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EXCLUSIVE

LAKSHMAN KADIRGAMAR

talks to

Mark Nicholson

Mervyn de Silva

THONDAMAN'S DEVOLUTION PACKAGE

DEVOLUTION AS CONFLICT STRATEGY

— *Ananda Welihena*

THE GREAT PEACE HOAX

— *S. Sathananthan*

The meaning of "REGION"

— *Kanishka Jayasuriya*

ETHNIC CONFLICT: Where's the link?

— *Rohan Jayawardene*

● *Patrick Jayasuriya*

● *U. Karunatilake*



Black Knight
It's your move

CHANDRIKA: SURE OF CONSENSUS

Mark Nicholson and Mervyn de Silva

The Sri Lankan government will offer a "very substantial devolution" of power to Tamils in the island's north and east, in a political package according to Mr Lakshman Kadirgamar, the foreign minister.

Mr Kadirgamar said the government of Mrs Chandrika Kumaratunge was confident it could forge a consensus around the package, which it hopes will form the basis of a political solution to the war in the north. The conflict over a Tamil-claimed homeland in the north and east has claimed more than 50,000 lives in the past 20 years.

Mr Kadirgamar said in an interview that the government had in effect ruled out further negotiations with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, the guerrilla group led by Mr Vellupillai Prabhakaran.

LTTE fighters, civilians and Sri Lankan troops have died in fighting since peace talks between Mrs Kumaratunge's administration and the LTTE broke down in April. Fighting has intensified in the past two weeks as the LTTE launched a counter-attack against a government offensive to capture LTTE-held territory on the Jaffna peninsula. Officials said that government forces were "consolidating" their position in the north.

Mr Kadirgamar blamed the LTTE for ending peace talks in April and said the move had "closed the door" on further direct talks. Direct negotiations have looked unlikely since Mrs Kumaratunge in May accused Mr Prabhakaran of masterminding the assassination of Mr Rajiv Gandhi, the former Indian prime minister.

Instead, Mr Kadirgamar said, the government aimed to isolate and undermine the Tigers by winning cross-party support for its proposed devolution package. He believed most Tamil parliamentary politicians would back the measures, and the opposition United National party would be "hard pressed" to object.

The package, which Mr Kadirgamar said he had discussed in outline with Tamil groups, would contain broad proposals to devolve power from Colombo to the north and east in areas embracing control over land, policing, education and finance. "There will be a list of areas which will belong to the regions and a reserve list of powers belonging to central government".

The package would not define borders or precise territorial units of devolution, which should be left to eventual border commissions. Tamil groups have long sought an autonomous homeland merging Jaffna and the northern province with the country's eastern province, which includes both the port of Trincomalee and fertile farmlands to the south.

The package would be only a "framework" which, if backed by Sri Lankan political parties, would require amendments to the constitution to enact. This would need the support of two-thirds of parliament and a referendum, Mr Kadirgamar added. The government had no timetable in mind for the eventual adoption of its forthcoming proposals or for a referendum on the measures in the east. Timing would partly depend on the outcome of fighting in the north.

He conceded that since the decision to ignore the LTTE as a political interlocutor, success in pushing through the proposed devolution measures would rely heavily on the Sri Lankan army managing to "enfeeble" the Tigers as a military force. Failure to shake the Tigers' stronghold in Jaffna would make it impossible for moderate Tamils in the north, or supporters of the government's proposed devolution moves, to make their political weight felt.

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CONTENTS

The CWC Proposals	2
The August-1991 Conflict Resolution Strategy	6
The Peace Hoax	9
Ethnic Conflict — Fact and Fiction	11
Singapore: The Politics of Regional Definition	13
Re-discovering Ravana (2) Books	19 20

Devolution Package Response of the Ceylon Workers Congress

The Ceylon Workers Congress appreciates the effort that had been made to outline a basis to resolve the ethnic question. As President of the C.W.C., I wish to commend Your Excellency on the earnest endeavour that has been made. A certain boldness that is evident in the current devolution package is rather unprecedented. Perhaps the seriousness of the crisis has demanded an approach which did not have a parallel earlier. For the Government and the LTTE, to engage in a serious and dispassionate discussion, the devolution package offers a worthwhile opportunity. However, political leaders of all shades may have to be sensitive to the reality that the content of devolution needs further amplification to serve as an alternative to a bifurcation of the nation.

It has been a harsh reality that the unitary constitutions of Sri Lanka failed signally to build up unity. In the light of this experience, the idea of a Union of Regions is a welcome departure. To recognise and to satisfy diverse concerns of a multi-ethnic society, such a Union offers the potential of success. A Union of Regions would presuppose full-fledged autonomy. It is in the nature of an aggrieved minority which has had an experience of exclusion to view the package with misgivings. To evoke credibility, even the faintest room for distrust needs to be dispelled. The progressive features of the package need to be reinforced through the fullest clarity. Avoiding provisos and qualifications would remove vestiges of ambiguity and strengthen credibility. It would therefore be prudent to refine the package through discussions before presentation to the negotiating party.

For over six decades the Tamil problem has been of serious concern to all communities of Sri Lanka. The Tamil speaking people as the dominant population of the North-East demanded autonomy from the early fifties. Recognition of their special concerns in a clearly identifiable and contiguous territory induced successive Governments to formulate a special package of settlement to assuage their apprehensions and to satisfy their aspirations. The B.C. Pact of 1957 through to the devolution package of 1995 effused from the same thinking. However, a disinclination to concede the reality of a special solution for a special problem has induced successive Governments to extend the solution for the North-East Region to other Regions. When autonomy is contemplated for all Regions there is a nagging fear that the power of the Central Government would inevitably be whittled down. This apprehension results in diluting the content of devolution. The resulting package of demented devolution is then offered to the people of the North-East. They become more prone to spurning such a package than considering it. Thereafter the response is either lukewarm or positively hostile. When the political package is rejected what the nation witnesses is "the extension of politics by other means" i.e. war. Four decades of recent Sri Lanka have seen a recurrence of this phenomenon. I am convinced that a radical departure and a bold initiative would spell success.

Sri Lanka is not large enough to extend autonomy to eight Regions. Except the North-East, the other seven Regions are not adequately large to receive autonomy. Six years of Provincial Council experience has shown the experiment at devolution to be a failure. The C.W.C. would therefore suggest four units of devolution for Sri Lanka. They are:

1. North-East
2. North Central and North Western
3. Central, Uva and Sabragamuwa
4. Western and Southern

To these four Regions, full-fledged autonomy should be granted.

The C.W.C. in its earlier proposals stressed that the boundaries of the North-East Regional Council shall be the same as at the time of independence and shall not be changed except with the consent of the Regional Council. The devolution package says that the North-East Region would be constituted by redemarcating the existing boundaries of the present North-East Province. This proposal is said to be made with a view to reconciling Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim interests. The C.W.C. still insists on the acceptance of the original proposal to keep the boundaries inviolate. However, in the event a redemarcation of boundaries is pursued to reconcile Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim interests, the C.W.C. urges strongly that by the same token, the interests of Tamils of recent Indian origin in the plantation areas be similarly considered and a viable politico-administrative structure appropriately constituted.

The warring parties — the Government and the LTTE — have to become negotiating partners if the devolution package is to be accepted and implemented. Legal shape to the proposal is crucial. But no less crucial is an appropriate political structure to take on devolution, to implement it and to consolidate the gains of autonomy. Political pragmatism would suggest that a politico-administrative structure already in the North-East is the best machinery to implement the Government's effort at devolution. The LTTE which has relentlessly spearheaded the struggle for freedom for over twelve years is well equipped to wield power, exercise authority and maintain law and order. The task of governance under the devolution package is therefore best entrusted to the charge of the LTTE. Tamils who seek success in a political arrangement have an obligation to concede the lead role of the LTTE in the fight for autonomy. The Government too is constrained to acknowledge the LTTE as the legitimate recipient of devolved authority. This authority should be entrusted to the LTTE for a period of five years. The LTTE has the obligation during its tenure of five years to build up the legal framework and to develop democratic institutions for the sharing of power and the exercise of authority. The Central Government has the responsibility of providing to the LTTE support for the steady evolution of the democratic process.

I would consider it my obligation to mention that courage and statesmanship are demanded to granting autonomy and yet not diluting it. Annexure I provides a list of subjects featuring certain grey areas. Annexure II contrasting certain C.W.C. Proposals and the Devolution Package highlights the need for circumspection.

I am most pleased to compliment Your Excellency for embarking on the most laudable but tortuous path of seeking to bring about ethnic harmony. I wish Your Excellency and the Government positive results and success in your endeavours.

S. Thondaman
President, Ceylon Workers Congress

There are several subjects mentioned concurrently in both the Regional list and the Reserved List. One is left to conclude that though the Concurrent List has been dispensed with, the spectre of "concurrency" is made to haunt the devolution process. Dual control is administratively tardy. A subject mentioned in the Regional List will be weighed down and scuttled when it is included in the Reserved List. The subjects noted below bring home the point.

REGIONAL LIST

1. Housing and Construction

Comment:

Authority over housing granted to the Regional Council is thwarted by reserving Specialised National housing Programmes for the Central Government. It is rational that housing should go over in toto to the Regional Council.

2. Agriculture and Agrarian Services

Comment:

Agriculture is inconceivable without Regional Council having authority over Research Development and Training.

Under the Thirteenth Amendment, Research was vested with the Central Government and all Research Stations in the North-East were vested in the Central Department of Agriculture. The Devolution Package is not an advance on the Provincial Council System.

With the argument of training as a central subject, even the School of Agriculture established by the North-East Provincial Council at Vavuniya was taken over by the central Department of Agriculture.

3. Health and Indigenous Medicine

Comment:

The totality of Health Administration is reserved for the Centre. The Regional Council cannot so much as get even Malathion sprayed. Indigenous Medicine alone is left to the Regional Council.

4. Minor Port and Harbours

Comment:

Trincomalee along with Kankesanthurai are the two harbours for the North-East Regional Council. But they come under the purview of the centre. A Minor Port like Point Pedro would also come under Central control, the moment it imports some onions from the Port of Madras since that would be international transportation.

5. Promotion of Tourism

Comment:

Promotion of Tourism is a follow-up on Tourism Development. Development Proposals of a Region can be vetoed by the Centre as not being consistent with National Policy on Tourism.

The Regional Council should have authority over Policy, Development and Promotion.

6. Protection of the Environment

Comment:

Evolving an Environment Policy appropriate to the Region in a particular development context should vest with the Regional Council. Supervention of National Environment Policy can thwart any development programme of the Regional Council.

7. Taxes - Income Excise Turnover

are to be specified.

Comment:

The need to be specific is imperative. On specifics depend the quantum of funds. eg: there may be no income tax since incomes have been destroyed over the last twelve years or more.

8. Taxes on Mineral Rights

Comment:

There is a likelihood of the right of taxation being denied to the Regional Council since minerals come under the purview of the Centre.

