constructed socio-cultural 'emic' term. I use 'ethnic' when I stress the differences within the 'races.' 'Indian(s)' are also called 'East Indian(s),' signifying those whose ancestors were Indian indentured labourers and settled locally, and not so-called "pure" Indians from India.¹¹ 'Africans' is

⁹ Normally Maroons or 'Bush Negroes' are regarded as a separate ethnic group (10%) from Creoles, though biologically both of them may be grouped as 'Blacks' or 'Africans' with some differences that Maroons are regarded more 'pure' to compare with Creoles, who usually have some mixed blood in their lineage.

¹⁰ In Trinidad, ethnic minorities are; Whites (British, French, Spanish) 0.6%, Chinese 0.5%, Mixed 18.4%, others including Syrians, and Amerindians (mainly of Carib origin) (1993 estimate). In Suriname, ethnic minorities are; Whites (mainly Dutch) 0.4%, Javanese 9.5%, Chinese 1.5%, Maroons ("Bush Negroes") 9.5%, and Amerindians 3.1% (1994 estimate) and others.

¹¹ Those recent immigrants or residents who were born in India and came to Guyana to do some business are called "Indian Nationals." They have shown their separate identity and orientation from local Guyanese 'Indians,' or Indo-Guyanese. Actually many of "Indian Nationals" have shown some disdain towards the local Indo-Guyanese as they think local Indo-Guyanese no longer retain their 'original' languages (either Hindi or Urdu) and caste

synonymous with Blacks or Creoles.

In this paper, I shall firstly look at how politics has been racialised and issues of racial differences have been politicised in Guyana. Secondly, I will explain some characteristics of popular discourse on racial riots, particularly those of the early 1960s. Thirdly, I will examine 'race' consciousness based on my observations of the 1992 general elections. Lastly, I will elucidate the importance of re-examining racial/ethnic identity, national identity and creolisation as generalised processes of historical and cultural creation and transformation.

1. RACIALISATION OF POLITICS AND POLITICISATION OF RACE

Since the colonial period, race and politics have been intertwined in the Caribbean. British Guiana was successfully developed as a sugar plantation colony depending initially solely on African slave labour. Colonial administration operated alongside the plantation system. The rigidity and inequality of ruler-ruled relationships was strictly maintained to sustain British mercantilism and the local colonial order. Virulent racism was the core of its ruling system, with Europeans as masters served by Africans as servants. Though African slaves tried to protest against inhumanity and cruelty in all possible ways, 'White' domination and the rigid racial pyramid could not be shaken so easily.

Historically the Blacks/'Africans' were placed at the bottom of the social hierarchy, with a very small but growing minority –the 'Coloured' (or 'mulattoes')– in between. Guiana district used to be sporadically inhabited by various ethnic groups of Amerindians,¹² the majority of whom had not been destroyed as happened in most of the Caribbean islands, as they could flee into the interior, the savanna. They negotiated with the colonial authorities and provided them with the useful service of recapturing runaway slaves from plantations. Consequently, their relationship with the 'Africans' became also one of racial hostility. Nevertheless, this kind of tension did not continue beyond the end of slavery in 1834. Amerindians have lived far from the populated coastal region (of Demerara, Essequibo and Berbice) which holds the most arable land and centres of commercial and political activities. Nowadays Amerindians remain generally "invisible" and "imagined" for the rest of the population, and may become a target of socio-cultural and political manipulation at various levels.

The rigid boundaries of the plantations and the world within them, fostered a

and other 'traditions' in the least changed shape, which are still regarded as the core of Indianness from the point of view of "Indian Nationals."

¹² Ethnic differences and diversity among Amerindians have hardly been recognised by coastal residents. The fact that the generic term 'Amerindian' has been used only to be distinguished from 'Indians' does tell their position or location in Guyanese cultural politics.

process of intense creolisation. The language of authority was Dutch (1621-1781),¹³ then English (1841-),¹⁴ and the ruling ideology was correspondingly Dutch and British. The workers needed to follow and emulate European rules and norms. Nevertheless, each plantation produced its own local creole culture, as it were, and masters and slaves somewhat developed sentiments of mutual dependency to make the system work.

'Whites' themselves were not ethnically uniform but they gradually formed a generalised 'backra' (meaning 'White') ruling class, in the eyes of the slaves in the new colony. As the number of Europeans remained very small and yet they needed to control and rule many slaves and the colony, they formed a collective sense of 'White' ruler out of common interests and perhaps out of fear.¹⁵ However, the longer they became tied to colonial life based upon the plantation system, the more creolised they became, and their behaviour and styles marked them out from the non-resident 'White' community. In other words, the 'White' ruling class on the plantations developed what is called "Euro-creole" culture, quoting Brathwaite's interpretation (Brathwaite 1971).

A similar process was seen among African slaves, too. Coming from various ethnic backgrounds and regions, each with its distinctively different lifestyle, language and religion, but now bundled together (it was standard plantation policy to buy slaves from different ethnic backgrounds to limit the possibility of insurrection), they created a shared culture for survival and communication among themselves mostly out of necessity.¹⁶ Under the strict rules and punishments imposed by the 'Whites' and the very harsh reality of life under slavery, slaves both African born and locally born (called 'creoles'), became generalised 'niggers' to the 'Whites'. and their culture would be called "Afro-creole" despite its many internal divisions, diversity and hybridity.¹⁷ While such distinctions and divisions based on

¹³ It was through British Sir Walter Raleigh that this area was explored first and propagated as 'el Dorado' to Europe. Dutch West India Company was set up in 1621 and since then the district (mainly the coastal region) became under the Dutch rule until 1781.

¹⁴ Since around 1781, British influence came to be felt strongly. In 1796, the British fleet was sent from Barbados to occupy the area, and since 1814, the area came under British rule. Officially it became 'British Guiana' in 1831.

¹⁵ According to Thompson (1987:112), in Berbice, the ratio of Whites and Blacks in 1762 was 1:11, in 1785, 1:28, and in 1811, 1:46. However he mentions there should be a great disparity on the plantations and in 1811, perhaps the net ratio must be 1:126.

¹⁶ The initial stage of creolisation is considered to have begun through the 'middle passage,' in slave ships, but some claimed it must have begun when slaves were taken to the 'barracoon' near the port of departure before they were shipped off.

¹⁷ It is well-known that among the slaves there were divisions and distinctions and those uneven differences were even manipulated to continue or increase so as not to have them thoroughly united against the Whites. The distinctions and differences were recognised, for

ethnicity, birthplace (especially whether they were born in Africa or locally in the colony) and even types of work allocated within the plantation system did not disappear, the degree of disparity and people's consciousness towards them must have diminished and faded gradually. A new generalised identity as Blacks or 'Negroes' appeared and began to dominate.

Whoever developed roots in the colony seem to have taken a path of creolisation. Creolisation is no monolithic process. Creolisation was and still is an on-going process of a complex combination and mixture of comprehension, compliance, complicity, concomitance, confluence and creativity. It is not a simple harmonious merge out of diversity but rather involves a compound of indefinite differences and coexistence of incongruity and even conflict based on painful pasts. Its dynamics have naturally changed according to time and place. In colonial Guiana, creolisation occurred both within each racial and ethnic group and in the colony as a whole. There people began to define themselves by measuring up the distance from their 'homes'/'homelands' and relating to their own neighbours including total 'strangers.' On the whole, Euro-creoles and Afro-creoles all built their new collective diasporic identities primarily on the basis of physical or phenotypical characteristics accompanied by some cultural traits.¹⁸ Colour identified people as effectively as a calling card.

The emergence and increase of 'Mixed Race' naturally caused controversies. Though 'Mixed Race' did not exhibit uniform physical traits, they transgressed clearly demarcated social boundaries and statuses based on a philosophy of race and social evolutionism. With the increase of a varied 'Mixed Race' population, the ambiguities within such a racist structure became clearer. There was no such harshness as the USA's 'one-drop' rule, but negative attitudes and ambivalence towards 'miscegenation' have never ceased. Neither belonging to the ruler nor to the ruled, 'Mixed Race' also developed their own unique characteristics and strategies to take advantage of their ambiguous position to empower themselves against planters, the colonial government and the Blacks. But the appearances of indentured labourers from various parts of the world offered further scope for hybridity. On the whole, physical traits and the preference to identify oneself essentially within a single racial category remained primary markers of political and cultural status. Hence, although most Guyanese have a 'mixed' ancestry, the number of those identifying themselves as 'Mixed Race' has always been small.¹⁹

instance, between field-slaves and house-slaves, African-born and creole, "pure" Africans and mixed-blood, in addition to the divisions along ethnic (hence linguistic and cultural and religious) differences back in Africa.

¹⁸ The physical factor seems to be the decisively meaningful inclusive 'racial' boundary however ambiguous.

¹⁹ Population data show that the 'Mixed Race' category has occupied about 10% of the population at least for the past 30 years.

