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THE COLOR OF DEMOCRACY:
REPRESENTATION IN A MULTI-RACIAL SOCIETY

A Thesis
submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of
Bachelor of Arts in Liberal Studies

By

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In the search for the most acceptable system of representation in a society organized under the principles of liberty and self-government, the impracticability of ancient direct democracy has posed a practical problem throughout history: what is representation?

Models offered by political philosophers and social scientists have been limited by the differences in social organization and by time and place. There is no model of representation with universal application. Besides, in the evolution of the representation system, a new element has been added to the expansion in gender and number of the participation of individuals in the political life: the racial and ethnic component.

When societies are politically divided along racial or ethnic lines, one or more groups tend to be under-represented or non-represented at all. Moreover, the lack of a national identity may contribute to the perpetuation of those defects in representation. The objective is neither a comparative study of models of representation nor a proposal of universal application. Rather, it is to expose representation as a source of conflict and tensions, and to offer directions towards the correction, if not avoidance, of those defects in representation.
The investigation of such political characteristics of multi-racial or ethnic diverse societies leads us, first, to a theoretical study of concepts and definitions of democracy and representation. The second task is the application of these definitions and concepts to societies where race and ethnicity are components of their political life. Finally, it is necessary to assess the impact of race and ethnicity on the political life; to evaluate some democratic models and representation systems; and to identify the sources of conflict and tensions.

The non-existence of a universal model of representation is the reflection of the same non-existence of a universal definition of representation. A *complexio oppositorum*, shrouded in mystery. That is how some theorists were led to regard representation, a term that for them lives in state of confusion. But that is not a cause for despair, or to abandon the idea. That is, if you can solve the mystery: in representation, as one writer puts it, something not literally present is considered as present in a nonliteral sense.

The ghostly "something" is the individual, the citizen, the people. Who is the individual? Who is the citizen? Who are the people? From ancient Greece to modern democracies the meaning of "people" went through different interpretations; from adult, wealthy and educated males to rich and poor males and females. However, children and non-
citizens are still excluded from participation in political life.

From the ambiguities of what properly constitutes "the people" to the different systems of representation in plural societies, the efforts to balance the interests of minorities and majorities is even more difficult when race or ethnicity become the source of the political arrangement.

Two societies that offer similar racial and ethnic political structures with different representation arrangements are the United States and Suriname. However absurd might be the comparison in other terms, politically the two countries show a very interesting contrast and a much more curious tendency of moving towards exactly the opposite of what each one searches for.

The United States are a society politically organized along ideological lines. The political organizations represent the interests of a diversity of races and ethnic groups. In Suriname the political structure is a rigid division of races whose interests are defended by ethnic well defined parties.

The political arrangement in the United States was made possible by constant efforts of cultural assimilation that ended up with the formation of a national identity. In Suriname, a young republic with an old Dutch democratic tradition, such efforts of assimilation were never promoted
and, therefore, it is evident the absence of a national identity.

Assimilation and national identity seem to be two fundamental components to ease the tensions common to ethnic divisions and, thereby, to offer the best ingredients in any formula of full representation of majorities and minorities. In Suriname, the development of those two components would contribute to eliminate the imperfection of the representative model, which now perpetuates the under-representation or non-representation of certain ethnic groups.

In the United States, legislative reforms forcing, for example, a race-conscious districting are keeping racial and ethnic issues unnecessarily prominent in the political agenda, and threatening a return of voting along racial lines. Ironically, what we are seeing in the United States seems to be a reversal of objectives vis-a-vis the Surinamese political environment: while in the latter the tendency is to search for national identity through assimilation, in the former the way being taken may well conduct to a des-assimilation process which might end up in the racial and ethnic fragmentation of the American political structure.

If the goal of both Suriname and the United States, and other multi-racial or ethnic diverse societies as well, is a color-blind society, then the only possible and desirable scenario is one of explicit desire of assimilation and of
formation and consolidation of a national identity that permits a stable system of representation of majorities and minorities.

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INTRODUCTION

It is hard to believe that in 1979 the U.S. Senate killed an attempt to amend the Constitution so as the American people could elect the President. But, you may ask, aren't the people electing the President?

More than two hundred years ago, when the founding fathers got together and started writing "We the people..." the only thing they had no questions about, when they began to figure out how to elect the President, was that George Washington would be the first President. The problem, as Benjamin Franklin immediately warned, was that although there were no doubts about Washington being a good man, no one knew what sort might come afterwards.

It might seem obvious that if the people was to choose the President then the problem was solved. However, then, as in 1979, the idea didn't have too much appeal. Direct election by the people was opposed by those among the Founding Fathers who feared that too much democracy was a dangerous thing. Besides, there were also reasons of all sorts that made it extremely difficult to directly elect the president: the country was composed of thirteen large and small States jealous of their own rights and powers and suspicious of any central national government; national
campaigns were impractical, even if desirable, since the population was spreaded up and down thousands of miles of land barely connected by transportation or communication; and, above all, it was felt at the time that "gentlemen should not campaign for public office (the saying was 'The office should seek the man, the man should not seek the office.')."  

The compromise was what became known as the "electoral college", a form of controlling the electoral process by giving to each state presidential "voters" or "electors" equal to the number of its senators and representatives in Congress.

The states would choose the "electors" by whatever means they might consider more appropriate. In the presidential race, the candidate with a majority of electoral votes would become the President, and the second most voted would be the Vice-President.

Why not give the people the task of electing the President? Although public intelligence was certainly a subject of lengthy discussion, the Founding Fathers rejected direct elections because they feared that the impracticality of campaigning and the non-existence of communication to spread information on candidates would lead people naturally to vote for a "favorite son" from their own state or region. "At worst, no president would emerge with a popular majority sufficient to govern the whole country; at best, the choice of
president would always be decided by the largest, most populous states with little regard for the smaller ones.\textsuperscript{2}

At a time when no political parties existed (some political thinkers believed that political parties were mischievous, if not downright evil), the common wisdom was that after George Washington the electoral voters would invariably fail to come up with a clear winner, and the election would then be sent to the House of Representatives, where each state would get a single vote. The real decisions, therefore, would be made by the enlightened men in the Congress.

The result was that within a short time after Washington, two presidential elections failed to produce a winner and were sent to the House of Representatives.

In 1800, Jefferson and Burr, from the same party, received 73 electoral votes each. The House decided to put Jefferson in the White House. In 1824, in a presidential contest with four fairly strong contenders, Andrew Jackson led in the popular vote but failed to win a majority of electoral votes. The electoral votes were so divided amongst them (the other two candidates were William Crawford and Henry Clay) that no one received the necessary majority to become president. The House of Representatives decided and bypassed
Jackson in favor of John Quincy Adams.*

Can a candidate win the popular vote and lose the election? After 1824, it has happened twice in American political history. In 1876, Samuel Tilden defeated Rutherford Hayes in the popular vote, but Hayes collected enough electoral votes (after some scandalous post-election politicking) to become the victor. The same happened in 1888 when Grover Cleveland won the popular vote but lost to Benjamin Harrison in the electoral college.

The electoral college may have been a good idea that made possible a compromise among the Founding Fathers. It now equals 435 members of the House and 100 of the Senate, and three electoral voters for the District of Columbia.

The members of the electoral college cannot be members of Congress, and are appointed by state political parties to fulfill what is now a largely ceremonial task. However, there is no law stating that the electoral voters "must" vote for their popularly elected party candidate. That means there is no party fidelity. (In 1988, one electoral

*After Jefferson's election, the 12th Amendment separated the voting for President and Vice-President, and the choice of president devolved upon the House of Representative. The election of 1824 is often cited as the first one in which the candidate who obtained the greatest popular vote (Jackson) failed to be elected president. The claim is weird because six of the 24 states at the time chose the electors in the state legislature (including New York, where Adams would be the clear winner in a popular election).
voter from West Virginia cast one protest vote for Lloyd Bentsen instead of voting for Michael Dukakis.)

In this scenario, two questions come to mind immediately: How representative is the electoral college of the will of the people? When the Founding Fathers wrote "we the people...", who did they mean by people?

Critics considered this "indirect" election as hardly the result of the will of the people. Others argued favorably pointing out that the final choice would in the end be of a candidate selected beforehand (in the caucus or primaries) by the people.

