

## **Abstract**

Unlike the upheavals in sugar plantations in the 1930s and 1940s when sugar laborers and small planters revolted against the ethnically stratified colonial order, political violence became ethnically-oriented after 1959 when the Good/Best Loser System as a consociational tool of ethnic proportionality was enforced together with coalition politics favoring the accommodation of ethnic elites. Violence in post-consociational Mauritius began to be characterized by inter-ethnic confrontations and claims against the ethnic allocation of state resources. The riots which occurred in 1965, 1968 and 1999 therefore have their roots in the invisible coercion of a system of power-sharing among entrenched ethnic elites organized in coalitions. In such a system, communalism which has plagued Mauritian society as one of the main sources of inter-segmental conflict paradoxically appears as the regulator of the Mauritian consociational democracy, fostering elite dominance and population acquiescence.

The implementation of consociational democracy in Mauritius changed the nature of political violence. Whereas it was previously bottom-up as in the 1930s, it now became mainly intersegmental, with cases of interethnic violence, political murders and acts of intimidation taking place during electoral campaigns. Society seems to self-inflict its wounds, directing its frustration and violence at the horizontal level, in order for its claims and frustrations to be heard and addressed by the political system, where politics of clientelism and ethnic favoritism prevail. The potential for conflict and violence in Mauritius is therefore not related to diversity management per se: "the right to pursue a culturally specific way of life has never been threatened in independent Mauritius" instead, the conflict can be traced to "certain practices in the public sphere related to socialization patterns, not to culture" (Eriksen 2004: 93). The implementation of consociation in Mauritius has entrenched communal divisions instead of resolving them, thus planting the seeds for potentially rampant conflict. This apparently justifies the criticism of authors according to whom consociational arrangements tend to freeze existing divisions and conflicts, reducing the art of accommodation to formulas that work only as long as processes of social, economic and political change do not upset them (Brass 1991: 342).