POLITY

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A PLURALIST POLITICAL CLASS?

The recent collapse of coalition talks between the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) and Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) is one of the stories that deservedly drew media headlines. The protracted negotiations between the two parties to come together, if successful, would have concretized a new alignment of political forces in the south in the context of on-going negotiations between the United Front government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). But, quite significantly, the emerging SLFP-JVP coalition also broke down because the two sides could not come to a shared position on two issues that are central to the peace process. According to the SLFP's explanation, the JVP insisted that there should not be devolution and that the Norwegians, who are facilitating the negotiations between the UNF and LTTE at present, should be removed from that role. It appears that President Kumaratunga strongly objected to the JVP's two conditions.

In another explanation of the failure of talks, President Kumaratunga has said the JVP had also made other unacceptable pre-conditions, demanding several key political and ministerial positions in a future coalition government. Among the JVP's demands were the key position of the coalition's chairmanship and the powerful deputy ministerial portfolio of defense.

It is quite significant that President Kumaratunga, despite a lot of pressure from sections of her own party to accept the JVP's preconditions, let the coalition talks end in failure. At least, senior leaders of the Sinhalese political class continue to treat the ethnic conflict as a serious political issue that requires a political solution centred on arrangements for power sharing. The JVP's vague and utterly outdated idea that the ethnic conflict can be addressed through a programme of 'true equality' within a unitary, centralized state, has not obviously convinced President Kumaratunga, who had only a few years ago led a national campaign for federalistic constitutional reforms.

However, a question that needs to be posed in relation to Sri Lanka's major political parties and their strategies for ethnic conflict resolution is whether the UNP and SLFP as political entities are ready for an extensive power-sharing settlement with the Tamils and the minority communities. Actually, it is very difficult to answer this question in the affirmative. The point is that in both the UNP and SLFP, only the two party leaders and a few of their senior colleagues have demonstrated a consistent commitment to either a political settlement to the ethnic conflict or to constitutional reforms for power sharing. While many of their second-level leaders still remain unconvinced about what the leaders advocate as a political solution, many rank- and-file members continue to remain confused by the vacillation often demonstrated by their leaders whose position has changed in and out of power. They are even kept in the dark about the political solutions that their leaders negotiate with the LTTE. Rarely would they demonstrate any familiarity with the political and constitutional concepts on which the political solutions might be worked out.

In this backdrop, one key question which political leaders in Sinhalese society should address is the need to transform the political consciousness and the level of political education in the ranks of their own parties. This task becomes all the more important if they are serious about a workable political-constitutional arrangement with the LTTE. In any future settlement talks, the LTTE leadership is very likely to present constitutional ideas that are many steps ahead of the devolution discourse with which the leaders of the UNP and People's Alliance are familiar and comfortable. Rights to nationhood, national-self-determination, two nations in one state, asymmetrical federalism, confederal arrangements and shared sovereignty are some of the key conceptual categories in which the LTTE's proposals to address the 'core issues' of the ethnic conflict are most likely to be formulated.

Indeed, it is the SLFP leadership in its interventions in the political debate during the past one year that challenged the LTTE to bring the 'core issues' to the negotiation agenda. The LTTE is most likely to take up that challenge in the next phase of negotiations with the Colombo government. Any proposals by the LTTE towards a political settlement to the ethnic conflict are also likely to be formulated from the perspective of re-constituting the existing Sri Lankan state. They would be far ahead of the devolution discourse of Sinhalese society. Probably, the Sinhalese political leadership is not yet ready to engage the next phase of LTTE's political challenge.

The second phase of the Government-LTTE negotiations is likely to first centre on the proposals for an interim administration. Beyond the interim administration is the question of a stable political settlement and perhaps settlement agreement between the LTTE and whichever party is in power in Colombo. For

the political engagement with the LTTE to continue and result in a settlement agreement, a radical shift in the political and constitutional thinking among the two main Sinhalese political parties is absolutely necessary. Without advanced political thinking, they would only be compelled to oppose and resist the likely LTTE's proposals for restructuring the state. A close historical parallel was the outright rejection by the United Front government in 1971-72 when the Federal Party submitted to the Constituent Assembly proposals for a federal constitution. Unable to intellectually deal with the federalist proposals, the SLFP and Left leaders who dominated the Constituent Assembly could only show contempt towards the Federal Party's alternative constitutional scheme.

Unless the political worldview of the Sinhalese political class is pluralized to the sense of a paradigm shift, the next phase of Sri Lanka's political negotiations might run the risk of not being able to achieve a breakthrough.

Edward W Said (1935-2003)

A Public Intellectual

Edward Said who died on 25 September 2006 aged 67, was Professor of English and Comparative Literature at the Columbia University, New York. He was that unique combination of world renowned, charismatic public intellectual and political activist. Born in Jerusalem, educated in Cairo and the USA, his major and most influential book was the pathbreaking *Orientalism* (1978), followed by another important treatise on *Culture and Imperialism* (1993) and many other books on the Palestine struggle, music and cultural studies. The impact of *Orientalism* on academics, students and the world over was immense, and he had a large following of admirers in the Middle East, Asia, Africa and Latin America. As the noted Indian scholar Partha Chatterjee wrote:

For me, child of a successful anti-colonial struggle, *Orientalism* was a book which talked of things I felt I had known all along, but had never found the language to formulate with clarity. Like many great books, it seemed to say for the first time what one had always wanted to say.... I was struck by the way *Orientalism* was implicated in the construction not only of the ideology of British colonialism which had dominated India for two centuries, but also of the nationalism which was my own heritage.

Many Third World intellectuals, academics, political writers and activists have been profoundly influenced not only by Said's writings but also by his ceaseless campaign for justice for the Palestinians. In a sense, Edward Said reinforced Afro-Asian intellectual solidarity which has been well-

described by Prof. Hamid Dabashi, Chair of the Middle East and Asian Languages, at Columbia University.

Through Edward Said we suddenly found comrades we never knew we had, friends and families we never suspected in our own neighborhood – Asia, Africa, and Latin America suddenly became the extension of our home away from home. Jose Marti I discovered through Edward Said, as I did Kojin Karatani, Chinua Achebe, Eqbal Ahmad, Tariq Ali, Ranajit Guha, Gayatri Spivak, Seamus Deane, Masao Miyoshi, and Ngugi wa Thiongo. Everyone else we thought we knew he made new sense of for us – Aimé Césaire, Frantz Fanon, Mahatma Gandhi, Mahmoud Darwish, Nazim Hikmat, Vladimir Mayakovsky, Faiz Ahmad Faiz.

Hanan Ashrawi, the best-known woman politician of the Palestinian Legislative Council and the secretary-general of the Palestinian Initiative for the Promotion of Global Dialogue and Democracy knew Said as a fellow Professor of Literature, as a champion of Palestinian liberation and as a commentator of the East-West discourse. She says:

Edward Said was not just a scholar, a brilliant mind, a creative artist, an ardent nationalist, an advocate of justice, a free spirit, an unrelenting force for integrity, an uncompromising fighter on behalf of human dignity; he was, too, amazingly human, vulnerable to the pains and doubts that beset us all... He had a raging thirst for the recognition and validation of a human can alive to vindicate the almost unbearable suffering of the Palestinian people and to render them part of an inclusive human experience.

On Edward Said's death, Samir Amin, the Egyptian scholar wrote:

I salute the subtle intelligence that allowed Said to debunk the Eurocentric projects hidden in the folds of Western scientific and fictional literature, which inform the dominant discourse on Orientalism. I salute in the person of Edward Said an exemplary combatant for the Palestinian cause. Exiled in the United States, Said found the words necessary to shake the preconceived ideas manufactured by a media that exclusively served those in power.

A Cairo-based poet Mourid Barghouti, "I am angry because Edward Said died when we most needed his voice, ranting against a new world order that has reached the heights of belligerency and the depth of barbarity."

Edward Said's musical interests also dominated his life. His close friend, the Israeli pianist Daniel Barenboim says:

Edward Said was not only at home in music, literature, philosophy, or the understanding of politics, but also he was one of those rare people who saw the connections and the parallels between different disciplines, because he had a musical understanding of the human spirit, and of the human being, and he recognized that parallels and paradoxes are not contradictions... It was a combination of all these qualities which led him to found together with me the West-Eastern Divan, which provides a forum for young Israeli and Arab musicians to learn together music and all its ramifications.

Polity and *Pravada* have published many of Edward Said's political writings, especially recently after the invasion of Iraq. In this issue of *Polity* we honour his memory and publish one of his last articles. "Orientalism 25 Years Later, Worldly Humanism vs. the Empire builders."

PEACE WATCH - Jayadeva Uyangoda

I. Road Map to Interim Administration

With the UNF government and the LTTE focusing on their proposals for an interim administrative (IA) structure for the Northern and Eastern provinces, Sri Lanka's peace process has entered a qualitatively new phase. Actually, Phase I of the negotiation initiative has come to an effective end and Phase II is shaping itself to centre on the question of an IA. In a consultative meeting held in Paris in August, the LTTE has drafted its response as well as alternatives to the proposals submitted by the UNF government in mid July this year. After lengthy consultations in Vanni among the LTTE leaders on the draft alternative proposals, the LTTE is likely to send its proposals to the government of Sri Lanka in November through the Norwegian interlocutors. Stalled peace talks might resume in mid-to-late November or early December.

When the negotiations resume, they will most certainly centre on a single agenda item: the establishment of an LTTE-controlled administrative structure in the North and East. Whether it should be called interim or not will not matter much at the negotiation table. What would really be in that single-item agenda are the issues pertaining to powers and functions of the transitional administration and its concrete institutional shape. Actually, the UNF government's options are likely to be limited in the bargaining process in this phase of negotiation. At the same time, the LTTE's options are also somewhat limited with regard to the obtaining of an administration of their choice. The rebels might not want to push the Ranil Wickramasinghe administration into instability by insisting on an institutional arrangement that would be seen by the opposition as caving in to LTTE pressure. For strategic reasons, the LTTE seems to be committed to maintaining its political engagement with the government without weakening it and not paving the way for the SLFP and JVP to launch a new frontal attack on the negotiation initiative. The balance of probabilities is interestingly in favour of a negotiable working arrangement between the UNF government and the LTTE with regard to the setting up of an IA.

Path to Interim Administration

As we have already noted, the question of an IA is the central agenda issue in the political engagement between the UNF government and the LTTE at present. This transformation of the negotiation agenda occurred in a context of some interesting circumstances. The idea of an IA has a peculiar history. The UNF in its parliamentary election campaign of 2001 revived the idea which President Kumaraunga had initially mooted. It appeared that the UNF and the LTTE had arrived at an understanding with regard to an IA to be established as soon as the negotiations began. In fact, the PA's accusation of a UNP-LTTE deal (*ali-koti havula*, as it was sloganized in evocative Sinhalese) during the parliamentary elections of December 2001 was a response to what the PA leaders learned about this understanding.

In this backdrop, the critics of the UNF-LTTE engagement hastened to predict that the negotiations from the very beginning would centre on the question of the IA. Some of the critics even anticipated that the LTTE was keen to extract an IA from the UNF government at the very first round of talks. President Kumaratunga's insistence that the negotiation agenda should focus on 'core issues' in order to find a lasting solution to the ethnic question, within a specific timeframe, needs to be understood in this backdrop.

There was, however, a surprise when the negotiations began. The LTTE did not bring the issue of an IA to the negotiation agenda. Actually, throughout the six rounds of talks the LTTE was totally silent about the much-talked-about interim administration. Instead the government and the LTTE began to develop a new set of options towards normalization in the North and East. The setting up of joint committees for joint action took precedence over an interim administration. After the second round of talks held on October 31 – November 3, 2002, they set up a Subcommittee on Immediate Humanitarian and Rehabilitation Needs (SIHRAN).

It was quite surprising why the LTTE appeared to have dropped the demand for an IA when the negotiations began. One possible explanation is that, because of the strong opposition to that demand, particularly mounted by the People's Alliance and the JVP, the LTTE probably decided not to press for it before stabilization of the negotiation process. The issue of IA was indeed the opposition's main plank of attack directed towards the UNF-LTTE negotiation initiative.

Meanwhile, the LTTE revived the demand for an IA under circumstances of negotiation deadlock after April 2003. Two developments constituted the backdrop of these circumstances. The immediate one was the Sri Lanka aid seminar held in April 2003 under the auspices of the US State Department. The American sponsors did not invite the LTTE to this important international event in Sri Lanka's peace process on the argument that in the US the LTTE remained a banned foreign terrorist entity. When the aid seminar continued in Washington DC without the LTTE, the LTTE leadership interpreted it as an attempt to reduce its position in the peace process to the status of a secondary partner. In their public statements, the LTTE leaders expressed anger that, even after their willingness to renounce a separate state goal, the US government was still treating them as 'terrorists.' In a major political offensive against the US government as well Sri Lanka's Ranil Wickramasinghe administration, the LTTE leadership launched a campaign to argue that their organization should be treated not just as a partner in the peace process, but as an 'equal partner' with the government. This claim for equality of status at the negotiation

table was obviously one designed to counter the 'terrorist status' which the US-led international community had given to the LTTE.

The second development, which was actually secondary to the first, was the failure of SIHRAN to get off the ground. SIHRAN was set up as a joint government-LTTE initiative to implement programmes for immediate humanitarian relief in the North and East. It was also a major attempt made by the two sides towards institutional building to stabilize the negotiation process. However, by March-April 2003, the LTTE appeared to have lost interest in SIHRAN. The point they made with regard to SIHRAN is that the participation of bureaucrats representing the government side could have made SIHRAN just another bureaucratic entity with no energy or enthusiasm to attend to the immediate humanitarian needs of the Tamil people.

Meanwhile, the Sri Lanka government as well as the international community was keen to resume the negotiation process with LTTE participation. A new round of talks was scheduled in Tokyo in June along with an international donor conference on Sri Lanka. The LTTE, while refusing to participate in either Tokyo talks or the donor conference, began to demand that their return to the negotiation table would be conditional to proposals offered to them by the government on the setting up of an interim administration. The government presented to the LTTE three sets of proposals. The first two proposals the LTTE rejected as inadequate. The LTTE did not reject the third set of proposals, although their expectations may not have been met even in the government's new thinking. Instead, the LTTE agreed to respond to them through their own alternative proposals. The LTTE's Paris meeting was organized to prepare these alternative proposals.

Phase II

S ince December 2002, negotiations between the government and the LTTE have remained stalled. At the centre of the debate between the two sides is the basic question of sharing of political and administrative power in the North and East. The question of an IA is essentially a one of sharing state power in the transition to a settlement agreement between the two sides. In that sense, the emerging Phase II of the negotiation process would be crucial in shaping the future trajectories of Sri Lanka's conflict and peace processes.

No observer of Sri Lanka's negotiation process should fail to note that in Phase II, the LTTE's primary focus would be on an agreement concerning an interim administration that would give them sufficient powers and authority to initiate reconstruction and development work. The LTTE will also ask for flexible arrangements for financial control, not subjected to excessive bureaucratic control usually associated with the Sri Lankan state. Therefore, the LTTE's conceptualization of the interim administration might also be one that would give the new entity a fair degree of autonomy from the state bureaucracy. Signals from the LTTE are that the interim administration should not be treated as another arm of the Sri Lanka's bureaucratic government. Concerning the utilization of foreign aid and assistance to the North and East, the LTTE is reported to have agreed to two conditions. The first is to accept the World Bank as the external custodian of funds. The second is to subject their financial transactions with regard to foreign funds to auditing by an international audit firm, nominated by the donor community. On both these counts, the LTTE will have the leverage to bypass the Colombo government.

