

***How does an Understanding of Identity as
Constructed develop an understanding of
Peacebuilding?***

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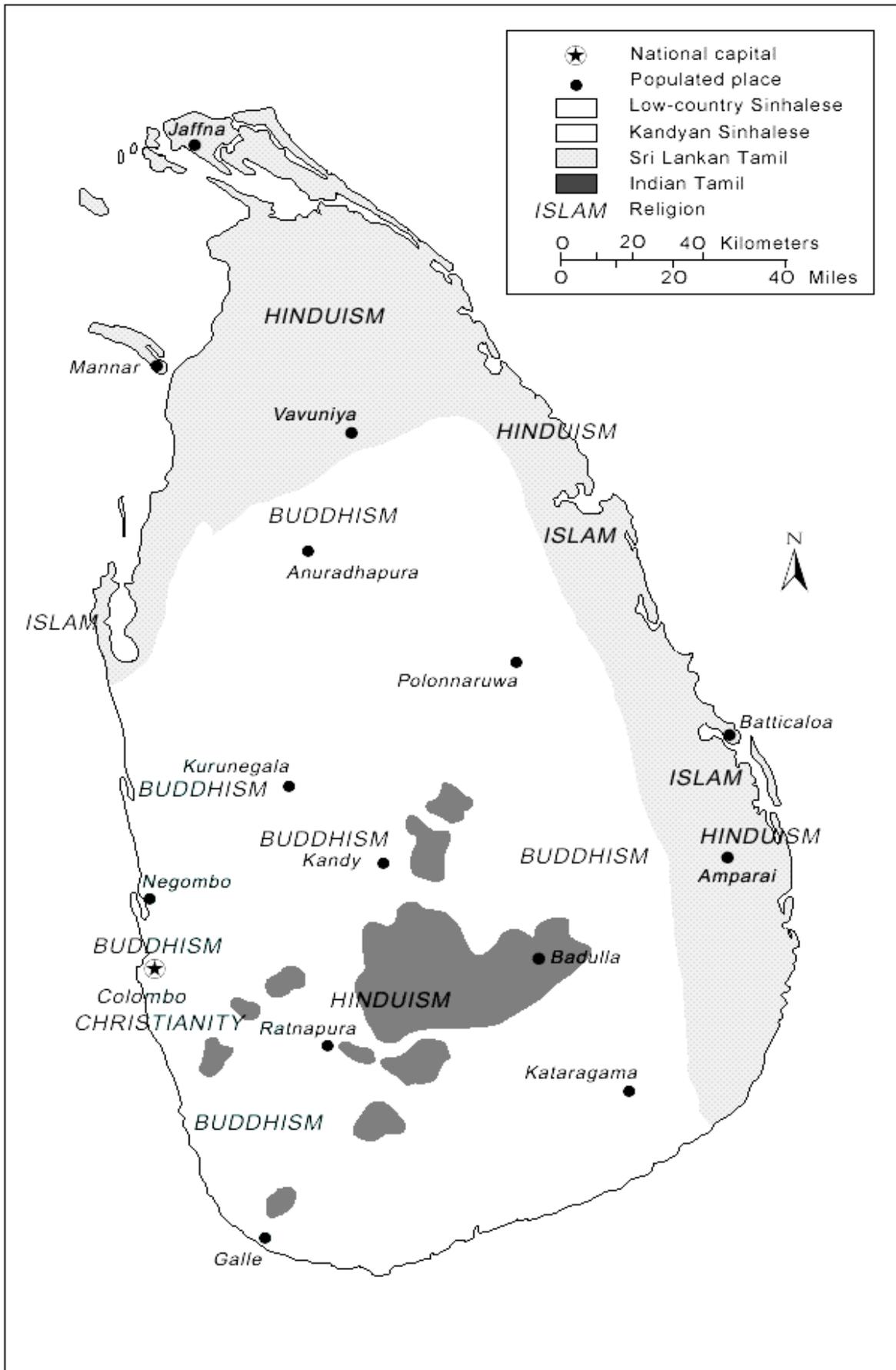


Figure . Ethnolinguistic Groups and Religions. 1988

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“hybridity as such is a ruse to denaturalise and historicise the settled identity categories we take for granted, and to highlight the contingent, contextual and political nature of apparently ancient cultural identities”¹

“Through the post-modern lens, a problem is seen not as a personal deficit of the person but as constructed within a pattern of relationships”²

Introduction

The role of identity within conflict is a central concern in the search for the successful resolution of conflict. It provides a concept from which understandings of why communities and individuals enter violent conflict, whether characterised as ethnic, national, or ideological, may be found.

This dissertation begins with a mapping of conflict resolution and identity theory. John Burton³ and Edward Azar⁴ are chosen from the conflict resolution field, because of their prominence within the conflict resolution and because much of their theory centres on the needs associated with identity. The place and understanding of identity within this work is explored. Chapter Two consists of an in-depth study of identity theory, from the level of the nation to the level of the individual and the community. A central concern is to examine the identity theory that conflict resolution draws on, and to determine how such theory informs the work of conflict resolution. It will be shown that there are serious conceptual difficulties in the identity theory that Burton and other Needs Theorists draw on, and that understanding identity as constructed and contextual offers significant advantages to understanding conflict and conflict resolution.

Chapter Three applies these findings. The extent to which identity theory can be applied and offer useful insights into the conflict in Sri Lanka is explored. It is shown that sensitivity to the formation of identity reveals the existence, and significance, of multiple identities and sub-identities within monolithic frames of identity. The complex relationship between these multiple is asserted as requiring recognition and addressing in any intervention aimed at conflict transformation or resolution⁵.

¹ Rajasingham, 2002, 63

² Winslade and Monk, 2000, 45

³ Burton, 1979, 1990

⁴ Azar, 1986

⁵ Within conflict resolution theory there is a distinction made by some theorists between conflict resolution and transformation. Miall et al refer to conflict resolution as a situation or process in which “deep-rooted source of conflict are addressed, and resolved. This implies that behaviour is no longer violent, attitudes are no longer hostile and the structure of the conflict has changed” while conflict

The findings from Chapters One, Two and Three are drawn together in Chapter Four, to explore how identity theory, and lessons learnt from Sri Lanka, can be used in the development of conflict resolution theory that reflects these new understandings of identity.

It is suggested that an understanding of identity as constructed highlights the existence of multiple, complex and hybrid identities, whose presence in the dissertation must be acknowledged in the successful development and application of the peacebuilding project.

transformation is referred to as “a deep transformation in the parties and their relationships and in the situation that created the conflict” (Miall et al, 21). Here transformation is used in this sense, and regarded as the ultimate goal of the peacebuilding project, in which the relationships underlying situations of conflict are transformed in which a way that harmonious coexistence is possible.

Chapter One

Conflict Resolution Theory

A Totalist and Non-Totalist Approach

At the heart of Needs Theory lies the assertion that there exist nine Basic Human Needs. These are identified by Burton as; a need for consistency in response; a need for stimulation; a need for security; a need for recognition; a need for distributive justice; a need to appear rational; a need for meaning in response; a need for a sense of control and a need for role defence (defence of roles that permits satisfaction of needs)⁶. These human needs are the basis of Burtons⁷ and Azar's⁸ approach to conflict resolution and form the subject of most critiques of the needs theory.

Burtons approach to conflict resolution is chosen as the starting point in this theoretical framework because of its influential position within the conflict resolution field. The theoretical underpinnings and implications that a needs based understanding of conflict and conflict resolution has shall provide the focus for this first chapter.

The approach to understanding conflict and conflict resolution suggested by Burton is contrasted with approaches that assert the importance of understanding the role of culture in conflict and conflict resolution. The 'culture critique' of various theorists⁹ is employed, as is the approach of social constructionism that offers a lens through which to approach an alternative view of the individual in society, and the functioning of identity.

These approaches use different epistemological bases and stem from different branches of the social sciences, but have in common an emphasis on the role that culture plays in the way that people understand and act in conflict, and in their approaches to conflict resolution.

Vayrynen¹⁰ distinguishes between the Human Needs theory of Burton and Azar, and the alternative perspectives referred to above, using the terms 'totalist' and 'non-

⁶ Burton, 1979, Burton and Sandole, 1986

⁷ Burton, 1990

⁸ Azar, 1986

⁹ Vayrynen 2001, Avruch, 1998, Avruch & Black 1987

¹⁰ Vayrynen, 2001

totalist' approaches to conflict. Non-totalist approaches claim that "*culture is vital for becoming and being a moral person*"¹¹, while the totalist needs theory asserts that the behaviour of people is driven by innate human needs that are universal and applicable in all contexts.

The non-totalist approach insists on the importance of culture as a focus for understanding the contextual construction of conflict within a particular social setting. Non-totalist approaches assert that for individuals "*the world is experienced in terms of typifications*"¹² which categorise and classify the world to us in certain ways"¹³ and "*the social groups and institutions of which we are members participate in creating and defining realities for individuals*"¹⁴. The non-totalist approach is interested in the way that the social world, conflict included, is perceived as reality by agents acting within it. Each conflict, and each individuals understanding of conflict is regarded as unique¹⁵.

The understanding of conflict as unique and understood through the perceptions of the parties to the conflict rests on the argument that culture is constitutive of the reality as experienced by the parties. Social constructionism offers a lens in which this non-totalist approach can be organised as theory and applied in practice. A social constructionist perspective argues that within cultures there exist discourses surrounding understandings of conflict and processes for the resolution or transformation of conflict. These local understandings of conflict and attendant resolute processes are termed by Avruch, Black and Scimecca as, respectively, ethno-conflict theories and ethnopraxis¹⁶.