9. Television

Comment:

A Reserved subject should not subvert a subject of the Regional Council

RESERVED LIST

1. Specialised National Housing Programmes.

2. National Standards relating to Research Development and Training in the area of Agriculture.

3. National Health Administration inclusive of existing Special Purpose Hospitals and Teaching Hospitals. Training, Education and Research relating to Health. Development of National Health Standards. Administration of all Special Programmes: eg: Anti-Malaria Campaign.

4. Airports, Harbours, Ports with International transportation

5. National Policy on Tourism

6. National Environment

7. Taxes - Excluding those devolved on the Region.

8. Minerals and Mines

9. Television Institutions

10. Relief Rehabilitation and Reconstruction

Comment:

The Reserved subject can deny to the Regional Council the authority over Public Utility Infrastructure Development which will be a major component in Rehabilitation and Reconstruction

14. Industries and Industrial Development

Comment:

Industrial Development and establishment of industries are inconceivable without industrial research and training. To bifurcate them would be to scuttle industrial development. Thus Research and Training should be a Subject for the Regional Council.

16. Regional Financial and Credit Institutions — Regional Councils will have the power to set up their own financial institutions

Comment:

A Stock exchange should be treated as a financial institution and a Regional Council should have authority to establish one. Regulation may be undertaken by the National Securities Commission.

17. International Borrowings

Comment:

Concurrence of the Centre for borrowings above the prescribed limit would be a serious inhibition against serious and responsible negotiation.

18. Regional I.G.P. appointed by the Chief Minister in consultation with the Governor of the Region

Comment:

This power of appointment should be exercised by the Chief Minister in his unfettered authority.

19. Regional Police Commission

10. Public Utility, Infrastructure Development

11. National Rivers

Comment:

Criteria should be spelt out to identify National Rivers and a list of such rivers should be specified in a schedule.

12. Labour Regulation and Standards

Comment:

Authority over labour should vest with the Regional Councils.

13. Museums and Archeological Sites declared by law to be of National importance

Comment:

Criteria should be evolved to identify those of National importance. They should be specified in a schedule at the very outset. All others should come under the purview of the Regional Councils.

14. National Industrial Research and Training

15. Inter-Regional Irrigation Schemes

Comment:

When this is a subject in the Reserved List, the Regional Council is divested of all authority over development, maintenance, water distribution and management of agriculture.

All such schemes currently in operation should be vested with the Regional Councils.

Proposals for the future initiated by a Regional Council should have the concurrence of the Central Government and other concerned Regional Council or Councils.

Proposals for the future initiated by the Central Government should have the concurrence of the concerned Regional Council or Councils.

16. Stock Exchange and Futures Market

17. International borrowings above a prescribed limit will require the concurrence of the Centre

18. Appointment in Consultation with the Governor

19. Appointment by the Constitutional Council

Comment:

Appointment should be by the Chief Minister with clearance from a High-Posts Committee of the Regional Council.

Appointment by the Constitutional Council is tantamount to extending the arm of the Central Government into the affairs of the Regional Council.

20. National Education Commission

Composed of Representatives of the Centre and the Region entrusted with a) identifying national schools and universities in consultation with the Chief Minister. b) setting minimum standards with regard to training, examination, curriculum and employment of teachers.

Comment:

Education should be fully devolved and a Regional Education Commission appointed by the Chief Minister should be entrusted with the above responsibilities envisaged for the National Education Commission.

- 21. The Governor will appoint a Regional Attorney General**
If a law is seen to be unconstitutional, the Regional Attorney General after consultation with the Governor will institute action before the supreme Court.

Comment:

It is not clear against whom action will be instituted. Is it the Chief Minister?, the Board of Minister? or the Regional Council?

22. Regional Public Service Commission

Comment:

The Chief Minister should be vested with authority for the appointment of the Regional Public Service Commission. Appointment by Constitutional Council deprives the Chief Minister and the Board of Ministers of authority over the Public Service.

22. Appointment by Constitutional Council

The Regional Public Service Commission will consult with the National Public Service Commission in effecting transfers.

Annexure II

C.W.C. PROPOSAL

1. Unit of Devolution

The boundaries of the Regional Council shall be the same as at the time of independence and shall not be changed except with the consent of the Regional Council.

The powers devolved to the Regional Council cannot be changed except at the request or with the consent of the Regional Council.

2. Advocate General

The Governor of the Regional Council in consultation with the Chief Justice (Judge) of the Region shall appoint a person who is qualified to be appointed a Judge of the High Court to be Advocate General for the Region.

It shall be the duty of the Advocate General to tender advice to the Regional Council upon such legal matters as may be referred to him by the Chief Minister.

3. Financial Arrangements

A constitutionally guaranteed quantum of financial resources will be turned over by the Central Government from the Consolidated fund to the Regional Council.

The quantum may be determined on the basis of a percentage of the GNP or the Annual Budget.

The quantum may be determined annually with the budgetary exercise.

4. Financial Infrastructure

The Regional Council shall have the right to establish institutions for finance and investments. The following institutions are envisaged:

1. Banks
2. Foreign Bank Branches
3. Insurance Companies
4. Regional EPF
5. Regional ETF
6. Lotteries
7. Regional BOI
8. Stock Exchange

DEVOLUTION PACKAGE

1. Unit of Devolution

One of the Regions would be constituted by redemarcating the existing boundaries of the present North-East Province.

2. Regional Attorney General

The Governor will appoint a Regional Attorney General.

The Regional Attorney General will advise the Governor on the constitutionality of the laws passed by the Regional Council. If a law is seen to be unconstitutional, he will institute action before the Supreme Court.

3. Financial Arrangements

There will be a National Finance Commission entrusted with allocating grants to the Region.

4. Financial Infrastructure

Regional Financial and Credit Institutions.

International borrowings above a prescribed limit will require the concurrence of the Centre.

Stock Exchange and Futures Market.

The August-1991 Conflict Resolution Strategy

Ananda Welihena

The first ethnic conflict resolution strategy of the Peoples' Alliance (PA) Government can be understood in the context of the Package of Proposals presented by the Parliamentary select Committee (PSC) whose aim was "to recommend ways and means of achieving peace and political stability" in the country.

The PSC was initiated by the previous UNP regime on 9 August 1991, with a view, 1) to arriving "at a political solution to the question involving the devolution of power to the Northern and Eastern Provinces, 2) to preventing the disintegration of the nation, the killing of innocent civilians, members of the Armed Forces and the youth fighting for a cause, the increased militarization of the culture of violence, 3) to achieving peace and political stability and utilizing the reduced defense expenditure for rapid economic growth and national development" (*Hansard*, C. 1270-1285, 9.8.1991).

The Report of the PSC together with the proceedings of the Committee and Minutes of Evidence was handed over to the Speaker Mr. M.H. Mohammed and Parliament on 12.11.1993 (*Hansard*, C. 206, 12.11.1993).

The PSC came into being after the motion was moved and seconded by two SLFP Opposition Members of Parliament. It received the support of the Speaker of the House and the late President Ranasinghe Premadasa.

Outcome

The outcome of the PSC was the Draft Interim Report which was called the majority consensus proposal, endorsed by the UNP, SLFP, LSSP, CP, SLMC and two MPs of Jaffna District, Mr K. Srinivasan and Mr Basheer Segudawood. The Tamil parties and the CWC responded negatively to this Report. They dissociated themselves from the PSC immediately after its presentation.

The process of the functioning of the PSC commenced with the receipt of 300 or more proposals which were categorised into political parties, organizations

and individual members. The document that was issued was called the CONCEPT PAPER which introduced a package of proposals providing for one separate Provincial Council (CP) for the North and another for the East to each of which power was to be devolved separately. An Apex Assembly was to be elected from those of these two separate Councils so that they would have power to deliberate and plan for the entire North and East Provinces, which would then be called a Regional Council. Broader issues concerning devolution revealed the establishment of an Upper Chamber of Parliament, Devolution Commission and an Independent Finance Commission. This framework was expanded with details and was called the OPTION PAPER.

The response offered by the Tamil parties (EPRLF, TELO, EROS, ENDLF, PLOTE AND ACTC) together with CWC, to this proposal was again negative. They presented, instead their own proposal which was known as the FOUR-POINT FORMULA which summed up the detailed proposals that the TULF has formulated (*Tamil Times*, 15 April, 1993). It provided for:

- 1) one politico-administrative unit consisting of the North and the East,
- 2) meaningful devolution of powers to PCs.
- 3) institutional arrangements for Muslims; and
- 4) The Sinhalese in the North-east to have the same rights as Tamils would have in the other provinces.

The second phase of the PSC process was the creation of a second framework which was different from the earliest one. It was known as the **Srinivasan Proposal**, which included one separate PC for the North and another for the East. The scheme of devolution of power was similar to that of the Indian quasi-federal system. However, Mr Srinivasan revealed in one of his subsequent letters that the North as well as the East should function as full federal units. This proposal was rejected by the six Tamil parties and the CWC. The latter withdrew and dissociated itself from

the PSC for it argued cogently for a merged North-East administrative unit endorsing the Tamil four-point formula.

The Srinivasan Proposal was converted into a full report called the **Draft Interim Report** which the Chairman presented in Parliament. The Tamil parties met together to decide on their next course of action. They issued a statement and dissociated themselves from the PSC. They stated that the report indicated a 'majority consensus': that "it confirms the lack of will of the Sinhala polity represented in parliament regardless of whether it is the ruling UNP or the major Opposition, the SLFP, to come to grips with the legitimate grievances and the aspirations of the Tamil people" (*Lanka Guardian*, 15.11.1993, p. 5).

UNP-SLFP Consensus

Another feature of the PSC was the success arrived in reaching a Government-Opposition consensus. This was a unique achievement and was regarded as one of the aims of the PSC. In the past, conflict resolution strategies have reached a dead end due to the failure of the UNP and SLFP to reach a consensus. The Opposition obstructed the implementation of past Peace Pacts. The Bandaranaike-Chelvanayagam Pact was opposed by the UNP and the Dudley-Chelvanayagam Pact was opposed by the SLFP. A consensus between the Government and the Opposition was essential to solve the ethnic problem. The credit goes to the UNP government for having stressed the need for this. The Chairman was pleased that a major historical breakthrough was possible. In his letter to the Speaker of the House he expressed his joy:

"The Committee has explored all avenues to find a solution that is acceptable to all parties concerned. Meanwhile, I am pleased to report to you Mr Speaker that the Members of the Committee, representing the UNP, SLFP, SLMC, CP, and LSSP have reached an agreement....." (*Tamil Times*, 15.01.1993, p. 9)

However, the UNP and the SLFP were accused by the Tamil parties of lethargy and indifference regarding the need for

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urgency to submit their own proposals for the resolution of the ethnic conflict. They stressed the folly of the decision of the SLFP to boycott the sittings of the PSC at the outset.