While the question of an interim administration is certain to determine the agenda of Phase II of the talks, the LTTE's approach to negotiation and bargaining is also likely to be different from the previous phase. Observers have already noted the fact that a Vanni-based, non-English speaking team with a background in military campaigns is now in charge of negotiations. The London-based. English-speaking 'theoretician' of the LTTE, Anton Balasingham, is out of the negotiation team, due to reasons of deteriorating health. It is also evident that the LTTE's leader himself is now making all the decisions concerning the negotiations. Phase II will certainly be qualitatively different from the first. Incidentally, the LTTE seems to approach political negotiations with the same degree of planning, strategizing and the element of surprise that they usually demonstrated in military operations. This is where the Sri Lanka government will have to be quite sharp in strategic thinking.

Interim to What?

C ritics of the Interim Administration proposal continue to raise doubts about the LTTE's commitment to an 'interim' setup. They argue that it would be at the minimum a 'permanently interim' arrangement that would ensure the LTTE's hegemony in the North and East without proper settlement agreement and without the LTTE having to face a popular elections. What it also suggests is that the interim administration can be the stepping-stone to a de facto separate state. The UNF government has not really responded to this criticism.

Would the interim administration really be a permanently interim one, creating a de facto separate state of the LTTE? Although the most popular answer to this question appears to be 'Yes,' it can also be examined from a different perspective. The question to ask then is why is the LTTE so interested in an interim administration? What do they seek to achieve through an interim administration? The LTTE's repeated emphasis as well as their investment of quite a large measure of political energy on an interim administration indicates that the movement's leadership has made a strategic decision to obtain one through negotiation and bargaining, backed by military strength. This can be seen as a larger strategic decision made by the LTTE. That decision is a crucial one which many in the South might still be reluctant even to acknowledge. To hazard speculative political analysis, one may argue that the LTTE's strategic calculation is that achieving the goal of a separate state by military means is neither possible nor feasible. In this strategic thinking, the best alternative to a separate state is internal self-

determination amounting to regional autonomy, backed by military strength. Seen from this perspective, one may even argue that the LTTE leadership is quite serious about an interim administration and they will be careful not to jeopardize the present historical opportunity to work towards that objective.

Now, the question whether the interim administration will remain interim or not will also depend on how the political process unfolds. Theoretically, it should be interim to a political settlement to terminating the war, reforming the state as well as the constitution and settling for a mutually acceptable power-sharing arrangement. The responsibility for ensuring the interim nature of the interim administration should actually be a shared one between the Sinhalese political leadership and the LTTE.

II. Mr Akashi's Dilemma

Mr Yasushi Akashi, the Japanese special envoy for peace in Sri Lanka, visited Colombo and Kilinochchi in the second week of September, to review the progress after the Sri Lanka donor conference held in Tokyo in June. On the top of his agenda was to persuade the LTTE to return to the negotiation table without delay. His meeting with the LTTE leaders in Kilinochchi on September 14 failed to change the rebel movement's decision to stay away from the talks. Before going to Kilinochchi Mr Akashi chaired an aid review meeting in Colombo which the LTTE boycotted. An exasperated Mr Akashi is reported in the media to say that the international community was "getting frustrated" by the LTTE's non-participation and the delay in resuming the peace talks.

The Japanese peace envoy's meeting with the LTTE's Thamilselvam in Kilinochchi on September 14 does not seem to have succeeded either in persuading the LTTE to return to negotiations. On his return from Kilinochchi, Mr Akashi made a statement clearly indicating the dilemma he faced. He insisted that the LTTE resume peace talks, since the donor community was awaiting to see that the funds allocated for the reconstruction of the North and East were properly utilized. But Thamilselvam, the LTTE's political-wing leader, "remained adamant after Akashi's request" and reiterated that the LTTE would re-enter peace talks or any other discussions only if the government "accepts its interim administration proposals" (*Daily News*, September 15, 2003).

In Mr Akashi's unsuccessful diplomacy with the LTTE is a crucial issue concerning Sri Lanka's peace negotiations. The Japanese government and some members of the donor community have made the LTTE's return to negotiation as a pre-condition for economic assistance to the North and East. The LTTE's approach is to de-link the progress of talks and international economic assistance. Actually, the LTTE has linked the progress of negotiations to the government's response to their proposals for an interim administration. Thus it appears that there are two competing approaches to the second phase of peace negotiations.

Chequebook Diplomacy

Why does the LTTE seem to have decided to defy the allure as well as the pressure of Mr Akashi's chequebook diplomacy? One key reason is that the LTTE appears to view with extreme caution the role of Japan in Sri Lanka's peace process. Two issues are probably at the centre of the LTTE's concerns. Firstly, the LTTE is reacting to what they see as 'excessive internationalization" of the peace process by defying the pressure from the US and Japanese governments. Actually, there are signs now that the LTTE may have made a strategic decision to redefine the role of the international community in Sri Lanka's peace process. This decision seems to have two elements: to diminish the role of the US and Japanese governments in the peace process, and then shift the focus towards Europe. Its objective is to secure greater European involvement in the future stages of the negotiation process in order to counter the overbearing presence of the US and Japan. The fact that the LTTE decided to have its meetings with constitutional experts in France and Ireland and their federalism workshop in Switzerland are pointers to this new strategic thinking.

The LTTE's second concern about Japan's role in the peace process emanates from a belief that external actors should not be allowed to hijack the LTTE's own agenda and timeframe for political engagement with the Sri Lankan government. Even though the LTTE's decision to pursue talks with the government in 2001 was made in a context of the internationalization of the conflict, the LTTE leadership does not seem to allow their strategic calculations being undermined by the international actors. The LTTE leaders have obviously noted in the behaviour of US and Japanese officials a certain agenda they themselves have formulated for Sri Lanka. Although the UNF government may have accepted that US-Japanese agenda for Sri Lanka's peace without any questioning, the LTTE seems to resist it, not allowing their own agenda to be hijacked by powerful international players.

The Japanese role in Sri Lanka's peace process has so far failed. It has also complicated the negotiation process. It is quite obvious that the Japanese assumption that chequebook diplomacy works, has not actually worked with the LTTE. This very clearly indicates the limits of the peace-building strategies of the global state as well as the donor community. With the failure of chequebook diplomacy, the international actors might resort to the carrot and stick, or the stick and stick, approach towards the LTTE. That will further complicate the negotiation process. Actually, it is now time for the international actors to learn the lesson that their agendas and priorities can hardly be translated into the LTTE's agendas and priorities. There is a simple reason for this. The LTTE pursues a strategy of negotiations as a militarily unvanquished counter-state nationalist entity. Not entangled in the web of global economic and political relations linked to the global state system, the LTTE still finds space to defy the dictates of the global system. This in a way further complicates Mr Akashi's dilemma. ■

REFLECTIONS ON WOMEN AND CULTURE: THE SRI LANKAN TAMIL COMMUNITY IN TORONTO, CANADA

Amali Philips

A perusal of writings by young Sri Lankan Tamil women in Toronto, as well as anecdotal information and reported cases reveal the dilemmas of Toronto Tamil women in coping with the conflicts between the value system they experience in Canada and that of their natal society. While immigrants of colour, regardless of gender, face the challenges of cultural adjustment and adaptation, integration and survival in a complex urban environment, the women among them face problems that are specific to their roles and experiences as women in both the private and the public spheres. The problems faced by immigrant women are not entirely triggered by their immigrant situation, but are equally attributable to their subordinate status in their native cultures.

One might expect to find more similarities than differences between the Toronto experiences of South Asian women in general and of the Sri Lankan Tamil women in particular. At the same time, the experiences of women within the same culture could significantly vary depending on the circumstances of individual women. As has been pointed out by others, many of the Sri Lankan Tamils, particularly women, who came to Canada after 1983 are disadvantaged by the lack of English language training, lower educational qualifications and lack of social skills that would facilitate their integration in Canadian society. The experiences of these women are very different from those of other Sri Lankan and South Asian women who are not so disadvantaged. In this brief article, I reflect on the role of cultural values in shaping the experiences of the Toronto Tamil women in the areas of marriage, family relations, gender-role socialization, gender-division of labour, cross-sex interactions, and domestic conflicts.

Culture Deconstructed

C ulture in the anthropological sense is a 'way of life' based on the acquired values, beliefs, rules and standards, that are used to 'interpret experience and generate behaviour.' This definition by James Spradley (2003) is one of the better definitions of culture that are available to us. Culture provides the framework for action and interaction in natal as well as diasporic contexts and has value and relevance as an adaptive strategy in any given environment. However, within anthropology, the concept of culture has generated a great deal of controversy and discussion with respect to its definitions and meanings, to the point that some of us are dismissive of culture's potential to reflect the shared experiences and interests of all individuals and groups within a single culture. Thus, we might even speak of Tamil 'women' and 'men,' the youth and the elderly as having different subcultures.

Although we should acknowledge the diversity of values and beliefs within a single culture, or promote the view of culture as neither fixed nor unchanging, in the popular view 'culture' is taken to be homogeneous and immutable in time and space. This conservatism appears to be stronger among communities in immigrant or diasporic situations than in their natal contexts. The 'freezing' of culture provides a sense of security, preserves cultural roots and satisfies nostalgia for the home country. Such needs are common among recent immigrants of older age groups, who are slow to adapt to a foreign culture, than among their children who may have been born or raised in their formative years in a western culture. Undoubtedly, there is a generational difference in perspectives and values between for instance, Canadian-Tamil parents and their children, a difference that expresses itself through increasing tensions, miscommunication or lack of communication between Tamil youth and their parents.

Canadian-Tamil parents often blame these tensions on the Canadian cultural influence, viewing Canadian culture and all western cultures as sexually permissive and anomic (without norms), and use this as an argument against the 'cultural' integration of Tamils in Canadian society. Such perspectives are both misguided and erroneous and betray a kind of 'ethnocentrism'—the idea that one's own cultural values are superior to those of others. The main cultural concerns among many Tamil parents living in Canada are regarding cross-sex mixing, controlling the marriage of children, maintaining domestic and gender hierarchies, and parental disciplining of children. These areas are considered to be fundamental to Tamil cultural traditions, and the attempts to preserve them invariably involve the control of women as wives, daughters and sisters.

In most Asian cultures, there is nothing more immutable than the assignment of a superior role to men and a subordinate role to women. What anthropologists call 'androcentrism,' or male-centred perspectives, underlie household and conjugal hierarchies, unequal gender division of labour, the sexual control of women, and double standards for women and men in their permitted gender behaviour. Gender is a cultural construction, and the positions and experiences of women within a culture cannot be considered apart from the cultural meanings assigned to women as a gender. Culture shapes community notions about women's roles and functions, their innate nature and proper behaviour in both restrictive and prescriptive ways. As anthropologists would argue, 'gender inequities come already embedded in culture.'

My last introductory remark is about 'cultural relativism.' The notion of cultural relativism holds that all cultures are equally valuable and that customs and traditions of different cultures must

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be understood within the frameworks of each culture. Canadian multiculturalism promotes this perspective of culture. The problem arises when the relativist perspective is taken to its extremes, leading to the 'relativist fallacy,' i.e., by declaring a social practice to be 'cultural,' community members place it beyond scrutiny and change. As we have witnessed in recent years, some traditions and practices within immigrant communities in Canada (e.g., veiling, female genital mutilation, physical punishment of children, etc.) have raised questions about the rights and well-being of women and children in the context of the rights of communities to practise their cultural traditions without interference.

Gender-Role Socialization and Family Relationships

The South Asian home, with its male-focused hierarchical structure and unequal gender division of labour, is the main socializing agent of gender behaviour. Every family strives to provide a high degree of security to its members, more so in the new immigrant environment with its extraordinary economic and psychological challenges, and is typically characterized by a certain patterned ambivalence in regard to child-rearing practices. As one commentator (Lannoy 1971) has observed in regard to the upbringing of children in India, indulgence and casual attention alternate with discipline and authoritative paternalism in the Tamil household. This ambivalence is consistent with the gender and generational hierarchies in the household. The father is a distant and elusive figure, whereas the mother takes on a more nurturing role in the gender socialization of children. In many South Asian communities, including the Tamils, women are assigned the role of being the guardians and representatives of their culture. Tamil culture has its own collection of female role models in literary traditions and religious mythology. It idealizes the dependent wife, the nurturing and self-sacrificing mother, and the obedient and modest daughter. Women are expected to live up to these ideals and face greater pressures than men in playing out their gender roles and in transmitting these values through the process of socialization.

Traditionally, male authority and power in a family came with male income and responsibility. This situation has changed in every society, and even in Sri Lanka and other South Asian countries women are no longer confined to the home but like men go out to earn a living to support the family. Many Tamil families in Canada depend on the earnings of 'wives' and 'mothers'; a number of these women did not have to, or never did, work outside their homes before they came to Canada. But the changing roles of women and their direct financial contributions seldom translate into gender equality within the family, or to an equal sharing of domestic tasks. The division of labour within the home has remained largely unchanged, and women bear the double burden of work at home and employment.

Food is an important part of every culture, and the ability to learn and prepare new dishes is a sign of sophistication for both men and women. Although a fair number of South Asian and Sri Lankan men are beginning to take an interest in cooking, it is women who bear the heavy cultural burden of cooking, entertaining and kin-keeping. According to Tamil university students, food (or Sri Lankan food) is the focus of parental sentiments and it is about 'food' that social conversations begin and end. "Have you eaten?," "What did you eat?" are questions of greeting expressed at any time of the day. Frequent extended-family gatherings and partaking of meals as a celebration of kinship is common among Sri Lankans, as perhaps among many immigrant communities, who are slow in being bought into the more atomized and relatively expensive entertainment culture of Toronto. The pattern of food consumption and entertainment at home takes a heavy toll on working women, even though the growing Toronto Tamil industry in take-out food and catered meals provides occasional, if not necessarily healthy, relief to them.

An example of the socialization of children to their gender roles can be seen from the observations made by a group of primary school teachers on the differences in the after-play cleaning up behaviour of South Asian girls and boys: the girls usually pick up their play things without being told, but the boys show reluctance to perform this simple task even when instructed to do so. The difference is traceable to the home, where mothers clean up for their sons while the daughters are trained to clean their own mess. From a young age women are socialized to accept that housework is entirely women's work. Even though Sri Lankan Tamil parents place as a high premium on the education and employment of daughters as on that of their sons, women are traditionally channelled along specific career paths (teaching, service sector, professions) and are trained to bear the double burden of career and housework. However, these traditional gender role assignments are becoming untenable in Canada, where women belonging to even the most restrictive cultures are exposed at least to the possibilities for equality between genders and opportunities for women to exercise their rights and freedoms as much as men do. Instead of adapting to and guiding their children in the new circumstances, Sri Lankan Tamil parents are known to persist in outdated disciplinary ways, often leading to severe breakdowns in family relationships. As fathers take on the role of enforcing discipline, mothers are thrust with the task of mediating between their hierarchical husbands and the recalcitrant children. Traditionally, restrictive hierarchical conflicts within the family would have been resolved by extended family mediation involving elderly aunts and uncles, or grandparents. These supports are not available in most cases for Tamil families living in Canada, and the relationship within the nuclear family may suffer even irreparably.

