Laudatio Eward Dew by J. Menke

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Abstract
The laudatio to Professor Edward Dew addresses the three dimensions in his work: The scholar, the promotor of research; and the academic who analysed the Surinamese political and social system, the so-called consociational democracy. In my critics I argue that "consociational democracy" is too narrow to understand the dynamics of the politics in the Surinamese society since the 1980s. A plea is made for alternatives to explain political and social processes in multi-ethnic Caribbean societies.

Keywords: Suriname, ethnic, democracy, political system, nation-building

Introduction
It is a great privilege to present Professor Edward MacMillan Dew, with an honorary degree by the Anton de Kom Universiteit van Suriname. He is the first distinguished scholar of the United States to receive one. Here is a political scientist who has made contributions: as a scholar in his own right; as a promotor of research by other scholars; and as an academic who played an important role in research on political and social policies in Latin America and the Caribbean. He attempted to document and analyze the evolution of the Surinamese political and social system. His passion was to understand the unique way in which Surinamese people with their ethnic and cultural diversity developed their own form of democracy, the so-called consociational democracy.

Edward Dew published two scholarly books on Suriname which made our country well-known in some academic circles in the USA and Canada. The first book ‘The Difficult Flowering of Suriname’ (1978) deals with ethnic relations, political mobilization, coalition forming and the role of party elites. The second book ‘The Trouble in Suriname’ was published in 1994, and focused on ethnic tensions, the new and old political parties, the military coup and the role of the military regime in Suriname.

A key concept in Edward Dew’s analyses of the political system in Suriname is consociational democracy (Dutch: pacificatie-democratie) that originates from the Dutch political scientist Arendt Lijphart. This is a majority party system of free elections, based on a proportionate principle in the electoral system, coalition formation and power-sharing between the elites of the political parties. In my presentation I will make a distinction between Edward Dew the First and Edward Dew the Second.

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Edward Dew the First was concerned with the question whether the resolution of conflict and conflicting preferences in the plural society can be managed in a western democratic framework. In the 1970s he was quite optimistic about the democratic stability of Suriname in the future. In his analysis he used the Hindustani word, Apanjaht, that refers to ‘the practice of ethnically based political parties playing about prejudice, fear and/ or communal interests to gain support.’ According to Dew the phenomenon ‘Apanjaht’ emerged with universal suffrage in Suriname and other multiethnic Caribbean societies. Edward Dew argues that the principal pre-condition for the existence of a consociational democracy is, that the elites of the different ethnic groups’ are aware of a possible explosive situation. For only then these elites are willing to engage in political cooperation and compromises. Dew examined the period when ‘apanjaht’ flourished. He argues that general perceptions of growth and improved well-being in Suriname, together with the remarkable leadership of the three major ethnically based political parties (VHP, KTPI, NPS) made ‘apanjaht’ consociationalism work at the post and pre-electoral level during almost twenty years. This is considered remarkable ‘given the grassroots fears and hostility recorded among groups at that time’ (Dew 1978). A positive connotation associated with Apanjaht is that it could serve as a means to political mobilization and a source of social liberalization (emancipation) of elites that previously were displaced. Finally Dew points at a negative implication of Apanjaht as it may encourage extremism of two kinds: ‘ethnic outbidding (by rival leaders in one’s own group who condemn the promises required for power-sharing) and anti-apanjaht utopianism (which tries to use ideology as a means of transcending cultural parochialism)’ (Ibid: 194). According to Dew these politics are condemned for feeding a ‘we versus they’ set of group identifications that is considered counterproductive to national identity and national developments (Dew 1990:192).