Response of Tamil parties

The third feature of the PSC was the participatory role of the six Tamil parties and the CWC. Their presence facilitated the functioning of the PSC though its projected aim was not achieved. They observed the prevailing trends and decided to submit a four-point formula. They did not withdraw from their stand-points but critically responded to and rejected the proposals and arguments put forward by the PSC.

Their participatory role was exercised on a collective basis. It was founded on the unity of all Tamil political parties except the LTTE. They were successful in receiving the help of the CWC which actually was always the first to assist the Tamil parties to launch their programmes. This could be attributed to two main reasons: 1) the CWC enjoyed a favourable position as a government party in coalition in which Mr Thondaman was a cabinet minister, and 2) it adopted a strategy to use this opportunity to establish cordial relations with the Tamil parties by supporting their plans.

The LTTE was absent from the outset. The chief reason was that they were not represented in Parliament. Besides, they did not send representatives or proposals. They continued with their military option. However, the Tamil parliamentary parties adopted the strategy of negotiated settlement. The negative impact created by the Tamil parties on the PSC proposal reinforced the plan of the LTTE to underscore the urgency for a political solution. The Tamil parties addressed the issue of the escalation of war and used it as an opportunity to articulate their interests in the four-point Plan.

The announcement of the Draft Interim Report did not bring them any good news and they decided not to attend the PSC sittings. Their argument was that the Report was an attempt to impose the unilateral views of the Sinhala people on the Tamil parties and that it cannot be called a Sinhala-Tamil consensus.

Future plans

The PSC episode is a lesson in ethnic conflict resolution strategy for a government. Such an experience would facilitate the formulation of future policy packages. The success of the next resolution strate-

gy is contingent upon the knowledge of this process of experience, and particularly about the limitations, dissatisfactions and criticisms which ought to be seriously reconsidered for a viable desired solution. The following are some of the issues which require further thinking:

- 1) It is an urgent need to look beyond the quest or search for either a de-merged two separated Provincial councils (North and East) or a totally merged, contiguous North-East province. It is essential to consider a merged region by adopting a new form of demarcation of the existing boundaries which is only a British colonial legacy.
- 2) It implies that zones based on ethnic groups of Tamil, Sinhala and Muslims have to be redemarcated in the North-East province. The North-east will comprise the North and also a part of Trincomalee. The Sinhala and the Muslim dominated regions will be separately demarcated to ensure their stability and cultural identity.
- 3) The quantum of power to be devolved will have to take into account the maintenance of law and order and the subject of land.
- 4) The unit of devolution would have to be the Regional Council (RC). The democratic socialist Republic of Sri Lanka would have to take the form of a Union of Regions to ensure a unitary State with a view to establishing a sovereign, territorially integral, united, free and independent Republic.

Criticism

Firstly, the PSC was keen to obtain only a government-opposition consensus. This is inadequate. Its aim should have been much more broader: it should have worked hard to have achieve a Sinhala-Tamil consensus. Secondly, Several significant issues emerged in the course of the deliberation which the PSC left under the carpet. They remained hitherto unaddressed, unattended to and undone. Its focus was excessively on the de-merger issue.

The new devolution proposals have to be located in this context of the PSC and its experience. The responsibility of the State is to do what has remained undone and rectify the pitfalls, limitations and other experiences. It has to begin from where the PSC has stopped and learn from its past faults and failures. It is only then that

it can be closer to the winning post of a good solution.

The new Devolution Proposals, issued by the PA Government on 3 August, 1995, after having introduced its content unofficially through the mass media a few days ago, arrived after a lapse of four years since the PSC Report was presented. They were obviously framed with the above perspectives in mind. They indicate positive signs of a more enduring political solution. This is evident from the responses in favour of these proposals which are on the increase. They are from those who have a genuine interest in establishing peace and stability in the country. The new proposals have achieved already the results which the PSC failed; the consensus of almost all the Tamil parties. All that is now required is a similar response from all the Sinhala Parties.

The new proposals reveal that the PA government has had a 'take off' from the PSC. The President, Madame Chandrika B. Kumaratunga in her Address to the Nation revealed her Government's new Devolution Proposals (CDN, August 04, 1995, p. 12) which "seek to redefine the constitutional foundation of a plural society within a united and sovereign Republic of Sri Lanka".

It will be based on the principles of living a life of safety, security, dignity and equality, by enjoying space to express the values of culture, religion and language with freedom and basic human rights, for the exercise of which the essential structures will be provided in a new constitution through a scheme of devolution of power to the respective regions which will not undermine but encourage the construction of a united, sovereign, stable and pluralistic democratic society (CDN, 04.08.95).

She emphasized that these proposals are being placed "with total sincerity of conviction aimed at a lasting political solution," and they are "not been arbitrarily or hastily formulated" but "in consultation with many responsible persons who have gained an insight into the current crisis". Her Government has presented these proposals with awareness of all hitherto attempted ethnic conflict resolution strategies. She stated:

"In essential terms, they represent continuity with similar attempts which have been made in the past in many policymaking fora. Each and every one of you will be afforded the opportunity of actively engaging in this exercise by articulating your views as the debate progresses" (ibid., p. 13)

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207, 2nd Cross Street,

Colombo 11.

The Peace Hoax

S. Sathananthan

Peoples Alliance and the Tamil Question

On 19 April the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) ended the cessation of hostilities. The LTTE had first set March 28th as the deadline for the Government to satisfy three conditions: closure of the Pooneryn Army camp, lifting the economic embargo on the Jaffna peninsula and eliminating restrictions on fishing. The fourth condition — freedom of movement for armed LTTE cadre in the East — was not emphasised (*Sunday Times*, 19/3/95). It was hoped that the Government's pledges to remove the economic embargo and fishing restrictions would in turn induce the LTTE to compromise on the closure of Pooneryn camp. On the 27th LTTE extended the deadline to 19 April. Despite the Government's failure to implement its pledges, many political analysts in Colombo expressed shock and dismay at LTTE's withdrawal from the "peace process".

The immediate response of these analysts was to condemn the LTTE for not giving the Government the 72-hour notice of termination as required under the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement (*the Island*, 7/1/95). This legalistic apology masked the Government's crass neglect of the April 19th deadline, which was announced more than three weeks (23 days) earlier. It was followed by considerable breast-beating that President Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga had unwisely placed her trust in Mr Velupillai Prabhakaran. A newspaper columnist argued that Mrs Kumaratunga's mistake was "not preparing for war while preparing for peace" (*Sunday Times*, 21/5/95). Dr Jehan Perera lamented that President Kumaratunga "trusted the LTTE. The LTTE in turn took advantage of the situation. Sri Lankans know this and the world knows it" (*The Island*, 21/5/95).

The notion that "innocent" Mrs Kumaratunga was caught unawares by "wily" Mr Prabhakaran is embedded in the belief that the Sinhalese are simple, honest people who are deceived and exploited by crafty Tamils (and others). This is a dangerous illusion. It has provided ideolo-

gical justification for anti-Tamil pogroms ("Tamils deserve it") and social and economic discrimination of Tamils and Muslims ("Sinhalese are third class citizens in their own country"). An early articulation of these chauvinist late 19th-century views could be found in the writings of Anagarika Dharmapala.

However it is necessary to go well beyond these base prejudices if we are to comprehend political realities in the late 20th century. At the very least we must recognise that a Sinhalese politician could be as devious (or honest) as a politician from any other community.

The Peoples Alliance (PA), led by the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP), defeated the United National Party (UNP) to capture power in the August 1994 parliamentary elections. Prime Minister Kumaratunga, the PA's candidate and a leading member of the SLFP, won the November 1994 presidential election to become the fourth President of Sri Lanka. One of the promises she made during the campaign was to negotiate a political solution to the Tamil Question.

Before and during the campaign for the parliamentary elections Mrs Kumaratunga adopted an apparently conciliatory stance towards Tamils and Muslims. But when influential Sinhalese lobbies raised doubts whether her primary loyalty was to Sinhalese interests, she was quick to reassure them. For instance the "Mid-Week Review" (*The Island*, 28/4/94) noted the misgivings expressed by some Buddhist monks with regard to the PA's reported intention to negotiate a federal solution to the Tamil Question. The monks opposed any solution based on the Indian model; they also rejected making permanent the temporary merger of the northern and eastern provinces into the North-East Province (NEP). The monks were alarmed that the proposed solution is "likely to lead to the ultimate division of the country"; and they cautioned that if their concerns are not taken into account, "they will be compelled to take the issue to the country at the appropriate time".

Within three days Mrs Kumaratunga,

speaking at the 1994 May Day rally, "solemnly promised to foster Buddhist rights in the event of her coming to power." It was explained further that she was responding to "some members of the Sangha [who] had misgivings about her interest in and concern over the place of Buddhism in a future SLFP government." As regards rights of other communities, "Mrs Kumaratunga hastened to add that the rights of other religionists will be guaranteed" (*The Island*, 5/5/94). She placated Tamil and Muslim voters by avoiding an outright rejection of the Indian model inclusive of the merged NEP.

But Colombo-based Tamil political parties promoted Mrs Kumaratunga as a peace-maker. Her statements in an interview to a Tamil newspaper, published coincidentally on May Day, were widely quoted by these parties to justify their electoral support for her. More than one year ago we critically examined their arguments in the article "Broker politics: a betrayal of Tamil struggle" published in the *Lanka Guardian* (15/6/94). To refresh memories, the relevant excerpts from the article are reproduced in the section below.

SLFP: a "new dispensation"?

The *Virakesari* (29/5/94) reported that two prominent Sinhalese intellectuals are engaged in brokering an alliance between the SLFP and the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) and Eelam Peoples Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF). According to *Taraki*, a political columnist, the TULF and EPRLF believe (a) that Mrs Kumaratunga "will stand firm" in resolving the Tamil problem and (b) that she is "unlike any other Sinhalese leader in the past or present". And Dr Neelan Tiruchelvam, a Member of Parliament (MP) of TULF, reportedly asserted that she is "the best bet for Tamils" (*Island*, 29/5/94).

Informal sounding revealed that some in the TULF are virtually gushing over an alleged "understanding" reached between the TULF and Mrs Kumaratunga.

What is the basis of optimism? In her May interview published in the *Virakesari*

(1/5/94), Mrs Kumaratunga offered nothing new. She merely repeated the following platitudes:

1. **A political solution to the Tamil problem could be achieved based on a form of decentralization of authority which includes an institutional mechanism for centre-region interaction.** Translated into simple language, she prefers to reduce the political autonomy of regional administration in Tamil areas and increase the powers of the centre in order to minimise center-region friction.
2. **Such a political solution must apply equally to all parts of the country.** In other words, she intends to ignore the Tamil National Question in the tradition of Sinhalese politics.
3. **The intransigence of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) is the only obstacle to a negotiated peace.** That is, under her leadership a future SLFP Government will pursue a military solution against Tamils in the NEP. Moreover, she has implicitly set up the LTTE as a convenient scapegoat for her future inability or unwillingness to achieve a political solution to the Tamil Question.
4. **Tamils in the NEP are virtually exhausted and wish an end to conflict.** In other words, she draws somfort from the mistaken belief that counter-insurgency techniques of collective punishment have weakened the resolve of Tamils.