¹¹ *ibid*, 2

¹² Vayrynen uses the word typifications to include the expectations of the world that we hold (how we expect it to be), the social patterns and structures that emerge from individual's actions, and the locating of the self in typifications held about the world. Typifications are stored as 'stocks of knowledge'. Vayrynen, 2001, 95

¹³ *ibid*, 3

¹⁴, *ibid*, 7

¹⁵ An understanding that identifies human needs as central to understanding the causes and solutions to conflict is perceived by a social constructivist perspective to be one approach among others; one that has emerged from a particular cultural location; the modern, 'Enlightened' 'West', and is particular, rather than universal, in its nature. By 'modern' it is meant that it emerges from the perspective of modernity, and is heavily formed by the process and principles of the Enlightenment (which is referred to here as a "political concept for emancipation from prejudice through the diffusion of scientific knowledge with its many practical consequences" (Vayrynen, *op cit*, 76)). For a comprehensive exploration of the meaning of 'modern' and 'modernity' see Hall & Gieben's 1992 *Formations of Modernity*, while for a good explanation of the location of conflict resolution in modernity see Betts, 2000.

¹⁶ Avruch et al 1991

Recognising the validity of culturally sensitive approaches to conflict and their resolution reflects the emphasis placed on an actor's own subjective understanding of the world. Culture is seen as the language that is employed in the participation and interpretation of the world¹⁷.

From the social constructionist perspective, an understanding of culture is essential to any analysis of conflict. The implications this has for understanding Burtons approach to conflict resolution and his explanations for the practice of his theory in the Problem Solving Workshop (PSW) will be the subject of this first part.

The Biology of Needs

Basic Human Needs theory draws heavily from other theories of human needs¹⁸, and like the most of them, asserts that there are "*certain universal needs rooted in the biological conditions of being human*"¹⁹. These are claimed to be "*ontological and universal*"²⁰, inherent in being human and thus applicable to all. Because culture and context are secondary to the universality of human needs, the nature of human needs allows for an approach to conflict resolution that is universal in application.

Because they are biologically situated within every human being, they are universal and found everywhere regardless of cultural or social differences. It is the denial or discounting of culture, and of the social context and contextually specific understandings of conflict, that have generated the largest amount of debate around the needs theory²¹.

Within the human needs approach, regardless of ones background and social context, identity or culture, the motivations and underlying causes of conflict reside in the degree to which ones human needs are met or not. People thus "*seek to fulfil a set of deep-seated, universal needs*"²², the motivations for which drive all conflict, and which are found in all human beings. For Burton part of being a human being is having Basic Human Needs.

¹⁷ Vayrynen, 2001, 3

¹⁸ Notably Maslows Theory of Needs

¹⁹ Vayrynen, 2001, 33

²⁰ Burton, 1990, 2

²¹ Jabri 1996, Vayrynen 2001, Avruch, 1998, Avruch & Black 1987

²² Burton in Avruch and Black, 1987

Culture in Need

According to Burton, people's behaviours can be best understood by reference to underlying human needs. These biologically based needs form the basis out of which peoples actions²³ originate. Satisfiers are the practices oriented to needs satisfaction. It is within the actions taken to satisfy needs that we find where Burton locates culture in his theory. Within these practices can be found the visible elements of what constitutes culture. For Burton "*culture has this vital importance because it is a satisfier – that is, a means by which to achieve and to preserve human needs of identity and recognition*"²⁴. In its role as a satisfier culture is seen by Burton to play, if anything, a problematic role in conflict resolution, one to be "*managed or resolved*"²⁵. For Burton, in conflict situations it is the choice of satisfiers that are regarded as conflict behaviour. Beneath these satisfiers, and all forms of cultural expression, understanding and behaviour, lies the inevitable drive to satisfy basic human needs.

Within a workshop, looking beyond currently employed satisfiers in recognition of the underlying nature of human needs suggests that a search for and identification of alternative, non-violent, satisfiers is a central goal of the process. Max-Neef²⁶ suggests a format of the needs workshop in which the sole concern is the examination and selection of alternative satisfiers²⁷. Satisfiers are a central part of conflict resolution.

The existence of norms, practices and institutions that vary between different cultures are seen as expressions of these underlying needs, the product of a collective group of individuals' efforts to create a functional society that will meet the underlying needs of the individuals within that society.

²³ Although Burton makes the distinction between actions and behaviours (actions being the manifestation of the underlying motivation, behaviour as the reason for action, in Burton, 1979, 32)

²⁴ Burton, 1990 211

²⁵ Ibid, 1990, 211

²⁶ Max-Neef, 1989, 40-43..

²⁷ Max-Neef proposes a framework, which although primarily concerned with development, is equally applicable to the process of conflict resolution. For him, the identification of alternative appropriate and 'non-destructive' satisfiers is the core goal of a needs based and satisfier focussed workshop.

A social constructionist explanation of these cultural manifestations offers a different understanding of the relationship between the individual and the surrounding societal forms.

Rather than the solitary individual of Burton who acts to create social structures that meet underlying human needs²⁸, the social constructionist perspective studies the manner in which social actors are constructed in and by the social world, and how they then construct their own reality, identity and needs within that world²⁹. The study of objective reality, the ‘interests’ of Burton, are rejected in favour of understandings that explore the reality, or the “*what is known as reality*”³⁰ in the subjective experience of social agents. It is in the interplay between social actors and organisations that the reality of organisational structures are created, and understood as reality by those social actors. Vayrynen states that “*individuals place themselves in social structures through biographies, and typical biographies work as a means of socialisation*”³¹.

The biographies of individuals and groups are represented as stories that include understandings of histories, reasons and validations for the present they occupy. These stories flow through the social world and serve as narratives that the individual uses to locate him or herself within the social world, and as a means of understanding that same social world. This meaning serves as the basis for action, and the definition of what is considered legitimate and illegitimate behaviour.

Because the reality of actors, in this case actors within conflict, is always subjective, an understanding of the culture, the context and socially constructed nature of reality offer a different means of understanding peoples behaviour in conflict.

Burton’s approach to conflict resolution is premised on the reframing of conflict for the conflict parties, and presenting the reasons and causes of the conflict in a new, needs centred way. Thus (limited) interests give way to understandings of conflict through (unlimited) needs. If these needs are not met to a sufficient degree through the normal systems and institutions within society, then conflict becomes one way through which these needs can be sought. Through the human needs approach to

²⁸ The drive to create a social scenario in which individual human needs are met is so strong that if frustrated, people are prepared to engage, sanction or support conflict. This is the underlying hypothesis of Burton’s theory.

²⁹ Vayrynen, op cit 105

³⁰ ibid 107

³¹ ibid 107

conflict Burton seeks to eliminate “*the problems that lead to conflictual behaviour in the first place*”³². This understanding of conflict is critiqued by the likes of Avruch, who notes Galtung’s distinction between positive peace and negative peace, where the former is the transformation of ‘structural’ and ‘cultural’ violence³³ and the latter is the absence of physical violence, and places Burtons notion of peace firmly in the latter.

An approach to conflict resolution, and peace, that emerges from a social constructionist perspective offers a different way to approach these issues than that emerging from human needs theory.

If reality is understood as constructed, and constructed through the relationship between human agents and social structures, then any study of conflict or effort to engage with conflict resolution requires an understanding of these processes. If reality emerges from shared typifications, located biographies and processes of communication between social groups and institutional structures, then it is imperative to develop understandings of how and where shared typifications disintegrate, biographies become confused or dysfunctional and communication breaks down. Processes of conflict resolution must be developed that can counter these processes, in ways that are reflective of and integrative with the local understandings of reality and conflict. In this way the relationship between social agents and structures can be reformulated to achieve a state of positive peace. Culture and context become the determinant factor in processes of understanding and transforming conflict.

The Problem Solving Workshop

Burton asserts that “*people of all races and all creeds have some common values and similar objectives*”³⁴; the satisfaction of human needs.

The universal application of unmet human needs as causes of conflict denies the importance of context and the uniqueness of each conflict. Thus the practice of the

³² Burton in Avruch, 1998 27

³³ Structural violence is defined by Galtung (1996) as violence that arises out of social structures (e.g.. The perceived discrimination against Tamils in educational and institutions of employment in Sri Lanka, cultural violence as that which legitimises structural violence (the historical justifications and referral to majoritarian democracy by the Singhalese in Sri Lanka) and actual violence (the physical violence the occurs between the Tamils and Singhalese on Sri Lanka)

³⁴ Burton, 1987

human needs theory, the PSW has been criticised for failing to recognise the uniqueness of the parties engaged in the process:

“[f]or all you (PSW facilitators) care, we can be Zimbabweans, Basques, Arabs Jews, Catholics, Protestants, Greeks, Turks. To you we are just guinea pigs to be tested, or at least to be engineered”³⁵

Although the practice of Conflict Resolution workshops may have moved on in their relation to culture³⁶, within the needs theory that forms the conceptual underpinning of the process, the cultural context has a very low level of relevance, to the extent that individual identities are felt by some participants to be ignored in the needs based workshop. Clearly, for some this is felt to be a critical issue.

The PSW has two aims: the facilitation of a new understanding of the underlying reasons behind conflict, and the development of skills so that this understanding can be applied by participants in the future and thus prevent, or in Burton's term, *provent* conflict³⁷.

Universalising Rationality

The assumption that solutions or resolutions to conflict can be generated through the PSW stems from the belief that there is a universal rationality that all actors can utilise, and that in the reframing of interests to needs, the reality of the conflict can be determined.

Within the framework of the PSW, Burton assumes that all actors are capable of taking into account the motivations of other actors and their motivations. They are capable of “*calculating the utility of expected outcomes*”³⁸, what Burton terms ‘costing’. The notion of universal rationality is integral to the explanation of the PSW process, as it is assumed that all participants are capable of adopting the notion

³⁵ (Benvenisti, in Vayrynen, 2001, 1)

³⁶ Conflict resolution workshops such as those run by ‘Responding to Conflict’ (RTC) engage with the cultural context from which participants come, in which “*the need for adaptation to context and culture*” is emphasised (RTC website).. Within the conceptual theory of needs however, culture remains identified in terms of needs satisfiers.