Affiliation to one of the official 'races' generally brought the support of that community, and provided a sense of belonging. 'Mixed Race' significantly carried the implication of not being part of those communities, but suggesting conflicting interests, values and orientations.

During the post-slavery period, ex-slaves began to strive for political empowerment as well as economic independence from the hated plantation work. The majority of residents, including 'Mixed Race,' began to recognise and nurture more and more their common identity as what could only be termed 'Guianese,' although society in general remained divided along racial lines.

The local 'Whites', after abolition, needed to replenish the vast labour shortage on the plantations. Ex-slaves were available as labourers, but they had already begun to sense their bargaining power and become more self-conscious about being mere labourers. When they realised the planters were unwilling to pay reasonably, they decided to abandon the idea of going back to the plantations. 'Whites' consequently wanted to avoid the danger of further increasing the number of 'Africans' for fear of rebellion. Other Europeans, especially Portuguese, were introduced as well as a small number of Blacks from other Caribbean societies, the USA and Africa, but were not regarded as successful. The target was changed to British India and China.²⁰

Indian indentured labourers satisfied the colonial rulers most because of their docility or tractability as a labour force. Though they were "favoured" by the 'White' rulers, regardless of diversity of caste, cultural, linguistic and religious backgrounds, they were collectively stigmatised as 'Coolies' not only by 'Whites' but also by 'Africans,' ex-slaves. 'Africans' generally felt threatened by such a large number of Indians who seemed "willing" to work just as slaves in the plantations they had deserted. Struggling at the bottom of the social ladder, Indians encountered 'Africans' who felt rivalry and prejudice against them, on the basis of linguistic differences, economic challenges, political orientation and religious and cultural incongruity.

Indians did not come as slaves and were allowed to carry their "cultural baggage." They intended to retain their cultural traditions and perform rituals according to their collective memory. However, they had realised they could no longer reproduce what was original due to their diverse backgrounds, lack of authentic authorities and intrinsic paraphernalia. Many Indians chose to remain in the new land abandoning the right to go back home after the expiration of indentureship in lieu of obtaining a piece of land in the colony. Taking root in the new land was a marking point in their history of Guyanisation. A new diasporic sense of 'Indianness' began to take shape.²¹ Even though many indentured

²⁰ Indian indentured labourers came since 1838, and Chinese, since 1853.

²¹ Creolisation among Indians began during the voyage from India. Among contemporary

immigrants appeared to sustain their original 'national' and cultural identity, indentureship in the new colony did change them. Their lifestyle, views and identity altered, merged and began to shape new forms which would join the hitherto Afro-centred stream of creolisation.

Creolisation also meant the creation of new racial and ethnic categories and new markers to distinguish them. Colonial Guiana proceeded with less emphasis on merging than most Caribbean societies and remained racially fragmented to a greater extent (Moore 1987). Creolisation did not mean the collapse of Guiana's racialised pyramid but rather its re-working to suit economic and political realities. Racial ideology continued to underpin the system.

'Africans' felt superior to 'Coolies' because they understood the existing Eurocentric system and values and how to appropriate them when necessary. Although they might sympathise with each other as lower class labourers in the face of unjust treatment, nevertheless, they also became foes in competition for the favour of the 'Whites'. Fearing how 'Coolies' and 'Africans' might possibly unite against the plantation managers and colonial authorities, British planters and officials made sure their 'divide and rule' policy along racial lines would work. Hence the racialisation of politics and politicisation of race became essential to the workings of British colonialism-cum-mercantilism, and the destructive influence of these strategies has persisted till the present in post-colonial Guyana.

During the struggle against colonial hegemony during the de-colonisation period, especially from the 1950s, prominent nationalist leaders shared at first a common goal to fight against the imperial power and to stand for more self-determination and self-government. They recognised the need to put aside their racial and ethnic differences. From the 1930s (or even from the 1920s), an energetic labour movement had developed with frequent strikes, riots and other unrest. Many organised trade unions sprouted primarily with an industry base. These movements denounced racialism, partly to expand their membership but also to stimulate the formation of a political party which would discourage racial separatism,²² hence the birth of the People's Political Party (PPP). The PPP was led by Dr. Cheddi Jagan, 'Indian,' as leader and Mr. Linden Forbes Burnham,

'Indians,' a '*ji(e)haji bhai*' (= shipmate or ship 'brother'), is still important. To show closeness of a relationship or a sort of friendship, *bhai* is used.

²² Dr. Cheddi Jagan founded the Political Affairs Committee to organise "political education" in 1946. He was elected under the reformed constitution in 1947 to a seat in the Legislative Council. Dr. J. B. Singh established the British Guiana Labour Party in the same year hoping to create a "political amalgam" with the unity between 'Indians' and 'Africans' and enforcing the multiplicity of labour organisations into one political alliance. Both the Political Affairs Committee and Guiana Labour Party were dissolved, but the majority of the members of both organisations joined the newly established People's Political Party (PPP) (Daly 1975:298).

'African,' as chairman. Burnham had come back from England not to join or form an 'African' oriented political organisation, but became the president of the British Guiana Labour Party, which was multi-racial. Then he cooperated with Jagan to form the PPP to fight against imperialism and try to create an independent socialist country. The PPP achieved mass support, particularly from trade unions, and became the core of the movement towards de-colonisation.

At the first general elections in April 1953,²³ with universal adult suffrage at the age of 21, the PPP captured 18 out of the 24 seats.²⁴ However, because of the Cold War, Britain was very upset about the possible birth of a socialist state in one of her dominions, and the likelihood of assistance from the communist block. Accordingly it suspended the constitution in October 1953, throwing Jagan's PPP out of power.²⁵ From 1954 to 1957, an Interim Government was introduced to rule British Guiana.

The effect was to destabilise the nationalist movement, and the unity of the PPP had vanished by 1955, because of differences within the leadership over policies of confrontation or cooperation with the British government. Both Jagan and Burnham had been trained overseas (Jagan in the USA, Burnham in England), and were very aware of the international political scene. As time passed, Jagan's approach became more "dogmatic" and radically socialist, inclined towards Marxist-Leninist ideology and an open welcome to international communist organisations.²⁶ On the other hand, Burnham's approach was more moderate and nationalist than dogmatically socialist. He stressed Guiana's self-responsibility to tackle its own problems, rather than be dependent on international networking.

²³ The first general election was held in January 1892 under the reformed constitution. There had been an income qualification for voting, though it was reduced from \$50 to \$40 per month. The "open voting" system was preserved and "aliens" continued to be excluded from voting mainly to ostracise the Portuguese (Daly 1975:270). However, further constitutional revisions continued. In 1943, the income qualification was lowered to \$10 per month (Daly 1975:298). In 1953, following the Waddington Commission, a major revision became possible for the constitution: universal adult suffrage, the abolition of property and income qualification for the electorate. The only restriction was English literacy (Daly 1975:299). Nevertheless, this remained controversial as the majority of 'Indians' then were still behind 'Africans' in terms of opportunities and accessibility for the public educational system.

²⁴ The main opponents were the National Democratic Party and the People's National Party, both of whom were mainly supported only by 'Africans.'

²⁵ The PPP leaders' approach to such an action was to confront the Governor and its officialdom, but some other members disagreed and preferred a more cooperative path to independence.

²⁶ When Britain announced the decision to take the PPP under Jagan out of government, it was officially assumed and claimed that Jagan would hand over British Guiana to Russia.

Though they shared many philosophical and ideological goals, their strategy led them to drift apart. Their personal split was certainly not caused by disagreements solely based on racial competition.

Their followers however were inclined to interpret the situation differently. As Jagan was supported predominantly by 'Indians,' and Burnham, by 'Africans,' popular interpretation of political messages tended to highlight the racial differences between the supporters. Thus when Burnham left the PPP, his 'African' supporters followed and formed a new political party, predominantly 'African' in membership, the People's National Congress (PNC) in 1957. The nationalist messages of Jagan and Burnham were thus overshadowed by racial confrontation and their positions as leaders of the two major racial communities. Commentators see this as the beginning of the racial politics and "a legacy of racial bitterness" (Hubbard 1969: 79). Since then the PPP has come to be regarded as the 'Indian' Party, and the PNC, the 'African' Party, although both have sought wider racial/ethnic support and emphasised their racial/ethnic diversity from time to time. Conflict between these two sections continued to grow visibly worse. Thus the beginning of a two party democracy was marked by major differences based on racial issues rather than by nationalist ideology and policy.

This internal conflict was exploited by Britain and the U.S.A. in particular, to interfere with the local democratic process in their fight against communism. In the 1957 elections, Jagan's PPP gained 9 seats out of 14, while Burnham's section won only 3. The new elections in 1961 again gave victory to the Jagan's PPP. With Britain's promise of independence, British Guiana was still heading for total autonomy under Jagan's socialist PPP with obvious popular support. The U.S.A. was horrified at the prospect of a socialist/communist nation in its backyard.