The electoral college system has been working for centuries affirming, with few exceptions, the popular vote. And it has served another purpose, good or bad, depending on one's opinion: it provided a constitutional shield for the safeguarding of the two-party system, making it almost impossible for a third party candidate to mount a serious challenge to the candidates of the other two.

Regardless of the pros and cons of such an unique electoral system, which certainly deprives the electorate of its power, the question remains of how representative is this and other forms of representation. In other words, in the search for the most acceptable system of representation in a society organized under the principles of liberty and self-government, can we identify or recognize one genuine form of
democratic representation?, or better and worse forms?

Models offered by political philosophers and social scientists have been limited by philosophical principles, by differences in social organization, and by time and place. It seems that there is no model of representation with universal application.

Besides, the evolution of the democratic system, the expansion - in gender and number - of the original concept of "who are the people?", and the inclusion of a new component - the ethnic and racial elements - seem to introduce not only a new challenge but also a new conflict in this constant search for the ideal representation.

The objective is neither to compare forms or models of representation nor to identify or propose a universal application. Rather, it is to expose representation as a source of conflicts, tensions and dilemmas in multi-racial or pluri-ethnic societies, where one or more racial or ethnic groups face the perspective of being condemned to endless under-representation, or no representation at all.

The political representation in certain multi-racial or multi-ethnic societies is even more tense and conflicting when political groups are organized along ethnic lines rather than ideological preferences, tending to perpetuate under-representation or no-representation.

In the identification of those tensions, conflicts
and dilemmas there are two areas that must be explored: the theoretical view of the concept of representation, and the presentation and analysis of an actual multi-racial or multi-ethnic society. As a first step, a definition of democracy is fundamental to orient the work.

The electoral college system in the United States and its two-party, all-races, multi-ethnic structure reveals strengths and weaknesses that excite the discussion of political under-representation. The arrangement of political parties based on ideology facilitates the access of, and consequently the representation of, groups that—in societies politically divided by race or ethnicity—might otherwise be underrepresented or not represented. However, this arrangement is not a guarantee of full representation and of racial and ethnic political harmony.

In the search for a society which could exemplify the existence of those tensions, conflicts and dilemmas in its political organization, Suriname—a country unique by its blending of races and political mixture—seems to offer some interesting and definite ingredients.

In this century, societies had their racial composition profoundly altered in many countries, both as a product of rapid progress in transportation and as a result of migratory motivation due to improved communications. And, also, ironically, as a result of democracy (e.g. today's
Conflicts and tensions have increased. Is race, or religion, or ethnic identity or language, instead of a common ideal, becoming the catalyzer in the political organization of societies? Is that a cause or consequence of under-representation? Or the result, or fear, of no representation? Are we witnessing a "colorization" of democracy?

* * * * *

Eastern Europe).
CHAPTER ONE

WHO ARE THE PEOPLE?

"A state aims at being, as far as it can be, a society composed of equals and peers"
(Aristotle)

Democracy is, literally, government by the people as a whole (in Greek, *demos*, people, and *kratia*, rule) rather than by any group, class or interest within it. What we understand by democracy, not to mention representation -a gigantic, impersonal and more indirect government in a nation-state- is not what an Athenian in the time of Pericles would expect to see -a small, intimate and more participatory city-state.

The theory of democracy is extremely complicated, partly because of difficulties in understanding who the "people" are, which acts of government are truly "theirs" rather than those of some dominant group or interest, and what it means "to rule".

What properly constitutes "the people" is ambiguous and has frequently been a source of controversy. The first ambiguity is in the notion of "a people": what constitutes "a people" for purposes of democratic government? One might assume that the Greeks were "a people". Not exactly. They
considered the Athenians, the Corinthians, the Spartans, and the residents of many other Greek city-states as "a people" each entitled to its own political autonomy.

Although they considered themselves, the Hellenes, as a distinct people with their own language and history, "they did not regard themselves as "a people" in the political sense of a group of persons who, rightly considered, should govern themselves in a single democratic unit."³

What it means is that what we call Greek democracy was not, in fact, "Greek", but rather Athenian, or Spartan or whatever. Such perception could be perceived as absurd today, but it is not when we start asking ourselves why Americans and Canadians, sharing the same mass of land and the same language, are different "people"? What about Spanish-speaking Latin America? Why do they have different governments?

Dahl rejects the explanation given by many political philosophers that presupposes that "a people" already exists as a given fact. He questions the fact by reminding us of the events in the United States, in 1861, when the issue was settled not by consent, or consensus, but by force. Even earlier, the American Revolution displayed the coming to consciousness of the Americans as a distinct people.

The second ambiguity is that within "a people" not all individuals are entitled to participate in governing. Who are the people, or who ought to be a member, in the demos?
The designation *le peuple* or *the people*, as the collective noun denoting those subject to government, came into prominence at the French revolution: it first stood for "menu" or "petit peuple", and characterized small businessmen, artisans, workers, the peasantry. Arendt, for example, held that "the words *le peuple* are the key words for the understanding of the French Revolution, and their connotations were determined by those who were exposed to the spectacle of the people's sufferings which they themselves did not share".4

Since then, the term has become wider in its significance. "The People" now designates all those subject to government within a jurisdiction, irrespective of class, status, or actual wealth and power. It recaptures the idea of the Roman *populus*, those subject to government, as opposed to the senate, those who govern. Such an idea is conveyed in the aim of "government of the people, by the people, for the people", and in the modern conception of the sovereignty of the people, according to which those who are governed also exert ultimate control (and not just influence) over those who govern them.

The "will of the people" is what a democratic election supposedly aims to discover, while the "interests" of the people provide a criterion for the legitimacy of certain kinds of popular government (specifically in the "people's democracies", like in China and in the former Soviet Union).
Here the term "people" is used as part of the theory of Marxism-Leninism, to denote "the proletariat and its allies."

On the other hand, some political philosophers refer to "a people" as a collective identity, at least partly independent of political structure. "A people" has a history, and a continuity, which are not those of a state, and according to some nationalist doctrine, it has a right to that state which will conserve and express such identity. It was the argument used by Nazi Germany to justify its racist and expansionist policies. Dahl flatly rejects this concept as part of "a shadow theory of democracy."

But, who constitute the people?

In Athens, the demos never included more than a small minority of the adult population. Not only women were excluded (as they continued to be in many democracies even in the twentieth century), but also long term residents and slaves. The requirement of Athenian citizenship was that both parents should be Athenian citizens. The slaves were denied not only all rights of citizenship but all legal rights. The number of people excluded from the "people" always has been higher than that of those included. The first "modern democracy," the United States, excluded until not long ago not only women, and children, but also blacks and native Americans. The bottom line was that not everybody was qualified to select the rulers or to participate in ruling, an
idea well absorbed by the Founding Fathers as we have seen in the creation of the electoral college.

From city-state to nation-state, representation as well as democracy were transformed, becoming more complex and, certainly, more confusing. A citizen of ancient Athens would probably consider our modern democracy as undemocratic. He (an Athenian citizen could not be a "she") could never see as democratic the changes and consequences of the complex representative political structure of a nation-state, as compared to the more simple direct political life of the city-state. 9

In modern societies, new forms of political identity for individuals were devised in order to deal with that gigantic and complex political structure of the polity. Individuals began to acquire political identity through organizations reflecting an aggregate of interests. This diversity of organizations became one condition of modern democracy, or of what we call plural societies. Pluralism, however, presupposes activities among groups, not individuals, which in turn produce of course their own elites who compete for political power. A plural society has multiple bases, or centers of power. In reality, one group is always more powerful than another, and, supposedly, no single group can dominate over the other.

Another kind of plural system is the corporatist
society, organized in groups but not as fragmented as the plural society. Groups in the corporatist model represent each major social division, acting as monopolistic organizations for each area of interest. Corporatist models are sometimes viewed wrongly as plural societies. The basic difference between the two is that the plural society is characterized by many and diverse groups, while the corporatist society relies on few and monopolistic groups.