³⁷ Burton defines the ‘provention’ of conflict as “a philosophy and a political-social system that could replace those presently dominant” (Burton, 2001, 23), and which integrates a needs based understanding to social life. The application of behaviours encouraged within the PSW are intended to be replicated outside of the process, and thus ‘provent’ conflict.

³⁸ Vayrynen, 2001, 62

costing their actions. Like other theorists on identity³⁹ Burton bases needs theory on the understanding that actors will always attempt to obtain the maximum benefit from any negotiation, and that reframing the negotiation or problem solving in terms of unlimited needs offers parties the possibility of pursuing maximum gain for mutually beneficial and sustainable needs⁴⁰. Solving problems identified in the workshop are seen as instrumental in attaining further goals, in this case the resolution of conflict.

The instrumental rationality inherent in Burtons needs theory and its application in the problem-solving workshop is identified as emerging, as already noted, from one cultural location, the Enlightenment modernity of the ‘West’⁴¹, and particular to that location. Needs theory and the problem solving approach to conflict resolution universalises a notion of rationality; and assumes that actors cost their actions and engage in the conscious formation of the future.

Culturally contextual concepts such as the power of fate and fatalistic approaches to life, implications inherent within the notion of ‘Insh Allah’ and beliefs in such concepts such as Karma are neglected in Burton’s paradigm of conflict resolution, which fails to reflect the cultural importance of such ideas.

False Consciousness

Within the workshop setting the facilitators act as professionals, skilled in “*conflict analysis, management techniques or human behaviour*”⁴². As such their function is to guide the participants through a process in which the problems they bring to the workshop are reframed in terms of needs. Implicit is the assumption that participants are not aware of the ‘true’ cause of the conflict, unaware that it is the denial of needs satisfaction that drives them into a situation of conflict. The trained professionalism of the facilitators enables them, according to Burton and Azar⁴³ to show the participants what the underlying causes of conflict are. Inherent within such an understanding is the belief “*that human beings under the influence of some forms of society or modes of production (e.g. capitalist) do not get to know their true needs*”.⁴⁴ The skill and enlightened rationality of the facilitators allows them to help the participants to realise

³⁹ The seminal text on ethnic identity and group formation is Barth’s 1969 *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*. Here he develops an actor centred approach to group formation, which is based on a belief that actors act to maximise their benefits. (Eriksen, 2001, 62)

⁴⁰ Burton, 1990

⁴¹ For an explanation of Enlightenment rationality and modernity, see 15

⁴² Azar, 1986, 35

⁴³ Burton 1986 and Azar, 1990

⁴⁴ Vayrynen, 2001, 51

their true needs. This reveals a further ethnocentric characteristic of Burton's human needs approach. Burton presumes that his conception of human needs is the true needs, that he is able to reach the objective diagnosis of needs. Yet Burton's approach is a product of one particular cultural background, and rooted in that. Furthermore, as will be demonstrated through a social constructionist perspective, the possibility of realising a truly objective account of needs, or reality, is deeply problematic. Thus *"viewing real needs as independent of the perceptions, concepts and frames of reference of actors in the social world, tends to produce an authoritarian definition of needs which dictates what the real needs should be"*⁴⁵.

The grounding of theory, and practice, in basic human needs, has a tendency to produce processes that impose a particular form of thinking, of behaviour and of understanding on the participants of that process.

An approach that recognises the 'reality' of the of the individual in the narrative that they themselves express, sees the 'true needs' in the perceptions of that individual in a particular context. By drawing on the understandings and beliefs of the individual, 'true consciousness' is only true to the extent that its subscribers believe it to be true.

Needs in Society

Burton's theory of human needs also has implicit assumptions regarding the nature of society and the relationship between the individual and society. Given that social harmony is linked to needs satisfaction, it is imperative that social structures and institutional values allow for the satisfaction of these needs. If they do not, conflict will emerge. Vayrynen notes, *"unless elite groups or authorities allow the satisfaction of human needs, they are not functional for the society"*⁴⁶.

There is a functional logic inherent within Burton's needs theory. This view of society clearly positions the individual as the constitutive element of society, which exists to allow for the meeting of needs. Once individual's needs are met, individual peace will transmute into social peace. This belief, that *"once basic human needs of the individual are fully satisfied, individuality will merge into and become identical with sociality"*⁴⁷, underlines the centrality the individual plays in an understanding of group conflict informed by basic human needs. For Burton, an individual with fully developed human needs becomes a fully moral person, who, in an ideal world,

⁴⁵ op cit, 2001, 51

⁴⁶ op cit, 2001 35

⁴⁷ Roy, 1991 127

constitutes with others a fully moral society. A fully moral society is legitimised solely to the extent to which it provides for human needs satisfaction. The implications are that the social structures exist as objective legitimate entities, separate from the individual agent, so long as they are deemed as functional (in satisfying needs) by the social agent. For Burton the individual and the structure exist as separate, discrete entities, with a direction of control that exists solely from the agent to the structure. Upon re-entry to their community, workshop participants are supposed to exert influence upon their social structures and fellow societal members to affect the conclusions reached within the workshop⁴⁸. According to Burton, the individual agent is free to reject, challenge, or mould the structure if it is not deemed functional.

Berger and Luckmann's seminal account of the way in which reality is understood contends an alternative view of the relationship between agents and social structures, and one that offers a different conception of the process in which individuals make sense of the social world, and their own role within it. Berger and Luckmann suggest that within the social interactions between individuals' understandings and typifications of each other's behaviour develop, and form a set of *known* and *expected* patterns of action and thus identity. As this develops wider sets of knowledge are constructed to explain the reality of the other. In this way "*a social world will be in the process of construction, containing within it the roots of an expanding institutional order*"⁴⁹.

It is in the interplay between individuals that a social world is constructed, and experienced as "*external and coercive fact*"⁵⁰. However, when a social world is maintained through the interaction of only two agents, the constructed social worlds objectivity remains "*tenuous and easily changeable*"⁵¹. It is only when these typifications are passed down through generations that they achieve the status of an unalterable, pre-given reality. Through time the constructed reality becomes concrete, and its status as a pre-given reality affirmed.

⁴⁸ This process, and the assumptions made of the change participants are hoped to make, can be criticised for not questioning the relationship between society and the individual. It is assumed that the individual is capable of transferring the conclusions reached within the workshop and exerting influence upon his or her peers. The problem of re-entry and transference points to the crucial issue of participant selection.

⁴⁹ Berger & Luckmann, 1996, , 75

⁵⁰ Vayrynen, op cit 107

⁵¹ Berger & Luckmann, op cit 76

Through the social constructionist lens of Berger and Luckmann, then, particular understandings of conflict, and the social structures and organisational forms from which they emerge are of central importance. For Vayrynen, *“the way groups and institutions distribute knowledge, define reality through shared typifications and use language becomes a critical issue for conflict studies”*⁵²

Accepting the approach suggested of Berger and Luckmann, Vayrynen and the social constructionist lens implies that studying the way that the individual perceives reality, and the placing of him/herself within that reality is of prime importance. In order to explore how this might occur, the understanding of identity within needs theory will be sketched.

Identity in Need

So far the theoretical framework of Burton’s Human Needs Approach has been outlined and a social constructionist critique suggested as an alternative lens through which to understand human behaviour and explain the PSW. It is now necessary to define the unit of analysis of identity that will be used to apply the theoretical framework of this paper to the case study of Sri Lanka.

Violent conflicts today are increasingly attributed to identity, and identity differences. According to Vayrynen, the causes of most conflicts in the world today are *“predominantly if not solely attributable to identity differences”*⁵³.

Identity within needs theory forms one of the central units of analysis in the application of theory to practice. It has consistently remained within Burton’s list of the Basic Human Needs he outlines as fundamental for the harmony of the individual and society. Indeed, Burton explicitly links identity with conflict when he states, *“conflictual situations emerge when...ethnic identity and culture are threatened”*⁵⁴. Although the number of needs has varied through Burton’s development of the theory, identity and security have always been included within this list⁵⁵. Thus *“the need for identity is regarded by several contemporary needs theorists as a fundamental requirement”*⁵⁶.

Burton and Azar adopt a particular type of identity model in the study of what has variously been termed ‘deep rooted’, ‘protracted’ or ‘intractable’, social conflicts. For

⁵² Vayrynen, op cit 108

⁵³ ibid 120

⁵⁴ Azar, & Burton, 1986 118

⁵⁵ Avruch, K., 1998 88

⁵⁶ Fisher, 1990 94

them “*the most useful unit of analysis in protracted social conflict situations is the identity group – racial, religious, ethnic, cultural and other*”⁵⁷. Conflict is understood to emerge because of the unmet need for free expression of identity.

Identity is clearly a significant area of concern within needs theory. Given its importance, it would seem natural that there would be a clear explanation of the manner in which identity is conceptualised within Burton and Azar’s theory of basic human needs. However this is not the case. For example, in his comprehensive, 280-page long book *Conflict: Resolution and Provention* there is only one section, less than a page long that deals specifically with identity⁵⁸. In it, Burton states:

“in this approach to conflict resolution, the nature of the human being and the identity group is a given. The resolution of problems and conflicts is based on an acceptance of the individual and identity group as givens”.⁵⁹

This understanding of the individual and the identity group stems from the understanding of the cause of conflict inherent within the basic human needs approach. Conflict is seen to emerge when the social organisations and institutions fail to meet the human needs of the identity group, where the individual defines which human needs are of importance. The image that appears is thus of an “*individual driven to satisfy his or her basic needs and of a community or collectivity which is the mere sum of its constituent parts*”⁶⁰. Within this model of society, social structures, and the leaders within them, are given legitimacy and followed to the extent that they meet identity needs. In contexts of conflict defined by issues of identity, whether nationalist, ethnic, caste or kinship, individuals give licence to leaders’ mobilisation of support for entering violent conflict if it is perceived⁶¹ to meet the needs of identity. In situations where conflict is over resources, the extent to which identity needs (which may be closely tied to other basic needs) are the determinate factor varies.

