

## **The Impact of Identity, Ethnicity and Class on Guyana's Strategic Culture**

**George K. Danns, PhD**  
University of North Georgia

### ***Definitions and Purpose***

As a new nation Guyana provides a lively laboratory for studying class, ethnicity and identity and how these phenomena have influenced the country's strategic culture and national security. The **identity** of a nation can be defined by those geographic, demographic, historic, symbolic, cultural and institutional characteristics that give a nation state and its peoples a distinct and recognizable sameness with which they collectively identify, and by which others can distinguish and define them. The identity of Guyana is a combination of and a derivative from its national, ethnic and cultural identities. The **national identity** refers to those elements of nationhood such as its flag, national anthem, constitution, system of government, geographic, ethnic and cultural elements that combine to make its peoples have a sense of belonging and see themselves as Guyanese, and the world to identify their nation state as Guyana. Barrington Moore, Jr., sees national identity as "membership in a group that can save an individual from the anxieties of carving out his own meaningful place in the world, especially when the realistic chances of doing so are tiny." (1978:488). It is this belief by its peoples in the membership of the nation that gives Guyana its national identity. Additionally, making an analogy between personal identity and national identity, Prizel argues that it is the interactions with the outside world, namely the acceptance or rejection of "the other" that allows polities to develop a sense of national uniqueness (2004: 16). Guyana's national identity is carried in the collective memory and behaviors of its people, its leaders and their institutions and forged on the anvil of its relations with other countries in the international environment. The country's national identity plays a crucial role in enabling an understanding of its strategic culture. It decisively impacts on its strategic decision making, foreign policies and proclivity to engage in hostilities to safeguard its national interests.

The **cultural identity** of Guyana is a unique mix of subcultures of European, Indian, African, Chinese and Amerindian cultures. It is manifest in their norms, values, languages, religions, cuisine, music and other aspects of non-material and material culture to which its peoples are affiliated or can identify. **Ethnic identity** refers to the physical markers and cultural orientations and practices with which members of an ethnic group identify, and which gives them a sense of belonging, distinguishing their members as an in group and which identifies them from other groups in the society. Guyana has a multicultural identity and a multi-ethnic identity. The country's plural cultures have historically been derived from its various ethnic groups; and, the identities of its ethnic groups have been respectively defined by their cultures. There is however, overlap between ethnic and cultural identities of the Guyanese people. There is also considerable assimilation and sharing among the various cultures which evolved over time in a way that makes these not entirely exclusive to any particular ethnic group. In this paper, the concept cultural identity is subsumed under ethnic identity since it is the latter that seemingly has more explanatory value in understanding Guyana's strategic culture.

The most important fact about class formations in Guyana is that they have been created or else induced by the state systems, both colonial and post-colonial, and have undergone fundamental transformations overtime. **Class** in Guyana is defined not only on the bases of wealth, income and occupational achievement, but also on the political and cultural status accorded those in the different levels of the class structure. The dynamics among class, ethnicity and culture are key elements which combine to forge an identity of the Guyanese peoples and their society. The national identity as defined involves more than these three elements. In this paper, the concepts identity and national identity may be used interchangeably. It is recognized however, that Guyana's identity has not always been the same as its national identity. The focus on identity provides a platform on which to analyze class and ethnicity. Guyana's strategic culture informs its strategic decision making and national security conduct. The strategic culture is in turn derived from its national identity but is also shaped by its class and ethnicity, elites and leaders among other factors. (See Figure 1). Trinkunas (2008) defined strategic culture as "the culturally and historically derived predispositions that exist in particular states and their elites concerning the use and effectiveness of the employment of force as an instrument of national policy."

Snyder (1977) views strategic culture as dynamic and evolving as “a set of semi-permanent elite beliefs, attitudes, and behavior patterns socialized into a distinctive mode of thought.” In addition, the United States Southern Command views strategic culture as a combination of internal and external influences and posits that it describes the range of cultural, political, and military experiences that drives a country’s approach to the world. (Lantis 2009). Strategic culture provides an analytic framework for pinpointing and grouping those factors within and without a nation state and that may determine its proclivity to engage in national security conduct. The heuristic value of this framework lies in its focus on those factors which facilitate interpretation and explanation, rather than necessarily prediction of national security action.

**The Emergence of Class, Ethnicity and Identity in Guyana**

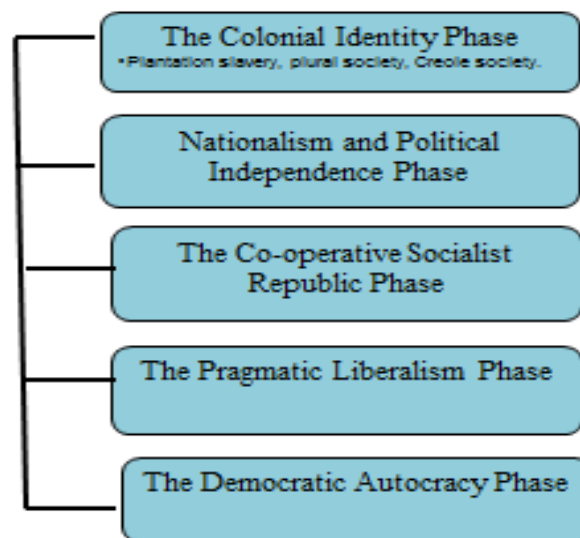
The identity of Guyana has emerged and been transformed over time through five distinct phases namely:

1. The Phase of Colonial Identity – plantation slavery, plural society, creole society.
2. Nationalism and Political Independence Phase
3. The Cooperative Socialist Republic Phase
4. The Phase of Pragmatic Liberalism
5. The Democratic Autocracy Phase

Each identity phase is dominated by the state and a paramount leader and “norm entrepreneur”; and, distinguished by ethnic rivalry and class transformations. The country’s strategic culture is in part framed by these phenomena and the identity phases in which they operate. Its national security threats have been fairly consistent across phases and include external threats from the countries on its borders, and internal threats from ethnic rivalries, labor unrest and rejection of authoritarian leadership and state rule.