These banal observations were widely quoted by many Tamil parties in Colombo as indicative of a new vision of ethnic reconciliation emerging within the SLFP; and as justification for Tamil support for the SLFP.

It is important to note the point omitted by Mrs Kumaratunga in her interview. She spoke mysteriously of a proposal that is being evolved within the SLFP to solve the Tamil Question, This proposal is to be "placed before the people" (in the election manifesto). She **failed to say that SLFP party policy will be changed** to reflect the so-called new proposals. So the SLFP will not be bound by them. For those who are naive enough to have faith in election manifestos, they surely must remember the number of times past manifestos of Sinhalese parties have promised an end to the Tamil Question. More to the point, election manifestos cease to have mea-

ning after voting is over and the regularity with which promises offered to Tamils in past manifestos were betrayed simply boggles the mind. It should be obvious that the new proposals will similarly be consigned to the dust bin after elections.

If the assertions of Mrs Kumaratunga are to be taken seriously by Tamils, she firstly must begin a nation-wide campaign of perception building among Sinhalese to make a federal system of government acceptable to them. Secondly, she must lobby within the SLFP to incorporate the fundamental concepts and principles of the new proposals into the official party policy. She has done neither, although similar inclusion was effected, for example, with respect to economic issues. Until she engages in concrete actions along these lines, any positive comment on the Tamil problem must be taken merely as political posturing in an election year which carries no meaning beyond the day on which elections are held.

The TULF and EPRLF would like Tamils to believe that their organizations have reached an "understanding" with Mrs Kumaratunga. She is being projected as "new and improved". "New", because she is the new generation. "Improved",

because SLFP acquired a liberal sheen after a few Sinhalese intellectuals began working with the party recently. All of which made a Tamil academic in Colombo speak breathlessly of a "new dispensation" under future SLFP rule.

But the so-called "understanding" is with Mrs Kumaratunga in her individual capacity. Like other Sinhalese leaders before her, she also has NOT attempted to change policies of her party. Any assertion by Tamil parties that she could impose a change within the first nine months of an SLFP election victory by voluntarily initiating (presumably through sheer altruism) OFFICIAL negotiations at GOVERNMENTAL LEVEL with the LTTE (and Tamil parties) is self-serving political fiction.

Mrs Kumaratunga has begun playing peace-maker. She is actively wooing Tamils WITHOUT compromising the SLFP. But after the elections SLFP policies on the Tamil Question will remain the same and the Tamil Question will continue to fester. The present as well as a future Government will avoid negotiations with the LTTE and continue to seek a military solution in the NEP.

(To be Continued)

Pianist

Round-shouldered, a drop,

Sitting like a dollop

Of marshed potato

On the polished stool

At a piano

Doing everything by rule.

Not a thought in her.

A geriatric finger

On a note

By sheer rote.

Whazzat?

Mozart.

*Before she met her piano teacher, normal
free and informal.*

Patrick Jayasuriya

Fact and Fiction

Rohan Jayawardene

Sri Lanka has been ravaged by violent ethnic strife since 1983 in the course of which families and communities of the south and the north have been devastated by the loss of human lives that were so precious in the interest of their existence. It has been a repetition of a historical fact — that humans kill each other without too much hesitation in causes that are claimed to be both godly and/or secular.

Ethnic strife is purely secular, but both varieties of conflict, the religious and the non-religious, may lie at the human need for identity. In the case of religion, a person finds this sense of personal identity through acceptance and association with a philosophy (religion) that provides guidelines for a lifetime in the average course of events. It therefore also serves as a strong underlying psychological support because ethnical and moral values are identified with the philosophy (religion), and this serves both as a propulsion and as a fall-back factor throughout the person's existence. Any threat to this fundamental stabilizing fact-of-life in an individual or in a community is, in fact, a potential de-stabilizer of its psychological make-up during crises and generates a response that is usually emotional, even bordering on hysteria. In circumstances we have seen throughout human history, humans have fought a succession of disgraceful wars causing millions of deaths, lots of them in the names of gods and holy places. Which god would approve of violence, brutality and killing in His (or Her) name? It is obvious that religions have been patently misunderstood by humans and served them poorly. Evidently we need Resident Gods on Earth to ensure correct understanding and practice!

The other potentially divisive source of personal or collective identity is the ethnic factor in human life, and it is also the other cause in interecine and international mass-murders called wars. In this insta-

nce additional elements come into play, such as loss of privileges/dwelling areas/national boundaries.

In para one of this essay there was reference to "violent" ethnic strife in Sri Lanka since 1983. However, prior to physical violence taking place there is usually a high level of non-violent disagreement which has finally led to the outbreak of violent manifestations. It is necessary in the current context of things in Sri Lanka to consider calmly and objectively a history of the events which finally led to violent manifestations of disagreement.

It is absolutely important at this stage that in order to be fair-minded, everyone cast aside unsubstantiated stories — or Fiction — and concentrate on the Facts which are supported by evidence. Emotions, — the subjective element of personality, should be held in check and Objectivity — which arises in the mind and in intelligence, ought to determine our decisions. If we insist on being purely subjective and emotional, and be possessed only of sentimental gut-reactions, there is a mighty fine prospect of enhanced numbers in cuts, bruises and corpses for many more years.

In the Sri Lankan ethnic conflict there are historical factors which are related to both Religion and Language, but it is not proposed here to delve into the distant past. The intention herein is to establish the more recent history which led to the outbreak of violence.

It appears that the recent history of the conflict is more or less explicitly concerned with LANGUAGE, and the enforcement of language-related issues. If violence did touch religious places of worship on stray occasions, it was merely one or more acts among many others within a policy of ongoing violent demonstrations.

The recent history, so-called, of the dispute is based on two unavoidably connected language issues: the enforcement of official language policy, and at the same time the elimination of the link language factor — English.

The implementation of an official language, or more than one official language, is the preserve of politicians and one that needs application of practical considerations, discretion, and collective-wisdom. However, in a multi-ethnic society it is of paramount importance that, even if the divisive factors do indeed keep multiplying, the ethnic LINKS which constitute channels of communication are not damaged or severed.

In the Sri Lankan situation the Language-Link between communities was the best known international language spoken in the country, ENGLISH.

If, for example, I did not know Tamil whilst being proficient in my native tongue Sinhala, I could always talk with a purely Tamil-proficient friend in English, as I indeed do even today. It is the link that connects my thought process and emotional reactions with his own processes, and by means of it understanding may be achieved between us.

Without the connecting link-language we could only wonder about each other's thoughts, gestures and motives, and perhaps reach absolutely wrong conclusions based only in suspicion!

A link-language is additionally, a means of COLLECTIVE endeavour, wherein the language-medium provides a means for united multi-ethnic effort.

Therefore, the factors which affect the present interecine violence have a recent history that is double-faceted — (a) Implementation of an official policy and (b) Deprivation of a link. A brief factual history of events seems to be as follows:

1944 - Mr J.R. Jayewardene probably stated the official language policy first. In May 1944 he proposed the following legislation in the State Council of Ceylon:

"Sir, the motion standing in my name reads as follows:

- a) *That Sinhalese should be made the medium of instruction in all schools;*
- b) *That Sinhalese should be made a compulsory subject in all public examinations;*
- c) *That Legislation should be introduced to permit the business of the State Council to be conducted in Sinhalese also;*
- d) *That a Commission should be appointed to choose for translation and to translate important books of other languages, into Sinhalese.*

My motion seeks to displace English from the position which it has held for over 125 years as the official language of this country. Though English has been the official language for so many years, only 10 per cent of a population of over 6 million speak and know the language.

*The tragedy that is enacted everyday in our Courts, in our Public Departments and in the very lives of our people is very vividly described in that famous book, which I would advise Hon. Members of this Council to read, called *The Village in the Jungle*.*

There, Sir, a villager from a hamlet in the Hambantota District is brought up for trial in the Courts before an English Magistrate, and after a number of days of trial, during which he did not understand a single word of what passed between the Judge, counsel and the other officials, he is sentenced to a long term of imprisonment, and even at that stage

does not know what had happened. That tragedy is occurring even today.

It is argued by those who know only English, who have been educated only in English, that if we displace English and make Sinhalese and Tamil the official languages, we will be shutting out a large world of literature and culture from our people. They little understand that that world of literature is already a closed book to 90 per cent of our people. We can today after so many years of English as the official language, measure its achievements in this country. It is true that we have produced a number of famous lawyers, doctors and judges and possibly legislators, but in the field of literature, of science, of culture, we have been entirely barren of achievement.

It was not so when the native language was the language of the Government. I think history records that wise men both from the East and the West came to the shores of Lanka to read the books that were preserved in

sanctuaries of the Buddhist Sangha. If one reads the travels of Hsuen Tsang, Marco Polo and Fa Hien and the lives of great Western philosophers such as Dr. Dhalke and Rhys Davies and others, we would find the contribution that this country made to world literature when we had our own language as the official language.

It is said that many of the mysteries of Indian history were unravelled by the translation of the Mahavansa into English, but today our youths, after so many years of British rule, are more interested in the love affairs of Henry VIII than in the historical events pictured in the Mahavansa; they are more aware of the materialism preached by Western pundits, than in the truths which are embodied in the Abhidhamma. It is with a view to changing this situation, a situation which can only be changed by substituting the national languages as the official languages, that I have thought it wise to introduce this motion.

(To be Continued)

Waiting — 8

Proposal Recollected

*Should it be thus?
That the words remain unspoken
And the smile held back
And the Story that had hardly begun
Remain unended,
With time for another to do the talking
And steal the kisses that I may not take?
Or will you rather let me
Twine my hands in the black coils of your hair
And place my brow against your eyes
Eyes that have seen beyond this pain and known
A sweeter wisdom meant for us alone?*

U. Karunatilake

Singapore: The Politics of Regional Definition

Kanishka Jayasuriya

The primary objective of this paper is to deconstruct the political rationale underlying the usage of the concept of the 'region'. Contrary to conventional approaches, it will be proposed that regions are socially constructed rather than natural entities. The critical point of difference between these perspectives is that the constructionist viewpoint does not posit an *essential core* to a region as in other perspectives, especially those focusing on issues of regional co-operation. The constructionist perspective proposed in this paper demands greater sensitivity to the contingent nature of regional projects.