Within basic needs theory the understanding of identity is an unproblematised, monolithic entity that exists as a category from and for which basic needs exist. As

⁵⁷ Azar, E., 1986 31

⁵⁸ Burton, J., 1990,

⁵⁹ *ibid*, 153

⁶⁰ Jabri, 1996, 123

⁶¹ If it is *perceived* to meet identity needs: within the dialectic construction of reality and identity exists the possibility for leaders to influence and manipulate this process to further this own agendas. These agendas exist within the socially shared understanding of reality.

Jabri notes, the conception of identity within needs theory is “*a static model of already programmed individuals easily mobilised once their identity needs are recognised as being violated*”⁶².

It has already been suggested that such readings of the relationship between the individual and society limit the extent to which context is taken into account in understandings of conflict and conflict resolution. Instead, Berger and Luckmann suggest “*identity is a key element of subjective reality and stands in a dialectical relationship with society*”⁶³. For Berger and Luckmann it is the social institutions that determine what is a legitimate identity, and are the prime definers of reality. The basic human needs theory doesn’t recognise the dialectical relationship between individual and society through which the perception of reality is constructed for individuals. Schutz, unlike Berger and Luckmann, identifies the social processes and interactions between groups and the individual as the basis for a shared reality. For Schutz identities emerge from the different social groups that we are members of. Because individuals are members of many different social groups that possess different typifications, there exist multiple identities.

Although there may be tensions or conflict between the different identities, because, in theory at least, the individual is able to choose which of the multiple identities to utilise, it is the individual agent that possesses the ability to assert that identity that causes him or her the least tension. In practice, however, threats of violence and the pressures of conflict suggest that the choice is not always available⁶⁴. The social group does not determine the individual identity, which is determined rather through the choices made by the individual. Unlike Burtons ‘*static model of already programmed individuals*’, for Schutz “*there is no single coherent identity which can be the source or the aim of behaviour, as Burton suggests*”⁶⁵. For Vayrynen, the important thing, rather than identifying underlying needs behind behaviour and ways

⁶² Jabri, op cit, 123

⁶³ Berger and Luckmann, 1966, 194

⁶⁴ The extent to which this model is operational in situations of violent conflict is a moot point. While it is argued further in the paper that individuals always possess the power to resist, in times of violence the choice between resistance and death renders such notions as questionable. Here, the model is presented a theoretical concept. It is imagined that applications emerging from this body of theory, and indeed this dissertation as a whole, would find most utility in divided, segregated post conflict communities.

⁶⁵ Vayrynen, op cit, 110

of building functional social organisations and structures, as Burton suggests, is to study the “*contextual and interpretive question of how people think about conflict*”⁶⁶. Similarly, Berger and Luckmann note that theories of identity, like theories of conflict and its resolution, “*are always embedded in more general interpretations of reality*”⁶⁷. It is important then to identify local understandings of identity, and to understand them through the epistemological frameworks that exist within the culture in which that identity is located⁶⁸.

An understanding of reality as socially constructed leads to a different understanding of the role and processes which are ascribed to identity and identity groups, and thus different models of identity.

It is argued that this understanding of conflict, conflict resolution and reality offers insights into the motivations and processes that stimulate groups to enter conflict, and provides suggestions for enhancing a workshop type process.

⁶⁶ Vayrynen, *ibid*, 110

⁶⁷ Berger and Luckmann, *op cit*, 196

⁶⁸ Berger and Luckmann explain by this by reference to psychological analysis: “a psychology interpreting certain empirical phenomena by demoniacal beings has as its matrix mythological theory of the cosmos, and it is inappropriate to interpret it in a non-mythological framework” (Berger and Luckmann, 1966, 195)

Chapter Two

Identity Theory: Mapping and Critique

Chapter One outlined the key components of the basic human needs theory, as articulated by particularly John Burton and (to a lesser extent) Edward Azar. It was argued that identity is one of the central elements underlying the formulation of the needs theory, and that the basic human needs conception of identity was not problematised sufficiently. Furthermore, it was shown that the role of the individual and identity within conflict could be understood more fruitfully through a social constructionist lens.

This next chapter will explore further the role of identity within conflict. The theories of identity that are drawn upon by needs theory as a conceptual framework will be provide the base upon which this exploration will be made. Although it will be shown that the insights into the operationalisation of identity within conflict contexts offered by A.D. Smith⁶⁹, F Barth⁷⁰ and Brass⁷¹ are useful and important, to comprehend the actual construction of identity, as experienced by the individuals for whom it is a reality, Social Identity Theory (SIT) offers an explanation more appropriate to a study of identity within a peacebuilding context. Here the work of Sherif⁷², Tajfel⁷³, Erikson⁷⁴, and Kelman⁷⁵ will be used. Finally, in line with the conceptual approach adopted in the first chapter, the conclusions obtained from the examination of mainstream identity theory will be critiqued and compared with reference to critical social theory, particularly through the lens of social constructionism. The work of Vayrynen⁷⁶, Jabri⁷⁷ and Gillard⁷⁸ will be drawn upon extensively here. Although it is recognised that a wider body of work exists in the field of critical social theory, the above mentioned theorists, with Vayrynen particularly engaged in a critique of traditional conflict research theory, are taken as representative of the field they inhabit.

⁶⁹ Smith, 1986, 1991

⁷⁰ Barth, 1969

⁷¹ Brass, 1997

⁷² Sherif 1996

⁷³ Tajfel, 1981

⁷⁴ Erikson, 2001

⁷⁵ Kelman, 1990

⁷⁶ Vayrynen, 1998

⁷⁷ Jabri, 1996

⁷⁸ Gillard, 1999

The Role of Identity within Conflict

*“Violent conflict does, however, arise from the individuals membership of bounded communities constituted through discursive and institutional dividing lines. The multiple identities of individuals come to be expressed in terms of one dominant identity, assumed to be inclusive of a community, whose unity is constructed upon an imaginary nation”*⁷⁹

Jabri specifically situates identity as a central factor in the emergence of violent conflict, and highlights the complexity of examining the phenomena of identity in explanations of violence. Issues of self and identity are seen to occur at multiple levels of analysis, with attendant multiple levels of identity that are exposed through this process of examination. It is individuals, as members of collectivities that support the mobilisation of their group to enter violent conflict. The individuals *“self and identity are central to the understanding of human thought, feeling and action”*⁸⁰. An outline of a theory of national identity found in Azar and Burton’s *International Conflict Resolution* (1986) will show how, in developing an understanding of identity formation that will assist in understanding peacebuilding for individuals, a national model of identity has limited use.

Imagining Ethnic Identity

For Smith, ethnic identity emerges from the sharing of common myths and understandings of history, which bind individuals together in a bounded community. Here the,

*“myths of origin and descent, in turn, are the most conspicuous and unique element in that complex of myths, memories, values and symbols which mark off ethnic and nations and around which such distinctive collectivities have been crystallized”*⁸¹

⁷⁹ Jabri, 1996, 120

⁸⁰ Jussim et al, 2001, 4

⁸¹ Smith, *ibid*, 72

Although Smith distances himself from the primordialist school of thought⁸², he maintains that the existence of ethnic communities, and the process through which they emerge, dates so far back as to be a given. Thus Smith states “*ethnic communities...first come to light in the record in the later Third Century BC*”⁸³

It is these pre-existing ethnic communities that Smith asserts are the basis for constructed national identities. For Smith, then, although the ethnic group is not a truly primordial phenomenon, over the *long duree* its existence has become a pre-given, which gives rise to other, associated and connected forms such as national identity⁸⁴.

The emergence of these binding and defining myths occurs by design, not chance, and for particular reasons. For Smith, “*the elaborate mythology of many present day communities is the work of nationalistic intellectuals who have tailored the broadly evolutionist model of social history to their own ethnic ends.*”⁸⁵

These constructed myths are then used as the basis for a political charter of rights, which are used to mobilise those groups held within the fold of the encompassing (constructed) myths of history and descent, and as justification for the demands made on behalf of the group mobilised around an imagined ethnic identity. These processes of group formation and political mobilisation are central to the understanding of conflict. For Smith it is the “*political claims for recognition and accommodation of collective identities, particularly those of ethnicity and nationality*”⁸⁶ that lie at heart of causes of conflict. Other writers on ethnicity such as Barth and Brass develop this instrumentalist approach to ethnic identity further.

Constructing Ethnic Identity

Barth remains one of the most influential writers on the understanding of ethnic groups. The main focus of Barth’s research is the boundary that defines the group, as well as the process of member recruitment: “*the fact of continuing dichotomization between members and outsiders allows us to specify the nature of the continuity, and investigate the changing cultural form and content*”⁸⁷. Boundary maintenance is thus

⁸² The primordialist approach to ethnicity, as represented by Geertz (1973) believe that ethnic identity is deeply rooted in the historical experience of being human to the point of being a given.

⁸³ Smith, 1986, 69

⁸⁴ Eriksen, 2001, 44

⁸⁵ Smith, *ibid*, 73

⁸⁶ Smith, *ibid*, 75

⁸⁷ Barth, 1969, 15

essential for the ethnic group and is not primordial, but rather the outcome of specific ecological, economic, historical or political situations.

For Brass ethnic identity is constructed by elites in search of particular goals: “*elites manipulate ethnic identities in the search for power. It is they who construct ethnic identity and ethnic conflict*”⁸⁸. Although Brass, and other instrumentalists, recognise the constructed nature of ethnicity, for them it is constructed by agents for whom ethnicity offer useful sites on which to mobilize sections of the population.