The family unit is generally seen as the site of the most intimate sentiments, a unit of love, mutual interest, cooperation and male altruism. However, there are cultural differences in the open display of sentiments of love and affection. In the current Canadian family environment, children commonly require and are given emotional reinforcement through words of endearment and physical gestures;

they are also privy to routine expressions of affection between parents. Tamil parents are usually reticent when it comes to expressing affection and are generally reluctant to indulge their children. These familial differences are not lost on the Tamil children growing up in Toronto; in fact, they are confused and disturbed by these differences. Tamil youth have commented on the absence of displays of emotions of love and affection on the part of parents. They remark that while their parents provide them with material goods (computers, clothes, etc.), even under great financial strain, they would seldom engage them in conversation, or offer verbal support and encouragement. Conjugal affection is also hidden and secretive, and in the open environment of Canadian society, where children and youth are constantly exposed to public displays of love and affection between couples, the Tamil children become unsure about the relationship between their parents. This is unfortunate and regrettable because most Tamil parents undergo tremendous hardships for their children, but they are hierarchically constrained from opening the home to free communication and emotional interaction between its members.

The family can also be the site of abuse and violence. Domestic violence is a concern within the Tamil community in Toronto. Violence is often fuelled by the economic and job insecurities of men, by male alcoholism, and women's resistance to their domestic work burdens and gender-based restrictions. Tamil women suffer many of the same pressures as men in Canada and are indeed worse off because of the disadvantages some of them face with poor language and communication skills. But as in other cultures, verbal and physical violence is the prerogative of men. There have been reported cases of suicides among Tamil women. Women are also known to contemplate suicide and to sacrifice even their own children to avoid the humiliation of domestic abuse. Young girls are at the mercy of their male siblings or cousins, who restrict them to prevent cross-sex interactions and preserve the 'honour' of the family. A newspaper report described the case of a young Tamil girl on whose arm a hot iron was placed by her brother and a male cousin as punishment for socializing with a boy.

Domestic violence is universal and is not peculiar to specific cultures, but in the context of an immigrant community violence against women acquires different dimensions. Wives, who are the targets of domestic violence and abuse, are usually without the traditional support of extended family members who would intervene on their behalf. There is also the absence of informal sanctions of the village or community that are brought to bear on the misbehaving husband. Domestic violence is also a well-kept secret, hidden and tolerated to protect the honour and good name of the family. Male perceptions on domestic violence are influenced by women's traditional roles. Thus, I heard an elderly gentleman say that domestic violence among the Tamils in Toronto is due to women being carried away by the values of equality and freedom and the loosening of male control over their women. However, many Sri Lankan Tamil women who are victims of violence, as well as men who perpetrate violence on their spouses, are now seeking and obtaining counselling to break out of the cycle of

domestic violence. On the other hand, social workers who undertake counselling among the Tamils have pointed out that there are instances when women are prevented by their male kin from freely communicating with the social workers.

The Dilemmas of Tamil Youth

Within the context of diaspora and migration, the children of immigrants, more than anyone else, find themselves in the 'in-between spaces' of the host and home cultures. Many young girls experience the 'contradictions' of cultural 'hybridity,' because of opposing value systems. For instance, parents demand university degrees and high-earning jobs of their daughters but will not allow them the same freedoms granted to sons. One of my female students pointed out that keeping late hours when it is job-related and involving overtime work is permitted, but not when it involves socializing with friends. Her brothers, on the other hand, have no curfew restrictions and are free to socialize with friends. Young women begin to question the traditional restrictions when faced with new values and lifestyle changes in immigrant situations.

Overall, Tamil women in Toronto have to measure up to two contradictory sets of values in the public and private domains. Independence, assertiveness, free thinking, creativity and confidence are deemed necessary for success in education and employment. But the values, generally considered ideal for Tamil wome are passivity, obedience to cultural norms, and dependence on males. A Tamil university student outlined her experience thus: "My father is very proud when I discuss controversial matters with him and encourages it, but in the presence of relatives or other community members, I am expected not to air my views, particularly if they are controversial." She attributed this to the cultural conditioning of older men to see passivity, obedience and lack of outspokenness as essential qualities for a woman. The two sets of values demand two types of personality types. Success in the public sphere demands an independent personality type, while submission to domestic hierarchies requires a dependent and passive personality. Young women who are high achievers or have independent personalities must either succumb to these gender rules or develop multiple personalities to fit the demands of family, community and the society at large.

The cultural practices and underlying values that limit women's freedom are invariably focused on cross-sex interactions, dating, arranged marriages and modesty issues. In all these areas, women's sexuality becomes a subject of great concern to the family and the community. A double standard exists for daughters and sons: men's sexual infractions are viewed as being the natural unfolding of male sexual drives, with relatively little implications for family reputation or marriageability, whereas women's sexuality has to be curbed and protected within the bounds of formal marriage. Reports about pre-marital sex and cross-sex interactions involving young Tamil women would indicate that they are reacting against the rigidity of the social norms of their parents and the community.

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As well, they are influenced by peer pressure to be 'cool,' which in youth parlance means fitting into what they perceive as the mainstream adolescent culture. The parents' rigidity and the children's reactions appear to be based on a thorough misreading of sexual freedom as being synonymous with sexual promiscuity.

Tamil boys seem to hold a double standard as well. They are willing conscripts to the culture of cross-gender mixing but are more selective when it comes to marriage. One young woman notes that a Tamil boy would date many women but expect his future wife not to have had a boyfriend. A woman's 'friendliness' would be interpreted as 'promiscuity.' An independent female personality is less valued as a prospective partner in marriage by young Tamil men who have grown up in Canada and like their female counterparts have been exposed to more liberal values regarding dating and marriage. Physical appearance and 'smartness' are valued for a girl, but 'independence' and 'assertiveness' are associated with promiscuity and a dominating female personality. Marriage is the number one priority for parents regardless of their daughters' ambitions for career and independence. Young women object to their parents' discouragement of higher education for the sake of marriage. With marriage comes the emphasis on motherhood and, in some instances, pressures on newly married women by their mothers-in-law to have children soon after marriage regardless of their career ambitions. Marriage and motherhood continue to be the defining criteria of Tamil womanhood in Toronto, without any consideration being given to the changing roles of women and their new circumstances.

The common South Asian view of North American culture is that it is materialistic, but there can be nothing more materialistic than arranged marriages and dowry practices that degrade and place a price tag on women. When marriage proposals are brought for a girl, prospective in-laws crassly inquire about her student loans and insist that they be paid off before the marriage in addition to the usual dowry payment. Beauty as in 'fair skin' and a slim appearance continue to be highly desirable traits in women for marriageability, although such traits are seldom required of men. A rather exacting mother-in-law-to-be wanted her future daughter-in-law, a professionally qualified young woman who had just arrived in Toronto for her arranged marriage, to go through beauty treatments before the marriage to have her 'dark' skin bleached to make it 'lighter.' Young Tamil women, like their parents, do not take marriage lightly, but their criteria for a good marriage are different and less focused on the larger collective attributes of caste, family, ethnicity, or on individual attributes such as money, jobs, etc. Instead, they place greater emphasis on love, compatibility, and common interests. With greater opportunities for cross-sex mixing, women are becoming open to the romantic and voluntary aspects of marriage, as indeed they should. They also want the time-honoured institution of arranged marriages to be modified by allowing the prospective partners to socialize before committing to marry.

In conclusion, gender discrimination is universal and is not peculiar to Tamil or South Asian cultures. But compared to other communities in Canada, the South Asian communities are among those who more emphasize the control of women's marriage and sexuality in the name of female modesty and female reputation and as a way of preserving cultural traditions. The preservation of 'culture' thus becomes synonymous with the control of women. The emphasis on cultural preservation is legitimate but not at the expense of one half of the membership of a culture. My argument is that the use of 'culture' to justify the control of women is illiberal and indefensible under any circumstance, and in extreme instances it can also be patently illegal. Oftentimes, culture is conveniently used to prolong old hierarchies that have neither meaning nor value with changing times and in different places. Every society has its own version of sexual differences, but as Sylviane Agacinski (1998), the French philosopher and feminist, has noted, 'difference' does not necessarily imply 'hierarchy.' Sexual difference—woman and man—must be celebrated but hierarchy denied. The goal of societies must be to promote 'parity' of the sexes, which means that sexual differences are affirmed and given equal value in all areas, not only in regard to equal representation in politics but also in observing democratic values in the family.

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CHILD SOLDIERS IN CIVIL WAR
WHY DO CHILDREN BECOME SOLDIERS?

S. I. Keethaponcalan

Introduction

T he end of the Cold War has been marked by many significant changes in the international as well as national milieu. One change is the way war is fought in different parts of the world. Before the end of the Cold War, conflicts were predominantly international in nature, although intra-state conflicts and ethnic struggles also existed. With the emergence of a "New World Order" the international system witnessed an exceptional proliferation of intra-state conflicts and guerrilla-type warfare. The increasing nature of the phenomenon of child soldiers is a by product of proliferating ethno-political conflicts. Although, it is practically impossible to provide an exact figure, informed sources maintain that an estimated 300,000 children are involved as soldiers or in support roles within non-state paramilitary groups and state military forces (e.g Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, 2001). This article examines the question why children become soldiers.

The concept of a 'child' is problematic legally and otherwise. The problem of definition arises when dealing with persons between the age of fifteen and eighteen, as there exists a wider consensus in referring to all human beings under the age of fifteen as children. Some decades ago most international legal instruments, for example, the Convention on Armed Conflicts, set the maximum age for children far below eighteen years.

In most societies, especially traditional ones, persons between the ages of fifteen and eighteen are regarded as 'youth' or young people. Religious beliefs play a role in determining the concept of childhood in some parts of the world as for religious purposes, and by rituals a child may become or rather accept adult responsibilities at an early stage of his or her growth. In some 'pre-literate societies' age categories have been determined by physical process, such as puberty. A community's political, economic and cultural values also play a role in the way in which childhood is determined.

In spite of these dynamics, most international organizations and experts currently prefer to define childhood as eighteen years of age and under. The United Nations now defines children as persons under the age of eighteen years. For example, according to the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, a child means every human being below the age of eighteen years. Graca Machel, the expert who undertook the UN Study on the Impact of Armed Conflict on Children, defined the term 'child' to include everyone under the age of eighteen (Machel, 1996). Other international institutions, such as the African Charter for the Rights of the Child, also define a child as a human being under the age of eighteen.

Recruitment and Enlistment

A s far as children's participation in armed conflict is concerned, some observers suggest that in most conflict settings children are forced to become soldiers by conscription. Meanwhile, some studies accept the fact that in addition to forceful recruitment, children also enrol in the army and rebel movements voluntarily. Machel (1996), for example, agrees that "in addition to being forcibly recruited, youth also present themselves for service" (p. 10).

However, Machel further argues: "it is misleading, however, to consider this voluntary. While young people may appear to choose military service, the choice is not exercised freely. They may be driven by any of several forces including cultural, social economic or political pressure" (p.10). Brett & McCallin (1998) also propose that the whole concept of what is 'voluntary' needs to be called into question, because the options for children are not free from influence. Cohen & Goodwin-Gill (1994) point out the role of social pressure and manipulation in the children's option to join armed groups, and they suggest that these forces are most difficult to resist.

Forcible Recruitment

F orceful recruitment of children is undoubtedly one of the most common forms of drafting new members for armed groups. There are countries where conscription is legal, for example, Ethiopia, Sudan, and Mozambique. In some countries where conscription is regulated by law, authorities engage in recruiting much younger children into the military as there are practical issues in proving the actual age of children (Wessells, 1998). Direct or indirect threat is used in places where conscription is not formally in place (Machel, 1996). Forceful recruitment often involves threat to the safety and well-being of children themselves and their families, and actual violation of the physical integrity of the youth. In some regions violence has been directed towards family members and others close to the child. Armed opposition groups, as well as national armed forces engage in these types of activities to force the children into armed movements.

'Afesa,' an Ahmaric term for press-ganging, is a common form of recruitment in many African states. Children are being forcibly recruited in streets, marketplaces, playgrounds, schools, and religious places of worship (Brett and McCallin, 1998). Brett and McCallin maintain that "teenage boys who worked in the informal sector selling cigarettes, matches, sweet, chewing gum and lottery tickets were a particular target" (p.50). Democratic Republic of

Congo (DRC) is one of the most dangerous conflict settings in Africa, involving a number of countries and parties in the ongoing war for land and resources. In Congo thousands of children are recruited, often forcibly, as soldiers. For example, Laurent Kabila's troops forced a large number of what they term 'young kadogos' into the army (Human Rights Watch, 2001). Other militia groups in DRC were also inducting children into their ranks. A Congolese boy explained his experience of forceful recruitment as follows:

> I was coming from school at about 5 pm. I went to school in the afternoon. I was heading home when soldiers in a vehicle stopped me and made me get in. They were Rwandans. There were lots of other young boys in the vehicle. We went to the airport in Goma and from there to Kalemie by plane. We were all ten, twelve, thirteen years old and older. Then we were sent to Camps Vert in Moba and trained there. Lots were killed in the training. Lots died of sickness. The food was poorly prepared and many got dysentery. (Human Rights Watch, 2001: 10)

In Uganda, the rebels are taking children forcibly after each raid, often over the dead bodies of their family members. Although the rebels prefer children in their teens, they abduct children as young as eight or nine. Children who resist recruitment or oppose the rebels are killed without any qualms. In Liberia, a childcare worker reported that "some boys were told, you join us or we'll kill your family" (Human Rights Watch, 1994a: 25). Image Asia (1996) suggests that in Burma forced recruitment is particularly common before and during large offensives.

Voluntary Enlistment

A s pointed out by observers as well as scholars, children also voluntarily enlist in armed organizations. There are several factors that contribute to children optionally joining armed groups. Prominent among them are: (i) Economic needs, (ii) Security needs, (iii) Power, (iv) Nationalism, (v) Revenge, (vi) Social and cultural values, (vii) Peer pressure, and (viii) Excitement.

1. Economic Needs

When basic human needs, economic as well as welfare needs, are not satisfied, human beings are capable of trying all possible alternatives to satisfy their needs. Children are no exception to this general rule, and in most conflict settings joining an armed group seems a last option for hundreds of children. That is why the lack of fundamental economic needs plays a major role in forcing children to take up arms with organized military establishments.

Machel (1996), the expert appointed by the U.N to study the effects of armed conflicts, claims: "one of the basic reasons that children join armed groups is economic. Hunger and poverty may drive parents to offer their children for service. In some cases, armies pay a minor soldier's wage directly to the family. Child participation

may be difficult to distinguish, as in some cases whole families move with armed groups. Children themselves may volunteer if they believe that this is the only way to guarantee regular meals, clothing or medical attention" (p. 10). Human Rights Watch (1994: 3) claims that all the warring factions in Liberia have forcibly recruited some children, but most children have joined voluntarily, usually because they saw no other way to survive. Again in Liberia, UN officials claim that most children chose to become soldiers because their economic situation was extremely limited (Human Rights Watch, 1994).

In Cambodia, the UN found that most child soldiers either were orphans or came from very poor families. For these children, joining the army voluntarily was a ready means to get food and earn some money for surviving relatives. Families may also encourage their children to enlist as means for economic and social advancement. In Liberia even seven-year-olds are involved in combat because, according to the Liberian Red Cross, "those with guns could eat" (Cohen & Goodwin-Gill, 1994: 33). Inside an armed group, an expert claimed, "for the first time these children can count on medical care and three meals a day" (Frankel, 1995: 44). Many underage soldiers, for example, in Lebanon, boast of bigger financial earnings than even professionals such as teachers and government servants (Cairns, 1996).