Britain and the U.S.A. governments accordingly planned to undermine Jagan's PPP. British government imposed "proportional representation" with the hidden agenda of cutting the 'Indian' vote. More insidious were activities to sow further disruption by instigating racial violence and raising racial tension even higher. Few doubt that the CIA initially plotted a subtle scenario and engineered the disturbances between 1962 and 1964.

In the 1964 election, under proportional representation, the PPP gained 24 seats, the PNC, 22, and the United Force (UF), 7. The UF was formed in 1960 and has largely represented the voices of conservative urban bourgeois Portuguese, businessmen and the upper-middle class. The PNC promptly approached the UF, which shared many of the interests of the mostly urban 'African' middle class. A coalition was formed, and they ousted the PPP, much to the satisfaction of the British-American governments. Guyana thus became independent in 1966 under Burnham's PNC.

In 1969, Guyana became a republic (albeit remaining in the Commonwealth) and the following year, Mr. Arthur Chung became President, elected by Parliament,

to replace the post of Governor-General, the official representative of Great Britain. The choice of a creole (Guyanese) Chinese was intended to demonstrate ostensibly the PNC's non-racist approach to politics and a new model of nation-building as if to sever the prolonged 'heritage' of racial politics. Burnham, the Prime Minister, remained the real power holder. The task of nation-building thus began with Burnham and the PNC, and Jagan and the PPP were pushed off centre stage.

Thereafter, however, the PNC became more racist than before. It managed to keep power through fraud, bribery, violence, and clever manipulation of the security forces (the army, police, civil militia) and civil service, and other means of suppressing the 'Indian' majority and reducing their access to political power. They did not forget to solicit support from some already successful urban middle class 'Indians' to display their "even-handed" approach to racial problems.

2. DISCOURSES ON RACIAL RIOTS

As mentioned above, the most vicious of the racial riots especially between February 1962 and December 1964 seemed to have been set ablaze because of outside political conspiracies. Their main aim was to expose the danger of real "chaos" if the PPP under Jagan governed the new nation. They could not bear a fairly large Caribbean territory in South America turning "communist." Therefore, he was assailed as an unsuitable, even incapable national leader. It seems that the goal of instigating racial violence from outside was not primarily to elevate Burnham as the national leader, but just to prevent the socialist Jagan from winning power and extending his influence elsewhere in the Caribbean. The main concern was that a second Cuba should not be allowed.

On the other hand, if there had not been such a long deep-seated racial conflict in Guyana, outside powers could not have intervened to such an extent. The Guyanese failure to diminish or mitigate the racial divide and racist antagonism has been appropriated by not only internal power politics but also international ideological wars. Ordinary Guyanese citizens, though they were sensitive and cautious towards local politics and racial stereotyping, seem to have fallen into the pitfall of vicious, aggravated racial discourse so prevalent at the time.

Before the real riot started, British Guiana was experiencing a socio-economic crisis accompanied with political strife. The nature of society remained 'plural' and inter-racial tension could be easily exploited at any moment. We must not forget however that the original PPP was the only viable anti-colonial political organ and quite multi-racial. Only after its split in 1957, did the strong association between party and race enter the scene. Ever since, racialised popular interpretations have been increasing regardless of the fact that membership of any political parties remained racially diverse. Another important point to understand the background of the racial disturbances between 1962 and 1964 is that in the 1961 elections, the

PPP won by polling 42.6% of the total votes cast and gaining 57.1% of the seats (of Parliament). The PNC under Burnham polled 41.0% of the votes but gained only 31.4% of the seats. Therefore, although the PNC lost the race, to lead British Guiana into independence, the PPP had many hurdles to cross both at domestic and international levels.

One of the key factors of Jagan/PPP's failure to be in accord with the USA and the U.K. was his strong pro-communist ideology. His overseas visits to discuss independence or foreign aid, encountered skepticism and opposition from anti-communist camps. These showed their preference for Burnham, who mixed an anti-communist posture while espousing "socialism" and "neutralism."

The harder the PPP tried to lead the new government for independence, the stronger and more organised opposition the PPP encountered including the press (newspaper *Daily Chronicle*, etc.) and previous allies of some trade unions. The PPP's 1962 Budget proposal was severely criticised as "choke and rob" (St. Pierre 1982:294) and various opposing motions were witnessed visibly. The opposition leaders orchestrated effective resistance such as "unprecedented" cash withdrawals from the New Building Society and Post Office savings accounts, workers protest propagated through major trade unions, and "a dramatic walk-out" in the House of Assembly at the time of the debate for the Budget proposals (St. Pierre 1982:295).

Workers' strikes started on February 13, 1962, and they roamed the city streets, mixing with the unemployed to share their "real" and "imagined" problems. The two leading opposition leaders, Burnham and D'Aguiar, appealed to large crowds for the Government to resign. In opposing to the Government's proclamation prohibiting public gathering, they also called for a sit-down demonstration around the public buildings which attaches Parliament. Though the Government tried to control such disorder with police and even a special plea for the British troops, the situation scarcely changed for the better.

On Black Friday, in February, 1962, a rumour spread at a mass meeting organised by D'Aguiar that a child had been killed when the police were using tear gas to disperse a crowd. Successive widespread arson and looting soon followed, which made the Government call for the British troops to move in and declare a State of Emergency. Through these riots, 5 were killed and over 80 were injured.²⁷ 172 business places were destroyed, damaged or looted (St. Pierre 1982). The PPP Government left a public image of incapability to handle and control such racialised and politicised confusion.

Burnham, abandoning the idea of achieving electoral victory alone, sought an official alliance with the second powerful opposition party, United Force led by D'Aguiar. This alliance could work effectively with proportional representation,

²⁷ One police superintendent was killed and 39 policemen were reported to be injured. The rest are civilians (St. Pierre 1982:295).

and they began to campaign energetically for a new constitution with proportional representation, at the same time calling for new elections before independence. They also fervently opposed reducing the voting age from 21 to 18 years old as suggested by the PPP. Judging from slight differences in the voting poll for the 1961 elections, anti-PPP camps became convinced that the PNC-UF alliance could oust the PPP from government, but only under proportional representation. With victory, they could proceed to political independence. The key problem was how to challenge the PPP's seemingly 'democratic' (or 'populist') proposal to reduce the voting age, which automatically meant an increase of 'Indian' voters, as the reproduction rate was much higher among 'Indians' than 'Africans.' Obviously, with the same reasons, the PPP and its supporters were opposed to proportional representation and a new election before independence, and vigorously advocated the reduction of the electorate's voting age.

The 1963 disturbances were partly a result of the PPP's awkward management of both internal and external situations, in part directly related to the disturbances themselves. Official talk on independence was postponed. The PPP government was clumsy handling legislation, including the Labour Relations Bill which was supposed to protect the vast majority of the working class but also thereby bring power to themselves. In the meantime, large trade unions organised demonstrations, picketing, squatting and strikes that spread to rural areas. These repeatedly revealed the PPP's inability to quench industrial and civil disorder. On April 5 and 6, large-scale looting and destruction occurred, and April 18 was the beginning of an 80-day strike, started by civil servants and teachers which proliferated throughout the colony. Almost all economic activities, except some sugar industry, came to a halt. Foodstuffs including basic staples, became scarce, and a State of Emergency was again declared. Looting and violence spread with widespread clashes between PPP and PNC supporters, even including top leaders in Parliament. Jagan and his wife were stoned. Both sides alleged that party members were hiding arms in their homes. The more determined the PPP government became, to pass legislation and to keep their position and power, the more rebellious became the actions instigated by the opposition.

The unrest and riots of both years may seem similar, but in 1962 they were more confined to Georgetown and cities whereas in 1963 they were more widespread in terms of time, space, and social level. Significantly, the 1963 disturbances became more racially motivated, i.e. clashes between 'Africans' and 'Indians' became conspicuous. Controversial allegations proliferated about overseas intervention through "aid" and "strike relief funds" to industrial workers, under the CIA's initiative.

Such successive unrest increased in scale and stigmatised the PPP as incapable of ruling the country. What followed was just a matter of time. The charged atmosphere became worse, and the economy was in chaos by the end of 1963.

Racial antagonism rose rapidly, and violent clashes became very serious in 1964. Many more were killed (176 people), brutalized (at least 920), raped, and the scale of burning and looting was horrendous. 1400 houses were burned down. The presence of British troops seemed useless. About 15,000 people needed to move out to settle in "communities where people of their own ethnic group predominated" (Daly 1975:306-307). Many preferred to call it a "civil war." Sporadic unrest and disturbances continued until July, when "uneasy truce" was established.

With external "advice" and the imposition of new rules, including the introduction of controversial proportional representation, an election was held under the new constitution in December, 1964. The result was predictable; the PPP failed to gain the necessary votes of 51% in order to form a new government.