## MODEL OF THE EMERGENCE OF CLASS, ETHNICITY AND IDENTITY Phases



Guyana's population in 2002 was 751, 223. The majority East Indians comprise 43.5 percent of the population, Blacks African 30.2 percent, Mixed Ethnic 16.7 percent, Amerindians 9.2 percent, Whites (0.06 percent or 476 persons), the Portuguese (0.20 percent or 1497) and the Chinese (0.19 percent or 1396). The country's population in 1980 was 759, 566 and for 2012 declined to 747,884 (Guyana Population & Housing Census, 2014). The decline in Guyana's population is due primarily to outward migration among the two largest ethnic groups.

### ***The Phase of Colonial Identity***

Understanding the origins of Guyana's identity, ethnicity and class requires focus on the role of the colonial state. The colonial state is an arm of a larger metropolitan state system and a subcommittee for managing the affairs of an exploitative imperial capitalist class. The state preceded the society and was responsible for its formation. It was authoritarian, repressive and an illegitimate bureaucratic system of rule. The colonial state was militarized and had of necessity to rely heavily on its police, militias, and military both imperial and local to maintain its illegitimate rule. Guyana's identity was that of a conquered and ceded colonial territory and was Spanish, then Dutch and finally British. A colonial society is a captive society. It is a society that is basically characterized by conquest, subjugation and exploitation of its peoples by an imperial power who initially at least, may be culturally and ethnically distinct from their captors. In Guyana and the Caribbean islands, the Europeans found no sophisticated, elaborate, established traditional social systems like in Africa and Asia. The society that the colonizers found in the Caribbean consisted of small clusters of largely nomadic Amerindian tribes who were in one way or another rapidly decimated. The Amerindians in Guyana resisted enslavement and retreated as a dwindling minority to the remote interior regions to avoid the Europeans. What resulted was the setting up of a colonial state without any indigenous population to rule. European conquest and settlement was in an effort to find the mythical El Dorado, a city with large quantities of gold and other precious metals. Failing to find El Dorado, the colonizers turned to farming but failed to attract a labor force from the mother country or effectively enslave the Amerindians. The stage was thus set for the importation of enslaved and indentured peoples from Africa, Asia and other parts of Europe. The imported peoples provided the ruled for the rulers, captives for the conquerors and a society for the colonial state. Africans were imported from Africa and enslaved. With the abolition of slavery in British Guiana in 1838, Chinese and Indians were imported from Asia and Portuguese from the Cayman Islands and the Azores Islands and indentured. This involuntary assembly of peoples of different ethnic and cultural backgrounds represented a transplanted labor force that upon their arrival were subject to unfreedom, inhumane treatment and exploitation.

The strategic culture of the colonial state was built around its mandate from the mother country to maintain stability in a plantation system that exploited a captive labor to plant sugar, cotton, coffee and other crops for export. An equally important dimension of this strategic culture was the plethora of policies and institutions that were developed to protect the colony from conquest by other warring European powers and uprisings from the slaves and indentured peoples. Military forts such as Fort Kykoveral were key institutional elements of this culture. Successive governors of the colony represented the imperial power in the colony and were its paramount leader. The colony of British Guiana had no foreign relations with other countries independent of imperial Britain. The two shared the same friends and enemies in the international environment and the colony was an extension of the mother country. Britain had to settle British Guiana's boundaries with its South American neighbors of Brazil, Venezuela and Suriname. The settlement with Venezuela in 1899 occurred only after the United States pressured Great Britain to respect Venezuelan sovereignty as a nation and settle the border question. People from British Guiana fought World War I and World War II as British soldiers. The colony had an identity that was decidedly colonial, English, ethnically and culturally plural and class based, but no national identity of its own. To understand the emergence and crystallization of the identity, class and ethnicity of British Guiana it is necessary to examine the types of society that emerged under the colonial state.

Elsewhere (Danns 1987) I have analyzed the different types of social structures that developed in British Guiana through the instrumentation of the colonial state and which served to establish an identity that was colonial but not national. I identified three distinct periods in the development of Guyanese society during colonial rule. The first period is *Plantation Slavery Society* which lasted from the inception of colonial rule to the abolition of slavery in 1838. Slave insurrections in 1763 and 1823 were the main internal threats to the security of the plantation society. Plantations were set up exclusively for the purpose of overseas trade and were not concerned in any way with developing or advancing the colony. The owners and managers of these plantations were immigrants and transients who did not regard the colony as their home. The colonial state officials along with the managerial class on the plantations formed an outward looking ruling class. The importation of Africans as an enslaved labor force heralded the emergence of plantation slavery society. Slave plantation society was typified by caste stratification system based on race, and a rigidly stratified social structure based on occupational status and divided along race and color lines. The myth of white racial superiority was perpetrated as a legitimizing narrative to justify the privilege and dominance of the English colonizers and planter class and the subordination of people of color. Plantations were geographically separate and total institutional structures. The slaves were regarded as an animate labor force and not citizens of the colony and their cultural practices were defined as primitive and heathen and discouraged. The Christian religion, English language and other English normative practices were propagated to induce compliance. The legal citizens were the White economically dominant class and the colonial state officials. The colonial state held overall control of the colony and the governor controlled the state apparatus. Emancipation was an unpopular policy among the plantocracy and was enforced by the superordinate colonial state apparatus.

The second period is *Plural Society* which lasted from emancipation until the 1930s when mass agitation for self-government and political independence was initiated. This period heralded the arrival of all the different ethnic and cultural groups that would permanently give character to the society. This period underlines the role of the colonial state as a class creator by liberating the slaves and deliberately importing other ethnic and cultural groups to replace them. The main internal security threats to the plural society were labor unrest involving indentured and freed labor protesting working conditions and labor relations, and ethnic unrest between competing minority ethnic groups. The importation and indentureship of new ethnic groups, Portuguese, Chinese, Indians and even a small number of Africans led to the crystallization of an ethnically and culturally plural British Guiana society. Because of their whiteness or nearness to whiteness, the Portuguese and Chinese were freed from plantations and together with the freed Africans added to the citizenry of the colony. By the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, British Guiana with its colonizers and imported peoples was color class stratified as follows. At the top of the hierarchy, senior government administrators, the planter class and top businessmen- all white and English- ruled supreme. Next were a Portuguese entrepreneurial class involved in commerce, followed by a colored mulatto bureaucratic class and the small population of Chinese engaged in limited commercial ventures. Blacks formed the bulk of the urban proletariat, provided skilled labor on the sugar plantations and were part of the rural peasantry. Through their acquisition of education they were afforded a limited measure of upward mobility in the teaching profession and the civil service. East Indians were indentures on the plantation and also formed a rural peasantry.