2. Security

Membership in an armed group and access to an AK-47, that a soldier would most probably obtain while inside the group, ensure protection from threat and harassment. Many children who have joined hands with armed groups have experienced violence in their personal lives, which makes them feel helpless. A Liberian boy soldier, for example, claimed that he joined United Liberation Movement for Democracy in Liberia (ULIMO) to protect himself against the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) (Human Rights Watch, 1994). Machel (1996) summarizes this as follows: Some children feel obliged to become soldiers for their own protection. Faced with violence and chaos all around, they decide that they are safer with guns in their hands. Often such children join armed opposition groups after experiencing harassment from government forces. Many young people have joined the Kurdish rebel group, for example, as a reaction to scorched-earth policies and extensive human rights violations. In El Salvador, children whose parents had been killed by government soldiers joined opposition groups for protection (p.12).

Therefore, membership in an armed group ensures safety and security to a child from threats and harassments. Also, it provides a certain amount of freedom to engage in certain activities. For example, a certain amount of freedom of movement is provided to children who opt to become soldiers. Such freedom is not possible for a normal child under some circumstances. In that sense, the desire to be safe from security harassment and threat influence many children to take up the option of arms.

3. Power

Being a member of an armed group ensures power to otherwise powerless children who mostly come from weaker social groups such as the poor and the uneducated. Frankel (1995) believes that in some places, "picking up a gun is simply the best survival option available. A child soldier gets a clean uniform with bright insignia, his first pair of shoes and a weapon—symbols of power and status that few enjoyed beforehand" (p.44). According to a UN official in Liberia:

> Lots of children are used at checkpoints. Manning a checkpoint gives a kid power and influence, even if he is twelve years old. Often a twelve or fifteen year old boy will stop a UN car at a checkpoint and make the officer in charge explain who he is, what he is doing… we teach our UN officers to be quiet, and try to explain. But a twelve-year-old doesn't understand. All he understands is that he is in power and has someone to command and can kill someone. Sometimes there are fifteen or twenty people at a checkpoint and the commander is only about ten years old. Boys at checkpoints have killed people for no reason at all. (Human Rights Watch, 1994: 32)

The power and prestige children acquire in armed organizations also allow children to break social traditions. In normal circumstances, elders such as parents and teachers control children. In conflict situations where children are involved as soldiers, parents and teachers may have to adjust to this new status of children. Furthermore, there are some social and economical benefits as well. For example, in Lebanon a girl claimed that her (underage soldier) brother does not have to wait in line to buy provisions (Cairns, 1996). In this sense the power children attain as result of their involvement in military organizations is not just political but also economic and cultural.

4. Ideology and Nationalism

Of course, many children believe in what they are fighting for because in one way or another they understand the stated objectives of their respective organizations. These designs may include equality, political liberation, holy war, the right to their ancestral lands, and ideology (Brett & McCallin, 1998). While some scholars insist that children profess loyalty to religious, nationalistic, or political ideologies and they take up arms to defend their beliefs (e.g. Juergensmeyear, 1993), others believe that children do not have the "cognitive capacity" to think rationally about concepts such as religion and nation (e.g. Coles, 1986). Cohn & Goodwin-Gill (1994) argue that children in Sri Lanka, for example, "were attracted by the black and white version of the world offered by the LTTE, which presents itself as sacred and infallible" (p.35).

For children, ideology is mainly a matter of compelling stories that relate the child's personal experiences to experiences of the community and to the future (Garbarino, Kostelny, & Dubrow, 1991a). Influenced by ideological motivations, children have taken part in political struggles in many conflict situations in the past. Children were on the front-line, for instance, in the Viet Cong's nationalist cause in Vietnam, in the Palestinian struggle against Israel, in Iran under the Ayatollah Khomeini, in Nazi Germany, and even in the American Civil War (Garbarino, Kostelny, & Dubrow, 1991b). This also applies to the numerous national liberation struggles that are being fought against state institutions today (Coles, 1986).

5. Revenge

The desire to take revenge often influences children to seek a role in armed organizations. Many children admit to the fact that they have experienced violence in their personal lives and lost loved ones. For example, Roland Vah, who voluntarily joined the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) maintained that, "My mother got killed by government forces" (Susman, 1999: A24). Ishmael Beah, a nineteen-year-old, who was in the Sierra Leone Army at fourteen, claimed that, "I lost my parents in the war, and friends of mine watched their parents killed in front of them" (Farley, 2001: 26). A Liberian boy soldier claimed "I joined ULIMO, for revenge because, my papa was killed" (Human Rights Watch, 1994: 26). These are some of the most common accounts of what motivates children to fight on behalf of an armed group.

6. Social Values

Social values have a strong impact on the children's decision to enlist in an armed group. How a community values conflict and its consequences, for example, in terms of social justice, religion, ethnicity, chosen traumas, and so on, is likely to be central to children's own perceptions. In some situations participation in military or warlike activities is glorified. Children are raised to revere military leaders of the past, and to look on military induction as a sign of manhood. Children may become extremely attracted to the military life or the glamour and prestige of a military uniform (Coles, 1986). For instance, a study (Image Asia, 1996) on the child soldiers in Burma points out that:

> Burma's military history plays an important psychological part in encouraging children to become involved in the military. This is due to the prominent role that General Aung San played in liberating the country from the British and Japanese occupations. The Burman public has turned him into an idolized national hero. Children, especially young boys, are raised to revere military leaders of the past, and to look on military induction as a sign of manhood. In much of the popular media, the soldier is held up as the perfect role model. Particularly among the ethnic groups, where many children grow up watching their fathers go to war… The ethnic groups also have revered leaders, that children are taught to adore, and often fear, from an early age. To be a soldier is to occupy a position of great honor and self-sacrifice. (p. 4)

The status of those who die in war is also imperative in this regard. In some conflict settings those who die in the war are being revered as heroes and saviours of the race, in extreme cases they become 'martyrs.' For instance, in Ireland, in Palestine and in Sri Lanka those who suffer death in confrontation are remembered with honour and revered as "martyrs" (Byrne, 1997). This "cult of martyrdom" plays a crucial role in forcing children to choose violence, because in essence the status of the dead becomes a source of pressure on the children in their respective environments.

7. Peer Pressure

Pressure, particularly from friends and members of the community, may influence a child to become a soldier. It is not uncommon for some children to join in armed groups simply because their friends have joined. All children expect approval from elders and their peers. Expectations of peer approval are an integral part of any child's life. The use of guns and involvement in violence are seen by many children as a way to win peer approval (Drogin, 1995).

8. Excitement

Being a soldier and the activities attached to it can give s pleasure to many children, although not many child soldiers openly declare it. "The crackle of gunfire, the pride of being in charge, the experience of attacking a village and being allowed to keep some of the spoil. This is what used to give David Samai (a Sierra Leon child soldier and a self-styled Sergeant) a thrill," says an observer (Simmons, 1999:1). "I like being a Sergeant," declared David Samai, in an interview in Sierra Leone (Simmons, 1999, p. 1).

Garbarino, an eminent scholar of child psychology and violence, and his team endorse the view that some children may appreciate the thrill that comes with moderate danger and some children may even seek extreme danger as an expression of psychopathology (Garbarino, Kostelny, & Dubrow, 1991b). Garbarino and his colleagues, from their experience in several war-torn societies, conclude that: "if we are honest we must recognize that war may mean the fun and adventure of being young and set loose on the world. This is one of war's attractions for young people, particularly young people who are trapped in a dead-end existence or who yearn for glory and excitement" (Garbarino, Kostelny, & Dubrow, 1991a: 5). Cairns (1996) reports that in Belfast many young men seek membership in IRA as a way of relieving boredom. This may be also true in other conflict settings, like Sri Lanka.

Propaganda and Indoctrination

A s aforementioned, some scholars question the real nature of 'voluntarism' in optional enlistment of children in armed groups, based on children's cognitive capacity to evaluate and make decisions. Of significance in this 'voluntary enlistment' is the role of propaganda and indoctrination. Since the propaganda mechanisms that are unleashed in conflict settings by concerned parties are so rigorous, children may find it hard to resist. This

may be because of the vulnerabilities of children themselves. According to social anthropologist Brian Milne, who has studied the exploitation of child soldiers in Southeast Asia, "kids don't have a doctrine or ideology" (Frankel, 1995: 44). "Adults need a good reason to take up arms. It is easier to convince kids to fight for almost nothing," remarked a Liberian working with former combatants (Human Rights Watch, 1994:3). Therefore, it is easy for any group, especially the ones that are in control, to induct children with any ideology including nationalism, holy war and the use of violence for political purposes. Olara Otunnu, the UN special representative for children and armed conflict said that:

> Children become in a cynical way the best raw material to fashion into efficient, ruthless and unquestioning tools of war. Because they are impressionable, they are like a vessel. Whatever you want to make them into, they'll be shaped. So you indoctrinate them, you shape them, and then as we see, from Sierra Leone to Congo to Sri Lanka, they are the most ruthless. (Susman & Mohan, 1999: A15)

Influence of ideology, especially when young people develop a sense of social bonding and identity, can have a lasting impact on them. History have proven that in places such as South Africa, Northern Ireland, Palestine, Rwanda, and Sri Lanka, the influence of ideology on children have brought disastrous consequences. In Sri Lanka, the Middle East, and Afghanistan, for instance, children have gone to the extent of undertaking suicide-bombing missions. This is, in fact done by respective armed organizations exploiting the innocence and immaturity of children (Machel, 1996).

Propaganda is undertaken by many ways and means. For example, in remote villages propaganda is undertaken by delivering lecture-like speeches explaining the goals and the rationality behind the decision to fight. The need for more manpower to maintain the struggle is also always emphasized. Then the villagers are asked, often with force, to supply the necessary human resources including little boys and girls (Brett & McCallin, 1998). Militants also use posters, street dramas and so on to attract the attention of children. This author has first hand experience of watching repeated telecasts of the movie *Omar Muktar: The Lion of the Desert* over the LTTE television station Nitharsanam in the early 1990s. This movie is based on a fine story of a Libiyan resistance movement agaist the Italians during the inter-war period.

However, in most conflicts today, propaganda and indoctrination are not just isolated acts, but a part of the life of the people who live in conflict settings. It is everywhere in their environment, for example, in art, recreational areas, schools, places of worship and so on. In other words, in many conflict settings, propaganda has been undertaken by the militarization of the whole society itself. And militarization has become the single most efficient component of the propaganda mechanism of present-day armed groups (Cohn & Goodwin-Gill, 1994). In the Arab world, observers believe that the Islamist movements "have perfected the art of recruiting willing martyrs." They also point out that mosque-based religious

preparation plays a crucial role in such recruitment (Frankel, 1995; Juergensmeyear, 1993).

Conclusion

T here has been a rapid increase in the number of children involved as soldiers in state armies as well as non-state paramilitary organizations in the recent past. While a substantial number of children are forcibly recruited, others voluntarily enlist for various reasons. Nevertheless, observers question the theory of voluntary enlistment, arguing that children do not have the cognitive capacity or skills to make independent decisions. This argument has been strengthened by the role of propaganda in forcing the children into violence. In many conflict settings, propaganda has been undertaken by several means including talks, poster campaigns, music, street dramas and so on. Yet, of significance is the way in which the whole environment has been militarized, so that the children cannot escape the attraction of the symbols of war and violence.

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POLITY

HEALTH AS A CATALYST FOR PEACE: EMERGING LESSONS FROM SRI LANKA

Kalinga Tudor Silva

Introduction

I t is well known that prolonged armed conflict invariably leads to escalation of injury, disease, disability and death, devastation of health infrastructure, displacement of health personnel and weakening of health systems. This is indeed the primary rationale for adopting emergency health as a cornerstone of humanitarian assistance in war situations. In this context emergency health interventions are merely seen as a humanitarian exercise designed to minimize human suffering and harm caused by armed conflict.

There are others who have recently advocated a move beyond this minimalist perception of health interventions in civil war. Taking a broader view of health as human well-being and not merely the absence of disease, WHO conducted a series of pilot projects in certain war-affected countries, including Sri Lanka, from 1991 to 1995 with a view to integrate peace building with health initiatives. "Shots of Vaccine instead of shots of artillery" (Swartz 1996) was the theme of the War and Health Programme of the McMaster University, Canada, identifying health as a potential means to bring together parties in conflict. "Health Bridges for Peace" (Peters 1996) launched in 1996 in former Yugoslavia embarked on a programme of training health professionals exposed to ethnic strife, in conflict management and mediation skills (Gutlove 2000). Using Sri Lanka's recent transition from war to peace, the present paper further explores the potential role of health in promoting peace and societal transition from a bitterarmed struggle to a path of peaceful negotiation of conflicts.

Sri Lanka experienced one of the bloodiest of civil wars in the world in recent years. It rapidly progressed from a low intensity ethnic conflict in the 1980s, to an intractable civil war consuming over 50 per cent of the annual budgetary allocations of the state towards the end of the 1990s. Even though active armed conflict was largely restricted to parts of the Northern and Eastern provinces, ramifications of the ethnic conflict engulfed the whole of Sri Lanka from time to time. This was due to devastating suicide bomb attacks on southern civilian and military targets by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, periodic outbreaks of ethnic riots and an overall breakdown of the law and order situation. The 18 year war left more that 60,000 people killed, at least 20,000 people disabled, an unknown number of men, women and children traumatised, over one million civilians displaced, and the economic and physical infrastructure and livelihoods of many inhabitants in the war-affected areas completely disrupted. The health services in particular suffered, due to shelling or military occupation of health facilities, displacement or departure of health human power, logistic difficulties as well as security concerns in delivery of medical supplies to war-affected areas and war-induced pressure on available health facilities.

The catalytic role of health, in the transition from war to peace can be understood by considering the prospects for developing an integrated approach to health and peace during war following the cessation of hostilities.

Windows to Peace During War

A s the civil war escalated, Sri Lanka was broadly divided into three zones, on the basis of the evolving security situation in each area. They consisted of: areas held by the LTTE; areas adjacent to the LTTE controlled territory, with a heavy presence of Sri Lanka security forces; and the remaining parts of Sri Lanka under civilian rule. Depending on successful military incursions by each side, the sizes of the first two zones ebbed and flowed. The unhealthy impact of the war was most severe in these two zones, and accordingly, humanitarian assistance by multilateral and bilateral donors largely focused on these two areas. Both the Government of Sri Lanka (GOSL) and the LTTE tried to attract donor assistance to areas militarily controlled by them, but the donors opted to operate directly through multilateral implementation agencies such as ICRC and UNHCR or through a multitude of local and international NGOs identified as neutral agencies (Ofstad 2002).

In spite of the war the GOSL maintained skeleton services inclusive of health facilities in all conflict-affected areas, including LTTE-held territory. This was difficult due to staff turnover, restrictions imposed by armed forces and the LTTE on mobility of people and goods, and war-related disruption of services, but clearly shows the pronounced legacy and educational facilities even in rebel-held areas. These services, however were grossly inadequate to meet the demand stemming from the war situation. In war-affected areas humanitarian agencies such as ICRC and MSF conducted mobile clinics to supplement the state-run health services. On the other hand, large numbers of Tamil, Muslim and Sinhala civilians living in conflict-affected areas became displaced due to the escalation of war. The Jaffna Rehabilitation Project and the Integrated Food Security Project implemented by GTZ demonstrated that some donors were willing to go beyond relief work in areas where security situations had improved.