How then did ordinary citizens interpret the disturbances in the early 1960s? Though quite a few citizens were more or less informed, and debated the political situation both within the colony and in the metropole (the UK and the USA), perhaps the great majority of "ordinary workers" were not so familiar with deep analyses and understanding of such complicated situations. The fact that many contemporary Guyanese tend to use the phrase "racial violence" or "racial riots" to designate the 1960s disturbances, testifies to their preoccupation with racialised politics. During my fieldwork in 1991 and 1992, I often came across similar discourses whenever our topic touched on something to do with racial and ethnic issues. Interestingly, the majority of residents I spoke to were willing to tell their own version of stories, even trusting their hidden feelings and confidential information to a total stranger like myself, saying, "I need to tell yu mi story, but can't tell it to oder Guyanese," etc. They were affirming their own personal experience in the light of other counter-narratives dominant during pre- and post-election fervour.

Both among 'Africans' and 'Indians,' popular discourses on racial riots tend to highlight the brutality of the 'Other' race. They rarely forget to explain simple retaliation by the 'Other' as racist aggression. 'Indians' stressed the savagery of murder, plunder, looting, and rape by 'African' attackers with a rather definitive accusation: "Africans dem started an' spread it," blaming solely 'Africans' for the cause of the whole violence. 'Africans' by contrast emphasised 'Indian' brutality, but showed less interest in specifying who initiated the fights. A variety of sources confirm that the riot started from a small town/village called Wismar, which is situated on the opposite side of the river from the city of Linden (previously Mackenzie), the heart of the bauxite industry. This industry has been traditionally dominated by 'Africans.' Linden and its neighbouring townships therefore have been populated mainly by 'Africans.' It is important to remember that the name of the city was re-named after the late Linden F. Burnham, who initiated nationalisation of the key industries including prosperous bauxite previously owned

by a Canadian company.

Discourses tended to highlight 'Africans' as more militant in their physical aggressiveness, and boldly backed by the PNC. The mobs were almost always composed of 'African' men although there were a few stories about 'African' women aggressors. 'Indian' aggressiveness was also emphasised even by some 'Indians' to show how 'Indian' men spontaneously retaliated against the more strategically orchestrated offensives by 'African' men. However, it is important to note that quite a few stories are related to sexual assaults on 'Indian' women, while there were very few stories about 'Indians' (mostly men) violating the sexuality of 'Africans' (primarily women). 'Indians' have been on the whole feminised while 'Africans' have tended to be masculinised. Such gendered racial discourses have easily been created, circulated and appropriated to profit respective racial groups.

Gendered discourses on racial violence were often heard during my fieldwork. There were quite a few stories and rumours about how 'Indian' women were sexually assaulted and victimised in public to humiliate the 'Indian' community. The "Indian nation"²⁸ as a whole could be most effectively damaged through destroying 'Indian' patriarchy by transgressing its symbol of "Mother India," which together had come to represent the core of the creole 'Indian' traditions and 'Indianness.' The brutal rape of 'Indian' women, both young and old, conspicuously exaggerated and will continue to bring into relief the powerlessness and impotence of 'Indian' men (cf. Shibata forthcoming). Such weakening and demoralisation of 'Indians' has been equated with their political incapability and powerlessness in the national arena.

Those who witnessed the actual scene regardless of their ethnic background, class, educational level, etc. held strong resentments against the 'Other,' showing how deeply they had been hurt not only physically but emotionally. Brutality on the spot tends to be interpreted and propagated as a symbol of atrocity by the 'Other' group, without any justified investigation or cross-examination, and thus hardens the negative stereotypes and deepens the existing racial/ethnic divide. Remembrance of historical scars was, and still can be, manipulated by various interest groups and retold with magnified details which may be untrue. Trauma was immense.

'Africans' and 'Indians' generally had difficulty in subduing their sense of rivalry and hostility. Collective memories about their own local history and accumulated stories or stigmatising stereotypical images about the 'Others' have added negative angles to whole events and persons. School education and religion were no mitigating factors when people's sense of racial tolerance and pride was hurt, and politics were in turmoil. Physical and cultural differences were easily exploited and exaggerated into "a tailspin of racial bitterness" (Premdas 1996: 62).

²⁸ Contemporary 'Indians' may use "Nation" also as a category of caste or *varna*.

Outside of Georgetown, the capital, residential boundaries often coincide with racial or ethnic boundaries. Even in heterogeneous Georgetown with its growing 'Mixed Race' population, some streets and sections of a "town" are inhabited primarily by one ethnic group. Residents regularly categorise their neighbours according to recognised 'racial' traits that include some cultural indicators. Normally everyday life activities can be performed without racial antagonism and apparent confrontations. Nevertheless, should political and racial tensions rise, the neighbourhood can quickly become a danger zone of "us" and "them," and even good neighbours may come to be regarded as racialised 'Others,' though ordinary citizens assumed that the CIA, not the 'Other' racial group, was the main instigator of the racial disturbances.

Following Burnham's death in 1985, the more moderate Desmond Hoyte became President. The generalised sentiment persisted among 'Indians' and various ethnic minorities that the PNC would continue to harass 'Indians' or PPP supporters mercilessly and ostracise them from the mainstream of society. Their resentment and fear was readily focussed by the assassination in 1980 of Dr. Walter Rodney, the charismatic founder and leader of the only truly multiracial party, the Working People's Alliance (WPA). Internationally well-known as a historian, radical activist and socialist politician, Rodney, albeit 'African,' attracted enormous support across racial/ethnic and educational differences. When he began to actively oppose the PNC, his influence was such that the PNC government felt deeply threatened. Rodney's cross-racial influences and popularity manifested the possible split of the 'African' community. Though the government promised a thorough full investigation of his assassination, it suspiciously neglected to carry one out. The unusually extravagant nature of his murder seemed a remarkably 'public' statement, and would have been very difficult without at least some government assistance.

Rodney's warnings proved tragically perceptive and timely:

We have had too much of this foolishness of race.... [O]ur leadership has failed.... [E]xternal intervention was important in bringing the races against each other.... But I'm concerned with the present. If we made that mistake once,... [n]o ordinary Afro-Guyanese, no ordinary Indo-Guyanese can today afford to be misled by the myth of race. Time and time again it has been our undoing.... Those who manipulated in the 1960s, on both sides, were not the sufferers.... The losers were those who participated, who shared blows and who got blows. And they are the losers today. It is time that we understand that those in power are still attempting to maintain us in that mentality.... The system doesn't stop at racial discrimination.... [I]t only camouflages its class nature under a racial cover.... [W]hen a monster grows, it grows out of control. It eats up even those who created the monster. And it's time that our

people understood that.²⁹

It was clearly government policy however to make such aspirations seem naive and impossibly idealistic, by cutting out the possibility of any grassroots middle ground between Guyana's racialised factions.

3. WHAT HAPPENED IN THE 1992 GENERAL ELECTIONS?

The PNC regime, especially under Burnham, expanded its authoritarian control with the power of patronage. Almost all the important public sectors were dominated by PNC supporters, primarily 'Africans,' but including not insignificant numbers of other racial groups, including 'Indians' as well. 'Indians' generally, more so if non-PNC supporters, felt humiliated, but dared not rebel violently as they had few compatriots in the army and police. Any attempt against the PNC seemed futile. The visible opponents against the status quo were publicly intimidated or even assassinated.

In 1970, Burnham proclaimed the "Co-operative Republic of Guyana," and nationalised the main export industries, sugar and bauxite, the very backbone of the country's economy which had been owned by private companies, with most of the profits going overseas.³⁰ The relative wealth Guyana had nevertheless gained through foreign investment and management, rapidly disappeared, and the country was reduced to absolute poverty, second only to Haiti in the Western Hemisphere. The Guyanese economy had long been tied to the 'world system,' and was not ready for such a "revolutionary" step as nationalisation. More systematic and long term training were required for locals to viably manage and diversify its economy.³¹

In early August 1992, the PNC government under Hoyte announced the long deferred general elections would take place on October 5. Immediately, I sensed a sudden change of air. The relaxed expressions of daily discourse became tense and

²⁹ Speech by Rodney in Georgetown, campaigning in defense of A. Rampersaud, PPP activist accused of the murder of an ('African') policeman (WPA 1985b:2-3).

³⁰ Demerara Bauxite Company was a subsidiary of the Canadian-based multi-national corporation. Alcan, also Canadian-based, since the beginning of the 20th century, monopolized 95% of the bauxite lands on both banks of the Demerara River. Its agent was Mr. G.B. MacKenzie and MacKenzie City was named after him. It was renamed later as Linden after Burnham, and the Highway from Georgetown to this city is called Linden Highway.

³¹ Burnham "set for the nation the target of feeding, housing, and clothing itself by 1976." To show his determination, he made for instance "co-operatives a compulsory subject in schools" and "[establish] the Co-operative College, [and] set up the Guyana National Co-operative Bank and the Agricultural Co-operative Development Bank" (Daly 1975: 310).

racialised. The opposition parties demanded publicly an assurance of "free and fair" elections after 28 years of "dictatorship" (WPA 1985a).