In both of these accounts, the role of the individual, and the account of the individual’s experience of this process, is not touched on. While this is not a problem for the application of such theories in some fields, such as explaining the emergence of collective identities in relation to a wider social picture in a context of conflict⁸⁹, or the role of elites and community leaders in the construction of ethnic identity and the characterisation of conflict as ‘ethnic’⁹⁰; for analysis that illuminates the dynamics of the individual experience and phenomena of identity construction such approaches are limited.

Two points are worth noting. The first is that the quasi-primordialist theory of Smith offers explanations of the functioning of a group, and its mobilisation and manipulation by particular institutional figures. The actual construction of the group itself, the process in which atomised individuals subscribe to and adopt these myths of origin and descent is not explained. Rather the group is presented as a given.

The second, particularly noticeable in the instrumentalist approach of Brass, is that the individual’s experience of participation within the group is not accounted for or explained. Elites dominate the construction of identity and motivation for action, and “*leave little room for individuals and the individual acts of ordinary people who engage in collective violence*”⁹¹. Although this subject is not the objective of either Brass or Smith’s work, it is an element that requires exploration in the explanation of individual identity formation and the functioning of a workshop, particularly in the context of the individual in peacebuilding.

It is not suggested that by focussing on the role of the individual, larger institutional and organisational structures are not important. Recognising that identity, both at a level of ethnicity and at the level of individual’s experience of ethnicity, is

⁸⁸ Horowitz 10

⁸⁹ Smith, op cit, , and Smith, 1991

⁹⁰ Brass, 1997

⁹¹ Horowitz, 1996, 14

constructed, offers the possibility of looking at how these constructions are used within and by larger institutional and organisational structures and leaders (the instrumentalist approach of Brass and Horowitz) or how the process of identity formation occurs, and the implication this has for the individual in a grassroots peacebuilding context of the workshop-type scenario. The former has provided the context for the problem-solving workshop, which is practised through enlisting the participation of the academic and political elite to affect change within these structures and leaderships. This dissertation seeks to explore how these processes are understood in the light of understanding of identity theory, and what relevance these processes have for application in a context of more grassroots approach to peacebuilding.

Individual Identity

Although most contemporary approaches to ethnic identity are instrumentalist in approach⁹², and the focus on instrumentalist use of notions of authenticity offer useful understandings of constructed ethnicity in understandings of violence⁹³, it is argued that an approach which recognises the experience of the individual is needed. As Eriksen states, it is *“necessary to point out the need for a phenomenological understanding of social identity, which sees it as emerging from experiences, not as a mere construct of ideology”*⁹⁴.

A social constructionist approach to social identity also calls for an understanding of identity that reflects the lived experience of individuals. Jabri notes *“memories, myths, symbolic order and self imagery form and constitute part of the practical consciousness of situated individuals”*⁹⁵. The individual experience of conflict is thus emphasised by the social constructionist approach.

The elements noted by Smith as significant in the formation of ethnic or national identity act as a background to individual and group social action, and in which the individual is always situated. The relationship between the individual and the social structure, or the constructed, imaginary entity⁹⁶ of ethnic identity, unproblematised within primordialist or instrumental approaches, is dealt with through a social constructionist lens that recognises the mutuality of agency and structure. It becomes

⁹² Rex, 1997,

⁹³ See particularly Brass (1997)

⁹⁴ Eriksen, 2001, 47

⁹⁵ Jabri, op cit, 129

⁹⁶ Anderson, 1983

imperative to develop ways of dealing with conflict that can engender a consciousness of the processes of identity construction for the participants, and models that allow for the communication of revelations such a process might reveal about the ‘constructed self’ with the reality of the ‘imagined other’; the demonised, hated enemy.

Group Identity

Social psychology has played a significant role in the understanding of identity within needs theory. Fisher⁹⁷ (a prominent needs theorist, PSW practitioner and co-author of *Getting to Yes*) points to social psychologist Muzafar Sherif’s work on social identity. Fisher bases his ‘Eclectic Model of Conflict’ “*in Realistic Group Conflict Theory, on the work of Sherif*”⁹⁸.

Sherif’s work on intergroup relations was to have a significant impact on the development of identity theory, and of understandings of identity within intergroup conflict⁹⁹. Sherif’s *Realistic Group Conflict Theory* work draws upon the conclusions generated from the ‘Robbers Cave Experiments’ that explored intergroup relations between children¹⁰⁰. The theory suggests that hostility between two groups results from real or perceived conflicting goals that generate intergroup competition. When groups are engaged in reciprocally competitive and frustrating activities of a zero-sum nature, each group will develop negative stereotypes about, and enmity toward, the other group (the *out-group*). Inherent within the approach is the understanding that there should first be real or perceived incompatible goals leading to inter-group competition, in order for psychology-related misperceptions and hostility to emerge.

Sherif also made the distinction between reference and membership group, or *outgroup* and *ingroup*. The membership group refers to the community or group of which is actually, willingly or unwillingly, a member, while reference group is that to which the individual aspires to be a member. Because loyalty lies with the reference, group, when the two are in conflict, such as in minority-majority ‘ethnic’ conflicts,

⁹⁷ Fisher, 1990

⁹⁸ *ibid*, 101

⁹⁹ Yagcioglu, 1996

¹⁰⁰ This hypothesis was validated by the first stage of the famous Robbers' Cave experiment (Sherif et al. 1988) involving boys in a summer camp. When boys were split into two groups engaging in competitive activities with conflicting goals, that is, goals that can be achieved only at the expense of the other group (for instance, the two groups had to compete with each other in a tournament of games like football, tug-of-war, etc.) intergroup hostility emerged very quickly and almost automatically (Yagcioglu, 1996)

the membership group tends to distrust or even reject the individual who places their loyalty within the reference group.

It is clear to see the relationship between a needs theory of conflict and that of Sherif. Sherif, like needs theory, sees conflict as the result of non-negotiable and incompatible goals, which, framed in this way, no resolution is possible. Like Burton, Sherif points to the need to focus on super-ordinate goals¹⁰¹ on which the two groups can work together and thus develop a mutually compatible relationship.

The emergence and process of consolidation of the antagonistic groups, or the role of individual identification with particular groups, are issues that Sherif's theory does not address, and are issues that, in order to explore how the construction of identity helps with an understanding of peacebuilding, require further attention.

Smith and Sherif's work deals with dynamics of group formation and intergroup relationships. The role of the individual, and her or his perception, understanding and motivation for subscribing and supporting a particular group are not engaged with. For both Sherif and Burton conflict emerges out of incompatible goals. While for Smith an understanding of the essentially constructed nature of identity, and engagement with the utilisation of it by manipulative leaders and politicians might contribute to a transformation of conflict, for Burton and Sherif the process of reframing these goals or interests into needs offers a direction in which to pursue conflict resolution.

Social Identity Theory

Social Identity Theory (SIT), and particular the work of Tajfel¹⁰² offers an approach that recognises the role of the individual within group formation and conflict¹⁰³. SIT posits an understanding of the individual as a situated agent, interactively developing and growing. SIT grounds itself in the recognition that from very early on there is a differentiation between self and other that leads to definition of the self. At the core of SIT is the assumption that *“the self can only be secured and valued in autonomy from an essentially different other – in function that the self and other are mutually exclusive qualities”*¹⁰⁴.

¹⁰¹ Sherif 1966

¹⁰² Tajfel, 1981

¹⁰³ SIT emerges from the field of social psychology, and has as its base the work of Freud, Mead and Erikson. SIT has at its core *“the recognition that personality is a social construct which has its origins in the infants recognition of its dependence on an ‘other’”*.

¹⁰⁴ Gillard, op cit, 8

This understanding is carried through to work which focuses on the dynamics of intergroup relations.

Unlike Burton or Sherif, for Tajfel it is the mere existence of multiple groups, rather than competition over scarce resources, which are sufficient for the creation of group identities. These group identities, emerging out of mutual comparison, consolidate and reduce the significance of individual identities. Strong group identities cause an ‘us vs. them’ situation in which intergroup animosity emerges. Unlike Sherif, for Tajfel simply the awareness of another group is sufficient to stimulate intergroup hostility. Tajfel states:

*“A primary component of the group schema is schema-based distrust – the learned belief or expectation that intergroup relations are inherently competitive and therefore the outgroup cannot be trusted and the ingroups welfare must be protected”*¹⁰⁵

This is a significant contrast with a needs based understanding of group-based hostility. Rather conflict over competing interests, Tajfel suggests that it is the process of intergroup comparison feeds bias, discrimination and thus conflict.

SIT provides an approach that points to an understanding of the ways group’s function, from the perspective of the individual. Unlike Sherif’s work, Tajfel engages with the individual experience of group membership, pointing to the importance of individual identity in subscribing to a particular group or identity.

Stereotypes

The process of stereotyping underlying SIT theory is based on an understanding of the need for “*cognitive simplification and social structure*”¹⁰⁶; it fulfils the requirements of individual’s need to understand the world, and to order it comprehensibly. For Jabri, this process is directly related to the principles identified in SIT. For her

“Social identity and categorisation emerge from cognitive processes which seek coherence and positive self-imagery producing in their instantiation such social consequences as stereotyping, social judgement and conformity, all of

¹⁰⁵ Brewer, M. 2001, 31

¹⁰⁶ Brewer, 2001, 20

which are constitutive of the conflict process and the legitimation of violence."¹⁰⁷

Both Burton and Sherif assume that there is natural tendency towards assimilation and coexistence and that conflict can be resolved either by the removal of all barriers to assimilation of the minority into the majority, or by creating the conditions that would enable minorities to achieve 'accommodation' or 'acculturation,' whereby the minority would retain its own identity and distinctiveness while at the same time becoming more similar to the majority.

For Tajfel the existence of multiple, different groups is a pre-given, and not problematised. His definition of social identity is almost purely individualistic, focussing exclusively on how the individual thinks and feels about group memberships¹⁰⁸.