The presence of multiple players, including international donors in war-affected areas itself served as an important deterrent to large-scale violation of human rights. Agencies such as ICRC and UNHCR made some effort to raise awareness among conflicting parties about international humanitarian law. More importantly, medical supplies provided by the Ministry of Health to the war-Affected areas were excluded from the list of banned items. While the flow of medical supplies to the North and East remained a constant source of contestation between the centre and health officials in conflict-affected areas, the interviews with Colombo officials revealed that they were fully sensitive to the implications of any serious shortages of medical supplies in the conflict areas. One high-ranking official noted, "If drugs are in short supply in the South it can only become a national issue. But if there is a shortage of vital drugs in the conflict zone it has the potential to become an international issue."

There was a degree of mutual cooperation between hostile parties in responding to certain medical emergencies. For instance, while pass systems had been introduced to by the Sri Lankan security forces and the LTTE, in order to regulate the flow of people in and out of the territories held by them and prevent infiltration from enemy forces, there was considerable leeway for people form one area to visit health services in another area. Given the rudimentary nature of health facilities in the LTTE-held areas, the typical flow of care seekers was from such areas, to health facilities in nearby army-held areas ("uncleared areas" in military jargon) and back. Both the LTTE and the Sri Lankan security forces gradually accommodated this care-seeking behaviour among civilians in affected areas.

While the Internally Displaced Peoples (IDPs) in welfare centres (camps) received regular attention in public health activities implemented by the GOSL and NGOs, routine immunization programmes were also implemented by government health workers in rebel-held areas with the consent of the local LTTE cadres. International agencies such as ICRC often served as mediatiors between government and LTTE in facilitating such public health campaigns. When a serious malaria epidemic did break out during 1997 to 2001 in many parts of the Vanni hinterland held by LTTE fighters, the government anti-malaria campaign carried out a mass campaign to contain the epidemic through focal spraying and mass administration of drugs (Sivaraja 2001). This campaign did receive approval of the LTTE. After reviewing various problems faced by aid agencies involved in humanitarian interventions in Sri Lanka, one observer concluded: "In spite of these problems, humanitarian assistance has been maintained throughout the war, and there has never been a major outbreak of starvation or epidemic diseases with catastrophic results so common in other war-affected countries" (Ofstad 2002: 175).

Health as an Emerging Catalyst for Post-Conflict Transition

F ollowing a peace initiative mediated by the Norwegian government, open hostilities between GOSL and the LTTE were halted since February 2002. Even though there are many uncertainties about the long-term sustainability of this peace process, health-related interventions have been identified as an important component of the proposed rehabilitation and reconstruction programmes backed by various international donors. Planned and ongoing activities in the conflict-affected areas include a WHO-supported project for rehabilitation of the Kilinochchi hospital, training of additional health workers, de-mining operations assisted by a variety of foreign donors, and an ILO-supported initiative for rehabilitation and reintegration of disabled ex-combatants from both sides of the armed conflict (WHO 2002, Specht n.d) Each of these projects has received blessings from the GOSL as well as from the LTTE and various other stakeholders. The successful implementation of these projects will largely depend on the future of the ongoing peace process, which in turn will rest on the ability of conflicting parties to evolve a workable political formula for resolving existing differences. If successfully implemented, these projects can be expected to contribute to and indeed strengthen the post-conflict transition in Sri Lanka. While such projects are by no means a substitute for required political and institutional changes, and health is by no means a conflict-free sphere, health may provide a path of least resistance in the difficult campaign to heal the wounds of a deeply divided society.

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BYE BYE TO *HI!!*
FODDER FOR THE BRAIN-DEAD

Sasanka Perera

After seeing a number of television advertisements of the new magazine *Hi!!* allegedly produced for the country's 'high society,' I was very curious to read this new literary product if for nothing else to aquatint myself with the opinions, fashions, attitudes and collective wisdom of the country's social and cultural elite. Many of these traits are ultimately based upon the concept of taste, and it looked that Hi!! intended to become the voice of the taste of local 'high society.' French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu in his essay *The Metamorphosis of Tastes* suggests that tastes emerge as choices made among practices (eg., sports, leisure activities etc.) and properties (furniture, clothes, houses etc.) "through which taste, in the sense of the principle underlying these choices, manifests itself.' An individual's taste can be ascertained in the way she has defined and chosen her social practices and properties. Every one of these activities or objects come with certain cultural capital or value attached to them as defined by society at large, or more importantly by influential sections within it.

It was in this context that I wanted to read and learn from *Hi!!* a magazine meant for high society. As an individual, I do not come from among the city's social and cultural elite. Most of the time, I do not understand these individuals, their social practices or cultural habits. But I know that they have the social power to make cultural practices and icons to be adopted or rejected as symbolic of high or low tastes in the symbolic field that semiotics often tries to decode and understand. So in the very least, I assumed that I could pick up a few fashion tips, insightful observations on literary and artistic trends and other such tips on high living. Rather than being academic, my interest was entirely personal. I assumed that by reading about and simulating some of these practices as described in *Hi!!*, I would be able to merge into posh crowds without making an absolute outcaste or an uncultured lout of myself next time I happen to be at the Hilton, the Colombo Swimming Club or whatever other posh places these individuals unleash their social practices. So I had no hesitation in spending the rather steep Rs. 250.00 to buy a copy of this magazine which was to be my manual and bible for a contented and sophisticated future social life.

The Editor in a tiny editorial comment pasted with her own photo makes the following observation as the mission of the magazine: "as a pictorial magazine featuring the happenings about town, the parties, the launches, the weddings, the fashions and the best attired, *Hi!!*, will cover the lives, liaisons, and the glitz of the gliterati and the literati of Sri Lanka and the subcontinent." Quite a substantial cultural mission one might think.

But I must confess that I have been very disappointed. In general, the whole magazine appears to be tailor made to a readership whose average IQ must be well below zero. That alone was a problem for me as my expectation in reading *Hi!!* was to learn how to become posh and not to become brain dead. As a general format, the magazine is an uncoordinated pictorial and gossipy rendition of the vulgar consumption and gastronomic acrobatics of individuals that the magazine and its editor have recognized as Colombo's 'high society'. Many of its pages are festooned with pictures of over-fed men and women of Colombo and beyond, often attired in the kinds of clothes that woud have truly horrified fashion designers from many parts of the civilized world.

Trivia

After reading through the entire magazine at least hoping to get my money's worth, I tried to recollect what I have finally learnt from it: now I know that people get married, which I knew anyway. The magazine had covered eight weddings of people I had never heard of, and after pictorial introductions to their weddings one only knows what their costumes were made of and nothing else. Now I possess the profound knowledge that businessmen and white women living in Colombo give parties, which sometimes involve wearing strange costumes. I know that Upali Wijewardena was a businessman and that he has disappeared which I had known for the past two decades or so. I know now that retired cricketer Aravinda De Silva's wife lost weight after childbirth and politician Navin Dissnayake has a family and a pet dog. To be frank, I did not know this bit of important national news before my acquaintance with *Hi!!*. And above all, I know that editor has identified herself and two Indian males as '*Hi!!* HeadLiners' in her own magazine, even though I have absolutely no idea what she and her fellow headliners have contributed to the betterment of human civilization to be honored in this fashion. I am sure that all this information would make a real difference in the lives of some people, perhaps the kind of individuals who volunteered to be featured within the pages of *Hi!!*.

However, it has been impossible for me and a few other fellow travellers in Colombo's 'low society' to understand the rationale for this cultural product at the present moment. What is it trying to achieve? This is particularly interesting given the fact that Hi!! is published by Wijeya Newspapers, a company that publishes some of the country's best known newspapers and one which does not necessarily have a mediocre tradition in journalism. Given the rather restrictive nature of local journalism, some Wijeya publications such as *Sunday Times, Daily Mirror* and *Lankadeepa* have made a mark in the local print media while quality may not have been always consistent. But then, no local newspaper company can claim to have been consistent in their quality of

publishing and content. In that context, the emergence of this magazine makes no sense, and in fact looks like an aberration in the publishing record of Wijeya Newspapers.

As most reasonably informed individuals would know, the present moment marks a clear moment of socio-cultural and intellectual unenlightenment in our country. In such a situation, it would have been very useful to see publications that place in context as well as establish a critical tradition in local sculpture, painting, installation, photography, music, dance, literature, academic writing, politics and so on. As far as I know, in most civilized parts of the world, people who claim to be the elite have an interest in these kinds of things, or in the very least they pretend to entertain such interests. Instead of catering to such a felt need, *Hi*!! seems to symbolize and become a victim and by-product of the intellectual malnourishment referred to above. On the other hand, the editor and the staff of *Hi*!! have not understood very basic principles of journalistic practice despite being backed by a well established newspaper company. That is, it seems to depict its chosen audience in a particular light to the extent that no other representation seem possible or necessary. For instance, its major interests are gastronomic extravaganzas and fancy parties in Colombo. Are these the most important things Colombo's 'high society' do? If so, then three cheers to *Hi*!! for depicting its target audience in its true light. If not, then the management of Wijeya Newspapers need to re-educate the staff of *Hi*!! in introductory practices of journalism so they can represent their audience with its varied complexities.

In the very least, a magazine that touts itself as an organ of 'high society' could have addressed some of these issues within its pages rather than documenting what appears to be elite orgies which brings to mind the kind of decadence that preceded the fall of the Roman Empire. Where are the reviews of art exhibitions, commentaries on the state of the arts, previews of musical events? Where are the political and cultural commentaries, architectural reviews and so on? In defense of the magazine's intellectual rigor, the editor could always refer to the stamp sized sorry excuses for book reviews presented in the section '*Hi*!! Brow' or two pages of war photography linked to the US invasion of Iraq as its political commentary. But what is *Hi*!!'s position on this war itself? Does Colombo's 'high society' have an opinion on war? Does it have any notion of the arts and the literature? Does this 'high society' know what music sounds like? Does it care to read literature or philosophy? Or is it simply about eating until you drop dead? It is in this light that *Hi*!! is truly a reflection of the intellectual poverty of Colombo's so called 'high society' as it claims to reflect the events and practices of that segment of society. It could however add one more section called 'Hi!! Dead Meat: Glitzy funerals of members of 'high society' permanently exiled to the other world inhabited by all of our dearly departed most probably due to numerous wrongful health practices, many of which are documented in Hi!! itself. Since we know all about unknown posh people's babies' names, how elegant their bodies are supposed to be, their weddings and gaudy costumes, and other such trivia, we might as well know about the parties that are organized in honor of their deaths. That would complete Hi!!'s goal in bringing the gossipy trivia of Colombo's unimaginative social elite into the public domain.

Fashion and Tastes

After reading through *Hi*!! and realizing that the fashions and tastes of Colombo's high society and their institutionalized vulgarity were not worth emulating, I was reminded once again of the extreme intellectual poverty of Colombo's social elite. It also brought to my mind a segment from Platos' *Phaedrus* as narrated by Socrates. In it, there is a conversation between King Thamus from Upper Egypt and God Theuth, the inventor of many things. Theuth was showing off King Thamus his many inventions while the king was evaluating the merits of each—not very different from reviewing *Hi*!!. When it came to writing, God Theuth observed: "Here is an accomplishment my lord King, which will improve both the wisdom and memory of the Egyptians. I have discovered a sure receipt for memory and wisdom." At this point, King Thamus reminded the god that as the inventor of writing, he would not be able to see its negative impact just the same way that the editor of *Hi*!! will not be able to see its exalted silliness. Thamus goes on to say, that those who acquire the capacity to write would "cease to exercise their memory, and become forgetful; they will rely upon writing to bring things to their remembrance by external signs instead of by their own internal resources. What you have discovered is a receipt for recollection, not for memory. And as for wisdom, your pupils will have a reputation for it without its reality: they will receive a quantity of information without proper instruction, and in consequence be thought very knowledgeable when they are for the most part quite ignorant. And because they are filled with the conceit of wisdom instead of real wisdom they will be a burden to society."

It seems to me that the judgement of Thamus is the only judgment that we can come to with regard to *Hi*!! and the section of society depicted within its glossy pages. If this is the 'high society' of our country, they are surely not worth emulating. If *Hi*!! is the organ of their extravaganzas of dubious value, then it is not worth reading it. We can use the final words of Thamus in dismissing both the magazine and the intellectually challenged audience it is attempting to cater to: "And because they are filled with the conceit of wisdom instead of real wisdom they will be a burden to society." And bye bye to *Hi*!! ∎

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SRI LANKA 2003 – PLAYERS IN SEARCH OF SOLUTIONS

Larry Marshall

"…a complex set of grievances left unresolved eventually festered and erupted into systematic repression and widespread violence."

> E.E. Azar, *The Management of Protracted Social Conflict* p.65

"Protracted internal conflicts are not easily amenable to negotiated settlement… But, protracted conflicts may also open up rare opportunities for conflict termination and settlement. What we have in Sri Lanka at present is probably one of those rare opportunities."

> Jayadeva Uyangoda, *Sri Lanka's Peace Process: Surprising Possibilities?*

Returning to My Roots

A s a Sri Lankan now living in Melbourne Australia I returned to Colombo recently to study the current successes and previous failures of the peace process. This is part of a comparative project, one that will take me to Mindanao in the Philippines next year to study their peace processes as well. Like so many in the diaspora I was drawn back to my homeland by the prospect of peace.

As a part of my research programme in June-August this year, I travelled to the north and east to talk with bishops and priests, internally displaced people, fisher-folk and teachers, international NGO workers from UNHCR and the International Committee for the Red Cross, the Government Agent (GA) in Vavuniya, the political wing of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in Kilinochchi, representatives of the Muslims and the Tamil community in Trincomalee, and members of the Sri Lankan Monitoring Mission (SLMM) and a peace group in Batticaloa.

Later in Colombo I spoke with parliamentary and organizational representatives of most political parties. I met leaders of the United National Front, the opposition People's Alliance (PA), the avowedly Marxist Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP), the Muslim Congress, the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF), and the much smaller Sihala Urumaya. I interviewed editors of leading newspapers, business people, Buddhist monks, university lecturers and the heads of many local NGOs and international NGOs working around the civil conflict.

An Improbable Peace

I n this essay I am interested in how we in Sri Lanka arrived at this juncture, where a ceasefire and a fragile 'limited peace' could lead us through a conflict transformation process which may allow for a negotiated settlement to this violent civil war. My focus is on the international actors in the peace process, the role they attempt to play, and the perception of that role in Sri Lanka.

Two years ago when government forces suffered a terrible defeat at Elephant Pass and bombs exploded in the airport outside Colombo few informed commentators would have dared predict an imminent end to this bloody 'civil war without mercy.' And yet, what could then only have been a hopeful dream for thousands of families caught in the crossfire of bombs and landmines, has become an astonishing reality. The major highway to the north, the A9, is open once again after twenty years, most of the army checkpoints are gone and the economy is back in the black. For the past nineteen months Sri Lankans have been experiencing an 'improbable peace.'

Internally Displaced People

T he ceasefire has ended, temporarily at least, a cycle of violence and abuse that drove over 1.3 million people to flee their homes. In 2000, UNHCR estimated 500,000 Sri Lankan's have taken refuge overseas and 800,000 have been internally displaced mainly in the north and east of the island. Just 26 miles across the Palk straight in Tamil Nadu some 65,000 refugees are waiting for the peace talks to bear some tangible political fruit before they receive official permission to return to their homes. A few desperate souls have been braving the Indian Ocean in small boats and canoes in a bid to return home to a more peaceful Sri Lanka.