Even before the government's announcement, there were rumours about a possible general election in the near future. The majority of citizens, including ethnic minorities, expressed anxieties over possible racial violence but predicted a victory for the PPP/Civic. "Cause de Government was not confident, dey had refused to publicise de official date till de last minute." "De government will announce di date o' di election suddenly so dat di opposition parties won't hab 'nough time fi prepare properly fi di election." As the WPA lacked a Rodney-type charismatic leader, people generally opted either for the PNC or the PPP(/Civic).

The PNC/Hoyte printed colour posters of himself standing beside the party symbol, a palm tree, in which his brief message to "dear citizen" was written. This was to encourage citizens to vote on the election day since many already had expressed fears of doing so because of racial violence set up by the 'Other' to prevent democratic voting. Rumour had it also that there would be fraud any way as "the government had been so good at it." The PNC/Hoyte poster called on voters to "ensure a bright future for yourself and Guyana." "Let us work together in Peace [*sic*] and Harmony [*sic*] to guarantee future prosperity for All Guyana's People." But such rhetoric was not taken seriously any more.

The entire election process was monitored and superintended by an international team under USA ex-President Jimmy Carter. Nevertheless, many Guyanese expressed their doubts about the promised neat and perfect electorate list. On the election day, a photograph and finger-staining were demanded for personal identification, but became easily falsified. Many voted more than once, and rightful voters were refused due to lack of supervision and mismanagement at polling stations. Anti-PNC citizens simply stated, "it is just orchestrated like that."

The two opposition parties propagated their slogans vehemently. "Time for Change, Time to Rebuild," with the party symbol of a cup, was the slogan of the PPP/Civic camp. They handed out numerous plastic shopping bags with the logo: "Cheddi Jagan, back by demand. Sam Hinds, unity across the land." By then Jagan and the PPP knew the necessity of changing the deep-rooted image of the PPP as "the Indian party." Thus the party candidate for prime minister was selected from the 'African' community, Mr. Hinds. To regain its massive popular support, the PPP united with the humanitarian NGO group, the Civic Movement. The Civic had been promoting democracy and fighting for human rights, and was naturally multi-racial. Significantly the leadership of the Civic was Christian, which had long been the major religion of the social mainstream. Though Christianity, numerically, had primarily been practised by 'Whites'/Europeans and 'African,' it was becoming increasingly multi-racial especially by virtue of the growth of 'Indian' membership. However, it is important to remember that some main churches remained distinctively segregated in terms of race. (For example, Indians try to avoid

Anglicanism, which has distinctively 'African' and 'White' membership. Presbyterians have separate 'African' and 'Indian' churches.)

The PPP/Civic promised an "honest and efficient government," to counter-attack the PNC, which had exhibited enough of its "dishonesty" and "inefficiency." Freedom House, the PPP's headquarters in Georgetown, was always full of busy party members teaming with enthusiasm, starting with Jagan and other top leaders. This contrasted well with the gloomy atmosphere of the PNC headquarters office and rather quiet and inactive Rodney House, the WPA's headquarters. Wherever the PPP held a rally, they attracted more crowds than the other parties.

The WPA chose elite scholar leaders as their representatives with a ringing bell as the party symbol. They offered Dr. Clive Thomas, 'African,' an internationally known left-wing political scientist for their candidate for President and Dr. Rupert Roopnaraine, an 'Indian' Marxist scholar, for Prime Minister. The slogan was "Why you will vote well, when you back the Bell." They were long regarded as "the brain" not only of the WPA but also for the country, and their political and economic ideas, policies and comments, albeit being outside the Government, were often carefully listened to. Nonetheless, to compare with Rodney, they are said to have lacked 'charisma' to appeal to the general public. Some popular criticisms like "Guyana can't be run just by brain. We need more dan dat." were often heard.

The WPA leaflet summarises the essence of their opinions as follows.

- 1) WPA has the best programme for rebuilding Guyana.
- 2) Everyone wins when WPA wins.
- 3) WPA will not sell out, nor are we for sale.
- 4) WPA has no fear of results of a free poll.

Their criticism against the Hoyte PNC was epitomised as "Hoyte's Seven Lean Years, Old House Pon [upon] Old House" accompanied by 10 reasons. The leaflet claims as follows: "why Hoyte does not deserve your vote. Let us put aside his dishonest attempt to distance himself from the PNC and look at the first term he gave himself, from 1985 [when he succeeded to power after Burnham's death] to 1989, and his second extended term to 1992 (brackets added by author).

- 1) In 1985... the crude death rate per thousand was 6.6. By 1989,... it was 7.9.
- 2) Life expectancy at birth in 1985 was 70 years. In 1989, it had dropped to 65.2 years.
- 3) The infant mortality rate was 43.9 [in 1985]. It rose to 45 by [1989].
- 4) The per capita supply of calories... in 1985 was 101.1. By 1989, it had dropped to 77. The per capita supply of protein dropped from 65 in 1985 to 50 in 1989.
- 5) CXC English Language results dropped from 20% passes in 1985 to 12% passes in 1989.

- 6) CXC Mathematics passes dropped from 23% in 1985 to 13% in 1989. And these days of course only those students teachers believe will pass are sent up.
- 7) .. In 1985, the population of Guyana was 756,900. In 1991, it was 754,900.
- 8) The GDP, using 1998 prices, dropped G\$34m. In 1985, it was G\$3650m and in 1991, it was G\$3516m.
- 9) The U.S. dollar value of minimum wage in 1985 was U.S.\$2.78 (\$11.55G\$). In September 1992, the minimum wage was U.S.\$1.3 (\$162 G\$, supplements included).
- 10) The cost-of-living index, using 1970 as a base (...) was 696 points in 1985. In 1991, it was 7872 (...)." (WPA 1992)

They seem to have targeted the then PNC regime under Desmond Hoyte, who began to attract support from various sections regardless of race and gain confidence in his more moderate and liberated policy, especially in economy, than Burnham. In fact, Hoyte tried to distinguish his policy from Burnham's and emphasised his flexibility and tactfulness in handling the country's very difficult socio-economic situations, out of which he claimed there appeared some promising signs and effects of socio-economic improvement. The press and other mass media, apparently under government pressure, propagated from time to time before the general election how Hoyte's regime had succeeded in bettering the overall living conditions and decreasing racial conflict, all of which had triggered massive emigration.

The WPA leaflets were distributed, therefore, to attack "the false image" the Government tried to emphasise and indoctrinate the citizen. The last section of the leaflet was devoted to the issue of the long pending problem of race, and the WPA has been known as the least racist. Interestingly, this issue was addressed by 'Indian' Roopnaraine:

I want to tell these tribalists that I am an Indian who understands that I can only prize and respect my own race when I learn to prize and respect the races of others.³² ... I am an Indian who understands that the safety and the security and the well being of my own race can only come about when the safety, the security and the well being of all the other races are brought about.... I am an Indian of the Walter Rodney generation who is sick and

³² He continues: "I want to tell them, that I am an Indian who is living in a country where there are institutions to further the culture of my own race — like the Indian Cultural Centre and the Indian High Commission, and as an Indian I ask myself why there is no African Cultural Centre? Why there is no African Embassy, here in Guyana?"

tired of tribalism... [and] racial arrogance.... I welcome the accusation that I am an Indian who feels deeply about the condition of the African people in my country; because of this I am in my rightful position of leadership inside the WPA. So, brothers and sisters, we can decide whether on October 6 we are going to dance in these streets or... shiver in fear....

Citizens of course considered the party slogans and policy statements, but the key issues of personality of leadership, ideology and racial issues remained their prime concern. As the opposition parties clearly stated, the reality was that Guyana's economy had gone from bad to worse, and poverty was rampant. Hoyte's policy to liberalise the economy was still overshadowed by the ghost of Burnham. Everything was stagnant in those days. The rich unexplored resources, both natural and human, seem to have waited too long to be "developed" usefully and properly. The country had been drained of talent, capital and technology. I often heard something like "more than half the Guyanese are living overseas!" from quite a few Guyanese both inside and outside the country. Many had only left because of the government's policies and remained strongly patriotic among Guyanese diaspora communities especially in the UK, the USA and Canada.

Citizens, both those who were actively involved with national and local politics and those who were not, regardless of racial background, showed great interest in the elections and were very eager to talk about politics. There were frequent gatherings at the homes of key persons to discuss politics and business. Humanitarian and human rights issues also became more politicised than before. Intermarriage, a good barometer of the fluctuating racial climate, became a deeply sensitive issue (Shibata 1993; 1998).³³ Active party members from the lower class, not well-educated but very "experienced" in life, expressed their opinions clearly without using party jargon. Even those apparently docile and not normally much concerned with politics, now expressed their own political opinions. Political discussion had very much become part of Guyanese life.