How these groups came into existence, and the relationship between pre-existing structures and the individual are not subjects that Tajfel addresses. The role that the social world the individual is born into is also not dealt with in Tajfel's approach to social identity. An approach to conflict and society that sees a mutually constitutive relationship between agency and structure requires a theory of identity that can encompass these approaches is needed.

Social Identity in Needs Theory

Kelman applies SIT to the process of the PSW, and in doing so provides an insight into how the conceptual approach of SIT and the practical understandings of the PSW might integrate. Kelman's use of social identity theory is particularly significant, as he was, together Burton, involved in the first 'controlled communication' exercises conducted in the early 1970's. Kelman's approach to conducting the workshops "*derives from the work of John Burton and follows the general principles he has laid out*"¹⁰⁹. In the workshops conducted by Kelman, "*the emphasis was neither psychological, nor sociological, neither the individual nor the social group, but their interplay*"¹¹⁰.

¹⁰⁷ Jabri, op cit, 126

¹⁰⁸ Jussim et al, 2001, 6

¹⁰⁹ Kelman, 1990 283

¹¹⁰ Vayrynen, op cit, 26

The individual is thus seen as providing the link between the PSW and the wider social structure of which he or she is a part. Change in the workshop participants is intended to be transferred to change in the wider community.

Kelman focuses his attention on the role that group identities play in conflict, and their role in conflict resolution. Group identities are “*bolstered by a national narrative*”¹¹¹, and the negation of the other group’s identity can become so central to understandings of the conflict that it becomes an integral part of the constructed identity of each group¹¹². Because a group’s identity is constructed from understandings of their history, their origins and relationship to the land, for Kelman the detail of the context is of great significance. Here Kelman and Smiths understanding of identity appears similar, and like Smith, Kelman sees an instrumentalist utilisation of these constructed identities. Unlike Burton, Kelman asserts that it is necessary for the facilitators of the workshop to develop a contextual knowledge of the situation if the consultant “*is to grasp the nuances of the analysis*”¹¹³. Because group identity is constructed, an understanding of the particularities of a constructed identity offers the consultant the possibility of facilitating a change in the constructed, antagonistic, identities. Group identities “*can be redefined because they are to a large constructed*”¹¹⁴.

The approach to Social Identity that Kelman and Eriksen suggest points to the importance of both the individual and the social group. They argue that group identities are not solely individualistic, that they emerge within social cultural contexts, in which:

*“Socio-cultural discourses, national myths, and intergroup relations are all essential to the creation of any particular ethnic or national identity, so that, according to Eriksen and Kelman, social identity resides at least partly within ones own national or cultural community, rather than exclusively within the individual”*¹¹⁵

¹¹¹ Kelman, op cit, 192

¹¹² *ibid*, 193

¹¹³ Vayrynen, op cit, 24

¹¹⁴ Kelman, op cit, 194

¹¹⁵ Jussim et al., op cit, 6

Because identity is situated within a social community, and its location lies to a certain extent within that social community, the features and formation of that identity are determined by that social context. As Schutz noted in the first chapter, and Tajfel developed above, the multiple memberships of different social categories grants individuals a corresponding multiplicity of identities. Erikson's notion of social identity recognises this, as he notes that *"identification is relational, situational and flexible, and that each person carries a number of potential identities, only a few of which become socially significant, making a difference in everyday life"*¹¹⁶

Erikson invokes the instrumentalist argument when he argues that identities are 'proffered', but avoids the restriction of the instrumentalist approaches outlined above by emphasising the importance of the lived experience of the individual.

*"In locating the universal not in the workings of identity politics...but rather in the social life-worlds in which individuals make sense of the world, we may have found a basis for comparison that will outlive academic fads and contemporary politics"*¹¹⁷

Erikson thus identifies two factors that are necessary for conflict to emerge. Firstly, (accessible, constructed) identities exist to some extent separately from the individual (some of which we are born into, such as gender, caste), and secondly that the lived experience, again separate from the proffered identity, is of significance in the emergence of group conflict.

It is the lived experience Erikson identifies that it is argued Burton's PSW fails to recognise. The significance of lived experiences emphasises the importance of selecting participants who have relevant experiences to bring to the workshop. Similarly, it is this lived experience that offers the most useful point of analysis for understanding identity in conflict and conflict transformation. This is particularly so in relation to understanding how the process of the workshop processes identified with Burton, Azar and Kelman promote conflict transformation, and how this process could be developed.

¹¹⁶ Erikson, op cit, 61

¹¹⁷ Erikson, op cit, 66

Conclusion

This chapter has examined the process of identity formation. Although the primordial perspective asserts a perpetually existing and unchanging identity, the common understanding of identity as constructed was recognised, both as a product of instrumentalist elites following a particular agenda, and in the relationships held with other groups and individuals. However, it was also noted that the experience of the individual and collective community was marginalized in the instrumentalist perspective, where the study of elite utilitarian identity formation dominated.

The social constructionist perspective was seen to address this, by emphasising the experience of the individual in relation to the social group and structures. The role of the individual was developed through Social Identity Theory, where a 'self-other' dichotomy was seen as a characteristic feature in understanding identity. This process was seen to assist in meeting self-esteem, producing in/out groups and the generation of stereotypes.

A problem that emerged from these understandings of identity was that in application identity was isolated from the social context in which it operated. Its use as an analytic tool was thus seen to be restricted to the immediately apparent identity as presented by the collective or individual. A process in which alternative identities (whose existence is implicitly acknowledged in the understanding of identity as constructed) are explored, developed or constructed appears beyond the scope of recognized identity theory. The conflict resolution theory of Burton¹¹⁸ et al, which utilises the identity theory noted above, is able only to effect a redefinition, an alteration, of the existing, presented identity, rather than the construction of alternative identity.

It is in Eriksen's approach to identity that the possibility of including the social context of individuals is found. Eriksen emphasises the relational and contextual nature of identity. The 'lived' experience he identified is expressed through the stories that make the social world coherent for individuals.

Approaches to understanding identity that offer conceptual frameworks for the understanding of group functioning are useful, but are unable to paint a picture of the individual in the group. A peacebuilding approach that recognises the multiplicity and

¹¹⁸ Burton, 1990

relational nature of identity, an approach that is capable of drawing out the layers and facets of identity held by individuals is clearly of benefit.

The next chapter will focus on identity in Sri Lanka and the role that identity plays in the conflict. The usefulness of theory so far identified will be evaluated, and its utility in explaining identity in Sri Lanka and forming appropriate strategies for dealing with these identities will be explored.

Chapter Three

Mapping Sri Lanka Identity

Map 1. Location of ethno-linguistic and religious groups in Sri Lanka¹¹⁹

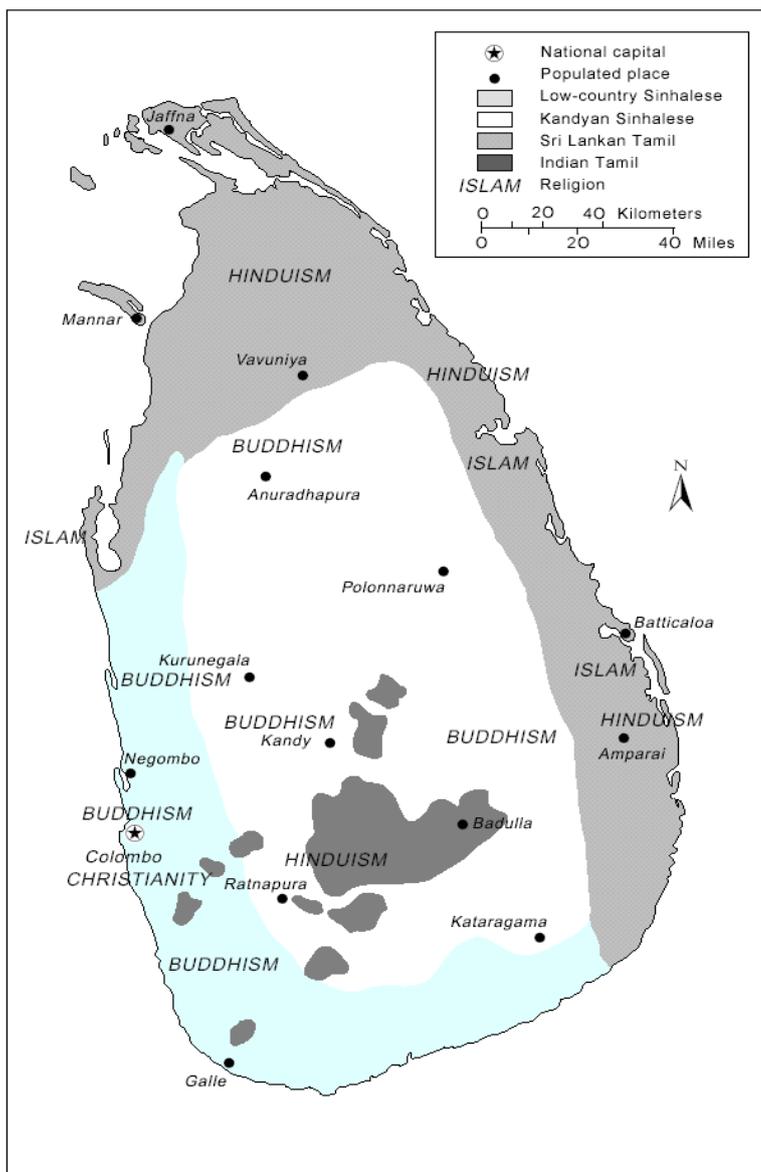


Figure . Ethnolinguistic Groups and Religions.1988

¹¹⁹ Library of Congress Country Guide
http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/sri_lanka/lk02_02b.pdf

Dominant Sri Lankan Identity Groups¹²⁰

Sri Lankans are generally divided into ethnic groups whose conflicts have overshadowed the Island since the nineteenth century. The predominant features that distinguish ethnic heritage in Sri Lanka are language and religion, which intersect to create four major ethnic groups--the Singhalese, the Tamils, and the Muslims¹²¹ (map 1.).