I met some of the Tamil families who have returned to their islands across the Jaffna lagoon in the past 18 months. Their communities have been displaced up to eight times as the war raged around them. They are exhausted and adamant that they would rather die than be forced to leave their villages again. They showed me the broken shells of their once beautiful brick and concrete homes. Each house is marked with bullets and mortar shells. The crumpled silhouette of the nearby canning factory is a poignant reminder of the prosperity and hope that has been taken from these people. One man showed me the burnt skin of his legs and back, and others display scars of physical and psychological damage as we talk in the abandoned schoolhouse which is now 'home' to nine families.

Since the ceasefire, an eager flood of over 150,000 'returnees' have tried to move back into their former villages and homes. New issues of reconstruction of crucial infrastructure (hospitals, schools, water and sewage) and landmine clearance slow this movement down. Many other returning families are still in UNHCR 'welfare centres' living on government rations as they wait for the military to vacate their villages which are still considered 'High Security Zones.' There are more than 100 such army camps in the Jaffna peninsula. Hundreds of IDPs are living on the outskirts of these camps looking in at spaces they used to call their own. There is a level of frustration and resentment here that decision makers I spoke with in Colombo did not seem to comprehend.

Surprisingly some Muslims have already returned to Jaffna. About sixty brave families are trying to pick up the threads of lives interrupted by the brutal tactics of ethnic cleansing. In 1990 the LTTE warned the 90,000 Muslims in the Jaffna peninsula that they must leave immediately or face the consequences. Families were given just two hours to evacuate their homes and jewellery and other valuables were taken from them as they left. The LTTE has since apologized for this attack on Tamil-speaking Muslims in Jaffna, and its political leaders now suggest that the two communities can live together in peaceful co-existence. However, these pioneer returnees face the harsh reality of LTTE taxation policies and still have to secure their land, shops and houses lost, looted and damaged since their forced exodus over ten years ago.

Initiatives and Concessions – from Ceasefire to Peace Talks

T he memorandum of understanding (MOU) signed in February 2002, which cemented the ceasefire and allowed for the peace talks, came as result of a unilateral ceasefire offered by the LTTE which was reciprocated by the new United National Front (UNF) government led by Ranil Wickramasinghe in December 2001.

In some quarters in Colombo there seems to be a view that it is the UNF government that has made all the concessions in these talks about peace. However, it must be remembered that the LTTE made the ceasefire offer and came to the negotiating table from a position of military strength and this in itself is an unusual strategy for a movement for self-determination. Guerilla groups are usually pushed to the negotiating table by a series of military defeats rather than military victories.

The second major initiative by the LTTE took everyone by surprise. At the second round of talks chief negotiator Anton Balasingham announced that the LTTE would be willing to work towards 'internal self-determination' rather than a separate state of 'Tamil Eelam.'

Thirdly, in December 2002 in Oslo, the LTTE embraced the idea of special autonomy for Tamils within a federal Sri Lankan state. These are important concessions coming from a single-minded military force which for more than twenty years has been utterly dogmatic about their push for a separate state.

I raised this issue with the LTTE political wing in Kilinochchi. We spoke in their brand-new smoke-glassed, two-story building, complete with luxury boardroom furniture and an enormous portrait of Prabhakaran watching over us. These younger leaders admitted that they faced a difficult internal problem. It was, they said, a controversial process trying to explain this new political stance, which is more accommodating to the Sinhala south, to those militant cadres in the LTTE who have fought, and watched hundreds of their comrades die, for the dream of Tamil Eelam.

The LTTE has been a highly disciplined and hierarchical military outfit. However, it is already being forced to accept that a political settlement demands compromise and that it must have a more flexible approach to internationally monitored peace negotiations. These initiatives auger well for those who hope and believe that the LTTE can, and must over time, transform itself into a political organization which accommodates different points of view, respects human rights, and allows for democratic elections in areas under its control.

The six rounds of peace talks held so far have been reasonably amicable and cooperative, and even though the 'official talks' have been suspended since April there has been a great deal of 'unofficial' talking and negotiating taking place. The proof of this is the new proposal by the GOSL for an interim administration in the north and east. This proposal is now being studied by the LTTE hierarchy in Paris and it looks like official talks may resume in September or early October.

Optimism about this peace process must be guarded and balanced by the dismal history of several unsuccessful attempts to end the Sri Lankan armed conflict through negotiation. There is a litany of agreements abrogated (going back to the 1957 Bandaranaike/Chelvanayagam pact) and of negotiations abandoned, by all sides, as the country slipped back to war time and again. These broken agreements cast an ominous shadow over the present. The Sri Lankan government's failure to implement agreements has left many Tamils cynical about the value of negotiations with the south. Likewise the south has become dangerously cynical about the LTTE's intentions of honouring any ceasefire agreement – it is seen by critics purely as a chance for the Tigers to re-arm and recruit for a new military onslaught.

Asymmetrical Conflict and the Peace Process

I ntra-state conflicts, like this one in Sri Lanka, are usually described as being 'asymmetrical.' This means that the manpower, resources, sovereignty, legitimacy and international support for the government of the state makes the oppositional forces much weaker. The peace talks begun in 2002 were only made possible by a shift in this ground reality. The LTTE had fought itself into, what is described in conflict theory as, a 'mutually

hurting stalemate.' Both sides realize they cannot win militarily and there is a perception of a balance of armed force in the war zones in the north and east of the island.

In 2001 the new government of Sri Lanka faced an ever-increasing military budget, embarrassing numbers of deserters from the army and an economy in serious meltdown after the bombing of the Colombo airport. Meanwhile, the LTTE also faced the fact that its military victories had cost the Tamil community dearly. Its people were suffering disastrously from the ravages of the war, the economic boycott from the South, and the inability of this incredibly successful military organization to provide any sort of real economic dividend to the people in its areas of control. This economic dimension then brought about a convergence of interests with both parties seeking major financial support for relief, rehabilitation and reconstruction of areas under their respective tutelage.

Meanwhile dramatic shifts in the geo-political landscape after 9/11, 2001, created a new political climate in which insurgents of all shades had less room to maneouvre. The LTTE had the opprobrium of already being labelled a terrorist organization when the US launched its 'war on terror.' The Tamil diaspora could no longer so easily continue funding the LTTE as host governments now threatened retribution and a freezing of assets.

So, this serendipitous congruence of interests meant that both the LTTE and the government of Sri Lanka were now finally ready to engage in a peace process facilitated by an independent third party from the international community.

Need for Mediation

"Thus civil wars, more than many external conflicts, need a mediator."
William Zartman, *Dynamics and Constraints*, p.21

Conflict theory stresses that in these intractable intra-state conflicts, where trust has been destroyed, a mediator is essential to assist the warring parties with a complex peace process. In 1990 under President Premadasa and again in 1994 under President Kumaratunge (who was elected with 63% of the vote on a platform of peace through devolution of power) the peace talks between the GOSL and the LTTE showed little maturity of process and did not engage any outside mediator. The difference this time is the experienced facilitation of the whole peace process by the Norwegian government and the more careful and flexible approach adopted by both the UNF government and the LTTE.

Facilitating the Peace Talks – Norway's Role

I n 1998 President Chandrika Kumaratunge announced that the Norwegian government would be playing a third-party role in helping to resolve the civil conflict in Sri Lanka. One commentator suggested that:

a crucial building block in the search for permanent peace fell into place. Given the level of mistrust between the government and the LTTE... there was an indisputable need for a third party that could be trusted to carry communications between the two sides. (Jehan Perera, National Peace Council, 2003, p.1)

Norway was selected because it was a small country and could not impose its will (quite the opposite of India's role in the 1980s). But it also offered the 'capacity to give constructive assistance' and the honest motivation to make peace as it had tried to do in various conflicts around the globe. This combination of factors made Norway acceptable to both the LTTE and the government.

The MOU also made provision for independent international monitors from Scandinavia to oversee any violations of the ceasefire. The Sri Lankan Monitoring Mission (SLMM) is made up of experienced military and civilian personnel (about 56 in all) from Sweden, Finland, Denmark, Norway and Iceland. The SLMM has only a limited mandate because the ceasefire agreement signed by the government and the LTTE is a voluntary agreement. "There is no external authority that can enforce it, apart from the willingness of the parties themselves" (Jehan Perera ibid). And yet, the ceasefire agreement has held for 19 months now and the peace process has been moved forward by the 6 successful meetings already completed.

The Norwegian facilitators have helped to build a modicum of trust, through ongoing communication and face-to-face meetings, between the main protagonists. Both warring parties seem to believe that Norway has no hidden agenda. However, it is significant, and worrying, that in the predictably negative politics in Colombo the opposition political parties (the PA and the JVP) are increasingly critical of Norway's role and continue to question its impartiality. In fact the JVP instructed me that Norway was only a puppet of the USA, and that most of the foreign players were in thrall to the Americans.

International Dimensions of the Peace Process

O n the one hand, the internationalization of the civil war in Sri Lanka may be credited with bringing the two sides to the negotiating table. The international spotlight has, at last turned to this 'forgotten war' and has consolidated the political pressure and financial support for a negotiated settlement. As we have seen, it is the mediating role played by Norway which has allowed the GOSL and the LTTE to build some level of ongoing trust in the peace process.

On the other hand, the deliberate internationalizing of the peace process by the UNF government has also shaken the equilibrium, the crucial strategic military stalemate, which existed at the beginning of these talks. This has in fact endangered the whole peace process.

The support for the Sri Lankan state by powerful players such as the USA and Japan in particular has left the LTTE feeling less than an equal partner in the peace process. This was most obvious when the USA refused permission for the LTTE, as a proscribed terrorist organisation, to attend the planning meeting in Washington for the major donor conference on Sri Lanka. As a consequence the LTTE boycotted the conference in Tokyo asserting that it would not rubber stamp programmes and 'road maps' that it had not been an equal party to.

The powerful intervention by international players seems to have supported the GOSL whilst laying down bench-marks and conditions on human rights, democracy and pluralism for the LTTE. Some commentators are suggesting that this may in fact be the other important reason why the LTTE chose to boycott the Tokyo summit on aid to Sri Lanka. By refusing to go to Tokyo the LTTE forced these major players to come to Kilinochchi and talk to the Tigers in their lair.

During earlier peace talks in 1990 and again in 1994 the combatants were determined to try and solve this conflict by themselves, without the intervention of international players. But this time we seem to be operating in a new paradigm. As this peace process gathers momentum both the LTTE and the GOSL are quite deliberately searching for political support from certain major international players and watching the others very carefully.

The LTTE has indicated that it is necessary for the international community to provide guarantees on any agreement that is negotiated with the GOSL. Too many agreements have been abrogated in the past for it to trust Colombo without some international monitoring of how this agreement will be implemented. Likewise, the GOSL does not completely trust the LTTE's commitment to a ceasefire and a negotiated peace. If the peace process breaks down and the LTTE chooses to go back to war (just two weeks notice is formally required to end this fragile peace), then the UNF government under Ranil Wickramasinghe wants some guarantees that the international community will come to its aid in pursuing the war against the 'terrorists.' The GOSL has been extremely flexible and accommodating during these high-profile talks and confidently views the international community as offering it a 'safety net.'

India's Role—A Watching Brief

Indian intervention in the Sri Lankan conflict in the late 1980s ended in disaster when the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) suffered a humiliating defeat and withdrawal. Current official Indian policy is to support the peace process, and yet, the point is made to me quite forcefully that whatever solution is reached in Sri Lanka it must not challenge the security interests of Delhi.

So, what this does is remove the possibility of secession by the Tamils as a political solution to this civil war. A separate state of Tamil Eelam has never been acceptable to India. However, power-sharing under some federal system akin to the Indian example would be welcomed. And in fact, this option is the one gaining favour in the inner circles of politics in Colombo.

Secondly, since the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi the LTTE have burned their bridges with the Indian government. Prabakharan is a wanted man and the Indians consider that they are being diplomatic in not objecting to his central involvement in the peace talks.

Thirdly, the current Tamil Nadu government, headed by Jayalalitha also displays a strong antipathy to the LTTE.

Prime Minister Ranil Wickramasinghe has a very good personal relationship with his Indian counterpart built up from their time in opposition, and his regular visits to Delhi during these talks indicate a respect for India's hegemony in the region. This is also careful fence-mending by the PM as his party was at odds with Delhi on strategic and economic policy through the Gandhi years.

Meanwhile, what is fascinating is the way that India is being played as a political card in the hot-house of Sinhala politics in the south. There is an astonishing reversal of attitude towards Indian involvement in the peace process from certain political forces in Colombo. The JVP, which virulently attacked the coming of Indian troops to Sri Lanka in 1987 as a challenge to her sovereignty, is now calling for more involvement by 'Mother India' in Sri Lanka's peace process. Of course, the base motive here is a grab for political power. India is perceived as being anti-LTTE with stronger links to some of the other Tamil groupings now muzzled by the LTTE. Therefore India's intervention in Sri Lanka might help the opposition parties, the PA and their erstwhile partner the JVP, to derail the current peace process.

Challenges Ahead

The hiatus in the 'Track one' peace talks since April may be a blessing in disguise. It offers opportunities for re-assessment of the whole peace process. It marks the end of a successful Phase I which has achieved a 'limited peace', a cessation of hostilities, and it has thrown up many new challenges for Phase II. The first challenge is the current discussion about the shape of an Interim administration for the north and east. This has to be conducted in a way that allows for compromise and short-term solutions within the political realities of Sri Lanka's unitary constitution.

The second challenge facing the government of Sri Lanka, the LTTE and the Norwegian facilitators in the peace process is to bring together all the other players in the political arena. The opposition parties must now be included in the peace process at various levels. A truly bipartisan approach may still save the peace process from the bitter rivalries of Sinhala politics in Colombo, which are threatening to fatally undermine community support in the south.

Muslim voices, particularly in the east, must also be heard. The recent killings of Muslim men in the eastern zone has made it imperative that this community is assured that any interim administration will respect its cultural, religious, economic and civil rights. The LTTE has to work with the GOSL to provide these guarantees to a sceptical polity. The international players may once again be important arbiters and help to ensure that agreements are more than just empty promises.

This is linked to the central human rights issue which has dogged the ceasefire and the SLMM in the past year. The LTTE must stop the political assassinations of its opponents, which have undermined community support for the peace process. Figures vary but at least two dozen such extra-judicial killings have been documented and blamed on the LTTE by respected human rights organizations. Phase II has to include some stronger sanctions and mechanisms for dealing with such flagrant flouting of the ceasefire provisions.

In terms of political architecture a restructuring is necessary, with constitutional change to back it in the long-term. But in the short-term at least, it is crucially important to address the difficulties created by the political realities of cohabitation between a President and a Prime Minister from rival political groupings. As the country tries to consider, in a mature way, the strengths and weaknesses of alternative models of federalism that may be utilized in the essential rebuilding of political institutions in Sri Lanka, it must be recognized that it was the government of Chandrika Kumaratunga which first put the 'devolution proposals' for a federal system on the negotiating table back in the mid 90s.

Therefore, the UNF government must create an inclusive space in this second phase of the peace process to encourage civil society to take the power-sharing proposals to the people and ensure the debate has the widest possible resonance in the community. A negotiated settlement to this violent civil war can only hold if the various stakeholders in the community understand and support the framework that is devised by the main players.