Of course, in conventional perspectives, this essential regional core¹ can vary — it may be based on culture, ethnic origin, geopolitics, 'security complexes' — but the point is that regions are inevitably reduced to these elements.² The effect of this theorizing is to naturalize the region so that its definition becomes a matter of 'common sense'. For example, this theoretical process of 'naturalization' makes it possible to identify 'internal' and 'external' forces operating on regional entities — a process that enables regional dynamics to be viewed as a complex of internal and external forces. In this respect, Buzan's work³ on security complexes provides a paradigm case of this form of understanding.

The essentialist view of regionalism is problematic for two main reasons. First, it presupposes an objective entity independent of the social construction of the region by subjects. As Neumann notes:

the construct does not assert its authority as an 'imagined community', a cognitive construct shared by persons in the region themselves. Rather, it is the construct of one man — the allegedly sovereign actor.⁴

Herein lies the problem: each essentialist construct will produce its own 'common sense' region: it is not clear why any particular mode of regional definition or understanding of the region should be privileged. For example, Southeast Asia — understood as an 'economic' region — is different from Southeast Asia as a region defined by geopolitical or security concerns. Therefore, as Neumann suggests, essentialist approaches to regional definition lead to the crucial politics of this process of definition being marginalised. This would suggest that the important analytical question should not be 'what is the region?', but, 'why is the region defined in this manner?' It is an approach to the study of regionalism that places great emphasis on the cognitive constructions of a region by political actors.

Secondly, the essentialist approach, because it takes the region as given or natural, fails to locate the importance of a multiplicity of regional discourses within state and society. Regional constructions often serve to define conceptions of state identity; however, these identities — like personal identities — are often fragmented and multiple. The extent to which multiple regional identities exist will vary from state to state, but in the Southeast Asian case, the existence of these identities is particularly important, and warrants further exploration. It will be argued that the state has constructed multiple — sometimes contradictory — regional identities, and that although the extent of this fragmentation will vary from state to state, it nevertheless remains an important feature of regional discursive practices in Southeast Asia. In the Singaporean context, the existence of multiple regional identities, and therefore, by implication, the manner in which state identity becomes implicated in the *politics* of regional definition, is the focus of this paper.

The elements of an alternative way of conceptualizing this notion are implicit in this critique of essentialist regional understandings. Neumann,⁵ in his perceptive account, argues that regions are similar to Benedict Anderson's⁶ view of nations as 'imagined communities': nations constructed on the basis of selective historical narratives. It is the mobilization of these historical narratives by political actors that makes nationalism a potent force. But, for our purposes, the relevant fact is that it is 'these political actors who decide which similarities should be considered politically relevant, and which should not'.⁷ Regions are much the same; they too are a product of political actors who 'as part of some political project imagine a certain spatial and chronological identity for a region, and disseminate their imagined identity to others'.⁸ From this dissident standpoint, regionalism is a set of cognitive practices shaped by language and political discourse, which through the creation of *concepts, metaphors, analogies*, determine how the region is defined; these serve to define the actors who are included (and excluded) within the region and thereby enable the emergence of a regional entity and identity. In many respects, this mode of analysis shares much in common with recent post-modern approaches to international relations,⁹ in that it places heavy emphasis on the understanding of regionalism as a discursive practice with its own history and interpretation.¹⁰ In other words, it seeks to provide a 'genealogy of regionalism'.

However, it is important to understand not only *how* regional definitions are produced. But *who* produces them. In the Singaporean case, we shall argue that while policy com-

munities played some role in the management of various regional discourses, the production of regional identities has been pre-eminently a state-sponsored project. Singapore is no exception. Whenever regional discourses have flourished in Asia they have been state organized and sponsored. Whereas societal actors have played a major role in the process of European regional integration they are all but absent in Asia; this has profound implications for the structure and process of regional institutions in the geographical space of the Asia-Pacific region.

With this preamble, the paper proceeds to explore the politics of this regional understanding in two parts. The first examines how regionalism has been defined in the Singaporean context; and the second part substantiates the view that regionalism is, in the main, a state directed project, and at the same time, explores implications of adopting this interpretive standpoint.

Singapore: A Multiplicity of Regions Economic Region

The discourse of economic regionalism has been of relatively recent origin. In this context, a key argument advanced is that there is no one dominant regional discourse and identity; rather, there is a plurality of regions which can be classified as 'economic', 'security', or 'cultural' regions. These multiple regional discourses are sometimes symmetrical and compatible, but often — like a jigsaw that does not quite fit — they sit uneasily together.

In the 1970s, the preferred analogy for Singapore was Venice! It was seen as a global city, functioning as a pivotal trade and financial centre in the global economy. As a former foreign minister and deputy prime minister put it:

we are more than a regional city. We draw sustenance not only from the region but also the international economy to which as a global city we belong and which will be the final arbiter of whether we prosper or decline.¹¹

In the 1980s, while this *global* economic discourse had not entirely disappeared, the thrust had begun to shift towards a more distinctly *regional* economic perspective. Images of Singapore as the global city have been replaced by Singapore as a key regional centre embedded in the evolving regional economy.

This shift is evident in three major foreign policy economic directions:

- First, the creation of the 'Growth Triangle' concept. The Growth Triangle involves Malaysia, Indonesia and Singapore, and seeks to take advantage of differences in factor endowments in these three coun-

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tries.¹² While the Singapore-Malaysia leg of the triangle is largely market driven, Singapore has made significant public investment in Indonesia, thereby supporting the Singapore-Indonesia leg of the triangle; all this reflects Singapore's political commitment to the Growth Triangle.¹³

- Second, Singaporean foreign economic policy has been highly supportive of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) free trade area concept.¹⁴ In fact, despite initial strong Indonesian objections, the creation of such a free trade area has been a consistent and dominant feature of Singapore's foreign economic policy within ASEAN.
- Finally, Singapore, in recent times has been highly supportive of the Asia Pacific Economic Co-operation (APEC) forum; indeed the siting of the APEC Secretariat in Singapore is in itself indicative of the degree of support for, and importance attached to, the APEC in Singaporean political and policymaking circles.

These changing policy parameters are therefore reflective of the increasingly dominant regional focus in Singapore's foreign economic policy. The reasons for this shift are complex and can only be briefly touched on in this essay. A major factor is the increasingly protectionist global environment that has forced Singaporean policymakers to look at regional markets. Similarly, the formation of regional trade blocs, such as the North American Free Trade Association (NAFTA) has raised concerns in Singapore. The 'elimination of barriers to trade and investment will make Mexico a formidable competitor for foreign investments because of its cheap labour and its proximity to the US market'.¹⁵ Perhaps, more importantly, Singaporean policymakers have realized the importance of a grouping such as APEC as a negotiating group for a small country such as Singapore through which it can play an important role in influencing the foreign economic policies of the states in the Pacific Rim area.

The changing domestic political economy in Singapore is an aspect that needs to be explored. As Rodan has argued, the globalization strategy that Singapore pursued in the 1960s and 1970s was founded on an alliance between state and foreign capital — an alliance that, for largely political reasons, excluded the participation of local capital.¹⁶ With the rapid economic growth in the Asia-Pacific region, the local bourgeoisie which is predominantly located in the service and financial sectors, has become relatively more assertive. Especially significant in this regard is the fact that Singaporean banking institutions have not only acted as 'safe havens' for overseas Chinese capital in Southeast Asia; they are also linked financially (as well as through kinship networks) with Chinese groups in Southeast Asia.¹⁷ For example, the Overseas Chinese Banking Corporation (OCBC), a locally owned bank, had:

strong networks and offices in Malaysia, but by the early 1970s had acquired substantial interests in thirty eight out of the top 100 companies in Malaysia.¹⁸

Indicative of the more assertive role of local capital in the Singaporean political economy, for example, is that Dr Tony Tan, the current chairman of OCBC is a former senior cabinet minister. Since local capital is at the centre of many regional economic networks, the increasing regional economic discourse highlights the interests of important sectors of the local bourgeoisie. Another aspect of this is the increasing regional economic role of state or state influenced enterprises, such as Telecom and Keppel. These enterprises have led Singapore's investment push into countries such as Vietnam and China, and they have been very active in the region.¹⁹

Complementing these political economy factors has been the emergence of an economic language that has constructed the 'Asia-Pacific' as a distinct regional economic entity. Innumerable journalistic pieces as well as a range of in-depth studies of the political economy of the Newly Industrialising Countries (NICs)²⁰ has transformed East Asia into an area with a distinct economic beat and tempo that has enabled the appearance of regional economic language to facilitate an understanding of Singapore as a city within a regional rather than a global economic order.²¹

But even this resort to a dominant regional economic language hides some revealing ambiguities and contradictions. For instance, Singapore's economic region can refer to the Growth Triangle, ASEAN, East and Southeast Asia, or the region bounded by the countries of APEC. Admittedly, the political and economic context, as a rule, determines the economic region that is being advocated, but it is clearly a process marked by great ambiguity and political contradictions. For example, do the United States and Australia form part of Singapore's economic region? The metaphor that Singapore uses to deal with this problem is revealing: it proposes regions as concentric and overlapping circles of linkage.²² Yeo-Cheow Tong, the trade and industry minister, has pointed out that these 'concentric circles of linkage have to be complemented by linkages that overlap or stretch across circles'.²³ Inherent in this metaphor is an important ambiguity in this understanding of regionalism: concentric circles unlike pyramids do not constitute an economic hierarchy. It places no particular order of importance on the various regions. We note, in passing, that this understanding of regionalism is of an entirely different order to that in Malaysia.²⁴ The point to emphasize thought is that even at this economic level, regional language can serve to mask Singapore's multiple regional economic identities.

Security Region

The other regional discourse articulated by Singaporean policymakers is constructed around security oriented issues. Security, or rather, insecurity — given the circumstances

of its formation — has been constitutive of Singaporean state identity.²⁵ Unlike the economic region with its problematically delineated boundaries, Southeast Asia is clearly defined as a discrete regional 'security complex'. However, it is a region that is understood as an area that is constantly invaded/ intruded by 'big powers'. This has resulted in a curious approach to regional defence cooperation. Thus, while Singapore has sometimes looked upon organizations such as the ASEAN as a means of security, it has at times publicly questioned the effectiveness of the ASEAN in the provision of security to its members.²⁶

In this regard, the dominant approach to regionalism appears to be in terms of a subordinate system, the dynamics of which are primarily determined by external factors outside the region. In other words, in this approach, the region is construed as a battleground for external powers. The construction of this idea of a Southeast Asian security region owes much to the Southeast Asian international relations literature.²⁷ The literature, in turn, borrows heavily from realist traditions in international relations. Concepts such as 'security complex', 'subordinate systems', 'great power intrusions', find a deep resonance in both the academic and policymaking bodies in ASEAN.²⁸ In this regard, it confirms the post-modernist insight that literature on international relations not only 'describes' reality, but also helps to 'manufacture' that reality, and in this case, a regional security system.