The Amerindians lived on the periphery of the social system of the British Guiana. As a marginalized group they were not treated as part of the Guyanese society.

The third period is that of *Creole Society* which lasted until political independence was achieved on May 26, 1966 and British Guiana became Guyana. R. T Smith explained that “The basic facts about Creole society are that it was rooted in the political and economic dominance of metropolitan power, it was color stratified and integrated around the conception of the moral and cultural superiority of things English”(1967: 234). The dominant value standards in the society were English and all remaining ethnic groups subscribed to these values because they saw them as the only way to gain upward mobility in the colonial society. Smith saw the institutions of religion, education, the law, medicine, journalism and the civil service as forces contributing to the process of creolisation. These forces while advancing the cultural assimilation of the various ethnic groups into English culture, helped to promote an upward mobility path based on a conversion to creole culture. Education was key to creolisation and speaking and writing the King’s English well were keys to professional and occupational mobility and success. The period of creole society was not only one in which the dominant British culture has been accepted by all seeking upliftment in the society, but it was also an era of significant social, economic and political changes and upheavals in the society. A growing non white professional, occupational, landed and propertied middle class had emerged. It began to wield political and legislative power. The economy was diversified from the tyranny of sugar and the price for this commodity in the world market was weakened. Bauxite mining by American Aluminum Company (ALCOA) was providing expanding employment opportunities with good wages. The labor movement grew and became increasingly empowered with the legalization of trade unions. The British Government established several commissions of inquiry which recommended changes in the country’s constitution towards more popular participation. A number of ethnic associations emerged to champion the cause of ethnic groups who over time came to identify themselves as British Guianese and the colony as their home. Universal adult suffrage was granted in 1953.

The nationalist political parties and their charismatic leaders that would shape the country’s future emerged. CheddiJagan and his PPP had won elections in 1953, 1957 and again in 1961 under a system of First past the post. Jagan was the first Premier of British Guiana. He claimed that his government was in office but not in power. The Governor who was the paramount executive held veto power and rejected Jagan’s policies to bring about radical changes and promote socialist development. Although the British Government controlled foreign policy, Jagan’s PPP actively traded with the Soviet Union, Cuba and other socialist nations. One of his Ministers boasted it is easier to stop tomorrow than to stop communism. Another impacting policy decision was to keep British Guiana from joining the British West Indian Federation. Jagan seemingly feared that his majority East Indian supporters would become a powerless minority in a Federation of Black dominated West Indian territories (Palmer 2010). Though a strong anti-colonialist, nationalist and an unrepentant socialist, Jagan’s ethnic chauvinism trumped his principles and underlined the ethnic divisions that shaped the country’s identity. This phase highlighted the existence of competing strategic cultures. The British Governor and the White ruling class were the purveyors of the colonial strategic culture. The nationalist movement as represented by CheddiJagan’s PPP, Forbes Burnham’s PNC, the labor movement, ethnic associations and intellectuals were advocates of a nationalist strategic culture. The foundation for an emergent national identity was being laid. Generations from the former slaves and former ethnics’ indentures were being born in the colony and saw it as their only home. They were dissatisfied with a British colonial identity and were seeking to carve out one of their own.

### ***Nationalism and Political Independence Phase – 1966 – 1970***

Nationalism in response to British colonialism took hold of the colony. This nationalism marked the rejection of continued British colonial rule as well the plantocracy and the color class upper crust of the stratification order. The People’s Progressive Party (PPP) was formed and contrary to the expectations of the colonial authorities won the first elections held under universal adult suffrage by a landslide. This party united the two dominant race groups by bringing together the masses of working class East Indians and Blacks. The Peoples Progressive Party led by East Indian dentist Dr. CheddiJagan and the Peoples National Congress (PNC) led by Black lawyer Forbes Burnham set their imprint on the minds of the colonized masses and the identity of their country. Both mass parties from the very inception identified themselves as socialist. CheddiJagan was labeled a communist and Forbes declared himself to be a Fabian socialist. These leftist ideologies put them at odds both with the Britain the colonial ruler and with the region’s superpower, the United States.

Britain, willing to relinquish its colonies in the West Indies, was not opposed to the vibrant nationalism and quest for an independent statehood by the local politicians. The hope was that the Westminster system of Government and capitalist ideology would be retained. These nationalist leaders who were trained in the metropolitan countries embraced Westminster Democracy but rejected capitalism as a suitable ideology for nation building. In the light of the cold war with the Soviet Union and the subsequent emergence of Cuba as a Soviet satellite in the region, the United States bitterly opposed any socialist or communist influences in the region. The Guianese nationalist leaders, in particular Cheddi Jagan, were seen as posing a threat to the national security of United States if Guyana was granted independence under Jagan's leadership. After the fiasco of the Bay of Pigs invasion with Cuba, the Kennedy administration took an active and personal interest in the politics of the colony and the identity its leaders were trying to forge. Britain and the United States combined to undermine the two parties and their leaders and in the process exacerbated race conflict between the mass of East Indians and Blacks in the colony. In the 1964 elections East Indians voted solidly for the PPP and Blacks voted for the PNC while Amerindians, Portuguese and mixed races voted for Peter D'Aguiar's United Force (UF) party. The dynamics between Jagan and Burnham and the machinations that led to Forbes Burnham leading the country to independence on the 26<sup>th</sup> May 1966 are well documented elsewhere (Palmer 2010). These two leaders along with Peter D'Aguiar, were the founding fathers of the Guyanese nation. Jagan and Burnham were united in their opposition to British rule and were determined to see fundamental transformation in the political, economic and social order. D'Aguiar, holding a competing strategic vision, wanted political independence but defended the colonial stratification order and the British way of doing things. The parties coalesced around separate ethnic and cultural interest but openly bought into Westminster democracy even changing the name of the British Guyana Legislative Assembly to "Parliament" when independence was granted.