Public policy in those models, considered as a reflection of the "common good" and not necessarily the "will of the people", is shaped by the largest coalition of groups of individuals organized by race, ethnicity, religion or any common interest. Being ideologically charged, political parties play an important role in pluralism as institutions with a programmatic function, unique to mass societies, providing political identification for individuals.

Pluralism generally describes our modern societies: a civil society in which several societies coexist in a single territory, interacting in a peaceful way, perhaps so as to become socially, politically and economically interdependent. It is assumed that such society if formed through a liberal constitution, which builds some principle of tolerance and minority rights in its procedures, so as to break down isolationist and separatist tendencies among citizens belonging to various racial, religious and ethnic groups.
Thus, the "people" in modern societies are all those who are members of the groups and sub-groups. But not all members of those groups and sub-groups qualify as "people" in the polity; only citizens are "people" with political rights. But not all citizens can exert their political rights (children are still excluded, and some minorities as well).

Under such circumstances in modern societies, it becomes increasingly evident that there are difficulties in representation of the multiplicity of groups and sub-groups; and the identification of the will of the people becomes even more problematic. How can a democracy be the rule of the people if the people is so divided? The question is intimately linked to representation, which is fundamental in multi-racial societies divided along ethnic lines and becomes crucial when tolerance and minority rights are non-existent or insufficient. Before addressing some concepts of representation, we shall try to come up with a definition of what is conceived or perceived as democracy.

* * *
CHAPTER TWO

THE REPRESENTATION OF DEMOCRACY

A distinction has to be made between direct and representative democracy. In direct democracy all citizens participate in the decision-making process, by voting and accepting the verdict of the majority. This democracy was possible in a small populated Athens, but it is not viable today in nation-states with millions of inhabitants and thousands of decisions to be made.

In representative democracy the people choose representatives who are then answerable to them, but at the same time directly involved, and usually without further consultation, in the business of government.

However, it seems that there is no agreement on what is important in constituting a regime as democratic. Two conflicting criteria might be employed in the assessment of any political decision: by whom was it taken? which raises the problem of collective choice, and whose interest does it serve?, which raises the problem of social choice.

In the Western democracies, it is normal to use the first criterion, and to call a state democratic if there is some way of attributing every major political decision to the people, who can take part in it or give it its consent. In the
so called centralized democracies, like in the former Soviet Union, the second criterion was used since decisions were regarded as democratic if they further, or simply intended to further, or claimed to further the interests of the people, even when decisions were taken by a ruling party.

In practice, decisions taken by a ruling party tend to be in the interest of that party as much as the interests of a ruling class are reflected in its decisions. Yet, the first criterion is more broadly recognized as the embodiment of a principle of democracy. Many Marxists, at this point, start talking about bourgeois democracy, and dismiss the impression as an elaborate ideological illusion.

Marxists decried Western representative democracies and considered that, regardless of votes being cast and parties organized, power would always vest in the the "bourgeoisie" or its agents. It contrasted with people's democracy, in which there may not be elections to office, but in which it was a condition of the existence of an office that it should be exercised only in the interests of the people as a whole, and not in the interests of any particular class. Marxists offered a system of representation through the "soviets", or the worker's councils. Sovietization would permit the transfer to such council of all economic, political administrative power in order, in theory, to facilitate grass-roots democracy (in practice, permitting control by the
central party). Only members of, or people approved by, the party could be elected to the a "soviet".

The impracticability of direct democracy leads us to the question of what kind of democracy is more democratic? We have said that democracy is government by the people, rather than by any group, class or interest within it. To have that condition people must agree on how they want to be governed. They have to negotiate a kind of social contract, or more commonly, a constitution.

Then, what makes a constitution democratic? It is to this question that the theory of Western constitutional democracy addresses itself, bringing altogether questions inherited from the history of European constitutional government, in which what first existed as a right of appeal of every subject to the sovereign, was gradually transformed into limited government with representational assemblies.

It seems clear that to limit, in such way, the power of government does not mean to transfer it to the people, and while regular elections and universal suffrage are now seen as essential features of a democratic constitution, they are only one part of a system of government which may be undemocratic in every other particular.

Every constitution requires a framework of offices and conventions which may be not subject to easy amendment by popular vote. In fact, power and privilege in that framework
will rarely be seen as a reflection of popular choice. Moreover, a democratically elected government may proceed to enact policies which are manifestly in conflict with the wishes and the interests of the people. Ultimately, representation with a proportional model in which changes of government occur frequently, and extremist parties flourish, might end up dampening confidence in the government's ability to govern and giving legitimacy to parties with ideologies that would destroy the system.

In representative democracies, which concern us more, various criteria have been laid down for determining when an election really does reflect the choice of an electorate. Attempts have been made to impose democratic organization on all institutions within a democracy, in order to avoid the obvious objection that the state represents only one among many concentrations of political power, like that of economic or racial and ethnic groups.

However, the desire to extend democratic decision-making through every autonomous body has provoked intense discussion, partly because it seemed that, without that extension, democracy would be seriously incomplete. This thought is also found behind many justifications given for the forms of government that existed, and still exist, in communist states.

In such a complex and confusing scenario, it is not
an easy task to try to define democracy. It has been noted that one can find definitions of democracy by the hundreds.\textsuperscript{11} Three general approaches to the meaning of democracy emerged in this century. As a form of government, democracy was defined in terms of sources of authority for government, purposes served by government, and procedures for constituting government.\textsuperscript{12} Huntington uses a procedural definition because of what he considers "serious problems of ambiguity and imprecision" arising when democracy is defined in terms of either source of authority or purpose. He reminds us that in other governmental systems people become leaders by reason of birth, wealth, violence, cooptation, learning, appointment, or examination. The central procedure of democracy is the selection of leaders through competitive elections by the people they govern.

One of the most respected modern formulations of the procedural concept of democracy was given by Joseph Schumpeter, when he minimized classical concepts of democracy as "the will of the people" and "the common good" broadly discussed in the works of Mill, Tocqueville and Rousseau. Schumpeter came up with the "democratic method, which is that institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the people's vote".\textsuperscript{13}

In the Schumpeterian tradition, Huntington then
defines a twentieth century political system as democratic:

to the extent that its most powerful collective decision makers are selected through fair, honest, and periodic elections in which candidates freely compete for votes and in which virtually all the adult population is eligible to vote."

As for comparison, democracy in its classical sense would be understood as "a society consisting of a small number of citizens, who assemble and administer the government in person..." Classical republicanism would define it as a society "in which the government derives all its powers directly or indirectly from the great body of the people..." Madisonian democracy has been summarized to refer to the "efforts to bring off a compromise between the power of majorities and the power of minorities".

In modern thought, democracy has been also defined as:

that form of government in which the sovereign power resides in and is exercised by the whole body of free citizens directly or indirectly through a system of representation, as distinguished from "a monarchy, aristocracy, or oligarchy"

These definitions and different approaches to democracy have led us to the identification of some constant components; there is always a source of democracy, "the will of the people"; a purpose, "the common good" or the "public interest", and a procedure, "free, fair and periodic
elections". We could claim, therefore, that representation, as a conduit of the choices of the people, has to reflect these three components to be considered or perceived as democratic.

* * * * *
CHAPTER THREE

THE DEMOCRACY OF REPRESENTATION

"Quod omni tangit ab omnibus approbetur".

Roman Law

"What touches all - states the Roman law - should be approved by all". But how? How can all people be consulted about all issues? How can this happen in a nation-state where, as we have seen, a gigantic, impersonal and more indirect political life replaces the more intimate and more participatory political life of a city-state?

In face of the impossibility of assembling a large number of people in a single place, individuals started representing other individuals or the interests of individuals. Direct democracy became unworkable, and the device of representative government was adopted "as a substitute for the meeting of citizens in person" as Hamilton, Jay and Madison point out in the Federalist Papers. Montesquieu, writing of the English constitution, observed that, since it was impossible in a large state for the people to meet as a legislative body, they must choose representatives to do what they could not do themselves.

Representation is today a significant and widely
used concept. Almost everyone wants to be governed by representatives, although not necessarily by a representative government (representation not always translates into representative government as we will see later); every political group wants representation, and every government claims to represent. However, we are still troubled by what is a genuinely representative government; by the many competing ways in which representation can be institutionalized; and by how full representation can be achieved, not in the sense of performance of the representatives but as a measure of how representation is in fact representative of individuals or interests or both.