What is happening today in Sri Lanka is very exciting at many levels. The dynamics of the conflict are being transformed by the peace process itself. The two main protagonists and other belligerent actors must slowly come to a realization that the resolution of the conflict is only possible through normal political means. Disagreements about power—sharing, landownership, ethnic rights- and economic and social justice will continue in Sri Lanka. What must change is that the 'nexus' between these conflicts and the use of violence and war be broken.

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IN MEMORIAM —EDWARD SAID

So, why do I find myself owing so much to Edward's work, his example? Short answer: like Jean -Paul Sartre, like Chinua Achebe, Said was, in the final analysis, a public intellectual. He took risks; he put himself out there in the form of words that intended in the form of manifestos, stances, critical opinions that would make him vulnerable to a whole range of responses: praise, endorsement, hagiography, rigorous critique and death threats. Like Sartre, he believed in commitment and engagement even as he enjoyed and luxuriated in the pleasure of high Western culture…

He chose to eschew methodological consistency and the card-carrying rigour of an "ist." He used Antonio Gramsci in his own way, but was not a Marxist; he used Foucault, but was no poststructuralist. Nor was he an exemplary humanist. It is quite amazing how much he has in common with Foucault till the very end; in particular, the passion to speak truth to power, and the imperative to articulate non-coercive truths. Yet he had made a decisive break with Foucault. Honestly, Said did not care how he was pigeonholed or categorised.

Extract from an article by Prof. R. Radhakrishnan
Courtesy *Frontline*

ORIENTALISM 25 YEARS LATER
WORLDLY HUMANISM VS. THE EMPIRE-BUILDERS

Edward Said

Nine years ago I wrote an afterword for *Orientalism* which, in trying to clarify what I believed I had and had not said, stressed not only the many discussions that had opened up since my book appeared in 1978, but the ways in which a work about representations of "the Orient" lent itself to increasing misinterpretation. That I find myself feeling more ironic than irritated about that very same thing today is a sign of how much my age has crept up on me. The recent deaths of my two main intellectual, political and personal mentors, Eqbal Ahmad and Ibrahim Abu-Lughod, has brought sadness and loss, as well as resignation and a certain stubborn will to go on.

In my memoir *Out of Place* (1999) I described the strange and contradictory worlds in which I grew up, providing for myself and my readers a detailed account of the settings that I think formed me in Palestine, Egypt and Lebanon. But that was a very personal account that stopped short of all the years of my own political engagement that started after the 1967 Arab-Israeli war.

Orientalism is very much a book tied to the tumultuous dynamics of contemporary history. Its first page opens with a 1975 description of the Lebanese Civil War that ended in 1990, but the violence and the ugly shedding of human blood continues up to this minute. We have had the failure of the Oslo peace process, the outbreak of the second intifada, and the awful suffering of the Palestinians on the re-invaded West Bank and Gaza. The suicide bombing phenomenon has appeared with all its hideous damage, none more lurid and apocalyptic of course than the events of September 11, 2001 and their aftermath in the wars against Afghanistan and Iraq. As I write these lines, the illegal imperial occupation of Iraq by Britain and the United States proceeds. Its aftermath is truly awful to contemplate. This is all part of what is supposed to be a clash of civilizations, unending, implacable, irremediable. Nevertheless, I think not.

I wish I could say that general understanding of the Middle East, the Arabs and Islam in the United States has improved somewhat, but alas, it really hasn't. For all kinds of reasons, the situation in Europe seems to be considerably better. In the US, the hardening of attitudes, the tightening of the grip of demeaning generalization and triumphalist cliché, the dominance of crude power allied with simplistic contempt for dissenters and "others" has found a fitting correlative in the looting and destruction of Iraq's libraries and museums. What our leaders and their intellectual lackeys seem incapable of understanding is that history cannot be swept clean like a blackboard, clean so that "we" might inscribe our own future there and impose our own forms of life for these lesser people to follow. It is quite common to hear high officials in Washington and elsewhere speak of changing the map of the Middle East, as if ancient societies and myriad peoples can be shaken up like so many peanuts in a jar. But this has often happened with the "Orient," that semi-mythical construct which since Napoleon's invasion of Egypt in the late eighteenth century has been made and re-made countless times. In the process the uncountable sediments of history, that include innumerable histories and a dizzying variety of peoples, languages, experiences, and cultures, all these are swept aside or ignored, relegated to the sand heap along with the treasures ground into meaningless fragments that were taken out of Baghdad.

My argument is that history is made by men and women, just as it can also be unmade and re-written, so that "our" East, "our" Orient becomes "ours" to possess and direct. And I have a very high regard for the powers and gifts of the peoples of that region to struggle on for their vision of what they are and want to be. There's been so massive and calculatedly aggressive an attack on the contemporary societies of the Arab and Muslim for their backwardness, lack of democracy, and abrogation of women's rights that we simply forget that such notions as modernity, enlightenment, and democracy are by no means simple, and agreed-upon concepts that one either does or does not find like Easter eggs in the living-room. The breathtaking insouciance of jejune publicists who speak in the name of foreign policy and who have no knowledge at all of the language real people actually speak, has fabricated an arid landscape ready for American power to construct there an ersatz model of free market "democracy." You don't need Arabic or Persian or even French to pontificate about how the democracy domino effect is just what the Arab world needs.

Will to Dominate

But there is a difference between knowledge of other peoples and other times that is the result of understanding, compassion, careful study and analysis for their own sakes, and on the other hand knowledge that is part of an overall campaign of self-affirmation. There is, after all, a profound difference between the will to understand for purposes of co-existence and enlargement of horizons, and the will to dominate for the purposes of control. It is surely one of the intellectual catastrophes of history that an imperialist war confected by a small group of unelected US officials was waged against a devastated Third World dictatorship on thoroughly ideological grounds having to do with world dominance, security control, and scarce resources, but disguised for its true intent, hastened, and reasoned for by Orientalists who betrayed their calling as scholars.

The major influences on George W. Bush's Pentagon and National Security Council were men such as Bernard Lewis and Fouad Ajami, experts on the Arab and Islamic world who helped the American hawks to think about such preposterous phenomena as the Arab mind and centuries-old Islamic decline which only American power could reverse. Today bookstores in the US are filled with shabby screeds bearing screaming headlines about Islam and terror, Islam exposed, the Arab threat and the Muslim menace, all of them written by political polemicists pretending to knowledge imparted to them and others by experts who have supposedly penetrated to the heart of these strange "Oriental" peoples. Accompanying such war-mongering expertise have been CNN and Fox, plus myriad evangelical and right-wing radio hosts, innumerable tabloids and even middle-brow journals, all of them re-cycling the same unverifiable fictions and vast generalizations so as to stir up "America" against the foreign devil.

Without a well-organized sense that these people over there were not like "us" and didn't appreciate "our" values—the very core of traditional Orientalist dogma—there would have been no war. So from the very same directorate of paid professional scholars enlisted by the Dutch conquerors of Malaysia and Indonesia, the British armies of India, Mesopotamia, Egypt, West Africa, the French armies of Indochina and North Africa, came the American advisers to the Pentagon and the White House, using the same clichés, the same demeaning stereotypes, the same justifications for power and violence (after all, runs the chorus, power is the only language they understand) in this case as in the earlier ones. These people have now been joined in Iraq by a whole army of private contractors and eager entrepreneurs to whom shall be confided every thing from the writing of textbooks and the constitution to the refashioning of Iraqi political life and its oil industry.

Discourse of Empire

E very single empire in its official discourse has said that it is not like all the others, that its circumstances are special, that it has a mission to enlighten, civilize, bring order and democracy, and that it uses force only as a last resort. And, sadder still, there always is a chorus of willing intellectuals to say calming words about benign or altruistic empires.

Twenty-five years after my book's publication, *Orientalism* once again raises the question of whether modern imperialism ever ended, or whether it has continued in the Orient since Napoleon's entry into Egypt two centuries ago. Arabs and Muslims have been told that victimology and dwelling on the depredations of empire is only a way of evading responsibility in the present. You have failed, you have gone wrong, says the modern Orientalist. This of course is also V.S. Naipaul's contribution to literature, that the victims of empire wail on while their country goes to the dogs. But what a shallow calculation of the imperial intrusion that is; how little it wishes to face the long succession of years through which empire continues to work its way in the lives say of Palestinians or Congolese or Algerians or Iraqis. Think of the line that starts with Napoleon, continues with the rise of Oriental studies and the takeover of North Africa, and goes on in similar undertakings in Vietnam, in Egypt, in Palestine and, during the entire twentieth century in the struggle over oil and strategic control in the Gulf, in Iraq, Syria, Palestine, and Afghanistan. Then think of the rise of anti-colonial nationalism, through the short period of liberal independence, the era of military coups, of insurgency, civil war, religious fanaticism, irrational struggle and uncompromising brutality against the latest bunch of "natives." Each of these phases and eras produces its own distorted knowledge of the other, each its own reductive images, its own disputatious polemics.

My idea in *Orientalism* is to use humanistic critique to open up the fields of struggle, to introduce a longer sequence of thought and analysis to replace the short bursts of polemical, thought-stopping fury that so imprison us. I have called what I try to do "humanism," a word I continue to use stubbornly despite the scornful dismissal of the term by sophisticated post-modern critics. By humanism I mean first of all attempting to dissolve Blake's mind-forg'd manacles so as to be able to use one's mind historically and rationally for the purposes of reflective understanding. Moreover, humanism is sustained by a sense of community with other interpreters and other societies and periods: strictly speaking therefore, there is no such thing as an isolated humanist.

Co-existence

T his it is to say that every domain is linked to every other one, and that nothing that goes on in our world has ever been isolated and pure of any outside influence. We need to speak about issues of injustice and suffering within a context that is amply situated in history, culture, and socio-economic reality. Our role is to widen the field of discussion. I have spent a great deal of my life during the past 35 years advocating the rights of the Palestinian people to national self-determination, but I have always tried to do that with full attention paid to the reality of the Jewish people and what they suffered by way of persecution and genocide. The paramount thing is that the struggle for equality in Palestine/Israel should be directed toward a humane goal, that is, co-existence, and not further suppression and denial. Not accidentally, I indicate that Orientalism and modern anti-Semitism have common roots. Therefore it would seem to be a vital necessity for independent intellectuals always to provide alternative models to the simplifying and confining ones based on mutual hostility that have prevailed in the Middle East and elsewhere for so long.

As a humanist whose field is literature, I am old enough to have been trained forty years ago in the field of comparative literature, whose leading ideas go back to Germany in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Before that I must mention the supremely creative contribution of Giambattista Vico, the Neopolitan philosopher and philologist whose ideas anticipate those of German thinkers such as Herder and Wolf, later to be followed by Goethe, Humboldt, Dilthey, Nietzsche, Gadamer, and finally the great 20th

century Romance philologists Erich Auerbach, Leo Spitzer, and Ernst Robert Curtius.

To young people of the current generation the very idea of philology suggests something impossibly antiquarian and musty, but philology in fact is the most basic and creative of the interpretive arts. It is exemplified for me most admirably in Goethe's interest in Islam generally, and Hafiz in particular, a consuming passion which led to the composition of the West-Östlicher Diwan, and it inflected Goethe's later ideas about Weltliteratur, the study of all the literatures of the world as a symphonic whole which could be apprehended theoretically as having preserved the individuality of each work without losing sight of the whole.

There is a considerable irony to the realization then that as today's globalized world draws together in some of the ways I have been talking about here, we may be approaching the kind of standardization and homogeneity that Goethe's ideas were specifically formulated to prevent. In an essay he published in 1951 entitled "Philologie der Weltliteratur" Erich Auerbach made exactly that point at the outset of the postwar period which was also the beginning of the Cold War. His great book *Mimesis*, published in Berne in 1946 but written while Auerbach was a wartime exile teaching Romance languages in Istanbul, was meant to be a testament to the diversity and concreteness of the reality represented in Western literature from Homer to Virginia Woolf; but reading the 1951 essay one senses that for Auerbach the great book he wrote was an elegy for a period when people could interpret texts philologically, concretely, sensitively, and intuitively, using erudition and an excellent command of several languages to support the kind of understanding that Goethe advocated for his understanding of Islamic literature.

Humanistic Spirit

P ositive knowledge of languages and history was necessary, but it was never enough, any more than the mechanical gathering of facts would constitute an adequate method for grasping what an author like Dante, for example, was all about. The main requirement for the kind of philological understanding Auerbach and his predecessors were talking about and tried to practice was one that sympathetically and subjectively entered into the life of a written text as seen from the perspective of its time and its author (*einfühlung*). Rather than alienation and hostility to another time and a different culture, philology as applied to *Weltliteratur* involved a profound humanistic spirit deployed with generosity and, if I may use the word, hospitality. Thus the interpreter's mind actively makes a place in it for a foreign Other. And this creative making of a place for works that are otherwise alien and distant is the most important facet of the interpreter's mission.

All this was obviously undermined and destroyed in Germany by National Socialism. After the war, Auerbach notes mournfully, the standardization of ideas, and greater and greater specialization of

knowledge gradually narrowed the opportunities for the kind of investigative and everlastingly inquiring kind of philological work that he had represented, and, alas, it's an even more depressing fact that since Auerbach's death in 1957 both the idea and practice of humanistic research have shrunk in scope as well as in centrality. Instead of reading in the real sense of the word, our students today are often distracted by the fragmented knowledge available on the internet and in the mass media.

Worse yet, education is threatened by nationalist and religious orthodoxies often disseminated by the mass media as they focus ahistorically and sensationally on the distant electronic wars that give viewers the sense of surgical precision, but in fact obscure the terrible suffering and destruction produced by modern warfare. In the demonization of an unknown enemy for whom the label "terrorist" serves the general purpose of keeping people stirred up and angry, media images command too much attention and can be exploited at times of crisis and insecurity of the kind that the post-9/11 period has produced.

Speaking both as an American and as an Arab I must ask my reader not to underestimate the kind of simplified view of the world that a relative handful of Pentagon civilian elites have formulated for US policy in the entire Arab and Islamic worlds, a view in which terror, pre-emptive war, and unilateral regime change—backed up by the most bloated military budget in history—are the main ideas debated endlessly and impoverishingly by a media that assigns itself the role of producing so-called "experts" who validate the government's general line. Reflection, debate, rational argument, moral principle based on a secular notion that human beings must create their own history have been replaced by abstract ideas that celebrate American or Western exceptionalism, denigrate the relevance of context, and regard other cultures with contempt.

The Loss

P erhaps you will say that I am making too many abrupt transitions between humanistic interpretation on the one hand and foreign policy on the other, and that a modern technological society which along with unprecedented power possesses the internet and F-16 fighter-jets must in the end be commanded by formidable technical-policy experts like Donald Rumsfeld and Richard Perle. But what has really been lost is a sense of the density and interdependence of human life, which can neither be reduced to a formula nor brushed aside as irrelevant.

That is one side of the global debate. In the Arab and Muslim countries the situation is scarcely better. As Roula Khalaf has argued, the region has slipped into an easy anti-Americanism that shows little understanding of what the US is really like as a society. Because the governments are relatively powerless to affect US policy toward them, they turn their energies to repressing and keeping down their own populations, with results in resentment, anger and helpless imprecations that do nothing to open up societies

where secular ideas about human history and development have been overtaken by failure and frustration, as well as by an Islamism built out of rote learning and the obliteration of what are perceived to be other, competitive forms of secular knowledge. The gradual disappearance of the extraordinary tradition of Islamic *ijtihad* or personal interpretation has been one of the major cultural disasters of our time, with the result that critical thinking and individual wrestling with the problems of the modern world have all but disappeared.