British Guiana became Guyana an independent nation within the British Commonwealth of nations. The country retained the British Monarch Queen Elizabeth II as its head of state. A Governor General, Sir David Rose was the Queen's representative as head of government in the new nation. Executive power rested largely with the Prime Minister Forbes Burnham. The symbols of the new nation were unmistakable representations of its intention to chart a sovereign path that highlighted the hope and aspirations of the former colonized rather than those of the colonizer. These included its national anthem replacing the British national anthem. Its new flag the Golden Arrowhead replaced the Union Jack. Its coat of arms provides symbolic representations of the country's indigenous Amerindian peoples, its many rivers, the flora, fauna and minerals of its pristine rain forests, its sugar and rice industries. The word Guyana is derived from an Amerindian word meaning "Land of many waters." The country's motto emblazoned on its coat of arms is: "One People, One Nation, One Destiny" and highlighted a strategic vision to go forward as a united nation. Yet, the coat of arms included a monarchical insignia and the national flower is the Victoria Amazonia Lily both symbolic of a continued connectedness to the rule of the British monarchy. A national army trained by the British was established. Anxious to assert its new nationhood, the Burnham government established diplomatic relations with Britain, The United States, Canada, India and some African nations. The British Government and the American Government were pleased with the new PNC/UF coalition government and development aid flowed to the new nation. The communist threat that the PPP represented was vanquished into the political wilderness never to rule Guyana again until 1992 after the Cold War was ended. Independence was a highpoint in Guyana's political development. Ethnicity and class were subordinated, however briefly, to the aspirations of the new nation and the identity of togetherness it was trying to forge.

A significant development in this phase was the replacement of English Government officials with dark and brown skin native born Guyanese. The colonial state had withdrawn by administrative decree taking its officials with it and relinquishing its power to the colonized peoples. The dwindling minority of White population no longer commanded all power and privilege. The color class stratification order based on whiteness and nearness to whiteness was irrevocably being reversed. The post-colonial state and its new elites had emerged and were unrelenting in the pursuit of radical decolonization and the creation of a new identity and strategic culture for the new nation.

The strategic threats to Guyana remained its border disputes with Venezuela and Suriname. Internally, the class structure had begun to change with locals having replaced colonial ruling class officials. Ethnicity remained an issue. Ethnic competition and conflicts mainly between Blacks and East Indians, encouraged by the political parties they supported, were heightened when elections were scheduled.

The massively rigged 1968 elections marked the beginning of undemocratic electoral rule in Guyana under the PNC for next 24 years. These elections also deepened the ethnic divide with East Indians and other ethnic groups left feeling disenfranchised. Like the colonial Governor, Burnham had become the pre-eminent custodian of the nation's strategic culture and the main purveyor of its strategic vision. He had restored undemocratic rule to Guyana by his strangle hold on the state apparatus.

Burnham had signaled his intention to declare Guyana a socialist republic thus creating for it a distinct identity at variance with the wishes of the region's superpower, the British and the British West Indian nations. In 1969 the new nation, its leadership, and its less than 2000 member army were severely tested by a secessionist uprising in the Rupununi Savannahs by ranchers allegedly trained and provided with weapons by Venezuela. The Guyana Defence Force combined with the Guyana Police Force repelled the rebels who fled across the border to Venezuela. The second serious threat came from Suriname in the New River Triangle where armed Surinamese settlers illegally occupied territory which was part of Guyana, but Suriname saw as theirs. Prime Minister Burnham acted against the advice of his foreign minister Sir Shridath Ramphal to take the matter to the United Nations. Burnham, who wore the uniforms of his armed forces, personally commandeered an elite squad of army paratroopers and launched a surprise attack on the interlopers. Some were killed or captured and the others scampered back across the border to Suriname. These were remarkable, somewhat surprising, and brave actions by the leadership of a small nation with little resources to repel threats to its territory and national security. These threats to Guyana's territorial integrity functioned to define and affirm the identity of the new nation by uniting the great majority of the Guyanese people in opposition to its hostile neighbors. Their attachment to the nation was now also emotional. The Guyanese people came to recognize that they were in the same ship and were headed for a common destiny. Ethnic identity however, played a role in the Rupununi uprising. Portuguese ranchers and their Amerindian workers living in the remote savannah regions were the rebels. The secessionists did not feel themselves part of the new nation, nor did they identify with its leadership and policies. Burnham's PNC had ditched its UF coalition partner in the 1968 elections and this may have alienated the Portuguese ranchers who supported the UF. Ethnic identity and chauvinism had surfaced to challenge national identity.

### ***3. The Cooperative Socialist Republic Phase 1970 – 1985***

The Cooperative Socialist Republic Phase is the phase in which the post-colonial national identity of Guyana is crystallized. Prizel (2004) argues that the sense of a nation and national identity plays a vital role in forming a society's perception of its environment. It is an extremely important, if not driving force behind the formation of a foreign policy because national identity helps define the parameters of what a polity considers its national interests at home and abroad. He further contends that a polity's national identity is very much a result of how it interprets its history – beliefs and perceptions that accumulate overtime and constitute a society's collective memory. Prizel concluded that the national identity is subject to that layer of the polity that has the custodianship of the collective memory. (2004: 14). The Burnham's PNC as the new rulers of the post-colonial state apparatus were the purveyors and custodians of Guyana's "collective memory". They set about the task of defining the collective consciousness in order to build a new national identity. The state ownership and control of the media made this task less challenging. The common history of suffering under slavery, indentureship, plantation exploitation, and ethnic and cultural marginalization provided the emotional, motivational and symbolic grist to build the new nation's identity. The way forward was to build "My Guyana El Dorado, best of all the world to me". The colonial settlers and rulers did not find the mythical El Dorado, a city made of gold and precious metals. The new nation was going to build an El Dorado out of the country's abundant, largely unexploited natural resources. This El Dorado was the Cooperative Republic. The new rulers were developing a new strategic culture out of past experiences.