The modern concept of representation is linked with the idea of democracy, and certainly with freedom and justice. These three elements must always be present in representation. It is not to say, however, that the concept or the practice of representation has always been, historically, attached to them. Representation also does not necessarily mean representative government. History has numerous examples of kings representing nations. Ambassadors as well as any public official can represent countries. Our concern, therefore, is not only with institutions, symbols and practices that have representative connotations necessary in any society, but mainly with popular self-government and how individuals are represented, particularly those belonging to minorities.
Before we apply practice to theory to investigate how representative are the systems of countries with multi-racial and multi-ethnic societies, a conceptualization of representation is needed as well as a brief description of its evolution through history.

* * *

All began, as H.M. Cam reminds us, when someone shouted during a noisy and confusing medieval meeting: "Don't talk all at once - who will speak for you?" Suddenly, silence! and then someone started speaking while the others nodded.

The concept of representation - in our case, of individuals representing other individuals - is a modern one. The Greeks had no corresponding word, even though they had activities involving representation like electing officials or sending ambassadors. The Romans had the word *repraesentare*, from which the French developed the word "representation" with its English derivation. However, the Latin word was used to mean the bringing into presence of something previously absent, or the embodiment of an abstraction in an object, as joy in a sculptured face. The word did not apply to individuals acting for others, or to their political institutions. The use of the word with its current meaning began in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, as
individuals sent to participate in church councils or, later on, in the English Parliament came gradually to be called representatives. Thus, initially, the concept had nothing to do with democracy or elections, nor was it even considered as a right.

Still, it is not completely clear what representation consists in, or what conditions determine its just and efficient functioning. Nonetheless, representation is, in essence, a modern artifice, although some scholars would add "with a medieval inheritance."²²

It was Hobbes who called attention to the fact that for 600 years the king did not represent his subject, "the name without contradiction passing for the title of those men, which at his command were sent up by the people to carry their petitions, and give him, if he permitted it, their advice."²³ Rousseau, regardless of his opposition to the principle of representation, accepted the idea as "modern," pointing out at the same time that "it comes to us from feudal government."²⁴ Direct democracy was for him the only form of government that could preserve an individual's natural liberty, since it is the only form in which his/her consent is the sole ground of legitimacy. Montesquieu was one of the few exceptions, when he remarked that the idea of the English (representative) government "was found in the woods"²⁵, or as an original English idea. From a historic perspective, the social
mobilization for free and representative government seems to have been more of a social inheritance than a social invention.

After Rousseau, political philosophy became historical and adopted a more favorable view of medieval institutions. Discussion on representation evolved with a fundamental change in the historical perspective. The modern debate assumed that "the people" are a whole to be represented by their government, while the medieval debate assumed that "the people" are a part to be represented to their government.

Moreover, Hobbes and Locke saw individuals represented in one sovereign artificial community made by the laws of reason to be found in human nature. However, individuals also developed their rationality in several communities which could no longer be called artificial because of their function in making or developing what had been called "human nature". Consequently, since the sovereign or the public cannot be made at once, it must be also developed in parts, in estates: one part between the government and individuals. The existence of the estate would guarantee that the government had in fact something to represent: a people formed into a class, or function, or race.

Historically, government by divine right (sacred) gave way to representative government (secular). Government began to represent, or reflect, culture and society, instead
of determining culture and impose on society. However, modern governments had to be limited in order to reflect the society or culture without forming it, or imposing it. It follows that because modern representative government is limited, each and every of its acts must be authorized; government, then, acts by consent (of "the people"). Besides consent, political philosophers, as J.S. Mill, argued that the best modern representative government depended also on two other fundamental conditions: education of the people, and the technology to make possible the public opinion of a large society. People had to be prepared for democracy based on an educated and dedicated society. Technology would help educate the people, politically levelling the society to avoid what Tocqueville called "the tyranny of the majority."

Modern representative government, being secular, is emphatically human. As divine right is government from the top, modern representation is government from the bottom. In modern representation, the people is a whole comprised of many individuals and also include ordered culture or society. Modern representation requires that all government be artificial so that it may be impartial, reflecting the interests of all groups and ruling according to the desires of none.

Divine right holds that the decisive relation of governance is between individual and God, not among
iniduals; and the equality of individuals under God is one of subjection. If all individuals were created equal by the God of divine right as opposed to nature's god, then they owe obedience to Him and, consequently, to the government He appointed. The people of modern representation have no such duty of obedience. Representation replaced political obedience and, thus, one of the functions that natural law was supposed to perform. The individual, however, was still protected by natural laws not merely from misrule but from every unnecessary interference with private liberty. Individuals were bound by virtue of their nature, independently of any conventional law.

In practice, as we have seen, representation was not invented but developed instead as a medieval institution. Modern representation is thought to have been the gradual consequence of developing modern societies. By joining the democratic idea of rule by the people to the "non-democratic" practice of representation, democracy itself took on a new form and dimension. Representation became widely accepted as a solution that eliminated the ancient idea of limits on the size of democratic states, and made democracy a doctrine suitable to both city-states and the modern large nation-states. The turning point in history was "the creation of a (medieval) Parliament... the birth of a representative system", says Guizot. 30.
From Madison to Pennock\textsuperscript{31}, the acceptance of the idea is evident that individuals do have representation because they cannot "be present" themselves. People as a whole must be represented by the government which, in turn, in the Hobbesian and Lockeian thought, rules with the consent of the governed, and with the obligation of protecting the people from misrule and from interference with liberty. The concept of representation is, thus, linked with freedom and justice, and is "wrapped up" by democracy.

"Representation means the making present of something which is nevertheless not literally present", as Pitkins points out\textsuperscript{32}, or, using Sobolewski's approach, is "the relation between the subject represented and the representative acting on his behalf".\textsuperscript{33}

Those were approaches and definitions mainly concerned with the activities, or actions, in representation. However, there were those who preferred to interpret representation as a process, instead of a simple identification of fragmented actions or activities. Lipset states that "representation is a system of actions which have to facilitate interchange between authority and the spontaneous groupings of society"\textsuperscript{34}; a system which includes "most major attempts to influence authoritative decisions".\textsuperscript{35}

In terms of a process, it is implicit that an interaction
exists between various social groups and the government (being forms of interaction elections, press campaigns, actions of pressure groups and political parties, demonstrations, strikes, petitions).

The political aim of this process is to build up a popular consensus on governmental policy taken as a whole. That is the central idea of democracy, and practically the indispensable condition of every democratic government. Representation is then a political "good," as qualified by Nordlinger. It implies a desire versus an interest; a constituency versus a nation; a majority versus a minority. Should a representative act without any consideration of the desires of those represented? Should a representative support the national as opposed to the local interest? Supposedly, a representative system ensures that governments act in the interests of the governed, that those governing are accountable for their actions, that it ensures the dignity of the individual (through a free or open society), and that it decreases the magnitudes of corruption and mismanagement normally involved in all forms of government.

Whatever the preferences, meanings or definitions of representation, discussions of representation are marked by long-standing and persistent controversies. Many political scientists would share, for example, Hobbes' argument that every government is a representative government in that it
represent its subjects. Others argue that no government really represents, that a truly representative government does not exist. Even totalitarian dictators, they say, have popular support, and all governments use propaganda to manipulate their subjects.

The controversy goes on with arguments over the proper relation between representatives and constituents. Hobbes suggested that the representative is free to do whatever he/she pleases, at least so far as his/hers constituents are concerned. Burke, in a thank-you speech to his voters in Bristol, England, who just had elected him to Parliament, reminded them that a representative does not owe "obedience", but "judgement." Nonetheless, "a vocal minority maintains that the representatives's duty is to reflect accurately the wishes and opinions of those he represents."  

The type of relationship between the representative and the represented - the mandate or independence controversy mentioned above - is entangled with other issues of relative priority as questions like the role of political parties, local versus national interest, and the nature of political questions; and of extreme priority like elections.

* * *

Representation is often associated with elections. The origins of an election as a means of choosing among
options remains a mystery. History suggests that acclamation of the victorious leader in tribal wars by both the vanquished and winning warriors may have served the important function of restablishing peace. The recognition by the losing side of the new state of affairs, although practically a compulsory form of "choice," at least served to reduce tension.