A variety of problems emerged in the multi-ethnic Surinamese society since its independence, which demands an inquiry into the relevance and usefulness of existing theoretical approaches. Therefore I will present a critical review of the political analysis by Edward Dew. Where do we stand today in the debate on ‘plural societies’ and ‘consociational democracy’ in multi-ethnic Caribbean societies since our first general elections in 1949? Edward Dew (1978), in his first study of Suriname, conceptualized the problem of democracy in narrow terms. He thus formulated the conditions of the politics of ethnic pluralism or ‘consociationalism’ that according to him kept Suriname’s society stable and accommodative: ‘The most important condition supporting the emergence of consociationalism in Surinam has been the multipolarity of ethnic groups, combined with their almost persistent internal fragmentation’ (Dew 1978: 203). He concluded that there are certainly grounds for hope to preserve democracy, cultivate it and making it flower (Ibid: 209).

Let’s now take a look at Edward Dew the Second. In the 1990s, almost a quarter century after publishing “The Difficult Flowering of Suriname” (1978) his initial optimism was replaced by some pessimism. This is evident in an article in a book edited by Ralph Premdas “Can Nation-building be achieved through Consociationalism in Suriname?” Illustrative are the following observations by Dew (2001): “I have spent the better part of my career studying the ethnic conflict of Suriname. Most of the time I held the optimistic position that the country’s social and economic life was integrated and harmonious - a model for any culturally plural society, and as they put it themselves, “The world in miniature”. While these observations may not have been incorrect , my thinking may have been foolish, for I assumed that I was watching a process of nation-building . The “flowering of Suriname” as I termed it in my first book, may have been “difficult” but it was only a matter of time and political process. In reality I was merely watching a fairly static situation, one aptly described by J.S. Furnivall in the 1930s (Ibid: 367). ’Perhaps it is the plurality of ethnic groups, in situations where none of them constitutes a majority, that leads to the breakdown of ethnically structured political parties . That plurality may also account for the fragility of consociational alliances that attempt to share power and provide a political alternative to tyranny and instability’ (Ibid: 359).”

Edward Dew the Second finally concludes: While the plurality of ethnic groups makes consociationalism
possible it also tends to block development initiatives, undermine nation-building, and invite regime collapse’ (Ibid: 359). He continues with … consociational alliances are essentially little timebombs waiting to explode. And the last sentence in his article is: ‘Under these conditions, any thought of nation-building is out of question’ (Ibid: 367).

Not only did Dew become more pessimistic about ‘consociationalism’, but at the same time he attempted to formulate the problem in somewhat broader terms of development. After 63 years of general elections and politics in Suriname, Edward Dew put it right when he said ‘I was merely watching a fairly static situation by pointing at the plural society as described by Furnivall in 1939. And this takes me to a critical observations for the future to explain political and social processes in Suriname and other multi-ethnic Caribbean societies.

First: In my opinion the theoretical conceptualization in terms of ‘plural society’ puts a disproportionate emphasis on conflict and a negative appreciation of ethnic diversity. This has proven too narrow to understand the dynamics of the politics in the Surinamese society since the 1980s. This also points at a major problem of the plural society concept that was introduced in the Caribbean by Rudolf van Lier (1949) and M.G. Smith (1965). This concept lacks the explanatory power to analyze the dynamics for integration or conflict between the constituting ethnic or cultural groups. It was a mistake by Furnivall, to think that the societies of South-East Asia do not have common values, as well as it was a mistake of him to believe that the western societies are homogeneous. Homogeneity of culture in nation states is exaggerated and associated with harmony and integration; the same holds true for exaggerating plurality of culture, associated with disharmony and conflict. It is false to assume that a homogeneous society is a prerequisite for a stable and harmonious order. Ironically, Furnivall did not mention the racial, ethnic and religious ideologies in allegedly homogeneous West-European countries in the 1930s and 1940s, particularly the ethnic and racial hatred of the Nazi. The latter had far more devastating consequences than the so-called plural societies in the Caribbean or South East Asia. Every society contains elements of unity and elements of plurality at different levels. The implication is that the plural society concept is inappropriate to analyze dimensions of unity between ethnic groups the complex matrix of various cultural, religious and linguistic subgroups and common values across these groups.