Cuffy, the Black slave who led the Berbice Slave Rebellion in 1763 and immobilized the plantation system was declared a national hero. The 1763 Monument, located in the capital city of Georgetown, was declared a national monument and featured a statue of Cuffy armed with a pistol and looking at the world in defiance. The 1763 monument was located next to the "Residence", the official home of Prime Minister Burnham and was unveiled on May 23, 1976. The 1823 Monument also featured Damon, a former slave who led a similar uprising against the plantation system and the colonial order. This monument was located in Anna Regina on the Essequibo coast. The Enmore Martyrs Monument was built by the Government to commemorate the lives and killing of five East Indian Sugar workers and the injuring of 14 more by the police on June 15, 1948. These workers were on strike and the incidence led to an improvement in labor conditions for sugar workers.

The Enmore Martyrs Monument was unveiled on June 16, 1977 on the 29<sup>th</sup> Anniversary by Prime Minister Burnham. The Non Aligned Monument was built in the heart of the capital Georgetown to commemorate the August 8- 11, 1972 Conference of the Foreign Ministers of Non Aligned Nations hosted by the Guyana Government. This monument featured busts of President Gamal Abdel Nasser of Egypt, President Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, President Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru of India and President Josip Broz Tito of Yugoslavia, the founding leaders of the movement who initiated the conference of Afro-Asian countries. This monument replaced a statue of Queen Victoria which was unceremoniously abandoned and placed at the back of the Botanical Gardens. Guyana's national identity was being forged and sculpted around symbols of struggle, bravery, freedom and self-determination. The custodians of the strategic culture had reached into the country's history and that of other nations with similar histories to derive narratives of struggle and legitimizing symbols of heroism.

A key policy initiative of Burnham's PNC government was to give national recognition to and celebrate the multiethnic and multicultural nature of the Guyana society through national holidays and festivities. In colonial British Guiana, the national holidays were almost exclusively in recognition of Christian religious festivities. These were Good Friday, Easter Monday and Christmas. New Year's Day and the Queen's Birthday were also celebrated. The new nation celebrated in addition Independence Day, Republic Day (Mashramani), Labour Day, Freedom Day, Caricom Day. Further, five new religious holidays were introduced. Three Muslim holidays: Yum an-Nabi (Birth of the Prophet Muhamad), Eid Al Fitr, and Eid Al Adha (Feast of the Sacrifice); two Hindu holidays Phagwah (Holi), Diwali (Hindu Festival of Lights) are all nationally celebrated. These ethnic, cultural and national holidays are embraced by all Guyanese and it is very normal to see the various ethnic groups participate in the cultural festivities of each other. The Christian holidays, Christmas in particular, remain the most popular among all ethnic groups. Enmore Martyrs Day is not a national holiday but is celebrated by sugar workers and the labor movement in recognition of the killing of East Indians workers who were on strike. The national recognition of ethnic and cultural diversity cultivated over time a sense of a national identity. National recognition of freedom from slavery and indenture, the struggles of workers, the country's independence, and the birth of the Cooperative Republic are symbolic and emotional markers in building the national identity. The celebration of Mashramani on February 23 was in recognition of the nation's status as a Republic. The concept Mashramani is associated with an indigenous Amerindians celebration after a harvest. Fifteen holidays are held in affirmation of the nation's identity. At least one of these national commemorations is held during each month except the months of July and September. Indian Arrival Day was later introduced by the Jagdeo government.

A second policy initiative which fostered the national identity was in the sphere of education. The educational system played a crucial role in the development of Guyana's strategic culture. The government took control of all schools and colleges removing ownership and control by the churches and other private enterprise. The educational system was seen as perpetuating colonial and anti-national values and learning. The Church schools were bastions of the colonial order and were in fundamental opposition to the socialist direction in which the state elite was trying to take the country. In 1976 a policy of free education from kindergarten to university was promulgated. Free uniforms and books were given to students. Text books were rewritten and the Queens image on note books was replaced by that of Prime Minister Forbes Burnham. Much emphasis was placed on training teachers and the secondary school system was diversified to meet changed and emergent learning needs. Access to university and tertiary education was significantly expanded, all paid from state coffers. Guyanese students received scholarships to study medicine and other disciplines in Cuba, Soviet Union, India and other countries. Foreign relations with North Korea and Cuba led to the introduction of "Mass Games" in which school children spent many hours out of school learning and performing mass exhibitions that celebrated national symbols, causes and myths. Free education provided opportunities for upward mobility for all social classes and the elimination of privilege of access maintained under colonial rule.

A third and major policy initiative was the constitutional change of the country to a sovereign republic. PNC leader Forbes Burnham had stated: Seek ye first the political kingdom and all else shall be added. The Queen was removed as head of state and executive power rested almost exclusively with Prime Minister Burnham. A ceremonial president was appointed. Guyana became known to the world as "The Cooperative Republic of Guyana". The cooperative was seen as the instrument for economic and social empowerment and development of the Guyanese people and their communities. Guyana was declared as a country in transition to socialism and the cooperative was seen as a primary means for making this happen. Socialism came to define the strategic culture of Guyana.



The PPP as the main opposition party wanted Guyana to be declared socialist from the inception and not to be seen as being in transition. Both the PPP and the Working People's Alliance (WPA) were to the left of the ruling PNC on the ideological spectrum. The WPA was a third party led by left wing scholars and intellectuals attached to the University of Guyana and elsewhere. The WPA with its multi ethnic and rotating leadership was strongly opposed to the PNC's undemocratic rule. To be non-socialist in this phase was to be deviant in Guyana. Socialism came to define Guyana's strategic culture and national identity because of the broad based support for this ideology. The PNC also introduced free health care in addition to free education. Opposition to the PNC was not because of its cooperative socialism, but because it was rigging national elections, had established a doctrine of party paramountcy and was perceived as corrupt and dictatorial.