The next step in the evolution of elections and representation appears to have been taking sides in the selection of leaders or the settlement of controversy. An Athenian law of the sixth century prescribed that in case of civil turmoil all citizens (evidently, not all people) were to choose one side or lose their status as citizens. The idea behind this device was that a great abstention could facilitate tyranny.40

The widespread use of elections in the modern world is largely due to the gradual emergence of representative government. Elections are means of making political choices by voting. They are used mainly in the selection of leaders and in the determination of issues. This concept of elections implies that the voters are presented with alternatives, that they can choose among a number of proposals designed to settle an issue of public concern. The presence of alternatives is a necessary condition, for although electoral forms may be employed to demonstrate popular support (for incumbent leaders and their policies, for example), the absence of alternatives
disqualifies such devices as genuine elections.

However, for purpose of analysis, it is important to distinguish between the form and the substance of elections. Electoral form may be present but the substance may be missing. The form is the way individuals elect their representatives. The substance is that the voter has a free and genuine choice between at least two alternatives.

The discovery of the individual as the unit to be counted was, from the seventeenth century on, the critical factor in the emergence of modern electoral processes. "The counting was a byproduct of the change from the holistic conception of representation in the Middle Ages to an individualistic conception."41

For example, the British Parliament was no longer seen as representing estates, corporations, and vested interests, but as standing for actual human beings. The movement abolishing "rotten boroughs"** that culminated in the Reform Act of 1832 was a direct consequence of the individualistic conception of representation. Once governments were not only believed to derive their powers from the consent of the governed but were expected to seek consent, the only remaining problem was to decide who was to be included among the governed whose consent was to be sought. The democratic

** The "rotten boroughs" were centers of small population controlled by one person or family.
answer was... universal adult suffrage.

Later, common interests led individuals to form groups, political parties, to defend specific common issues and influence political decision-making. Like elections, political parties are a representative institution, and one of the main linkages connecting citizens, their elected leaders, and their political institutions. For political parties, serving as a linkage means providing a continuing exchange of ideas between decision makers and "the people" on whose behalf they operate.

* * *

Elections are, therefore, ingrained in the concept of representation. The discussion of the above issues, however, only reinforces the difficulties of equating the representation of an individual with respect to all his/her interests with which government must concern itself. To look for a balance between individual interest and government response would be, as Rousseau recognized with typical hyperbole, "immensely difficult and inevitably partial and innaccurate." It is impossible to represent the interests of all at the same time; to please all without displeasing some.

Moreover, the controversial nature characteristic of the debate also exposes the difficulties, not to say the impossibility, to come up with a model of representation which could be universally applied to each society. The existence of
numerous and varied avenues of representation, "each by virtue of its own peculiar nature, seeing, reflecting, attempting to effectuate a slightly different facet of that conglomerate of desires and interests," says Pennock, perhaps produces a more tolerable result than could be accomplished by any results by any of them alone.

However, we can, at least, design a "template" in which we identify three fundamental elements - democracy, justice and liberty - and some required components - popular consent and participation - as always present in any model of representation. Obviously, people (as individuals or groups of interests) are the main ingredient. That "template" assumes that the individuals to be represented are those in the society qualified to be represented according to what we have identified as being "the people," that is, those who were to be included among the governed whose consent was being sought.

Ultimately, the minimum requirement is that every individual has a right to have a say in what happens to him, and how he wants to be governed. Thus, there is no question that representation means popular representation, and self-government. There are also conditions - a democratic environment - required for such representative expression, that is, the three constant components of democracy have also to be present: the will of people, the public interest, and free, fair and periodic elections.
It follows that those elements and components, requirements and conditions, have to be present in all segments of society and entirely cover the relationship between governor and governed, representatives and represented; and that, in their absence, full representation is non-existent, and any attempt to justify representation is irrelevant.

Therefore, full representation should not be regarded as the result of simple measurements of individual participation, but as the product of that individual participation within those conditions and requirements. Higher participation does not necessarily mean greater or better representation. Majority over minority may legitimate actions, but only majority and minorities legitimate representation. We shall look for this evidence, or lack of it, in societies politically divided by ethnicity rather than ideology.

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CHAPTER FOUR

EQUALITY AND REPRESENTATION

Inequalities among individuals are a persistent and serious problem in all democratic countries. The persistence and seriousness of political inequality blurs the ancient vision of a political order in which individuals participate in political life on essentially equal terms.*** This vision still remains far from realization.

It is not within the scope of this work to give a detailed account of the inequalities among individuals in their opportunities and capacities for influencing the government of the state, or to consider the plausibility of theories of domination by minorities or majorities, or of a consensus involving both. Surely, from ancient times to the present day, we have already seen how virtually all thoughtful advocates of democratic government have been concerned with popular participation, leaving exposed the issue of how democracy is threatened by inequalities.

It is sufficient for now to admit the existence of inequalities; and that inequalities exist in the vertical

*** The use of the word "individuals" is preferable to, for example, "citizens" due to the different connotations of each one. Individuals are used as all "the people", while "citizens" have certain specific political characteristics.
relation (governor and governed) of the social pyramid, as well as in the horizontal interaction (majorities and minorities) of individuals and groups. It is of relative priority at this point to find or to propose the rules to be followed in collective decision-making. Rather, we want to examine, in those collective decisions, if all individuals or groups, majorities or minorities, have adequate participation in the democratic process. It is the base of the pyramid that concerns us most, the people whose consent is sought, and whether or not their concerns and interests are projected on the top.

The rules of collective decision-making — strict majority, majority, unanimity or an indefinite range of possibilities — have to rest upon a broad representative base, in which majorities and minorities are actively represented and clearly included. Any exclusion will end up delegitimizing the democratic process as a consequence of under-representation or simply no representation.

It seems that the risks of exclusion — or under-representation or no representation — are higher in societies politically divided along ethnic or racial lines.

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The Republic of Suriname is a country of approximately 400,000 inhabitants situated on the north-east coast of South America. The Dutch acquired Suriname in 1667
(in exchange for New York, ex-New Netherlands) and established "a full blown plantation system based on African and, in rare instances, American Indian slavery." Slavery was abolished in 1863, and the Dutch began to import East Indian contract labor from India. The quest for cheap labor also brought thousands of Javanese from the Dutch colonies. Chinese immigration followed as well as Lebanese. African-Surinamers were divided into two main groups: Creoles, or those who settled in the urban centers mainly in the coastal area, and Maroons (the bushpeople), descendants of runaway slaves who fled to the interior.

In 1955 Suriname acquired political autonomy from Holland with respect to internal affairs, while foreign affairs continued to be handled in the context of the Charter and Constitution of the Kingdom of the Netherlands. In 1973 the political parties advocating independence won the elections, supported mostly by the Creole population. In 1975, the Republic of Suriname was born with independence from Holland.

Traditionally, politics in Suriname have been heavily influenced by ethnic lines. By the mid-1980s the population composition of the country was: Hindustani (East Indians) 38 percent; Creoles 30 percent; Javanese 15 percent; Maroons 10 percent; Amerindians 3 percent; Chinese 2 percent; Europeans 1 percent, and Lebanese and Others 1 percent.
Similarly, the political representation is organized along ethnic lines. Thus, you have three big political organizations: the Hindustani party (VHP), the Javanese party (KTPH), and the Creole party (NPC). The first three, joined later by an active labor party (SPA), integrated the coalition (New Front) which has been prominent in Surinamese politics and in government, over the last twenty years. Other political groups - organized in a coalition called "Democratic Alternative-91" - were formed recently but they were just break-away parties from their counterparts in the New Front.

Other political groups are either inexpressive experiments with multi-racial organization or too small and unable to field their own candidates. Perhaps the only exception in the ethnic-oriented political environment in Suriname is the National Democratic Party (NDP), which enjoyed significant support in the last elections from different racial sectors. However, the support to the NDP, the party in power as result of a military coup in December 1990, was heavily influenced by an election-oriented public spending program. The NDP is commonly perceived as having close ties with the military, whose commander, Lt. Gen. Desi Bouterse, is one of its founders.