This is not to say that the cultural world has simply regressed on one side to a belligerent neo-Orientalism and on the other to blanket rejectionism. Last year's United Nations World Summit in Johannesburg, for all its limitations, did in fact reveal a vast area of common global concern that suggests the welcome emergence of a new collective constituency that gives the often facile notion of "one world" a new urgency. In all this, however, we must admit that no one can possibly know the extraordinarily complex unity of our globalized world, despite the reality that the world does have a real interdependence of parts that leaves no genuine opportunity for isolation.

The terrible conflicts that herd people under falsely unifying rubrics like "America," "The West" or "Islam," and invent collective identities for large numbers of individuals who are actually quite diverse, cannot remain as potent as they are, and must be opposed. We still have at our disposal the rational interpretive skills that are the legacy of humanistic education, not as a sentimental piety enjoining us to return to traditional values or the classics but as the active practice of worldly secular rational discourse. The secular world is the world of history as made by human beings. Critical thought does not submit to commands to join in the ranks marching against one or another approved enemy. Rather than the manufactured clash of civilizations, we need to concentrate on the slow working together of cultures that overlap, borrow from each other, and live together in far more interesting ways than any abridged or inauthentic mode of understanding can allow. But for that kind of wider perception we need time, patient and skeptical inquiry, supported by faith in communities of interpretation that are difficult to sustain in a world demanding instant action and reaction. Humanism is centered upon the agency of human individuality and subjective intuition, rather than on received ideas and approved authority. Texts have to be read as texts that were produced and live on in the historical realm in all sorts of what I have called worldly ways. But this by no means excludes power, since on the contrary I have tried to show the insinuations, the imbrications of power into even the most recondite of studies.

And lastly, most important, humanism is the only and I would go so far as saying the final resistance we have against the inhuman practices and injustices that disfigure human history. We are today abetted by the enormously encouraging democratic field of cyberspace, open to all users in ways undreamt of by earlier generations either of tyrants or of orthodoxies. The world-wide protests before the war began in Iraq would not have been possible were it not for the existence of alternative communities all across the world, informed by alternative information, and keenly aware of the environmental, human rights, and libertarian impulses that bind us together in this tiny planet. ■

Edward Said was a Professor at Columbia University, and a contributor to Cockburn and St. Clair's forthcoming book, *The Politics of Anti-Semitism* (AK Press).

EDWARD SAID—AN APPRECIATION
Editorial—*Daily Star*, Beirut

E dward Said (1935-2003), respected by many but let down by most. There will be much hand-wringing in the next few days as tributes to the late Edward Said flow from admirers and detractors alike. They will note that it is not just the Arab world that has lost an erudite and impassioned advocate; not just his adopted American homeland that has been robbed of a maverick savant; and not just academe that mourns the passing of a brilliant mind. They will declare that humanity as a whole is poorer for his death. They will be right, of course. But they will also be missing the point that he must have died a very disappointed man because while he lived, almost all of them let him down.

Said's seminal 1978 work, *Orientalism*, set the mold that was to shape his career and interests for the rest of his days. The book identified a host of mechanisms through which perceptions of the Arab and Islamic worlds have been warped by generations of Western artists, politicians and scientists. It sparked furious debate that continues to this day. It was also, however, a collection of excuses for a part of the world that refused to believe in itself as much he did.

As a product of two very different cultures, Said tried mightily to bridge the gaps between them, only to be constantly frustrated by the refusal of both to recognize the merits of the other. The United States remained largely unwilling to acknowledge the legitimate grievances of the Arab world vis-a-vis Israel, or to dilute its support for the Jewish state even when the latter was manifestly acting against its own long-term interests. The Palestinians and their Arab brethren remained betrothed to backward policies and empty rhetoric, undermining the possibility of rehabilitating themselves in America's eyes and so of regaining any part of what they claimed to value above all else.

This was not Said's failure. He did more than could fairly be expected of any man but was denied by the arrogance and ignorance of others. Thus his efforts to increase Western acceptance for the Palestinian cause were rewarded at one point by Yasser Arafat's banning him from the Occupied Territories because he criticized rampant corruption in the Palestinian Authority. His work to help Americans overcome their misconceptions about the Arab-Israeli conflict earned shameless accusations of anti-Semitism and other vicious attempts at character assassination.

Said's heroic battle with the disease that eventually killed him is lost forever. But his lonely campaign to foment mutual understanding, a worthy one to which he devoted so much of his life, still needs recruits from all backgrounds. The greatest representatives of the human race are never properly appreciated during their own lifetimes. For all the accolades he has received, Said was no exception. Only when there is a full and fair peace between Arab and Jew in the Middle East will it begin to dawn on most people just how much has been lost with the death of a single individual and how much time has been wasted on the petty claims and counter-claims of decidedly lesser minds. Only then will both of his peoples, East and West, even begin to deserve his legacy.

■

A TRIBUTE TO EDWARD SAID

Roger Normand of the Center for Economic & Social Rights

T oday we express our deep sadness about the death of Edward Said, and send our love and condolences to his family and friends. His incredible vitality and spirit throughout his long struggle against terminal illness gave us the hope (and perhaps the illusion) that this day would not come so soon.

At the same time, we must not forget to celebrate his extraordinarily rich and productive life. Edward Said was never afraid to explore and express his inner convictions, often against the overwhelming tides of conventional wisdom. His particular genius enabled him to reshape discourses and spawn an entire academic discipline by virtue not only of his qualities of heart and mind, but also and especially the resonance his ideas and sentiments found within each of us. He was that rare individual able to give voice to a universal conscience, to awaken within us a collective yearning for a better world right now, in this particular time and place.

The importance of his life's work cannot be denied even by his avowed political opponents. Consider how Professor Said's crowning academic achievement the publication of *Orientalism* is more relevant today than ever, not as grand theory to discuss in intellectual salons, but as a life-affirming and life-saving prescription for a world on the brink of endless war. With literal-minded religious and political figures seemingly committed to an apocalyptic unfolding of the "Clash of Civilizations" we would do well to remember his central message: that dialogue between cultures and peoples can be either repressive or liberating. He articulated clearly and forcefully the fundamental distinction between an imposed discourse of conqueror to conquered based on an imbalance of military might and a respectful exchange between equals based on shared principles of human rights at the heart of every true civilization.

Professor Said took sides, choosing to fight against oppression in all of its forms. Throughout his long career he fought with insight, erudition, compassion, courage, perseverance, and a stinging wit. Perhaps because his own identity was based on the merging of opposites, West and East, citizen and exile, he chose to defend all humanity, and not just the Palestinian cause as some critics like to suggest. (Who has more brilliantly dissected the flaws of Arafat than Edward Said?). Each of us faces the same matrix of moral choice as he did, and we are thankful to him for showing us an honest and honorable path.

Of his many outstanding writings, one that always remains with me is a short essay called "Decolonizing the Mind." Written in 1994, at time when Professor Said stood virtually alone among Western intellectuals in denouncing the false peace of the "Oslo process," this essay affirms the value of cultivating mental freedom to face the overwhelming crush of sorrow and oppression that blankets our world. In response to the abuse of words, the abuse of concepts, the abuse of politics, and the abuse of people, Said offers us the decolonized mind as an expression of the human rights mind, a mind that recognizes universal principles of common humanity first, before focusing on the myriad differences that can either be understood to enrich all of us together or exploited to divide us from them, me from you.

Edward Said represented the best face of the hero, a public intellectual with unflinching integrity, and we will miss him greatly. But we must celebrate as we mourn, for he is survived by a growing community of family, friends, and strangers inspired by his passionate belief that 'Speaking the truth and fighting for right' is our only real choice, and that neither illness nor death will slow our march towards universal justice. ■

AN EXPLORATION INTO THE LULLABIES AND DIRGES OF WOMEN

Sasanka Perera

Selvy Thiruchandran, *Feminine Speech Transmissions: An Exploration into the Lullabies and Dirges of Women,* New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, and Colombo: Women's Education and Research Centre, 2001.

S elvy Thiruchandran's book is essentially a description and analysis of two types of verses from the oral tradition that used to be commonly sung by women in Tamil society over time, even though the popularity of these have diminished in more recent times. The types of verses Thiruchandran has focused on are *tallattu* and *oppari*, which are described by her as lullabies and lament songs respectively. In Sri Lanka, these types of songs are found generally in three locations: in the north among Northern Tamils, in the east among Muslims who also speak Tamil, and in the hill country among Tamils of Indian origin. The common strand that runs through these verses is the language despite its regional variations and in some clear cases the differences in experiences depicted in the lyrics as well. Thiruchandran suggests that women's verses in the oral tradition such as *tallattu* and *oppari* should be viewed from the perspective four broad areas: 1) women's role as performers, 2) how women use these verses, 3) women's specific creativities being conditioned and constrained by their social environment, and 4) women's verbal arts being part of the subjective consciousness of the self (p.3).

According to Thiruchandran's analysis, *tallattu* as lullabies fulfil a number of functions. These include the immediate purpose of putting a baby to sleep, while they are also sung when a baby is being breast-fed allowing the baby to concentrate on her feeding (p.8). In addition, these songs also open an outlet for mothers to openly express certain desires, which includes love for her children as well as concerns for their safety and expectations of their future (p.11). In this context, *tallattu* are "confined to a particular time and space, and to a gender category" (p.2). These verses are usually sung by mothers and female members of a child's kin group within a private domain, while they are directly linked to childhood in terms of their contents (p.2). Nevertheless, Thiruchandran points out that *tallattu* can move beyond the confines of the home and to a more public realm such as the field or the market in situations where women take their children to these spaces (p. 2).

In the north, the *tallattu* were mostly secular and they expressed deep emotions and kinship ties across members of extended families (p.15). In addition, they also retain the traditions of other Tamil literary creations in the way similes and metaphors are used to convey notions of beauty, gentleness and sweetness of babies (p. 15). By contrast, *tallattu* from the Eastern Province indicates clear differences in terms of content. One of these is the emphasis on Islam which has taken place when the original Tamil (Hindu) *tallattu* were adopted and adapted by eastern Muslims to suit their own personal and religious circumstances. Even here, while certain new elements were introduced, the basic structure and purpose of the verses remained consistent. However, this basic structure and purpose changed in the context of the genre of *tallattu* known as *uptesapillai tallattu sintu* (which preach to children). Here, the primary purpose was to "explain the duties of a good Muslim citizen and give instructions on cultivating good habits and virtues" (p. 13).

The *tallattu* of the hill-country Tamils of Indian origin also indicates some regional variations based on historical processes as well as socio-cultural and physical circumstances. As Thiruchandran points out, the Tamil women in the hill country also gave their *tallattu* a religious flavour where they constructed the "God of the Hills" as their saviour (p.22). In a sense, some of the lyrics in these verses offer a microscopic social history of migration, resettlement, anxiety and evolution of a particular ethnic community in a new locations. In one *tallattu* that Thiruchandran refers to there is a reference to the mountain Child God, the Lord Of Palani who is a god from the pantheon in Tamil Nadu (2001: 22), the general area from where British colonial rulers brought the early estate workers to work in Sri Lankn tea plantations. However, with settlement in the hill country, the emphasis on God of Palani shifted to God Kataragama, the pre-eminent deity worshipped by the hill-country Tamils in the Sri Lankan context (p.22-31).

When compared to *tallattu*, *oppari* as a genre of verse appears to be the opposite of *tallattu* in the sense that they are sung indicating grief, contextualizing them as ritual lament songs (p.34). As Thiruchandran points out, oppari has ritual status as well as dramatic elements enmeshed within it. When a death happens, women in the household get together and weep loudly, indirectly announcing the news of the death to the neighbourhood. At this point women in the vicinity assemble in a circle around the body with their hands around each other's necks and join in the collective crying (p.34).

From this point onwards, "lamentations flow poetically with rhymes and alliterations in a tune that is symptomatic of grief" (p.34). Structurally, and in terms of content, the lyrics consist of praises and virtues of the dead individual (p.34). *Oppari* serves as a medium of remembrance of dead persons while it also serves as a form of catharsis for the self for the grief-stricken survivors (p. 41). There is also a belief that *oppari* appeases the soul of a dead person, thereby achieving "a peaceful accent to the other world" (p.41).

Thiruchandran suggests that *oppari* is an extension of the *saramkavi* traditions of Tamils which are post-death poems composed by poets on the deaths of kings and nobles (p. 41). Usually women as a group collectively sing *oppari* to express grief. But on occasion, they can also be sung by a woman by herself.

As Thiruchandran indicates, *oppari* has also undergone change in keeping with socio-political transformations in society. One such example is the occasion where Catholic writers in Jaffna have used the *oppari* format to describe the death of Jesus Christ, and "used this highly emotive literary form for conversion" (p.39). Thiruchandran also refers to at least two occasions when the *oppari* form had been used as part of protest in contemporary political conflict (p.70-71). It would have been of considerable academic interest to explore manifestations of contemporary uses of *oppari* more extensively, particularly as the writer points out that *oppari* as a verse form is almost extinct in Tamil society.

In general, the main contribution of Thiruchandran's book is its ability to bring into public as well as anthropological discourse in Sri Lanka two genres of verse associated with women in Tamil-speaking society which are generally not known outside of that linguistic community. She also manages to re-focus the attention of individuals interested in the sociology of gender upon an area of study that is clearly under-researched in the Sri Lankan academic context. In addition, she also briefly outlines how these verses have transformed themselves in the context of changing socio-cultural and political conditions of those who sing them. For instance, the subtle variations among the *tallattu* of northern Tamils, eastern Muslims and hill-country Tamils places in context specific historical processes, particular shifts in identity and specific shifts in religious beliefs.

Its main limitation of the book is its thinness of ethnography in the sense that not adequate numbers of verses seem to have been collected to make this a substantial analysis. But as Thiruchandran herself points out early on, this is partly due to technical limitations. Much of the material for the study has been collected from sources already published, which unfortunately is not substantial. This material, not collected and recorded with any serious degree of scholarly rigour also cannot be periodized except on certain occasions where specific references to incidents or particular linguistic structures may allow for periodization and therefore more accurate conextualization. Given the fact these are part of a vanishing oral tradition, particularly in the case of *oppari*, it would have been useful to conduct long-term fieldwork at least to establish nothing else other than what has already been recorded is available for scholarly analysis. On the other hand, the social and political analysis that Thiruchandran undertakes in a very brief fashion through the verses could have been progressively expanded with additional theoretical rigour which would have strengthened the analysis and added to the ethnographic quality of the work.

If some of these shortcomings had been addressed, it would have been possible to produce something like Laila Abu-Lughod's well-known ethnography *Veiled Sentiments: Honor and Poetry in a Bedouin Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986) Nevertheless, in our specific context, generally marked by an increasing lack of knowledge about ourselves, Thiruchandran's work would add to our knowledge about a cultural and social tradition in Tamil society that may well disappear in times to come. ∎

Soon from the SSA

LABOURING TO LEARN

Towards a Political Economy of Plantations, People and Education in Sri Lanka

by
Angela W. Little

Using a wide variety of primary and secondary sources, Angela Little traces educational progress from the mid-nineteenth century to the end of the twentieth century. The analysis is embedded within political, social and economic relations which stretch beyond the confines of the plantation; within a plural society in which the plantation people have gradually become more central to the political mainstream and within a national and global economy in which plantation production has become less central and less profitable over time.

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