

RED THREAD

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Re: TFVAW/LAC/GUY/RT&HSH/04

We apologise for the continued delay in making a final report and write now to say what has caused it and when we will be able to complete it.

In our interim report (attached again for your convenience), we explained why in order to address the aims we had established, we had to change our approach: Given a worsening “crime” situation with its undertones of race; the increasing politicisation of race; and the concern and fear we encountered as we attempted to discuss the racialised violence against women in the post-1997 period in Guyana, we decided against an ‘investigation’ into this period of violence. We also agreed that the contemporary manifestations related to a deeper, historical rupture in Guyanese society, specifically the disturbances between 1962-1964, and especially focusing on the months of brutal violence between February and August/September 1964. About this period, which we contend is at the heart of how the two major groups in Guyana confront each other up to today, little has been said, and what little is said is often deeply politicized and used by the two major parties to attribute blame.

As we reported, then, we therefore decided to talk with women *and men* to put a face to the tragedy of 1964, to think about what is underneath the silence about it, and to find a way to intervene at a national level that is constructive not divisive, while holding on to our commitment to naming the kinds of violence, especially against women, that were permitted here as they are often permitted in times of ethnic conflict. Sustained interviews across gender is a first for Red Thread, the focus remains on the ways in which women’s lives were affected, but it entails talking with men to assess how the accounts and responses might be differently gendered.

We have now

- (1) Gathered reports and information on inter-ethnic violence in the aftermath of the 1997 and 2001 elections;
- (2) Compiled a fairly representative literature survey that both outlines the relative paucity of information addressing the human costs of 1964 and captures the non-intersecting, parallel narratives of the same historical moment;
- (3) Conducted an extensive search of the Guyanese newspapers available at the local newspaper archives at the Museum for the period 1963-1964;
- (4) Conducted interviews with over 40 men and women in over seven communities, primarily on the East Coast of Demerara and Linden/Wismar;
- (5) Attended and filmed (with permission) a ceremony held annually to commemorate a bombing that took place in 1964 at which 43 women, men and children were killed;
- (6) Held meetings among the members of the Red Thread team working on the project to address the findings and to debrief on the fieldwork.

The report will be completed by the first week of December and will explain the project and the changes, describe the field research and offer an analysis of the primary and secondary data collection. It will also offer some preliminary and tentative recommendations on ways forward, and how Red Thread envisions a constructive public intervention. This latter part is more than ever, clearly not a short-term mandate tied to a funded project, but must be undertaken carefully, ethically

and sensitively. In this regard we have had to revisit our earlier, pre field-research plans to make our findings immediately public through workshops, press releases etc. This was an extremely intensive exercise, physically and emotionally, with little time to debrief from the disturbing information we collected on several occasions. Overall, people were willing to talk with us, and there are very mixed feelings on the question of whether we need a public conversation in the country on the disturbances of 1963-1964. Even those who think something needs to be done and said so publicly, have made it clear that this research carries a grave responsibility to ensure that how we present these findings is constructive, does not lead to a re-awakening of the 1960s level of anger and resentment (and many informants did say that they could feel anger again as they were asked to recount what happened). Red Thread's work in this area will continue and discussions are underway to come up with innovative ways to tell this story in ways that do not aggravate the current divide, but rather build on and multiply those other narratives (the cross-racial moments) into a vision for solidarity, peace, and justice.

Yours faithfully,

Alissa Trotz (Adviser to the project)
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