The result of the elections of May 1991 followed the historic pattern with the parties representing the ethnic majorities winning the majority of the 51 seats in the
National Assembly. The New Front, thrown out from government by the military, recovered power after receiving 54 percent (30 seats) of the votes, against 22 percent (12 seats) given to the NDP and 17 percent to DA-91 coalition (9 seats).\textsuperscript{47}

Suriname has a unique presidential-parliamentary system of government. The President governs with a Council of Ministers (there is no Prime Minister). The National Assembly "represents the people of the Republic of Suriname and expresses the sovereign will of the nation," and "is the highest state body," according to the Constitution (Articles 55 and 61).

The first parliamentary elections with universal suffrage were held in 1949 while the country was still ruled as a colony. Five years later it attained full internal self-government within the Kingdom of the Netherlands as equal partner with the European Netherlands.\textsuperscript{48} So ended its colonial status, until Suriname severed its ties with the kingdom and established a sovereign republic in 1975.

Problems with representation are not new in Suriname, and should be expected in a society with such racial diversity. The law by which the Dutch parliament introduced elections by universal suffrage for the Suriname legislature merely stipulated that Suriname's capital and only major city of Paramaribo would elect ten representatives and the other districts a total of eleven. This apportionment of seats
entailed obviously an over-representation of Paramaribo: with only slightly more than a third of the eligible voters in the first universal suffrage elections of 1949, it was given almost half of the seats.

"The principal motive for this deviation from proportionality was the desire to weight the votes of the better-educated urban population more heavily than those of the rural voters". Proportional representation was not prescribed, but the division of the country into one or more Paramaribo and several rural districts guaranteed, according to the Dutch government, "an equitable distribution of the seats and an adequate representation of all groups", given the considerable degree of geographical concentration of the ethnic segments.

The originally dominant Creole segment (which in the early years included a few whites among their political leaders) succeeded in implementing these electoral provisions to their own advantage by adopting the British plurality method and making Paramaribo into a single district.

Under this system, a candidate needed only to count more votes than any other single opponent to win the election, and he needed not, as required by the majority formula, have more votes than the combined opposition. (Both the plurality and the majority-decision rules are employed in the election of presidents in the United States. The composition of the
electoral college, which actually elects the president, is determined by a plurality vote taken within each state. Voters choose between the names of the presidential candidates, but they are in effect choosing the electors who will elect the president by means of a majority vote in the electoral college. All of a state's electoral votes, which, as we have seen in the Introduction, are equal in number to its seats in Congress, are given to the presidential candidate who gains a plurality of the vote in the state election. It is, thus, possible for a president to be elected on the basis of a minority of the popular vote.

The Creoles captured all ten Paramaribo seats, and the Hindustani party, which in a proportional system would have been entitled to at least two seats, did not gain any. Lijphart observes that the combination of the over-representation of Paramaribo voters and the use of the plurality formula in this ten-member district gave the Creoles - then the largest ethnic segment but not a majority - an absolute majority of thirteen seats in the legislature. The Hindustani won six seats and the Javanese two. A fully proportional method, he adds, would have made the distribution of seats among the three principal ethnic segments of Suriname about 9 to 8 to 4 instead of 13 to 6 to 2. 51

Between 1963 and 1966, during a period of close collaboration between Creoles and Hindustani, three
fundamental changes were made in the electoral law (1) to eliminate the over-representation of Paramaribo, (2) to adopt proportional representation for the Paramaribo district and one larger district, and (3) to give a second ballot to voters for electing about a third of the enlarged 39-member legislature by proportional representation in a single nationwide district.

In 1987, the system was again changed and the National Assembly membership was increased to 51, to be elected by ten districts according to the following proportion of seats: Paramaribo, 17; Wanica, 7; Nickerie, 5; Commewijne, 4; Sipaliwini, 4; Brokopondo, 3; Marowijne, 3; Para, 3; Saramacca, 3; and, Coronie, 2.

The amendments made the electoral law rather complicated. The new proportional representation system, borrowed from the Dutch electoral law, is known as the "list system"—the d'Hondt method—an electoral threshold that equals the electoral quotient, and the possibility of casting a preferential vote for a specific candidate on the list. The list system is different from the single transferable vote formula (or Hare system) because voters choose among party-compiled lists of candidates rather than among individual candidates. Electoral computations are on the basis of party affiliation; seats are awarded in respect to party rather than candidate totals, and allocated to party candidates in the
order in which they appear on the party list.\textsuperscript{52}

Over time, Suriname's electoral process and system of representation did in fact change, "partly alleviating criticism on the domination of the (city)capital over the districts, and - connected to that - allowing larger representation from ethnic groups who had their primary voter base in the rural areas".\textsuperscript{53}

Political coalitions were formed in which one ethnic group clearly dominated whether as result of intra-party compositions or as consequence of a single-party powerful electoral base, as was, and is, the case of the Hindustani party.

However, in order to accommodate the ethnic variety and legitimate government representation, the winner in an election, although free to form whatever the cabinet it might choose (because of the majority support it enjoyed in the National Assembly), did not use such freedom, or unilateral act, which was perceived as a kind of ethnic exclusion by the political organization left out. It is the kind of situation which configures what Lijphart warns as a violation of the "consociational" format. That "violation" was clear in the period 1973-1980 when the Hindustani were "excluded" from government.\textsuperscript{54}

Democracy in Suriname can be defined along the lines of Lijphart's "consociational" model. Lijphart contrasts two
models of democracy; the Westminster model, derived from an idealized version of the British parliamentary and two-party system, and the "consensus" model, characteristic of proportional representation systems as represented for example by Switzerland, Belgium, and some former Dutch colonies as Suriname. Consensus is not necessarily unanimity, and the guiding principle of the consensus model is, according to Lijphart, to achieve the explicit consent of the major social groups in the country. The model contains some "majority-restraining elements" as executive power sharing, multiparty system, and grand coalitions.

The violation of the consociational format by the "exclusion" of the Hindustani in the 1973-80 period was, in fact, another blow to what many political scientists consider the incremental rupture of the consensus. In 1973, a predominantly Hindustani cabinet was toppled because they too lacked "ethnic legitimation." Furthermore, the consociational system seemed to have broken down as early as 1967, when the Creole party, the NPS, withdrew from broad coalitions tactics, in place since 1955, and entered into new uneven coalitions with minor Hindustani parties, which in turn were toppled in 1969.

"It would thus seem necessary to amend Lijphart's criteria for consociationalism to require the decision-making participation of the largest parties from each major ethnic
group, if this model is to be accepted as a legitimate solution to the problems of ethnic pluralism," observed Dew.\textsuperscript{55} Coalitions between one large and several small parties break the elite cooperation which is "the primary distinguishing factor" of consociational democracy, that also presupposes "a cooperative attitude and behavior of the leaders of (all) different segments of the population."\textsuperscript{56}

It should be clear by now that the political structure in Suriname is intentionally designed as a rigid horizontal proportional representation of ethnic groups. It is also clear that when projected to the top, the composition of ethnic groups at the base is not reflected in its entirety. Moreover, although proportional representation has been working, and consensus has been reached at some points despite the succession of crises of the consociational model, the constant presence of the major ethnic groups in the power-sharing system became evident, as Dew suggests and formally proposes. The same is true for the total absence of the minor ethnic groups in that model.

It is also true that proportional representation is working in that a coalition exists and power is shared among major ethnic groups. However, not all ethnic groups have, or have ever had, access to share this power because the system benefits political parties and not ethnic groups. And only the large political parties representing the larger ethnic groups
are the ones who have been traditionally, in-and-out, in the structure of power: the cabinet and the National Assembly.

Consequently, representation at the top of the pyramid includes majorities but excludes minorities. Why does it happen, or why has it happened?

Despite the party-oriented system of proportional representation, the electoral division of the country takes into account the population factor and not the ethnic diversity. Seats in the National Assembly (which, by the way, elects the President) are allocated according to population. Therefore, the heavily populated capital, Paramaribo, has the largest number (17) of seats.

It is a fact that individuals belonging to the major ethnic groups live in Paramaribo. It is also a fact that not all ethnic groups live in the capital. The Maroons and the Amerindians are concentrated in the interior of the country, exactly in three districts (Sipaliwini, Brokopondo and Marowijne) which account for a total of 9 seats in the National Assembly.