Nationalization of the commanding heights of the economy was a logical step in the transition to socialism. It functioned to define Guyana's identity in the eyes of the international community. The state nationalized 80 percent of the economy culminating with the historical act of taking over the sugar industry from Bookers McConnell in 1976. The nationalization of sugar brought the external ownership of the sugar plantations to an end. The bauxite industry and utilities were also nationalized along with several sizable local and foreign businesses. The PPP strongly supported nationalization but disagreed with the Burnham government decision to compensate the companies they were nationalizing, particularly the sugar and bauxite industries. Many enterprises taken over had the prefix "Guy" short for Guyana as part of its name. The sugar industry was "Guysuco", the bauxite industry became "Guymine". Utilities had the full name to their title such as Guyana Electricity Corporation and Guyana Telephone and Telegraph Company. The Burnham government did not discourage private enterprise but made the point that the public sector and the cooperative sector will have precedence over it in a tri-sectoral economy. This was a reversal in fortunes for the private sector which was preeminent and flourished under colonial rule. The colonial state had functioned to regulate the economy and played a minimal role in ownership. The post colonial state, devoid of the external backing of the imperial state, assured its power and dominance by its ownership and control of the economy.

Like the colonial state, the post-colonial state became a class creator and impacted the class structure and social organization of the society. The new ruling class comprised the state elite and public sector elite, and a diminished private sector elite. A professional middle class and medium size business owners formed the next tier of the stratification order. The working class masses made up the third tier. Class in post-colonial Guyana was defined more by political power and administrative control over the economic enterprises than by ownership of these enterprises. Elsewhere (Danns 1982) I have described this class transformation as a "silent revolution". The revolution of decolonization, of undoing and doing over. An important element of this socialist transformation was "comrade politics" a symbolic usage that was engendered in the strategic culture. Everyone regardless of their status in the society was a comrade. There was "Comrade Leader", Comrade Prime Minister", Comrade Principal", Comrade Director", Comrade Messenger", or just plain "comrade" when there was no compulsion to recognize status. Comrade became a socially equilibrating construct that in the words of its purveyors made "the small man a real man". This was another symbolic departure from the status conscious colonial social structure. Comrade had no race, no color, and no creed. Everyone was a comrade. The gap between those in the ruling class and the other two classes was not wide. The new ruling class members of the state and public sector elites were largely salaried officials in a society where wages were ungenerous and corruption was endemic. The implications of socialism and nationalization for Guyana's national identity were the discouragement of foreign investment and the serious limiting of development aid from Western Countries. The government sought to overcome this by championing a policy of non-alignment and noninterference in the affairs of other nations.

The 1980 Constitution effectively underscored: the nation's identity as being in transition from capitalism to socialism; state control of the economy; the organization of people into cooperatives; and the creation of an executive presidency with dictatorial powers. The Guyana Constitution became an artifact of the nation's strategic culture, its identity and its ideals. It enshrined in law the strategic thinking of its elites, if not also its people. It provided a legal framework and justification for the core values of a nation and is a good place to start when seeking to understand that nation's identity and strategic culture. The cooperative socialist phase ended with the collapse of the Guyana economy around the failed development policies of its elites. The Burnham Government had made a serious misstep in nationalizing the large foreign owned economic enterprises and in the words of Clive Thomas turned "national assets into a national foreign debt".

This phase however forged the country's national identity and strategic culture most of which remain intact. It ended with the untimely demise of its architect and paramount leader President Forbes Burnham.

#### **4. The Phase of Pragmatic Liberalism 1985 – 1992**

The death of President Burnham in 1985 marked a significant turning point in Guyana's post-colonial history. As the new lead custodian of the strategic culture President Desmond Hoyte set about vigorously reintegrating Guyana back into the capitalist world economy and weaning it away from the failed cooperative socialism of which he himself had been one of its strongest ideological advocates. The implementation of austere structural adjustment policies to foster a market economy, as well as substantial cutbacks in the dispensation of welfare benefits by the state, led to a widening of the gap between haves and have nots. University education was no longer free. Pressured by IMF requirements to cut spending, President Hoyte also abandoned many other social programs that defined the cooperative socialist phase. The cooperative movement which was heavily subsidized by the Burnham government and touted as an engine of development disappeared. The era of anti-imperialism, chest thumping nationalism and comrade politics had unceremoniously ended. Nationalized industries were quickly put up for privatization in the new market economy and industrialization by invitation came to define the changed strategic culture.

Divestment, privatization and the swing to an open market economy led to reorganization and significant changes in the stratification order. Privatization resulted in the diminishing of the influence of Blacks in the ruling class due to the closure of some state enterprises or the change in ownership and management of others. Blacks were a bourgeois of the public sector in that their access to ruling class status was predominantly possible through employment in the top levels of the public service, state economic enterprises, the military and police, and the upper echelons of the political directorate. The market economy led to an upswing in the class position of East Indians who embraced private enterprise.

The Hoyte Administration did not end relations with the socialist countries, but significantly reduced Guyana's close ties to them. There was retention of the basic tenets of the Burnham Republic in foreign policy minus its socialist transition rhetoric. Similarly, Hoyte never sought to reduce the powers of the Presidency nor the basic elements of the country's constitution that had created a *de jure* and a *de facto* dictatorship. He also promoted Guyana as a champion of the environment by allocating one million hectares of pristine Guyana rainforests for research.

The Hoyte impact on Guyana's strategic culture was transformative and included the repudiation of cooperative socialism, the reintroduction of a market economy, and the democratization of the society by paving the way for the first time for free elections and the peaceful transfer of power in a post-colonial Guyana. Hoyte believed and sought to promote a strategic culture where elections would be based not on race but competence and fairness in government.