Therefore, Singaporean policy discourse about regional security is a product of realist Southeast Asian international relations literature.²⁹ A relevant consideration in this context is that academics and influential policymakers in Singapore have by and large been schooled in Australian and British academic institutions which boast a strong realist tradition. Invariably, debates about regional policy have been moulded by the thinking of these practitioners of international relations, who have played an influential role in policymaking. There is no doubt that international relations, as an academic discipline, has contributed disproportionately to the discussion of regional issues in Singapore — perhaps more so than in many other ASEAN countries.

Realism has manufactured a conception of regional security that produces a 'reality' of Southeast Asia as a 'security complex', to use Buzan's terminology,³⁰ but at the same time subordinates this security complex to the interests of 'big powers' — China, Japan and the United States. Against this background, it becomes difficult to think in terms of 'Southeast Asian' regional security institutions. For example, this dominance of realism in Southeast Asia renders concepts like 'collective security' highly problematic, because from this realist perspective, whatever regional security processes emerge will have to focus on the engagement of great or big powers. As with the economic discourse, a deep ambiguity lies at the heart of Singapo-

re's regional security language: an ambiguity that arises from the realist understanding of international relations in Southeast Asia, and its consequent implications for models of regional security.

Cultural Region

Interestingly, there now exists — alongside economic and security conceptions of the region — an emerging *cultural* notion of regionalism, which is gaining in salience. Indeed with the close of the Cold War, the opening up of China, the retreat of old ideological certainties, and the defeat of domestic leftist opponents, culturalist understanding of international relations and conflict have replaced anti-communist interpretations of global conflict. It is this *culturalist* language that shows all the hallmarks of becoming more strident in the post-cold war era. In fact, this is beginning to overshadow the earlier dominance of 'economic' and security regional discourses. Singapore's important neighbours, Malaysia and Indonesia, have also begun to be prone to articulating an understanding of the region in culturalist terms.³¹

This *cultural* understanding, it should be clearly understood, addresses not only questions about the social construction of a region, but also speaks to the *identity* of states. While, as Neumann suggests,³² this is importantly a part of the processes of 'region building', it is, at the same time, not inconsistent with the development of *state identity*. Culturalist political language performs a two-fold function: first, it defines the region in terms of who is culturally included and excluded; second, the language provides opportunities for the creation of a sense of state identity.

In the immediate post-independence period, states such as Singapore created a 'siege-state' mentality to shore up state sovereignty. However, with the end of the Cold War, this garrison state strategy has become redundant, and the resort to a form of cultural discourse provides a set of strategies around which new concepts of state identity can evolve. A dominant feature of these new identities is that they constitute the dangerous 'other' in terms of *cultural* interests and, in addition, provide a set of strategies as a means of defending state sovereignty and authoritarian rule from both internal and external forces.³³

Certainly, cultural strategies of regionalism are by no means unique to the Southeast Asian region. For example, in Western Europe, the exaggerated notion of a 'common cultural tradition' has proved to be a valuable resource in building a European region. However, Southeast Asia differs in that cultural strategies are used to distinguish between the 'civilisational distinctiveness' of the 'East' and the 'West'. It is this 'civilisational' argument that is driving cultural definitions of the Asia-Pacific region. Consequently, much of the discourse is centred around identifying the 'West' as distinct from the 'East' — a curious inversion of western orientalism.³⁴ It follows that the central and

distinctive feature of this language is that 'Eastern' cultural values are of a different order from those of the 'West'.

Here, it is worth quoting in detail Singapore's influential former prime minister, or to use Chinese parlance — the current paramount leader — Lee Kuan Yew, who while maintaining that there is no 'Asian model as such', argues that:

Asian societies are unlike Western ones. The fundamental difference between Western concepts of society and government and East Asian concepts — when I say East Asians, I mean Korea, Japan, China, Vietnam, as distinct from Southeast Asia which is a mix between the Sinic and the Indian, though Indian culture also emphasises similar values — is that Eastern societies believe that the individual exists in the context of his family. He is not pristine and separate. The family is part of the extended family, and then friends and the wider society. The ruler or the government does not try to provide for a person what the family best provides.³⁵

According to Lee Kuan Yew, it is these cultural traits that have been responsible for the economic success of East Asia:

I think the World Bank had a very difficult job. It had to write up these very, very complex series of situations. But there are cultural factors which have been lightly touched over, which deserved more weightage. This would have made it a more complex study and of less universal application, but it would have been more accurate, explaining the differences, for example, between the Philippines and Taiwan.³⁶

The appeal of this cultural language to the authoritarian rulers of Southeast Asia — be they Lee Kuan Yew, Mahathir Mohamad or Suharto — is obvious. It provides a convenient defence of the coercive state apparatus in Southeast Asia. It remains, as will be elaborated below, predominantly a form of 'state' discourse. To put it differently, it is a cultural language articulated by the state and is central to the constitution of state identity. It needs to be emphasized that both domestically and internationally, Singapore has taken a strong lead in defining and initiating this cultural project.

Nevertheless, deep ambiguities remain in Singapore's delineation of the cultural region. Sometimes, it refers to, as Lee Kuan Yew's statement implies, to East or Sino-influenced Asia. Singapore increasingly seeks its identity in this cultural area rather than in the geographical Southeast Asia.³⁷ At other times, the cultural region encompasses both geographical South and East Asia. As with references to 'security region', there are deep ambiguities and contradictions that are at the heart of this culturalist analysis. This is an inevitable effect of Singapore's geographical location and trading interests.

However, there is a significant difference between *security* and *cultural* interpretations

of the region. Whereas the former draws on realist international texts to construct its reality; the latter draws from a wider array of sources for its intellectual underpinnings; these include 'orientalist texts', social science modernization theory and American management theory. The civilisational reading is deeply indebted to the classical texts of 'western' orientalism, but it reverses the positive and negative signs on such ideas as individualism, and the importance of the group or collective; nevertheless, it remains entrapped in these orientalist discourses. Modernization theory, particularly its cultural variants, such as those provided by Lucian Pye,³⁸ is another source for the construction of international relations as civilisational, rather than ideological. Finally, management theories which attributed the East Asian economic miracle to the impact of Confucianism have been taken seriously by both East Asian regimes and academics.³⁹ The irony of a cultural interpretation, based largely on rather dubious 'Western' sources, is lost on the new found interpreters and defenders of 'Eastern civilisation'.

To summarize the discussion so far, we have suggested that regionalism is not a natural entity, but a social construction. However, there is no single dominant method of defining a region. In the Singaporean case, there is no single regional discourse, but a multiplicity of regions and languages,⁴⁰ that define and articulate these regional definitions. In turn, the language of this regionalism is underpinned by a range of intellectual sources from realist international relations literature to modernization theory.

Politics of Regionalism

'Asian' regional organizations such as APEC do not bear immediate comparison with regional organizations in Europe, eg, the European Union (EU). They represent different approaches to regionalism. For example, there is no inevitable logic that places APEC on the same path to integration as the EU. The differences between the two can be categorized as 'regionalism from above' and 'regionalism from below'. Though aspects of the movements toward European integration were heavily elite driven,⁴¹ the European idea was shared and articulated by societal actors such as business groups, intellectuals, and the bureaucracy. In other words, the understanding of regionalism was, at least in part, *society-centred*. The massive literature on integration — be it neo-functional or based on epistemic communities and regionalism — reflects this perception of regionalism as being society-centred. By contrast, in Asian regionalism, the idea of an 'Asian' region is a *state-directed* rather than a society-centred project. Thus, as previously stated, the various forms of regionalism — economic, security, and cultural — that we have thus far discussed have all been state initiated and state driven.

In the Singaporean case, while there is a large number of 'think tanks' and policy institutes engaged in the pursuit of 'regional'

issues, none of these bodies are in any significant way independent of the state. As Rodan points out,⁴² the government allows little or no space for independent non-government groups. In this context those institutions and policy communities — such as the Pacific Economic Cooperation Committee (PECC), the Singapore Institute of International Affairs (SIIA), the Policy Studies Institute (PSI), and the Institute of South East Asian Studies (ISEAS) engaged in regional building exercises — tend to be state sponsored bodies, highly supportive of government policies. These institutions are not in themselves 'agenda setters', but play an important role in establishing support for the government's preferred approach to regionalism. It remains the case, however, that ideas for regional organization and innovation mostly emanate from the bureaucracy or from within the cabinet. Indeed, many of these institutes and think tanks function as parts of the state apparatus rather than as independent policy entities. For example, Chang Heng Chee, the current director of ISEAS, was formerly Singapore's representative at the United Nations. Similarly, a former ambassador, Tommy Koh, has gained a high profile in articulating and defending a culturalist understanding of the region. The overriding conclusion is that the discourse on Asian regionalism is a state rather than a society centred project. In so far as policy institutes and think tanks such as PSI and ISEAS have been involved, it has not been as policy or ideas innovators but as 'cheer leaders' for government policy.

It is not possible to sustain the idea of a policy network⁴³ because this assumes a degree of state and societal interaction in the construction of policy networks. It requires therefore a degree of societal autonomy. In the Singaporean case the low levels of societal autonomy mean that whatever networks exist, they are all highly state directed. Singaporean policy institutes and think tanks (including most academics) march to the beat of the state drum.

However, Singaporean policy institutes and think tanks have not been totally insignificant. First, they provide an institutional amplification of the state's regional discourse. In this sense, the cheer leading function is an important means of disseminating the language of regionalism. More importantly, Singaporean institutions perform a similar function with regard to the international environment. Singapore has traditionally been an economic middleman — a trading centre at the cross roads of international trade. Increasingly, Singapore institutions are performing this role with respect to the 'selling' of certain types of regional understandings. It has been especially active as 'vendor' for the idea of an Asian Free Trade Area (AFTA), and more recently engaged in the trafficking of cultural definitions of the region. A recent *Asiaweek* report on this issue makes the point that:

Not surprisingly, given Lee's influence, many of the outspoken new voices come from Singapore. They include Cabinet Mi-

nister Brig-Gen. George Yeo, Yung Buon, former ambassadors Tommy Lou Thong Kee and Chang Heng Chee and academic Lee Tsao Yuan. In speeches and in journals, they beat the drum for Singapore's alternative model.⁴⁴

The key institution in this regard is the ISEAS. Under the directorship of the late professor Sandhu, ISEAS pioneered a great deal of social science work on Southeast Asia. The work of this influential research institute contributed greatly to the development of a notion of 'Southeast Asia' as a regional entity, an aspect critical to the development of a Southeast Asian regional identity. For example, in the 1970s and 1980s under the leadership of a Thai economist, Dr N. Akransee, ISEAS built up a stock of information and knowledge on Southeast Asian economies. This knowledge was used to argue and justify the need for regional economic cooperation. Equally important, ISEAS has over the years acquired considerable 'expertise' in the areas of 'security' studies much of which is cast in a strongly realist cast. The production of this knowledge has contributed to the legitimization of certain kinds of approaches to regional security problems, particularly those that emphasize security through dialogue with big powers. More recently, ISEAS has been pursuing a 'cultural regional agenda' best illustrated in the current on-going project on Asian democracy.