On election day, a rumour spread about fraud and troubles at polling stations,

³³ Interestingly, some top politicians and leaders of national organizations are inter-racially married. For them, intermarriage comes to offer distinct strategic advantages. Jagan's wife, Janet, is American. The 'African' H. Greene's marriages have roused both scandal and suspicion among the public. Well known for being both clever and ruthless, he has gangs of party thugs who terrorize his opponents. Popular belief is that he "assassinated" another prominent Indian politician and poisoned his 'African' wife, who was also a very successful politician (minister). He married his third wife, a prominent 'Indian' professional, in 1992, just before the general elections. Popular opinion was that this last marriage was to counter-balance the notorious image he already had of being racist. And the story ran that if he ever regrets this decision, then he would just arrange for her to die mysteriously too.

and the majority of citizens chose to stay quietly at home after voting. Next day a numerous and abusive crowd of 'Africans' (more males than females) gathered outside the office of the election committee headquarters and threw countless stones, bottles, etc., to break its windows whilst the election team was still holding meetings. Many stern looking police and army officers prevented the angry mob from entering the building, but interestingly, not from damaging it. Helicopters were flying low above Georgetown, and around the Police Headquarters, where crowds also gathered, appealing for justice. Only a small number of 'Africans' were elsewhere out on the streets in Georgetown. Many streets became deadly silent under the hot sun. In early afternoon, the government announced its defeat.³⁴

In downtown Georgetown, one street attracted quite a crowd of 'Africans,' both young and old, male and female. A band of young calypsonians using run-down instruments made of used tins, pans and wooden or cardboard boxes, sang their impromptu protest songs successively against the PPP victory and political "corruption." All the "big name" politicians and 'Indians' in general were caricatured and denounced severely with reference to local history and events. The incessant puns of the sweating musicians were so amusing that the large crowd just burst into laughter. The tense atmosphere, with almost all the shops shut up and locked heavily, suggested something ominous might happen at any moment. However, that corner exhibited a creative and peaceful outlet for frustration and outrage.

Nevertheless, towards dusk, many shops and houses belonging to affluent 'Indians' were plundered and looted (although thoroughly locked and blocked with lumber, thick cardboard, or wire netting). Furniture (beds, wardrobes, sofas, tables, chairs, etc.), radios, TVs, video sets, electrical goods (even including large refrigerators!), and other goods were carried away with triumphant laughs and cries. Nobody seemed to have tried to stop them. A mob of 'African' looters, both men and women, dashed from one place to another with their trophies and booty. Some non-'Africans' who happened to be on the street were harassed, but not killed.

Such large scale looting and rioting seems to have happened only in Georgetown and did not continue. More widespread outbreaks of racial riots were avoided. Instead, fears by 'Africans' of 'Indian' retaliation appeared, not surprisingly, in light of the looting and the PPP's victory. Rodney's diagnosis was still apposite in late 1992. Both 'Africans' and 'Indians' feared future chaos due to the change of government. Countless 'Africans' seriously expressed fears that

³⁴ The PPP gained 32 seats (including 4 from local governments) in Congress while the PNC gained 31 (including 8 from local government). The WPA and the UF got only 1 respectively. There were some comments about the closeness of the votes between the PPP and the PNC and the ignominious loss of the WPA. For the former, there were scandalous rumours about the PNC's manipulation of Amerindian votes in the Interior.

Jagan would sweep all 'Africans' out of public offices and replace them with PPP members. Many 'Indians' were in turn afraid of an 'African' back-lash. The root problem of racialised politics remained.³⁵

4. ETHNICITY, NATIONAL IDENTITY AND CREOLISATION

Official government policy has always been to denigrate racialised and racist politics. It has promulgated a common Guyanese national identity. The national motto, "One People, One Nation, One Destiny" has never been questioned seriously in public. With a brief knowledge of Guyana's modern history and the foundation of the PPP to fight colonialism and imperialism, it is not difficult to understand the logic of proposing "One Nation," and "One Destiny." It was nevertheless clear that "One people" was a myth or illusion and hope rather than a reality and sprang from the need to concentrate on unifying such a divided society for political independence.

People were keen to listen to politicians' speeches, either at political rallies and through the radio and newspapers.³⁶ But racial problems left indelible scars on popular memory. Under such talk of "unity," Guyanese heard the voice of "arrogant" confidence by the PNC in its powers of patronage to maintain the pluralist reality that served its own self-interest. Optimism on racial integration was doomed precisely because the PNC called the shots.

In fact, many ordinary Guyanese, including 'Indians,' have shown a preference towards cultural pluralism rather than unification and integration under the banner of "One Nation," and argue that national identity must be built upon the affirmation of racial identity. For the majority of residents, personal identity was primarily racial (especially as long as they stay in Guyana). This is especially true among 'Indians.' For the majority of Guyanese,³⁷ racial and ethnic identity is nurtured within families and local communities, but national identity is different. It is something one has to learn and acquire in more public settings, through public education (in a very broad sense) and foreign experience.

In the early 1990s I heard quite a few citizens plainly deny the existence of national unity.

³⁵ For references after the 1992 elections, see Ryan (1999b:ch. 4).

³⁶ The PNC's opinions were well expressed through e.g. the *Guyana Chronicle*. Many admitted this newspaper became "nationalised" and turned itself into the Party organ and was used for its propaganda. Those who wanted a "fairer" and more "objective" view read the *Stabroek News* as a national paper. The *Catholic Standard* sometimes carries political messages.

³⁷ For the 'Coloured' and other 'Mixed Race' people, it is not so simple, especially *douglas*, offspring of 'Indian'—non- 'Indian,' especially— 'African' unions (Shibata 1998; forthcoming).

Here in Guyana, wi only see Indians and Africans and so on, and talk 'bout Indians and Africans. Only on a few occasions wi may have to see people as Guyanese, not as Indians and Africans and t'ings.

Guyana is just divided into two. Wi hardly say "Guyanese" amon' ourselves. Maybe w'en wi show de passports...

Towards outsiders, they could often use phrases like "we Guyanese". In certain circumstances, they were willing to show some pride in claiming their Guyanese identity as if to show all Guyanese think and talk and act in the same way or as if to show they are true representatives of Guyanese. Such verbal dexterity should not be taken too literally. Popular discourse on the authenticity of 'Guyanese' tends to carry a simplified version of monolithic and stereotypic racial and ethnic ideas and images. But this is part of the multifaceted reality of contemporary Guyana. There exists an assumption of a common face for Guyana, but it can not include, except by great effort, both sides of the racial divide. This kind of self-image is still dominated by racial bias.

We must not forget that independence was possible only under Burnham's PNC. Even though the PNC government never stopped mentioning racial complexity, it became obvious that espousing each racial/ethnic group equally was unrealistic in those days. The problem was how to write a new scenario of nation building sensitive to the inter-relationships and interactions between 'Africans' and 'Indians' as the main protagonists, and the other ethnic minorities as supporting actors.

One powerful expression and image for this new scenario was "mosaic."³⁸ This expression is often used for the benefit of outsiders, such as tourists. It implies that Guyana's multi-racial and multi-cultural mix combine to form a harmonious pattern. Though the majority of citizens agree that the protagonists for a nation-building story are 'Africans' and 'Indians,' and therefore demonstrate the picture, they also keep some space for the other ethnic minorities to play their respective parts, however small their space may be. The whole idea is to minimise the bi-

³⁸ For instance, *The Guyana Mosaic* by Robert J. Fernandes, which is a collection of pictures with explanations for tourists to buy at stores. Guyana has only a few bookstores or even large "general stores." Though the book seemed scarcely to be in public demand, shops normally "recommend" outsiders to buy it. Within 48 pages of pictures, 7 pages show Amerindians with their faces (including only a few with clear facial expressions), another 16 pages are devoted to the territory or culture of Amerindians (including the various waterfalls, the Rupununi Savanna and rivers), including the *Umana Yana* in Georgetown. When other peoples' faces are shown, they are more or less either 'African' or 'Indian' and none shows both together in one picture. (There is one with several children fishing in a trench in town. The boys look 'Indian' but one of them may be 'African.' As he looks down, it is unclear.)

partisan portrait and to maximise unadulterated multiplicity. At least this is what the government officially wished to spread and advertise. For this type of image, even Amerindians in the "virgin" Interior (especially around the Guiana Plateau) have been pictured most positively with their "traditional" ways of living — a bit of hunting and gathering and limited subsistence agriculture, planting cassava, etc. — not as a representative of the "primitive" and symbol of underdevelopment. The "exotic" 'Other' tends to be pictured as a harmless symbol of peace-loving innocent man in "the real nature" that strikes people with awe and admiration. Such a racial mosaic, however, readily gains a predominantly 'African' tint.

The first national hero chosen to symbolise the new nation was Kofi,³⁹ the most famous leader of the most memorable and biggest slave revolt in (Dutch) Guiana, the Berbice Slave Rebellion of 1763. To enshrine a leader of a rebellion against slavery, plantation system and colonialism, as a national hero for the nationals to look up to was common in other Caribbean societies, beginning with Haiti, where the majority of population was predominantly 'African' by descent.⁴⁰ To honour and visualise Kofi's courage and power, a statue was erected emphasising his negroid traits. Thus a national monument became equated with 'Africanness' in newly independent Guyana, where the majority of population was already 'Indian.' This can be interpreted as the beginning of official 'Africanisation' of 'Guyanese-ness.'