Second: Consociationalism in the 1960s was considered a solution for the assumed inherently negative foundation of cultural diversity in plural societies. The argument is that the political cooperation between the ethnic elites (consociationalism) is justified to prevent that the alleged explosive social situation between ethnic groups will result into conflicts. This more or less elitist political representation of a ‘plural society’ underlies the construction of political practices, through which the delegation of power from the people to the elites of the different ethnic groups is legitimized. The elites then, on behalf of the ethnic groups authorizes themselves to negotiate on the sharing of appropriated power. Like the plural society the concept of consociationalism is not sufficient to explain dimensions of unity and common values across (ethnic) groups, which is mainly due to its exclusive focus on the political elites.

Third: The distinction between processes of nation-building and nation-creation contributes to explain the nature and evolution of nations in ex-colonial societies (Menke 2011). Nation-building is based on a mono-cultural ethnic ideology that idealizes a homogeneous society using the power of the state, while nation-creation is based on an ideology of harmonic ethnic diversity, using the cross boundary power of important spheres of the society. While the concept of nation-building associates a negative connotation to cultural diversity, the concept of nation-creation considers such diversity an asset, rather than a problem.

Nation-creation is a process that expresses the recognition of equal rights and legitimizes the immaterial and material culture of the different ethnic or cultural groups driven by a collective urge to survive, based on mutual respect and a harmonious interaction between these groups. It enhances intercultural exchange and interactions that may
Contribute to the development of a community or a nation. While the individual cultures remain recognizable and distinguishable, each culture forms an integrated component of the society.

Contrary to nation-building, that is initiated by the colonial state, the process of nation-creation refers to the collective efforts initiated by (cultural) groups to develop a nation that is inclusive and trans-ethnic, based on solidarity, mutual respect and a harmonious interaction between ethnic groups and their cultures (Menke 2011). Despite these limitations of the ‘plural society’ which also hold for consociational democracy, there is a search in the Anglophone Caribbean to apply consociational democracy as a possible solution for the ill-effects of the Westminster majority system of ‘The winner takes all’. A striking example is the volume ‘Consociational Democracy and the Logics of Governance’, published in 2008 by Rishi Thakur, a Guyanese social scientist. The ‘consociational democracy’ concept was developed in contrast with the majoritarian democracy. A fundamental assumption is that there is more to democracy – in terms of quality, social stability and public policy outcomes – than the standard majoritarian principle. Consociationalism became an issue since the social and ethnic unrest of the 1960s in Guyana.

John La Guerre, a Trinidadian made an attempt to identify the missing links in the theory of consociational democracy. He argues that the ‘vital link which connects the various leaders to one another, namely the political parties ‘ is missing (La Guerre 1999: 163). I believe that La Guerre is missing some of the points for consociational democracy to work, and which were lacking in the case of the 1986 and 1995 coalitions in Trinidad & Tobago. First, collaboration between parties and leaders long before the elections, is an important precondition for success. Second, a coalition by definition is not enough for sustained power sharing. What is necessary is the existence of a culture and norms of a ‘give and take’ type of permanent negotiation in the policy of decision making and allocation of public sector (human) resources and funds. Third and finally, the conditions for the pacification of potentially extra-parliamentary oppositional groups (trade unions, civil society and pressure groups) is important - a dimension that is missing in the theory of Lijphart, who is concerned solely with the pacification of supporters.

Prof. Edward Dew, in his career, maintained intensive and friendly contacts with Suriname and the Anton de Kom University. In 1991 he visited our university. In that year he did additional research to write the manuscript of his second book. Together with his wife Anke van Dijk he has a particular affection for Suriname. In addition to training sessions, seminars and courses on Suriname, he produced a documentary about our country. Edward MacMillan Dew, Professor Emeritus, Politics at Fairfield University in the United States of America. He was born in 1935 in California and married in 1960 to Anke van Dijk, has two sons, grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

Edward MacMillan Dew, Professor Emeritus is an eminent researcher with an exceptional scientific standing in relation to Suriname. He has embraced new ideas and stimulated innovative thinking and policies on the Surinamese society, in particular in the spheres of political science and politics. Therefore, we consider him a splendid candidate for awarding him the honorary doctorate degree of the Anton de Kom University of Suriname.

References