Apart from this research role, ISEAS has also been influential in bringing together scholars, academics and policymakers from ASEAN countries to workshops and conferences which have contributed to the construction of a highly distinctive regional understanding. Particularly interesting was the ASEAN Roundtable instituted in 1980 to bring together a range of people from the private and public sectors.⁴⁵ In its choice of research agenda it has been highly responsive to the interests of the Singaporean state as well as Singaporean state elites. In effect, it has functioned as a interlocutor for the Singaporean state's regional discourse.

Liberalism, Regionalism and Sovereignty

From the foregoing, it is evident that the region building process in Singapore and Southeast Asia reveals deep differences when compared with similar processes in Europe; the latter provides a liberal regionalism rather than the Asian pattern which is more 'statist'. To put it differently, the European regional experience appears to be directed from 'below', whereas Asian regionalism is a process managed and organized from 'above'. The central difference between the two lies in the fact that political science literature on European integration is embedded in a liberal account of international relations. This liberal discourse, in turn, is anchored within a particular conception of territoriality. Liberal democratic conceptions of collective identity are founded on a notion of a political rather than a cultural community. In more general terms, the liberal tradition

emphasizes the nation as a political community founded on citizenship rather than on the basis of fundamental cultural values and interests. The liberal conception of political community presupposes a distinction — a space — between state and society. It is the construction of this public sphere that enables politics to be established as a purposeful human activity. Liberal governance is about managing and regulating this public space. Under these conditions the control of territorial space becomes less central to the exercise of sovereignty and the activities of government.

From this standpoint, there is a constant tension between market capitalism and territoriality. As market capitalism gained in strength territoriality it became less central to the activities of government. As Barry points out:

Within liberal democratic societies government must be conducted 'at a distance' from the economic and demographic processes of the nation. This does not mean that economic or social management is impossible, but that if it is conducted it must be done by enabling and encouraging the national capacities of its subjects — whether these subjects are understood as families, or individual or enterprises.⁴⁶

This leads, in turn, to the insightful suggestion that European regionalism is 'directed at reconstructing the European space in particular form, and a means for establishing this space as a possible object of government'.⁴⁷ The construction of this European space as the object of government is dependent on the marginal role of territoriality in the activities of government. More specifically it was the conflict between territoriality and 'space' that made possible, first, the national, and later, the European political and economic community. It is the construction and governance of this regional space that make European regionalism a fundamentally liberal project. In understanding European regionalism it is important to recognize that techniques of national economic regulation have been applied to ever widening areas of governance, because territoriality plays a marginal role in conceptions of sovereignty.

The Asian form of regionalism is significantly distinctive from this liberal brand of European regionalism. In Southeast Asia the control and organization of territorial space is constitutive of government and sovereignty. Territoriality is the central component in the East Asian understanding of sovereignty. This understanding of sovereignty allows little or no room for space between society and the state. It is not possible therefore to conceive of an 'Asian' conception of economic and political space in the same way as in the European regional project. This statist understanding of sovereignty in which territoriality plays such a fundamental role makes an 'Asia-Pacific' political, economic, or defence community an unlikely prospect.

Regional understandings are therefore

historically contingent. European regionalism arises out of a liberal mode of governance that enables the construction of political and economic space. Asian regionalism, on the other hand, is distinguished by the predominant role of state and state power. Regional understandings are therefore imposed by the state from 'above' rather than from below. This state directed regionalism is reflected in the words and concepts used to describe Asian regionalism. For example, instead of advocating an internal economic community, Asian-Pacific political leaders use the language of 'open regionalism'. Open regionalism⁴⁸ is, in essence, a demand that East Asian states be allowed to maintain their export oriented and/or mercantilist economic strategies without a corresponding effort to deregulate and open their markets because the latter course would entail a significant reduction in state power. Likewise, in the area of security, the preferred language is for a dialogue with the 'big powers' rather than building a security or defence community.

For countries such as Singapore the cultural language of Asian regionalism enables the construction of state identity in cultural terms. Increasingly, in the post-colonial period territorial control needs have tended to be conceived of in *symbolic* terms: the cultural constitution of state identity in Singapore, which makes it appear as an 'Asian' state allows territorial control to be manifested in cultural terms. The paradox of this Singaporean, and, I think, Southeast Asian, approach to regionalism is that it reinforces, rather than diminishes, state power. At a more general level, we need to be careful in the way in which we apply theories based on European experience to region building in the Asia-Pacific region. The crucial distinction that needs to be made is between 'statist' and 'societal' regional projects. The former allows little or no room for the policy communities and networks to pursue a regional agenda independent of the state. The crucial issue for political analysis of regionalism is to map the cognitive and institutional location of actors in various regional projects.

Our argument suggests that whereas European regionalism was concerned with the creation of regional space as an object of governance, Asian regionalism is about using regionalism to consolidate state power. It reinforces, rather than diminishes, the centrality of territoriality in the understanding of sovereignty. It is in this context that Singapore's current enthusiasm for cultural definitions of the region must be located.

Notes

1. Bruce M. Russett, *International Regions and the International Systems* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1967); Karl Deutsch, *Political Community and the North Atlantic Area* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957).
2. In fact much of the disagreement between scholars in 'standard' international relations studies boils down to their respective emphasis on criteria that define the regional entity.
3. Barry Buzan, *People, States and Fear: an Agenda for International Security Studies in the Post-Cold War Era* (Hemel Hempstead: Harcourt Wheatsheaf, 1991).
4. Iver B. Neumann, 'A region-building approach to Northern Europe', *Review of International Studies*, 1994, Vol. 20, p. 57.
5. Neumann, 'A region-building', pp. 51-74.
6. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: New Left Books, 1983).
7. Neumann, 'A region-building', p. 58.
8. Neumann, 'A region-building', p. 58. Following on from Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, it could also be argued that regions, like nations, need historical myths to sustain them. In the Asian-Pacific geographical area these myths are likely to be based on invented cultural traditions.
9. Michael A. Shapiro, *Language and Political Understanding: the Politics of Discursive Practice* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981).
10. Methodologically this implies a greater sensitivity to the differences between various regional projects. It suggests that no universal explanation about the nature of regionalism can be deduced from these historical contingent forms of regionalism.
11. Quoted in Amitav Acharya and M. Ramesh, 'Economic foundations of Singapore's security: from globalism to regionalism?', in G. Rodan (ed.), *Singapore Changes Guard* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1993), p. 141.
12. See, for example, Lee Tsao Yuan, *Growth Triangle: the Johor-Singapore-Riau Experience* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1991).
13. The growth triangle has considerable security implications for Singapore by drawing both Malaysia and Indonesia into an interdependent economic relationship with Singapore.
14. Acharya and Ramesh, 'Economic foundations', p. 141.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 144.
16. Garry Rodan, *The Political Economy of Singapore's Industrialization: National State and International Capital* (London: Macmillan, 1989).
17. Catherine Paix, 'The domestic bourgeoisie: How entrepreneurial? How international?', in Rodan (ed.), *Singapore Changes Guard*.
18. Paix, 'The domestic bourgeoisie', p. 170.
19. *Strait Times* (Singapore), 23 March 1994.
20. Stephan Haggard, *Pathways from the Periphery: the Politics of Growth in Newly Industrialised Countries* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990); Fredric C. Deyo (ed.), *The Political Economy of the New Asian Industrialism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987).
21. The point here is that this is not a natural economic region; it is very much an intellectual product of the 1970s and 1980s.
22. Speech by the Trade and Industry Minister, Mr Yeo-Cheow Tong, at 10th general meeting of PECC, *Strait Times* (Singapore), 23 March 1994, p. 2.
23. *Strait Times* (Singapore), 13 March 1993, p. 2.
24. It is this fact that may in the long term pose difficult problems for Singapore.
25. Lee Kuan Yew and the PAP have astutely preyed on these fears to establish political dominance.
26. Philippe Regnier, *Singapore — the City State in South East Asia* (London: Hurst and Company, 1987).
27. See, for example, Lim Jno-Jock, *Territorial power domains: Southeast Asia and China* (Singapore: Institute of South East Asian Studies, 1984); Dick Wilson, *The Neutralization of Southeast Asia* (New York: Praeger, 1975); Michael Leifer, *Dilemma of Statehood in Southeast Asia* (Singapore: Asia-Pacific Press, 1972); Edwin Martin, *Southeast Asia and China: the End of Containment* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1977).
28. For an overview of the philosophical issues raised by realism, see Hedley Bull, *The Anarchical Society* (London: Macmillan, 1977).
29. The major Malaysian, Indonesian and Singaporean strategic and international relations think tanks all subscribe to this realist framework. It needs to be added that these think tanks are in fact so closely aligned to the governments of these countries that it could be argued that they are part of the state apparatus.
30. Buzan, *People, States*.
31. In comparison, there is less use of these culturalist definitions of the region in Taiwan and South Korea.
32. Neumann, 'A region-building'.
33. For a development of the concept of state identity in relation to the state system see Alexander Wendt, 'Anarchy is what states make of it: the social construction of power politics', *International Organization*, Vol. 46, No. 2, 1993, pp. 391-426.
34. For a definitive account of Western orientalism see Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon, 1978).
35. Interview with Lee Kuan Yew, *Strait Times* (Singapore), 11 March 1994, p. 32. Also see p. 11.
36. *Ibid.*, p. 33.
37. This was a significant and decisive shift in Singapore's foreign policy of the 1960s and 1970s. It should also be pointed out that this has implications for the management of inter-ethnic relations in Singapore.
38. Lucian Pye, *Southeast Asia's Political System* (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1987).
39. George Lodge and Ezra Vogel, *Ideology and National Competitiveness: A comparison of nine different countries* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 1987).
40. There is the intriguing possibility that different parts of the state may initiate different regional conceptions.
41. For an approach that highlights the role of elites, see W. Sandholtz and J. Zysman, '1992: Recasting the European bargain world', *World Politics*, Vol. 42, No. 1, 1992, pp. 95-128.
42. Garry Rodan, 'Introduction: challenges for the New Guard and directions in the 1990s', in Garry Rodan (ed.), *Singapore Changes Guard*.
43. M. Atkinson and W. Coleman, 'Strong states and weak states: sectoral political networks in advanced capitalist economies', *British Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 19, No. 1, 1989, pp. 47-67.
44. 'The Asian Way', *Asiaweek*, 2 March 1994, p. 23.
45. Institute of South East Asian Studies, *Annual Report*, Singapore, 1981.
46. Andrew Barry, 'The European community and European government: harmonization, mobility and space', *Economy and Society*, Vol. 22, No. 3, 1993, p. 318.
47. *Ibid.*, p. 319.
48. For an elaboration of this concept see Hugh Patrick and R. Drysdale, 'An Asia-Pacific Regional Economic Organisation: an exploratory concept paper', Washington, Congressional Research Service, Library of Congress, 1979; A. Elek, 'APEC: motive, objectives and prospects', *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 46, No. 2, 1992, pp. 61-74.