#### **5. The Autocratic Democracy Phase 1992**

The Cold War had ended, the Soviet Union had collapsed, the Berlin wall had collapsed and CheddiJagan was no longer seen by the President Clinton's Administration as a threat to the national security of the United States. The Jagan platform had pledged to have a mixed economy and not to turn back the economic and other initiatives Hoyte's PNC government had negotiated with the foreign donor community which promised substantial aid if free democratic elections were held in Guyana. Ministers of Finance were appointed who kept the country faithfully in line with the conditionalities of the IMF/ World Bank structural adjustment programs. Pursuing socialism was not an option for the PPP if even it wanted to. East Indians who formed the party base were in no mood for such an ideology and strongly embraced private enterprise. The Black population, while unsettled by the change in government and the austerity measures of the economic recovery program, were also largely fed up with the greater economic hardships and undemocratic rule socialism had brought. President CheddiJagan during his five years in office from 1992 - 1997 as Guyana's President changed little of the basic structure of authoritarian governance left in place by the PNC. The most significant change was the removal of Blacks from top positions in the public service, state enterprises and government and their replacement by East Indians. Blacks were marginalized and victimized and were equated with the PNC and seen as enemies of the PPP government. This reversal in the social order underlines the critical role ethnicity continued to play in defining the national identity of Guyana. The paramouncy of the PNC over the government was supplanted by the party paramouncy of the PPP.

Jagan died on March 6, 1997 by which time rampant corruption had taken hold of his government and narco traffickers in partnership with underground elements of the East Indian business sector had begun to operate unchecked. His funeral, like that of Forbes Burnham, united the Guyanese people of all races, color and creed. They acknowledged the passing of a national hero and one of the founding fathers of the Guyanese nation. The PPP party began to elevate Jagan's contribution to mythical levels including the false claim that he, not Forbes Burnham was a founder of the regional integration movement. Jagan had opted to keep Guyana out of the British West Indian Federation when he was in office. The PPP government has been tireless in its condemnation of the PNC for its 28 years of rule and continues to propagate a narrative that the PNC and its leaders had done nothing for the country except ruin it. Everything Guyana as a nation had accomplished was attributed to the PPP leader Cheddi Jagan and his party. The PPP did this while keeping the institutional structures of the state largely unchanged and also faithfully followed the programs for the country put in place by the Hoyte government. The strategic culture was built around the notion that Guyana was a free democratic society which holds free and fair elections.

President Samuel Hinds who was Jagan's Prime Minister succeeded him in office for nine months until elections were held in December 1997. Hinds, a Black Guyanese, was merely a caretaker President and Janet Jagan the powerful wife of Cheddi Jagan was appointed his first Vice President and Prime Minister. She was instrumental in cultivating her husband in death as a mythical figure and heroic national leader. Janet Jagan succeeded her husband as President and her brief reign was characterized by widespread political unrest and protest against an American born Guyanese being President of the country. Some of the protests against her assumed a racial tone because she was not only foreign born but was also white. She resigned as President in 1999 after only twenty months in office and was succeeded in office by the young Moscow trained finance minister Bharrat Jagdeo. She did little in government and poor health and unrelenting protests mainly by supporters of the PNC played a part in her stepping down.

Unlike Burnham, Jagan and Hoyte who were also the leaders of their respective parties, President Jagdeo is not also the leader of his PPP party. His power as President is somewhat tempered by the PPP Central Executive which is a cabal with control over the state. He utilizes the powerful office of the Presidency as a bully pulpit to sustain the narrative of blaming the PNC for everything that was wrong with the society and for the ineptitude of his own administration. He was successful in adhering to the IMF programs and obtaining major debt write off. A defining feature of the strategic culture administration has been the expansion of Guyana's policy on protection of its rainforests and fighting climate change through its 2009 Low Carbon Development Strategy treaty with Norway. This Norway funded agreement includes funded development initiatives beneficial to Guyana's indigenous Amerindians. Another defining feature of Guyana's strategic culture during the current phase is East Indian triumphalism. The East Indian elite, both Hindu and Muslim, have been accentuating Indian culture in music, dance, films, festivals and language, with the design of seemingly making it the dominant culture in Guyana. Cultural and trade links with India have been considerably expanded. Relations with Islamic countries are being accentuated with the 2010 establishment of an Embassy in Kuwait. Indian Arrival Day has been introduced by the Jagdeo Government as another national holiday to commemorate the arrival of East Indian indentureds to Guyana on May 5, 1838. This renaissance of Indian culture and the promotion of things Indian are seemingly central to the strategic thinking of the PPP government.

A concomitant of Indian triumphalism has been the growing exclusion of Blacks from the mainstream of economic and social mainstems. One study found that Afro-Guyanese individuals and communities reported feeling excluded, discriminated against and criminalized (United Nations 2009). Under President Jagdeo's rule race conflicts were exacerbated. Narco traffickers have extended their influence in the society leading to perception of Guyana as a narco state. Narco politics gave rise to powerful extra legal armed groups such as the "Phantom Squad" and a rogue police squad known as the "Black Clothes police". Both groups engaged in extra judicial executions of over 200 Black youth some done in public. No one was charged for these extra judicial killings. Law and order was seemingly broken down with people having no confidence in the police and the integrity of the government. People of all races were intimidated and fled the country in droves. The population of Guyana is now less than it was in 1980. Ministers of the government and other top regime officials became conspicuously rich overnight. The PPP government, in the face of international condemnation by human rights organizations, has been making token overtures to appease the marginalized Black population.

Despite a recent record of economic growth there remain high poverty rates, high unemployment especially in the Black villages. Public infrastructure and public utilities are very deficient. Some efforts have been successful in attracting some foreign direct investment but the main source of investment appears to be coming from some nouveau riche Indians whose wealth comes from sources largely unknown. Although private investment is encouraged, poor infrastructure, corruption, a declining population and a poor security climate are disincentives to investment. After almost two decades of the PPP government, the PNC is still being blamed by the government for all that is wrong in Guyana. The PPP never fails to convey to their supporters that the option to their rule is the PNC and Black dominated rule. The nation's identity is consequently locked in the dysfunctional grip of ethnic politics fuelled by the two major political parties.