Being able to fill only nine seats in the Assembly, the Maroons and the Amerindians will never have a majority necessary to form a government, and will only be a part in a power-sharing structure as members of a coalition in which they will certainly continue to be a minority. In the rigid ethnic-oriented and party-oriented proportional representation
system the two groups - which together represent almost all the Javanese population - have extremely slim chances of any influence in the policy-making and decision-making processes.

Moreover, the chances diminish even more when traditional animosities between the two groups are taken into account and, consequently, break up their possible joint representation share. Thus, Maroons and Amerindians would have to fight for the nine seats. In reality they already have been fighting for what can be considered a total absence of representation. Isolation and no representation led to war.

Since 1986 Suriname has experienced a civil war and periods of intense social unrest. The Maroons started a guerrilla war in search not of power, but of assurances and guarantees that included them in the political and economic decisions of the central government, which has been charged of ignoring the population of the interior. The Amerindians, who always considered the former runaway slaves as "invaders" of their territory, soon went up in arms for the same political and economic reasons. Although tensions persist, the war ended with the signing of a peace accord not coincidentally known as "agreement for reconciliation and development of the interior."57

As a consequence of the civil unrest, the 1987 elections excluded the three districts and the elections held in 1991 caught them off guard without a party or candidates.
Maroons and Amerindians still continue without representation to this day, although it is almost certain that the peace accord will open new opportunities for the two groups to become more politically active.

The exclusion of the two groups from the base of the pyramid exposes a fatal breach in representation - the absence of the majorities and minorities - necessary to legitimate actions and decisions taken at the "top" of the political pyramid.

* * *
Suriname is at once the celebration of ethnicity and a challenge to the ideal of assimilation. The country's political division by ethnic groups was a consequence of a historic process in which cultural assimilation threatened the political interests of the colonizer and the majority groups. Independence further sharpened the social division by racial groups when the country involuntarily imported from the ex-metropolis a political model that consolidated the historic trend of ethnic divisions.

In other countries with similar social conditions of race and ethnicity, society is politically divided principally along ideological lines permitting individuals, regardless of race or ethnic group, to participate in the same political organization and share common interests. An ideological harmony, a convergence of individual values and interests appeased ethnic conflicts. Political organizations were identified by their social and economic objectives rather than by the color of their members.

Ironically, this ideology-oriented political representation was achieved through a historic process dominated, at the beginning, by the major (not the biggest)
ethnic group, invariably the colonizer. As a result of social upheavals and interest pressures, political organization and party structure evolved in a way that permitted a gradual assimilation of other ethnic groups and cultural sub-groups. (In Suriname, the "colonizer" withdrew from the country, which was left with the existing ethnic mosaic.)

Also important was the development of a national identity which helped the political assimilation of the ethnic diversity. It might be that Suriname has yet to develop a national identity, and that the lack of this national identity is one of the restraining elements of political assimilation.

No nation with ethnic diversity reached this desired assimilation as result of a voluntary initiative by the different segments of population; rather, political assimilation was often imposed by the majorities. Some countries simply preferred to ignore the existence of ethnic minorities and the need for political assimilation (Guatemala is a good example, as well as many Latin American countries with Indian populations). Others developed a process of assimilation by convenience of interests (like Canada, with its broken national identity). Many, however, were politically divided according to their ethnic groups as is the case of the new countries of Eastern Europe. Still others experienced a slow historic process of an almost successful political assimilation, and then, after developing a strong national
identity and reaching a hight point of assimilation, began to show indications of a reverse trend towards a kind of ethnic political representation. Such is the case of the United States.

* * *

"Instead of a nation composed of individuals making their own free choices, America increasingly sees itself as composed of groups more or less indelible in their ethnic characters," observed historian Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., reacting to growing demands of multiculturalism in the United States. It seems that the search to draw the line between national identity and minority pride may end up increasing the potential for a political backlash, the need to count heads by race and ethnicity to overcome racial and ethnic discrimination. Political representation will risk being a reflection of ethnic groups, and minorities may not reach their objectives in such a different political model.

American politics and political representation were transformed in the 1960's at the culmination of the struggle for civil rights. The Voting Rights Act of 1965, for example, solidified, extended and institutionalized gains already achieved in the historic process, but created a new political reality that has reached almost into every group and affected almost every political process in the country. It altered the racial composition of the electorate, the party coalitions,
and the officeholders.

In fact, since the Act's passage, the proportion of blacks registered to vote increased from 6.7 percent, in 1964, to 67.5 percent in 1970. Throughout the South of the United States nearly a million new black voters had been added to the rolls by 1970, and more than 400 black officials had been elected. The impact was so great "that within a decade the law transformed the South's historic pattern of racist politics beyond recognition." 59

By 1990, Virginia had a black governor, 24 blacks and 10 Hispanics sat in Congress, 417 black and 124 Hispanics representatives held seats in state Legislatures, and 4,338 blacks and 1,425 Hispanics held office in city or county governments. 60 Moreover, the political mobilization of African Americans since 1965 has transformed their historic marginality in political life; since the 1970 their participation has equaled and often exceeded that of whites of similar economic status. 61

However, the desire for assimilation and broader political representation by the minorities may yet end in an ethnically divided political organization. Moreover, some groups like the Native Americans are still under-represented or not represented at all in state Legislatures or even in Congress. Some communities have been forced to alter their traditional electoral procedures. Leaving aside the political
fact that changes in electoral rules can lead to significant redistributions of power (which will certainly be favored by those who win and opposed by those who lose), some political scientists object to what is happening.

The most common objection to the evolution of voting rights laws and enforcement, according to Cain, is that it has bestowed special representational advantages upon some racial and ethnic groups but not others and has pulled the United States back from its much cherished ideal of color-blind society.\textsuperscript{62}

Entitlements to representation based on race and ethnicity, it is argued, are unfair and dangerous, inflaming racial and ethnic tensions. Legitimate rights in a democracy should rest on individual rights and not on group rights. An electoral outcome might be unfair to a middle-aged male member of an ethnic group in his identity as member of that group, but perfectly fair in his identities as a male or a middle-aged person. Which should be the relevant criterion by which we assess fairness? Among the answers given, one is that is morally less complicated to ignore the group attributes of individuals and give them only individual rights, such as the right to vote and the right to an equally weighted vote.

Finally, starting from the premise of the desirability of a color-blind society (that one, in Martin Luther King's words, where people "will not be judged by the
color of their skin but by the content of their character"), there are those who do not believe that only blacks can represent blacks or whites can represent whites, and hope that "one day race and ethnicity will not be important factors in electoral choices". 63

* * *

In order to force the political system to be fairer, it appears that efforts have been made to define as voting rights rights which are questionable at best. In the case of Suriname, legal intervention in matters of representation, as changes in the proportional model to guarantee the presence of all minorities in the legislative body, may be necessary, but in the case of the United States such intervention is a more dubious strategy. It would have been better if the political system had been able to correct itself, because that would have preserved the diversity, richness, and flexibility of the early representative system. It would preserve assimilation and avoid a reversal towards ethnic representation.

Regardless of how absurd it might be to compare representation in Suriname and the United States, the fact is that in both countries there are different representational needs. In an ideal world, it would be nice to preserve the option of varied electoral arrangements (within some broad democratic range) to meet these varied conditions. A change in the doctrine of one-person, one-vote, for example, could
correct some malapportioned area or region, or exclusions of minorities. The choice between more or less proportional systems is a trade-off between the competing democratic concerns of legitimacy, stability and efficiency. Entitlements to representation based on race and ethnicity, it is argued, are unfair and dangerous, and inflaming, as we have seen, racial and ethnic tensions both in Suriname and the United States.\textsuperscript{64}

In spite of all electoral changes and initiatives to broaden ethnic participation, representation seems to be always a source of conflict in that its objective of formal equality is losing ground to formation of racial or ethnic groups. This leads to a situation in which representation in societies politically divided by ethnicity tend to perpetuate underrepresentation or non-representation of certain minorities.

Concern with representation is great among political scientists like Cain, who foresees "the underpresentation of Latinos and blacks at all levels of American government as a continuing problem in the 1990's."\textsuperscript{65} The same can be predicted for the Maroons and Amerindians of Suriname.