In fact, the 28 year PNC regime not only 'Africanised' Guyanese national identity but also simultaneously displaced 'Indianness' from political and cultural exposure at the national level as much as possible. This was cleverly done to ensure the monopoly of socio-economic interests and power by the PNC. The PNC carefully included some 'Indian' supporters, and did not totally eliminate 'Indians' from public offices, in part to show off their "fair" approach to race issues. 'Africans' thus continued to dominate the urban settings, monopolising public offices, the civil services and mining. 'Indians' on the other hand, remained in rural

³⁹ He was from the Akan tribe, which was probably the most aggressive and rebellious against slavery. Similar characteristics were observed in Jamaica and Suriname, where Akan-speakers were many. Jamaica's maroons were mostly Akan-speaking people, and one of the very famous leaders, Nanny, was said to have been the most "intractable" and courageous. She was enshrined as a national hero(ine) with other notable leaders who championed freedom.

⁴⁰ Haiti became independent in 1804 with tremendous influences from the French Revolution. The 'Founding Fathers' of independence were Toussaint L'Ouverture, Henri Christophe, and Jean Jacques Dessalines, and their statues are solemnly laid out in the most conspicuous plaza in the Capital, Port-au-Prince. Jamaica was the first Anglophone Caribbean (and Commonwealth) nation to become independent in 1962. The national heroes and a heroine were chosen because they were the most fearless fighters against slavery, colonial authorities, and the establishment.

areas, heavily concentrated in agriculture (notably sugar and rice industries) and commerce, though more and more "Indians" have moved into "respectable" professions such as medicine and law. Such occupational segregation however was not regarded as the result of fair competition on "equal" ground among all racial groups, based on merit and achievement.

Social mobility in the colonial period was only possible for "Indians" through western-style public education, i.e. Christian or missionary schools. The majority of 'Indians' were Hindus and most of the remainder were Muslims.⁴¹ For them, to be "educated" meant simply being forced to convert or at least become indoctrinated by the Christian establishment, thus facing the possibility of losing not only their religion but also their ethnic cultural traditions, which were very much centred around religious ideas and rituals, however creolised they might have become.⁴² As 'Indian' women were expected to reproduce and increase "Indianness," the majority of 'Indian' parents, especially fathers, refused to send their daughters to schools for fear of losing their ethnicity or facing some inevitable changes which essentially threaten their *raison d'être*. Therefore 'Indians' educational achievement came quite slowly and was confined to those who were eager to be incorporated into the mainstream creole society and joined the urban middle class. It was repeatedly reported nevertheless that "Indians" exhibited more academic excellence than 'Africans,' according to recent observations.⁴³

Among government posts, in 1965, 'Indians' dominated land development, but were weaker in local government and primary education (Despres 1975: 95; Premdas 1996: 53). The strong association of 'Indians' with land, the very base of agriculture has changed little according to more recent studies (Glasgow 1970; Greene 1974). Almost all responsible senior positions especially in public sectors have been occupied by 'Africans' (Premdas 1996: 52).

"Africans' fears" still rested on the economic power 'Indians' had accumulated over the years to survive in colonial Guiana and strive for independence from the hostile urban mainstream society which was becoming more and more Afro-creole. There were many expressions like the following: "Indians dem control money an' Africans dem hold power." The main purpose of nationalisation of primary industries under Burnham was to stop the drain of profit overseas and give better incentives for localised industries, which would benefit mainly 'Africans.'

⁴¹ There were a small number of Christians from the beginning of indentureship as well.

⁴² Even though some "Indians" "converted" or at least showed their open espousal of Christianity, many did not abandon their traditions. Such "syncretism" further diversified Indo-creole culture.

⁴³ Again the main motivation for 'Indians' to excel in schools, for example, was because of PNC's dominant policy not to prepare enough job opportunities for 'Indians' because of political reasons. For 'Indians' contribution to society, see Nath (1970).

Nevertheless, in the end, Burnham's political objectives led to the ruination of Guyana's economy, and by aggravating racial tensions lost the opportunity of genuine harmony and unity.

Even in the early 1990s, when people talked about "national" artists, they could only remember a few names of painters (Dennis Williams), sculptors (Philip Moore), and writers (Jan Carew, Martin Carter, Arthur J. Seymore, Edgar Mittelholzer⁴⁴ and Christopher Nicole) almost all from the 'African' community. Very few "national" Guyanese artists from the 'Indian' community are known to have achieved "great success" or distinct international recognition, except perhaps someone like Dr. David Dabydeen (poet, scholar, "cultural ambassador"), who lives in England. Most well-known Indo-Guyanese are found either in academia, the professions, or in politics. Though 'Indian' artists have exhibited their talent "in public," they tend to be known only among 'Indians' but are not much recognised at the "national" level. In other words, they may be 'Indian' artists, but this does not necessarily mean automatically they are regarded as *Guyanese* artists.

Thanks to the size of the 'Indian' population, their religious freedom is more or less protected, especially Hindu (both *Sanatan Dharma* [orthodox] and *Arya Samaj* [Reformist]) and Islam. There are numerous *mandirs* (Hindu temples) and mosques/*masjid* as well as churches and other meeting places of various "cult" groups. 'Indians' built an Indian Cultural Centre, where Indian traditional dances and songs as well as language (Hindi) and some Indian history etc. are taught.⁴⁵ 'Africans' on the other hand have no equivalent institutions. The existence of an Indian High Commission represents the importance of India and Indians not only for 'Indians' (Indo-Guyanese) but also for Guyana itself, whereas any counterpart for 'Africans' remains non-existent. Part of the reason of course is that "India" is a country while "Africa" is not, hence the level of representation differs. Other deeper reasons are not hard to find.

'Africans,' though not unanimously propagating their opinions, differ significantly on the idea of Africa as their ancestral land and source of their cultural identity. The questions by Dr. Roopnaraine in 1992 (as mentioned before) were right though in a way misleading. Indian cultural representation has remained rather a localised tradition.⁴⁶ The Indian Cultural Centre promotes cultural events and education in Indian "authentic" culture, mostly classical and "traditional" but

⁴⁴ Mittelholzer himself was known as a "negrophobe" and from a tender age he had very troublesome identity problems and crises due to his 'mixed blood' including a tint of 'Blackness.'

⁴⁵ Hindu organisations like Gandhi Youth Organization offer language training classes for those who are keen to learn and participate actively in traditional rituals.

⁴⁶ Trinidad, though the situation is similar to Guyana, has recognized contribution by 'Indians' more 'nationally' and in a greater scale.

not "tribal." Thus emphasising "Indianness" in Guyana resonates with membership of the Indian diaspora and notional membership of a distant homeland. To many 'Africans,' 'Indians' provocatively maintain their linkage with their ancestral land while extracting the limited wealth of Guyana's 'small cake.' To be 'Indian' and Guyanese easily attracts a suspicion of ambiguity and even outright contradiction. By contrast, to be 'African' and Guyanese raises no eyebrows, and there is no similar demand for an African Cultural Centre. 'Africans' have dominated Guyana's national cultural scene, to the extent that Guyanese culture is interpreted as predominantly 'African.' The differences are enormous.

Guyana's other famous "national" monument is *Umana Yana*, a round building with a huge conic thatched roof. The word "*umana yana*" means "a meeting place of the people" in the language of the Waiwai, one of the Amerindian ethnic groups. This local *Umana Yana* is said to be "virtually an exact replica" of the Umana Yana, at a Waiwai village named Konashen, in the South Rupununi (Fernandes 1990: 25). It was built in 1977 by the Waiwai under the supervision of George Henry, an 'African' architect in Georgetown, at the end of Main Street (the name of the street is also symbolic), in front of the then Pegasus Hotel, the most prestigious hotel in Guyana, for the meeting of Foreign Ministers of the Non-Aligned Nations. No staff seem to be located there normally. The Waiwai themselves have continued to live very far away from the coast. No official reason was given to explain why no other form of architecture from another "tribe" or ethnic group, or even a "mosaic," was chosen as a "national" symbol. But to choose something from the most invisible community⁴⁷ implies a conscious effort to avoid celebrating the cultural contributions of the most visible community, the 'Indians,' under the national motto and idea of cultural diversity.

Of course, 'Whites' have many colonial structures all of which are placed in central Georgetown; the government offices, and courts and even an impressive white statue of Queen Victoria. Numerous Christian churches and cathedrals including the famous landmark of St. George's Cathedral,⁴⁸ remind them of their long colonial past, and tie them to the neo-colonial present. "Kokers," a Dutch legacy for controlling water on the coast are numerous and compose a significant part of the landscape.⁴⁹ On the coast streets, cities and towns have mainly either Dutch or English names. (Some Indian names while Amerindian names are used for districts and internal landmarks.) The Portuguese are separately distinguished from the generalised 'Whites' as they came initially as indentured labourers. They

⁴⁷ For further information on Guianese Amerindians, see Sanders (1987).

⁴⁸ It is reputed to be the highest wooden building in the world.