The Singhalese are the largest group, comprising 11 million people or 74 percent of the population in 1981. They are distinguished primarily by their language, Sinhala, which is part of the Indo-European linguistic group. Ninety three percent of Singhalese speakers are Buddhist, while ninety five percent of Buddhists speak Singhalese. The vast majority of the Singhalese are in the South, although exact numbers are not known as the conflict has prevented a census being carried out in the North and Eastern areas (see Annex 1-4).

The people collectively known as the Tamils, comprising 2,700,000 persons or approximately 18 percent of the population in 1981, speak the Tamil language. Tamil was spoken in South Asia before the arrival of Indo-European languages in about 1500 B.C. and today is spoken by at least 40 million people in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu, and by millions more in neighbouring states of southern India and among Tamil emigrants throughout the world. This number of Tamil speakers, weighed against the number of Singhalese speakers, is an important factor in the dynamics of the conflict.

The Tamil speakers in Sri Lanka are divided into two distinct groups. The Sri Lankan Tamils trace their arrival in Sri Lanka to the distant past and are effectively a native minority. In 1981 they numbered 1,886,872, or 12.7 percent of the population. The Indian Tamils were brought by the British to Sri Lanka to work on plantations in the central highlands. In 1981 they numbered 818,656, or 5.5 percent of the population. Because they live on plantation settlements, predominantly in the Nuwara Eliya and Badulla districts (see Annex 3-4), separate from other groups, including the Sri Lankan Tamils, the Indian Tamils have not integrated and are viewed as foreigners by

¹²⁰ This brief mapping of Sri Lankan identity groups draws on the US Library of Congress account of Sri Lanka's identity groups and population statistics, cross-referenced with the Sri Lankan Departments of Statistics

¹²¹ The existence of smaller identity groups, such as the Christian, Burgher, Veddah and secular identity groups are recognised. For the sake of cognitive simplification the dominant identity groups are sketched. It is recognised that this process of simplification lies at the heart of the argument of this dissertation, and its application is used with caution.

the Sinhalese. Ethnic Tamils are united by their common religions beliefs, and the Tamil language and culture. Some 80 percent of the Sri Lankan Tamils and 90 percent of the Indian Tamils are Hindus. Religion and caste create significant divisions within the Tamil community, as much of the Indian Tamils are of low Indian castes that are looked down upon by the higher castes of the Sri Lankan Tamils. Furthermore, a minority of the Tamils (4.3 percent of the Sri Lankan Tamils and 7.6 percent of the Indian Tamils) are Christian, and have distinct, separate cultural lives. Thus the large Tamil minority in Sri Lanka is divorced from the mainstream Sinhalese culture and is split into two major groups with their own Christian minorities.

Muslims make up roughly 7 percent of the population. They possess separate sites of worship, cultural lives, social circles, and languages. The Muslim community consists of three distinct main groupings - the Sri Lankan Moors, the Indian Moors, and the Malays, each with their own history and traditions. The majority of the Muslims in Sri Lanka are found in the Ampara district, with the second biggest grouping found in Colombo (see Annex 1-2.)

The Sri Lankan Moors make up 93 percent of the Muslim population and 7 percent of the total population of the country (1,046,926 people in 1981). They trace their ancestry to Arab traders who migrated to south India and Sri Lanka between the eighth and fifteenth centuries, adopted the Tamil language and settled in Sri Lanka. The Sri Lankan Moors live primarily in eastern coastal trading and agricultural communities, (with the majority in Ampara (see Annex 3-4) although during Portuguese rule many moved to the Central Highlands, where some of their descendants remain. The Indian Moors are Muslims who trace their origins to immigrants who arrived during colonial times. They have tended to retain their own places of worship and their ancestral languages.

The Malays originated in Southeast Asia. Their ancestor's came to the island when it was a Dutch colony. The main source of current Sri Lankan Malay identity is their common Malay language. In the 1980s, the Malays were approximately 5 percent of the Muslim population in Sri Lanka and are found mainly in Colombo and Gampaha District (see annex 3-4).

While these multiple identities exist under the broad label of Islam, there exists a further fracturing of Muslim identity in Sri Lanka. The Sufi's are the more esoteric, mystical branch of Islam (of both the Sunni and Shi'ite sects). It has quite often been

the subject of persecution, particularly in Iran¹²², and in Sri Lanka represents an alternative to the form of Islam associated with a transnational politics and identity, and the identity of the elites of the Sri Lanka Muslim political leaders, as will be demonstrated. Many of these crosscurrents among the Muslims are “*totally invisible to the larger Singhalese Buddhist and Tamil Hindu communities of Sri Lanka, for whom the Muslims continue to be an opportunistic political swing-vote but a reclusive cultural enigma*”¹²³. As such an in-depth exploration of the Sufi identity in Sri Lanka will reveal the existence of multiple identities lying beneath the hegemonic political face of Islam in Sri Lanka in the form of the Sri Lankan Muslim Congress (SLMC).

Locating Sri Lankan Identity

Chapter Two explored theories of identity from number of different perspectives, from the primordialist approach of Smith, the instrumentalist approach of Horowitz and Brass, through to the Social Identity Theories of Sherif, Tajfel, Eriksen and Kelman. The implications for their understandings of conflict and potentials for transformation were also developed, along with arguments that sought to highlight some of the critiques raised against them. It was argued that an understanding of identity at the level of the community and individual was important in the development of approaches that could offer analytic tools of use in ‘deep’ conflict transformation¹²⁴, in transforming the experience of conflict for individuals.

This third chapter will seek to explore the extent to which the theories and approaches outlined in the second chapter can be applied to the study of identity in Sri Lanka¹²⁵.

In this chapter the work of Sri Lankan academics will be drawn upon extensively¹²⁶, together with insights offered by practising Sri Lankan conflict transformers (or peaceworkers).

¹²² Library of Congress Country Profiles: Iran

¹²³ McGilvray, 2002

¹²⁴ Such transformation is described by Miall et al as “the deepest level of change in the conflict resolution process” (Miall et al 1999 21)

¹²⁵ Sri Lankan is used here for ease of referral and clarity, despite the recognition that such a term is both loaded and contested, with rejections by the LTTE of the representativeness of the term, preferring the term Eelam as the signifier for a Tamil homeland. Other names, such as Ceylon and Taprobane are recognised, along with their implications. Here the term Sri Lanka refers to the whole island. The significance, particularly in light of the power of discourse emphasised in Chapter Four, of the use of such terms is also recognised.

¹²⁶ Academic output from Sri Lanka and Sri Lankan authors is used over the work of non-Sri Lanka authors, in the belief that not only do authors indigenous to the case study possess more intimate understanding of the situation, but also because their work *in itself* reveals insights into understanding the case study, and the role of identity in Sri Lanka. Although the limitations and qualifications which

Tirulchelvam notes that the social science enquiry into Sri Lanka informed by a “*history chequered by virulent ethnic strife and a frayed and fragmented political identity*”, and that such inquiry has been essentially “*reactive and dialectic to the politics of myth and the ideologies of the state*”¹²⁷. The inherently situated nature of the Sri Lanka social science enquiry into identity is thus a project both of, and within, identity within Sri Lanka¹²⁸.

Within Sri Lanka the role of identity is a much-researched project, with articles, books and conferences covering the subject¹²⁹. Given the historical context of what has been described as an interstate war¹³⁰, and the implications this has for national unity, much of the research has focused on the functioning of the nation, the role of identity within the nation and the impacts that the functioning of the nation-state has had for ‘national’, collective, community and individual identities. Much of this research has stemmed from the strong tradition within the social sciences in Sri Lanka of questioning the assumptions of and “*the inclusive pretences of the nation*”¹³¹. Critiques of the ‘nation’ have extended to claims that “*the nation state and its characteristic attributes inflicts sustained and broad scale violence on its citizens*”¹³². Such an approach reflects the proposition of structural violence put forward by Galtung¹³³, which in this case would refer to the inherently violent nature of the state as an institutional structure.

The role of identity within the nation becomes of great significance when there exists within the nominated boundaries of the state identities who feel themselves to be excluded, or whose difference goes unrecognised. Thus “*when one speaks...of a nation...as a homogenous political entity, not only does one elide [miss out] the class conflict simmering beneath, but one also assumes that people homogeneously inhabit any given piece of territory*”¹³⁴. Here Barth’s assertion in Chapter Two of the need for

must accompany the use of such work is recognised, the insights it offers into an understanding of Sri Lankan identity and its role in understanding conflict and its potential transformation remain valid.

¹²⁷ Tiruchelvam, 1998, vii

¹²⁸ The situated nature of such research within ones own context are open to claims of partiality, bias and all the other acknowledged values of the Western empiricist research project. For example, it was noted by one ex-patriot that he believed that the reason for voluminous amount of research on the ethnic conflict and the role of identity within it was “the intellectuals way of detaching themselves from the conflict”. (Interview with director of Berghof Foundation, , Colombo, 26/07/02)

¹²⁹ See Pravada, Social Justice, the range of books on identity by Sri Lankan authors in the bibliography, the recent conference on Identity held by the International Centre for Ethnic Studies.

¹³⁰ Rajasingham, 2001

¹³¹ Jeganathan, & Ismail 1995, 3

¹³² Uyangoda in Tiruchelvam, 1998, xi

¹³³ Galtung, 1996

¹³⁴Jeganathan, & Ismail 1995, 1

different groups to be able to express the particularities of their identity offers an understanding that resonates with that of Jeganathan & Ismail. For Tiruchelvam the construction of identity as unity is troubling simply because it chooses to “*ignore or silence voices of disquiet and opposition, and to ignore the significance of multiple allegiances, communities and experiences, in exchange for its own coherence and consistency*”¹³⁵.