Demographic disadvantages, such as ethnic concentration in the interior or in urban pockets; socioeconomic liabilities, such as inadequate education and participation; and systemic hurdles, such as relatively and
onerous (in the United States) and inefficient and complex (in Suriname) registration systems, will continue to hinder minority electoral power, and consequently its representation.

* * *

Representation has grown steadily through history, but in multi-racial or multi-ethnic societies it seems that minorities are visibly underrepresented or not represented at all. In some societies, national identity eased the process of political assimilation and, thus, facilitated the process of replacing ethnicity by ideology in the representational model, where different ethnic groups participate in different political groups. It follows that in societies where ethnicity determines the political structure, the tendency is the perpetuation of underrepresentation or no-representation.

Mill reminded us that in a really equal democracy every or any section would be represented, not disproportionately, but proportionately. "A majority of the electors would always have a majority of the representatives; but a minority of the electors would always have a minority of the representatives." 66, what practically translated into a representative to all minorities. Furthermore, representative systems in which minorities are underrepresented or not represented would be democratically illegitimate.

It has been said that a representative system ensures that governments act in the interests of the governed,
that the rulers are held accountable for their actions, that a representative system is usually found in conjunction with an "open" or "free" society, that "it ensures the dignity of the individual, and, assuming that all forms of government involve some corruption and maladministration, that a representative system decreases the magnitudes involved." Representative systems in which minorities are underrepresented or not represented cannot give these assurances.

Of course, it is difficult to imagine that any single legislative provision, as in the case of the Voting Rights Act in the United States, could successfully rectify the effects of centuries of discrimination against minorities in the electoral process. It is also difficult to believe that the only solution to correct representation in multi-ethnic societies would be a redivision of nations exclusively based on the ethnic component.

When political conflicts endanger national unity, political leaders may replace majoritarian practices with consociational arrangements. If the conflict subsides, these consociational arrangements may in turn give way to a less consensual, more majoritarian system, which is roughly the present case of Suriname.

Dahl identifies the main conditions that favor majoritarian practices in a country:
- the more homogeneous the people of a country, particularly in characteristics associated with political attitudes, the less likely it is that a majority will support policies harmful to a minority and therefore the more likely it is that a broad consensus on the desirability of the majority rule will exist. At the limit, a country’s people would be so homogeneous that no majority could ever harm a minority without simultaneously harming itself, as Rousseau assumed when entrusting collective decisions about the general good so confidently to the majority.

- the stronger the expectations among the minorities that they will become tomorrow’s majority, the more acceptable the majority rule will be to them, and the less they will feel a need for special guarantees as a minority veto.

- whether as a consequence of the first two or for other reasons, majority rule is likely to gain greater support among members of a minority if they are confident that collective decisions will never fundamentally endanger the basic elements of their way of life, whether in matters of religion, language or economic security.

A change in the democratic model should be accompanied by a different representation format. The most desirable representation format in a multi-ethnic society is not one that guarantees every minority a piece of the power-sharing, but one that offers the same opportunity to all
groups access to political life and to power participation. Assimilation facilitates the developing of national identity which, in turn, helps eliminate the ethnic or racial fragmentation of representation through a political life conducted by political organizations formed along ideology, and not ethnic, lines.

In Suriname, the crisis of the consociational model was the result of a break up in the consensus, as a consequence both of the domination of one group over others and the absence of politically relevant groups in the formation of that consensus. Imperfections in the representation system contributed to the break up of the consociational model by leaving important minority groups, like the Maroons and the Amerindians, out of the political life. The civil unrest in the interior clearly exposed the flaws of the system when those groups went up in arms to fight not for power but for representation.

The absence of efforts by the national government in Suriname or by the ethnic groups themselves to promote assimilation and, thus, a national identity, makes it more difficult, if not impossible at this moment, any transition to a democratic model other than the consociational. It is not that government by consensus is the only formula to manage power in the country, but it is still the most desirable and more stabilizing method to deal with such ethnic diverse
political structure. However, in order to work, the consociational model will depend upon corrections in the representation format that can offer access to political participation and the opportunity of power-sharing to all majorities and minorities. This can be achieved through reforms that combine a fair and effective proportional representation with policies encouraging the search of a national identity conducive, in the long run, to other democratic models based more on free political exchange of ideas and less on racial compromise.

In the United States, assimilation and a political structure along ideological lines have facilitated the political racial integration. Voting along racial lines has until recently been largely considered a thing of the past. However, the concentration of minorities in districts where they become a majority, as consequence of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, may increase the number of minority officeholders, but decrease what has been a wider minority influence by reducing it to localized political areas. Moreover, the forcing of race-conscious districting keeps racial issues unnecessarily prominent in the political agenda. Ironically, the effects we are witnessing are reversing the long assimilation process and may end up racially or ethnically fragmenting the American political structure.

The minority empowerment vision of a world where fixed
racially defined groups are awarded a share of the power in proportion to their numbers would give democracy too many colors. Thus, race-conscious remedies are undesirable. In Martin Luther King's words, people should "not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character". Political rights are given to individuals because they are individuals, not because of the color of their skin. The idea is wrong that only a Hindustani can represent a Hindustani, that only a Javanese can represent a Javanese, that only whites can represent whites or that only blacks can represent blacks. Race and ethnicity should not be important factors in electoral choices and government because they hurt the ultimate goal of a color-blind society. Outside a scenario of assimilation and national identity, democracy is, at least, incomplete.

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2. Ibid, 2


5. As opposed to the modern minipopulus, an small organism with citizens randomly selected to examine specific issues or agendas, and linked electronically with one another; a non-political body, just for policy recommendations, in Dahl’s A Preface to Economic Democracy.

6. In German, Volksgeist, the spirit of a people, a term used by writers of the late eighteenth century, specially Herder (Johann Gottfried von, 1704-1803) a powerful intellectual opponent of the Enlightenment, to give theoretical foundation to the nationalist position by arguing that each people has its own spirit, from which language, customs and institutions emerge. It is ultimately the people over the state.


8. Using Dahl’s definition: a subset of persons entitled to participate in governing, the citizens or citizen body.


14. Ibid.


25. Montesquieu, in "De Esprit des Lois" (XI,6), as quoted in Mansfield, 1968.


27. Government by divine right seems to be compatible with any of Aristotle's constitutions of government, including democracy as mentioned in chapter 1. Certain Puritan sects in the seventeenth century even advocated "democracy by divine
right". see Mansfield, 1989.


32. Pitkins, 1967, 144.


35. Ibid.


41. Ibid.
42. Pennock, in Representation, 1968, 11.


44. Ibid.

45. All acronyms are in Dutch. The English translation would be as follows: KTPI - Party for Unity and Harmony; NPS - Suriname National Party; VHP - United Reformist Party; SPA - Suriname Labor Party; NDP - National Democratic Party; PPRS - Party for the Development of Suriname; VP - People's Party; PALU - Progressive Laborers and Farmers Union; PSV Progressive People's Party. In the elections of 1991 the KTPI, NPS, VHP and SPA ran as a coalition called "New Front". Another coalition - the DA-91 - was formed with break-away parties from the New Front. Two other small political organizations also were present as a coalition, the PBP-ABOP - Rural Inhabitants' Party / General Liberation and Development Party Coalition.


47. Ibid. 53


50. Ibid, 188.

51. Ibid, 188

52. For a better understanding of the computation of votes and allocation of seats see S.F. Polanen, The Electoral System of the Republic of Suriname (Paramaribo: Independent Electoral Council, 1988)
53. A Surinamer, J. Marten Schalkwijk, made this point in a lecture given in Paramaribo, in June 1991, on authoritarianism and democracy models applied to Suriname, from which the quote is taken.

54. There were only two Hindustani ministers out of 14 cabinet members.


56. Lijphart, 1977, 3-10.

57. The agreement, signed in September 1992, commits the government to several development projects in the interior and to the creation of tribal economic zones.


64. This might be an widely held viewpoint in American white middle class, but is shared by Abigail M. Thernstrom, in "The Odd Evolution of the Voting Rights Act", *Public Interest*, no. 55(Spring), 49-76.


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