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The Metamorphosis of Ravana in Tamil Society

Sasanka Perera

As far as the Tamil imagination is concerned, a somewhat similar process seem to have taken place. While a "legendary memory" of Ravana did exist through folklore his image was not constructed in the heroic model. But today all these have changed. Ravana has not only ceased to be a "bad guy", but he has also been appropriated and claimed as their own by Tamils. At least this is what evident at the level of political and nationalist rhetoric of some sections of the Tamil middle class, particularly those expatriates resident in Western Europe and North America. What were the circumstances under which this rather interesting metamorphosis took place?

Satchi Ponnambalam, in his polemical book, *Sri Lanka: The National Question and the Tamil Struggle* makes the following observations:

"The Mahabarata and Ramayana the two great Indian epics written in Sanskrit before the sixth century BC mention the Naga Kingdoms and their conquest by Ravana, the Tamil Yaksha king of Sri Lanka." (Ponnambalam 1983: 17)

"— According to tradition the Tamils of India and Sri Lanka are lineal descendents of the Naga and Yaksha people. (According to Harry Williams) Nagadipa in the north of Sri Lanka was an actual Kingdom known to historians and the people who occupied it were all part of an immigrant tribe from South India, Tamil people called Nagars — The conclusions that could validly be drawn from the new historical data clearly establish that the ancestors of the present day Tamils were the original occupiers of the island long before 543 B.C. which the Pali chronicles date as the earliest human habitation of Sri Lanka." (Ponnambalam 1983: 18)

The reasons for the use of the legendary Ravana and the Yakshas (and Nagas) as heroes and ancestors of contemporary Sri Lankan Tamils by both Ponnambalam and other nationalist writers like him was to "establish" an early presence for the Tamils in Sri Lanka preceding the legendary arrival of the Sinhalese, symbolized in the contemporary Sinhala imagination by the myth of Vijaya. Interestingly, in the context of deteriorating inter-ethnic relations, a new nationalist myth is constructed by giving an existing legend a new twist. Therefore Ravana who had no real ethnic value 20 years ago is suddenly vested with both ethnic and political value. He is no longer simply Ravana, who snatched Rama's wife Sita, but "Ravana, the Tamil Yaksha king who ruled Sri Lanka even before the arrival of Vijaya."

The construction, or rather the reconstruction of such political myths has to be understood in the context of Sinhala myth-making. Since the latter part of the 19th century certain key elements have been visible components in the Sinhala identity. The Sinhalese are descendents of Vijaya, who is a prince of Aryan origin from North India, and the Sinhalese were the first "civilized" people to arrive in the island. These mythic strands have also become components of the overall myth cluster explaining the origin of the Sinhalese. In the post independence politics of ethnicity this overall myth cluster has been utilized by many Sinhala nationalist politicians to assert the Sinhalese' political hegemony over the island, and to a certain extent to de-legitimize the very existence of Tamils and other minorities in the country. Such positions tend to suggest that Tamils arrived in Sri Lanka much later, and that too as destructive invaders, and therefore they should have no rights or their rights should be secondary to those of Sinhalese.

Thus the new reformulation of the Ravana myth has been to counter the claims generated by Sinhala nationalist myths of this nature. When the Sinhalese trace their ancestry to Vijaya, the Tamils trace theirs much further by using their version of the Ravana myth. The tendency here is clearly to assert that Tamils arrived in Sri Lanka prior to the Sinhalese and therefore they should have equal (or more) rights with the Sinhalese. Here the demand for equality is not based on the notion of individual rights, but on the basis of reconstructed myth.

With the metamorphosis of Ravana among Tamils, the demonic and the malevolent features of Ravana and Yakshas, which were evident in the Sinhala popular tradition have been purged. Or such features simply do not exist in the new Tamil political myth. In this sense the Tamil nationalist myth-makers seem to be following what the Hela activists attempted in the 1940s and 1950s by attempting to humanize Ravana and Yakshas.

The Tamil appropriation of Ravana however, has to be placed in a much more dynamic and extensive process of myth making. For instance, the mere suggestion that the Tamils have been in Sri Lanka before the Sinhalese has been inadequate. Thus the antiquity of Tamil civilization is traced back to the Mohenjodaro civilization:

"The Tamils of Sri Lanka are an ancient people — It was a Dravidian civilization which traced its origins to the people of Mohenjodaro in the Indus valley around 2,000 years before Christ." (Satyendar 1985: 85)

The question that needs to be posed at this point is, to what extent are these new myths popularly accepted in Tamil society. Certain patterns are clearly evident. Most of the writings that attempted these reformulation in the 1980s emerged from the West, and were written by predominantly English-educated middle class elements of the Tamil diaspora. However, the deteriorating inter-ethnic conflict and the entrenchment of political violence within this conflict seem to have motivated some Tamils to accept some of these ideas.

Thus even in 1988, many Tamil-medium students and teachers whom I interviewed were well aware of, and generally receptive to such political myths, despite the fact that at that time they were most readily available only in English (Perera 1992). Even though I could not find any Tamil translations, it seems reasonable to assume that there were many, given the widespread knowledge and belief in these myths among both students and teachers. It was also clear from the limited interviews conducted in 1988 that teachers were a significant channel for the transmission of these myths (Perera 1992). Recent interviews also suggest that in comparison to the general failure in popularizing the resurrected Ravana myth among the Sinhalese, the attempted resurrection of the Ravana myth and a whole range of similarly reformulated political myths seem to have been relatively more successful among Tamils. While the exact extent of this success remains to be seen, I would suggest in conclusion that the relative success of the Tamil project was due to the fact that the attempts were made at a time when there was adequate socio-political space for such dissent, specifically in the context of the aggressive process of Sinhala myth-making. On the other hand until this point Tamils did not have the kind of all-inclusive origin myth the Sinhalese had. Thus there was also a relatively stronger political compulsion to construct such a myth cluster.

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Trauma of Sri Lankan Tamils

THE SRI LANKAN TAMILS: ETHNICITY AND IDENTITY; Chelvadurai Manogaran and Bryan Pfaffenberger, Westview Press, Boulder. \$ 42.95.

This edited volume comprises nine essays by seven leading Sri Lankan specialists. Drawn from various Social Science disciplines, the contributors analyse the crucial issue of identity of Sri Lankan Tamils in the context of the multi-ethnic fabric of the Island Republic. As Bryan Pfaffenberger highlights in the introductory chapter, the book is the "first sustained attempt to comprehend the ethnic identity of the indigenous Tamil community of Sri Lanka, as that identity has been formed, and finally forged in bloodshed and fire, through the Tamil community's years of change and crisis." This academic exploration has enabled the authors to explain the phenomenon of Tamil militancy and the explosive issues relating to self-determination and separatism.

It is necessary to highlight the fact that the projection of Sinhalese and Tamils as two antagonistic identities, at war with each other for several centuries, by Sinhalese/Tamil chauvinist writers in an illustration of the well known axiom that truth and objectivity are the casualties in times of conflict.

Distinguished anthropologists like Prof. Thambiah have pointed out that the Sinhalese and the Tamils share many "parallel features of traditional caste kinship, popular religious cults, customs and so on." Throughout the colonial period, there were no ethnic conflicts in Ceylon, except the Sinhalese — Muslim Conflict of 1915, in which strangely the Sri Lankan Tamil leadership took the side of the Sinhalese.

As Pfaffenberger points out "it is reading history backwards to suppose that today's problems stem from yesterday's divisions." The ethnic conflict is the result of post-independence Sri Lankan politics, an offshoot of the nation building experiment, when the Sinhalese leaders tried

to build the nation on the basis of Sinhalese language and Buddhist religion, to the exclusion of all minority claims.

In an interesting essay on the "Material basis for separatism" Amita Shastri describes how from the demand for greater autonomy, the Tamil political parties and militant groups developed, through various stages, the demand for a separate state for Tamil Eelam. Dagmar — Hellmann Rajanayagam discusses the changes that have taken place in Tamil perception about themselves and how the Tamil writers probed the past to find Tamil presence in Sri Lanka from very early times so that they could justify the claim that they are the authentic sons of the soil.

In another essay, Dagmar provides insights into various Tamil militant groups, their political ideologies, their organisational framework and how finally the LTTE was able to dominate the Sri Lankan Tamil politics. Chelvadurai Manogaran explores the crucial issue of land colonisation, its nature and extent and how the demographic composition in the east has been radically altered to the detriment of the Tamils. Prof. Wilson surveys the broad divisions among the Sri Lankan Tamils — Jaffna, Batticaloa and Colombo — and how the effects of these divisions are getting blurred and slowly a Ceylon Tamil nationalism is emerging.

The Sri Lankan Tamils, who were able to get considerable sympathy and support from the international community after the communal holocaust in July 1983, are facing a great dilemma. As Pfaffenberger writes, "In the areas under LTTE control, massive and persistent violations of fundamental rights have occurred as the LTTE has sought to suppress even the rumour of dissent from its policies". Despite LTTE's "brutality and fascism", if it is able to get Tamil support, it is for three reasons: (1) Colombo will never agree to devolve sufficient power to the north and the East; (2) There is nothing to be gained by supporting the Tamil moderates, who have not been able to obtain major concessions from Colombo and (3) In the event of a complete defeat of the LTTE, Colombo "would drop any remaining pretence of caring to address Tamil grievances".

Pfaffenberger's conclusions are worth repeating in full: "Perhaps the cruelest irony of the Sri Lanka conflict is that, at the hands of Sinhalese hegemony, the Sri Lankan Tamils are well on the way to transforming their ethnic identity so that it mirrors the modern Sinhala identity in its equation of race, religion, language and territory.

But standing against this are many Sri Lanka Tamils who, like their counterparts among the Sinhalese, prefer to emphasise the incorporative and tolerant aspects of their culture. They fight, often at the cost of their lives, for the rights of all people of Sri Lanka. Only time will tell whether their heroic voices will prevail over those that call for ethnic cleansing, hatred and killing".

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Why there's sound of laughter in this rustic tobacco barn....

There is laughter and light banter amongst these rural damsels who are busy sorting out tobacco leaf in a barn. It is one of the hundreds of such barns spread out in the mid and upcountry intermediate zone where the arable land remains fallow during the off season.

Here, with careful nurturing, tobacco grows as a lucrative cash crop and the green leaves turn to gold... to the value of over Rs. 250 million or more annually, for perhaps 143,000 rural folk.

Tobacco is the industry that brings employment to the second highest number of people. And these people are the tobacco barn owners, the tobacco growers and those who work for them, on the land and in the barns.

For them, the tobacco leaf means meaningful work, a comfortable life and a secure future. A good enough reason for laughter.

 **Ceylon Tobacco Co. Ltd.**
*Sharing and caring
for our land and her people.*



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