⁴⁹ The alluvial coastlands are some 4 to 5 feet below sea level at high tide. For the protection of agricultural and residential areas from flooding, this system of sea defense, irrigation and drainage have been essential.

nevertheless have established prominent lineages with considerable business influence and maintain enormous Catholic Cathedrals.

Chinese also built a grand building for their ethnic association in central Georgetown. Chinese restaurants and shops regularly display Chinese characters on the outside. This however does not prove that all Guyanese Chinese have retained their original languages and traditional culture unchanged. Chinese, especially women, remain small in number, and tend to avoid intimate socio-cultural mixing with the general public. Some still hesitate or even detest intermarriage, but recruiting a compatriot from China is regarded as rather costly and unproductive. They do not show fervent resistance against "Westernisation," and some even welcome it as seemingly offering most viable way to survive in Guyana. Here, the number game is still important to understand their position. The majority seems to be content with general adaptation, in the Guyanese popular imagination, into creole Guyanese society while subtly trying to keep their Chinese identity as much as possible on the basis of physical features and cultural traditions. They did not pose any major threats to the 'Africans,' the PNC regime or the establishment, by emphasising their Chinese ethnic identity to the extent of disregarding "Guyanese-ness." In fact, the Chinese are reputed to be the most successfully "creolised" (meaning "Guyanised") ethnic group. One good example is therefore the selection of Mr. Arthur Chung as President in 1970. A good majority of descendants of indentured labourers no longer have a Chinese first name. Observing such tremendous changes, recent arrivals either from Hong Kong or Taiwan have expressed deep disappointment and resentment against "going native." Still, Chinese Guyanese seem to have found a clear niche in society.

'Indian' cultural visibility in architecture is, needless to say, immense. Apart from religious buildings (*mandir*/temples and *masjid*/mosques),⁵⁰ there are countless *jhandis*, (Hindu colourful flags/pennants used for *pujas*/rituals). The only national "Indian" monument is a small statue of Mahatma Gandhi in Promenade Garden, the 'national' park, in Georgetown. Needless to say, Gandhi is Indian (or *authentic* Indian) but *not* Guyanese. Tucked away in an obscure corner of the "Oriental" section of the big park, his statue seems conspicuously foreign by comparison with the statue of Kofi and *Umana Yana*. Gandhi had very little to do with Guyanese "national" affairs.

Not only the visible monuments but also public holidays show "Indian" under-representation at a national level. Guyana now holds 14 national holidays as follows; New Year's Day (January 1), *Mashramani* (Republic Day) (February 23),⁵¹

⁵⁰ Some Hindu gatherings are held in Christian church buildings and those whose shapes modelled after Christian churches, to exhibit its creoleness. See Singh (1980).

⁵¹ *Mashramani* is celebrated to commemorate the birth of Republic. The word is originally Amerindian, "symbolizing the celebration that takes place after workers have completed a

Eid-ul-Azha (Id al-Adha, Muslim Festival of Sacrifice) (March-April),⁵² *Phagwah (Hindu Holi)* (March-April),⁵³ Good Friday (March-April), Easter Monday (April),⁵⁴ Labour Day (May 1), Independence Day (May 26), *Yum an-Nabi/You-man-nabi* (Prophet Mohammad's Birthday) (June),⁵⁵ CARICOM Day (July),⁵⁶ Freedom/Emancipation Day (August 1), *Divali/Deepavali* (Hindu Festival of Lights) (October-November),⁵⁷ Christmas (December 25), and Boxing Day (December 26). Considering the numerous numbers of Hindus to compare with Muslims, this shows how Hindus are served worse than Muslims. Hindus emphasise that one has to be born Hindu, signifying the impossibility of non-Indians becoming Hindus. On the other hand, Muslims as well as Christians stress their universality and openness to everyone. Hence their congregations are multi-racial or non-racially segregational. Christian festivals are four. Though the government installed more "neutral" public holidays, the fact remains that the Republic Day, CARICOM Day, and Freedom Day are principally associated with 'Africans.' The Republic was made possible under the PNC. CARICOM Day suggests a strong flavour of 'Africanness' when it comes to the term "Caribbean" simply because of the prevalence of strong 'African' cultural influences throughout the Caribbean. Freedom Day is apparently a celebration of the end of slavery, and hence for 'Africans.' The government clearly seems to emphasise the importance of universal or non-essentialist symbols which do not coincide with 'Indianness,' despite the existence of a generalized Indian Heritage Day.

Thus "Indian" cultural representation has been essentially confined to 'Indian' localities and space. The "soundscape" and smells as well as visual signs and symbols, marked entry into an 'Indian' community, but did not cross racial and ethnic boundaries. With such limited visibility in the national public arena, it is no wonder a large majority of 'Indians' felt like birds in a cage. There were more than enough reasons to justify 'Indians' seeming indifference and cynicism towards *national* affairs and competition in cultural events.

The "Hindu renaissance" movement which spread especially from the 1970s among overseas Indian diaspora communities,⁵⁸ including Guyana, promoted a

community project like building a house or clearing land for a farm. Groups of individuals representing business places come together to form costume bands, and, together with steelbands, they parade through the streets and take part in competitions." (Fernandes 1990: 35).

⁵² The date varies according to Muslim calendar.

⁵³ The date varies according to Hindu calendar.

⁵⁴ The dates for both Good Friday and Easter vary according to Christian calendar.

⁵⁵ The date varies according to Muslim calendar.

⁵⁶ The date falls on the first Monday.

⁵⁷ The date varies according to Hindu calendar.

⁵⁸ There are quite a few references on Trinidadian Indians and their "Hindu renaissance."

shared Indian identity among Hindus (though differences between *Sanatanists* and *Arya Samaj* supporters have not diminished drastically). It thereby distinguished Hindus from non-Hindu 'Indians' (especially Muslim communities),⁵⁹ thus severing the collective identity of the 'Indian' community. "Hindu renaissance" was welcomed because already many Indo-Guyanese realised their 'Indian' identity had been nurtured with the help of imagination and myth, but not through "legitimate" understanding of India's rich and complex history and culture.

CONCLUSION

For the 'African' or 'Indian' ancestors of modern-day Guyanese, colonial Guiana became hardly a country or home, but a plantation society where their birthright was torn away from them in a vicious system of exploitation. Without a shared sense of belonging, it is not surprising that what emerged was an ideology of protective networks among those racial/ethnic enclaves, distinguished by mutual suspicion and competition. Thus it became a country with only a minimal sense of being a nation, and without passionate patriotism, and without common heroes. After creating Guyana, the political leadership had to create "Guyanese." And this process of building a "nation" and creating an agreeable national identity is still in progress.

Lacking a common nationalism, what bound people together was passion in abundance for justice, the re-distribution of wealth and the redressing of past wrongs. The only possible "visions" with the strength therefore to unite the fragmented people were socialist and communist in nature. Britain and the USA however had made it abundantly clear that these were not an option.

There was no easy highroad to genuine reconciliation, tolerance and integration. It was tragic that the PNC government slid into politics built around racial "tribalism" and state "banditry," and was marked by economic and administrative incompetence. Yet it would be deeply misleading to suggest that, with the social building materials available, government and politics ever be, in that tricky Cold War period, anything except profoundly racialised.

I have said that the genetic reality of most Guyanese is "mixed." Even unions between 'Africans' and 'Indians' have not been unusual at times within Guyana's chequered history. By contrast, the social and cultural reality has been intensely racialised. The obvious contradictions between these two realities have prompted me to concentrate my main research on ways in which Guyana's separate 'African'

See e.g., Vertovec (1992). For recent inter-relationships between 'Indians' and 'Africans' in Trinidad, see e.g., Ryan (1999a).

⁵⁹ Muslims have never become major elements in building ethnic identity or promoting racial identity.

and 'Indian' streams seem to be flowing together, to produce new forms of 'Afro'-'Indian' or 'Indo'-'African' creolisation. In particular, I have conducted extended interviews with intermarried couples and so-called 'douglas',⁶⁰ the offspring of 'Indian' and non-'Indian' parents.

'Douglas' share (but not collectively) a sense of being, ironically, the most totally *Guyanese* because they can claim neither Africa nor India as their mother country, but only Guyana. They must consciously face up to the "war in the veins" (Williams 1991). Nevertheless it would be unrealistic to see the development of a genuine 'Indian-African'/'African-Indian' or 'douglas' creole community. These are brave and sometimes optimistic families and individuals who risk marginalisation and even violence because they do not hesitate to be at odds with the kind of racialised networking without which most Guyanese think "civilised" life is impossible.

The whole thrust of this paper has therefore been to show how, whilst creolisation is often interpreted to mean the mingling of a region's ethnic or racial mix into a new common culture, Guyana's record emphasises both how intensely conscious the creolisation process can be and how it has reinforced a racial ideology from the colonial and plantation period.

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⁶⁰ 'Douglas' has a Hindi origin meaning "miscegenation" and used to be very derogatory. As time went by, the term has been neutralised, and does no longer carry a strong negative meaning.

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