### ***Conclusion – The Paradox of National Identity***

The nation of Guyana is undergoing an identity paradox. First, it is a democratic nation state that is locked in the throes of zero sum ethnic struggle in which the ruling party supported by an ethnic majority resorts to their victory at the ballot to stigmatize, marginalize and disempower a significant minority ethnic group. Secondly, it is a would be market economy which is dominated by state ownership and control. Third, its Constitution proclaims the nation a parliamentary democracy, yet it enshrines an autocratic executive presidency that can operate above the law. Fourth, it is dominated by socialist political parties in power and in opposition while seeking to pursue a capitalist path of development. Fifth, it is geographically located in South America and is bordered by neighbors Brazil, Venezuela and Suriname with which it has limited contact. Yet, it is culturally and in other ways strongly connected with the Anglophone Caribbean. Finally, it is a country rich in natural resources but poor and underdeveloped. The country's identity has evolved from colony to an independent nation state, to cooperative socialist republic, and now a liberal democracy on a state controlled capitalist path of development. These paradoxes of identity have kept the nation's strategic culture in a state of flux and have consistently led to a strategic vision among its leaders that stymies the country's development. The implication of this is that Guyana is certainly not a nation that is equipped for, nor would it seek armed conflict with other countries. It is now doubtful whether its leaders and armed forces would be suitably disposed to confronting an attack on its territory by anything other than diplomatic means. Desertion by members of the armed forces is a high probability in the event of such an attack. Internally, the government lacks the institutional capacity to deal with civil war which is not a remote likelihood. Pockets of vigilante power and narco-traffickers have penetrated the society in ways that continuously threaten law, order and domestic peace. Such pockets of the armed lawless can also pose a threat to Guyana's neighbors and may even be penetrated by terrorist organizations. Guyana remains a small state in the real politik. Its post colonial leaders, both past and present, have had grandiose plans for nation building, attempted bold ventures, and held illusions of being big players in the international arena.

The Guyanese people have a discernible sense of a common identity and share a multicultural milieu by which they identify themselves and are in turn recognized by others. The Guyanese identity transcends their ethnicities and cultures, but yet is defined by them. It was for most of its history British, Western-oriented, and committed in principle, if not always in practice, to democracy and the rule of law. Guyana and its West Indian neighbors may be poor developing countries but certainly have identities that are essentially western. Despite well organized efforts among cultural advocates to create a renaissance of Indian culture in Guyana, and similar efforts in the past among Afro-centric groups, succeeding cohorts of young Guyanese and their parents have embraced the United States as a material Mecca to which they seek to migrate, and a cultural beacon the practices of which they seek to assimilate. Guyanese identify with this superpower nation because of its influences in the region and because their kit and kin are citizens or residents there. They also identify with the United States because the Burnham regime successfully discredited the British as the former colonial masters. It is a major setback when a US visa cannot be obtained or is taken away. It is a major source of pride when a US visa is obtained or possessed. The United States would remain an ally and a country with favored status among the Guyanese people and their leaders for a long time to come.

The ethnic conflicts in Guyana have thrown its national identity into a state of flux. Are its current leaders governing for the nation as a whole or ruling to benefit their own ethnic group? Guyana has become a porous nation and its peoples are outward looking. Mass migration from Guyana is affecting the identity of the nation as people of all class and ethnicities have been leaving the country permanently in droves. It is as if this nation is disappearing just the way its forebears came. This is not an absence of loyalty to identity, but rather a diminishing loyalty to territory.

Guyana's self centered and autocratic leadership, its association with narco dealers and lawless and extra legal forces; coupled with its inability to maintain a secure society and generate meaningful development are primary causes of the national flight. Its social classes and ethnic groups are slowly disappearing.

### **References**

- Danns, Donna (1988) "Guyana's Debt Problem", *Social and Economic Studies* Vol. 37, No. 4 December 1988 ISER, University of the West Indies.
- Danns, George (1980), "Leadership and Corruption: An Analysis of Emergent Post Colonial Rule in the Caribbean". *Transition*, Vol. 3, No. 1, Institute of Development Studies, University of Guyana.
- Danns, George (1982), "The Colonial State in the Caribbean: The Case of Guyana". *Transition*. Vol. 16, Journal of the Faculty of Social Sciences and the Institute of Development Studies, University of Guyana.
- Danns, George (1982) *Domination and Power in Guyana: with foreword by Lewis Coser*, Transaction Books, New Jersey.
- Despres, Leo (1967) *Cultural Pluralism and Nationalist Politics in British Guiana*, Rand McNally, Chicago.
- Hintzen, Percy (1977) *Myth, Ideology and Crisis in Plantation Society: The case of Guyana*, Yale University.
- Lantis, Jeffrey (2009), *Strategic Culture: A Multifaceted Cultural Approach to the Study of Latin America*, FIU Applied Research Center, FIU – SOUTHCAM Academic Consortium.
- Palmer, Colin A (2010), *CheddiJagan and the Politics of Power: British Guiana's Struggle for Independence*. The University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill.
- Prizel, Ilya, (2004) *Foreign Policy: Nationalism and Leadership in Poland, Russia, and Ukraine*, Cambridge University Press.
- Moore Jr. Barrington (1978), *Injustice: The Social Bases of Obedience and Revolt*, Ney York, ME Sharp, 1978.
- Smith, MG, (1963) *the Plural Society in the British West Indies*, University of California Press 1963.
- Smith, R. T. (1966) "Social Stratification, Cultural Pluralism and Integration in West Indian Societies" *Caribbean Integration: Papers on Social, Political and Economic Integration*.
- Snyder, Jack (1977), *the Soviet Strategic Culture: Implications for Nuclear Options*, R-2154-AF Santa Monica: Rand Corporation.
- Thomas, C. Y., "State Capitalism in Guyana", *Crisis in the Caribbean*, F. Ambursley and R. Cohen, (editors), N. Y., Monthly Review Press, 1983.
- Harold Trikunas (2008), "Understanding Venezuelan Strategic Culture," Research Paper #11, Applied Research Center and Western Hemisphere Security Analysis Center (December 2008)
- United Nations Human Right Council (2008), *Promotion and Protection of all Human Rights, Civil, Political, Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, including the Right to Development: Mission to Guyana*.
- Bureau of Statistics, Government of Guyana (2014). *2012 Population & Housing Census*.