In Sri Lanka then, the state is regarded by some as an institution that does not allow for the expression of the multiple identity groups that are present in the island, and in its repression exercises structural violence upon those same groups.

It is in understandings of Sri Lanka’s past that many identity groups base their own legitimation. Such understandings are used to shore up the legitimate existence of groups such as Sinhala and Tamil, and as will be demonstrated, even Muslim. As a result, in the context of the nation-state, through the ‘categoricist’ approaches to identity formations, Sri Lanka has always been, and will always be, a nation defined and determined by ethnicity. Rajasingham reminds us, however, “*in the face of such simplistic yet compelling narratives of the islands past, it is salutary to remember that ethnic identity, an abstraction, is often subsumed and cross-cut by other sectarian alliances and identity markers*”¹³⁶. This dissertation aims to illustrate the essentially constructed nature of identity, and does so by arguing that behind the monolithic identity groups (such as ethnic identities) presented in Sri Lanka there exist numerous examples of multiple identity and allegiances, mixing and hybridity of what are seen as distinct identity groups. Furthermore, the extent to which these Sri Lankan understandings of identity contribute to understandings of the conflict and the role of identity within it will be examined.

Individual and Community Identity

Although constructed identities may be seen as products of elite agendas, they must have a relevance to those to whom the identity is offered. As de Munck argues they “*must have something to say: that is they...must be useful...to individuals in the context of their real life experiences*”¹³⁷. In Tajfel’s terms, a proffered identity must contribute to the positive self-esteem of the individual. Similarly, the notion of a relationship between agency and structure delineated through Social Identity Theory

¹³⁵ Tiruchelvam, 1998, viii)

¹³⁶ Rajasingham, 1999, 124

¹³⁷ de Munck, 1998, 111

and social constructionism serves as a theoretical lens through which to approach the manner in which individual identity in Sri Lanka interacts with the dominant and dominating identities that are visible at a national level of analysis.

Witharana suggests that there are

*“issues within the community which can be worked out by the community itself, without waiting for national level actors to come to a settlement. In fact community peace work should complement peace efforts at the national level”*¹³⁸.

Analysis at the macro level of elite leaders is linked to, and its significance decreed by, the extent to which it is ‘useful’ to individuals. Thus the justification for analysis of individual, micro-identities stands because *“micro-identities, constructed out of the intersection of shared experiences, shape and influence the interpretation of macro-identities”*¹³⁹.

It is significant that as elites play an instrumental role in the formation of identity in Sri Lanka (as argued by Brass, Horowitz, Knoerzer,¹⁴⁰), so too must their own identity play into the nature of the identity they form. This has been demonstrated clearly by Knoerzer in relation to the formation of Muslim identity in Sri Lanka¹⁴¹. While such accounts can be accommodated within the conceptual frameworks of Western notions of identity, as noted earlier in this dissertation, Knoerzer notes that, in the case of the Muslims at least, these elites all come from the high caste groups of Sri Lanka. The role that caste, a factor in identity formation that cannot be accommodated within western theory of identity, remains problematic¹⁴². It is suggested that caste is an important factor in the functioning of identity in caste-based societies. Both the Muslim leaders of the SLMC and the origins of the LTTE are to be found in the high caste groups of their constituencies¹⁴³. This is clearly a significant element within the

¹³⁸ Witharana, 2002, 4

¹³⁹ de Munck, 1998, 111

¹⁴⁰ Brass, 1997, Horowitz 1998, Knoerzer, 1998

¹⁴¹ Knoerzer, 1998. A more detailed account of Knoerzer’s findings can be found in ‘The construction of Muslim identity’, page 50-53, this dissertation.

¹⁴² It is interesting that within much of the Sri Lankan literature on identity, itself a product of, or at least heavily influenced by, western traditions of scholarship, caste appears to remain low on the radar of significant issues in the study of identity. It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to fully explore this, but it is an issue that is worthy of further research, both as a phenomenon in the dynamics of identity within Sri Lanka, and as a discourse within Sri Lankan academia.

¹⁴³ Knoerzer, 1998, Swamy, 1994

formation of these identity groups, yet it is not an identity construct accommodated or recognised within Western identity theory.

Within Sri Lanka, in the context of the conflict, Hollup argues that the emphasis and emergence of ethnic identity is in response to “*Sinhala Buddhist fundamentalism, Tamil separatism and the occurrence of ethnic violence*” and consequently “*interethnic relations have deteriorated and ethnic identity has become the predominant identity by which the major ethnic groups try to distinguish themselves*”¹⁴⁴.

Thus in Sri Lanka “*there has emerged a bi-polar ethnic imagination wherein Sinhala Buddhists and Ceylon Tamils appear to have been perennially locked into combat*”¹⁴⁵. This is characterised by an understanding that “*constructs Singhalese and Tamils as mutually exclusive and collectively exhaustive of the islands diverse and hybrid communities*”¹⁴⁶. According to Rajasingham and, as will be shown, various others, this process has occurred at the expense of the multitude of alternative identities and communities within Sri Lanka, and has rendered them invisible, by the monolithic presentation of the two communities as the only significant identity and community groups in Sri Lanka.

Narrative Hegemony

The implications of this dominant representation of the situation is picked up by Witharana who, through his research on peace work in Sri Lanka, argues that the collective identities within Sri Lanka exist as a meta narrative (an ‘ethnic conflict’ in which the Singhalese are fighting Tamils), within which exist a plurality and multiplicity of identities and understandings within the conflict¹⁴⁷.

Witharana suggests that there is no single meta narrative that can explain the Sri Lankan conflict at a community level, and that “*no explanatory meta-narrative available can be considered either correct or incorrect by itself*”¹⁴⁸, rather all

¹⁴⁴ Hollup 1998, 78

¹⁴⁵ Rajasingham, 1999, 100

¹⁴⁶ *ibid*, 101

¹⁴⁷ Witharana (2002) quotes some of his interviewees: “*tell the Tigers to stop the war, then we will have peace*”, “*tell the Tamils to stop the war, then we will have peace*”. Clearly for some people the war is fought by all Tamils, and for others it is fought by the LTTE. There exists plurality of perception among the Singhala population. Similarly, for Tamils: “*tell Singhala people to stop the war, then we will have peace*” and “*tell the government to stop the war, then we will have peace*”.

¹⁴⁸ Witharana, 2002, 5

explanatory meta-narratives offer useful insights into understanding the conflict at a community level. Restricting analyses and approaches to the Sri Lanka conflict at a community level poses significant risks as “*identifying members of generalised categories at community level with the characteristics introduced in meta-narratives can restrict effective peace opportunities and lead to false analysis of the conflict situation*”¹⁴⁹. It is perhaps this last point that provides a central underpinning for the justification of this dissertation: that in order to contribute constructively towards peacebuilding, it is necessary to look afresh at the lenses and labels which are employed to understand and conceptualise not only the conflict but also the salient features highlighted as significant. Such an approach is relevant to all studies and projects engaging with conflict.

The (Ab)Use of History and Race

The next section will explore the theoretical lenses that are employed in the understanding of Sri Lankan identity. The ways that history¹⁵⁰ has been used will be explored, and it will be shown that understanding history as a linear, continuous narrative provides for its use in the creation and legitimation of exclusive, monolithic and antagonistic identities. Similarly the use of racial theory to present the conflict in Sri Lanka as an ethnic conflict between different racial groups demonstrates how theory of origins and identity are used in the construction of identities in conflict.

Understanding of this process can be usefully made through reference to Barth’s previously cited work¹⁵¹ on the importance of boundary maintenance. In the shoring up and definition of these boundaries around notions of race and exclusive histories, allied with the need for cognitive simplification identified by Tajfel, identity groups become essentialised and thus capable of broader appeal. Sub-identities, capable of causing confusion in the maintenance of group boundaries, are subsumed beneath the monolithic entity of collective identity groups. Witharana’s meta-narrative obscures the complexity of identities in Sri Lanka.

The competition to claim history as a charter for a particular identity demonstrates the process in which groups attempt to create cohesions among its members. The

¹⁴⁹ *ibid*, 5

¹⁵⁰ Although touched upon here, a full and detailed account of the history of the Sri Lankan conflict is beyond the limitations of this dissertation. For a detailed account of the history of the conflict KM de Silva’s ‘A history of Sri Lanka’ is the classic text, (although critiqued by some for being overly pro-Sinhalese) (de Silva 2002). For an excellent overview of the literature on the uses of history de Silva 2002 provides a useful starting point.

¹⁵¹ Barth, 1969

importance of in-group and out-groups identified by Tajfel reflects the principles in which identities build up bounded entities, beyond which lies the ‘other’, the out-group.

This creation of identity groups based upon the existence of in and out-groups in Sri Lanka has been couched in terms of ethnicity, of the existence of groups distinguishable through their heritage or provenance. Here theories of racial origin are, or were, employed to distinguish the different identity groups in Sri Lanka. This process occurred as a result of particular political objectives, and has framed the debate to such an extent that although the content of the label may have moved on from its initial base in ‘racial’ theory, the term ethnicity is still used to characterise the different groups in Sri Lanka. The manner in which racial theory has been used will be explored, and the political significance of it will be demonstrated.

The Use of History

Throughout the almost fifty years of conflict in Sri Lanka, and for a significant period before, different collective groups have turned to history to legitimise political goals and claims to particular rights. Perhaps the most identifiable example is the Sinhalese belief that Buddha visited Sri Lanka and invested the island with the role of guardian of the Buddhist faith¹⁵². The translations and interpretations of historical texts, notably the Pali-Vamsas and in particular the Mahavamsa¹⁵³, have been employed as evidence of the Sinhala claim to the island as a homeland for Buddhism, in which certain legal and political safeguards and rights are necessary to ensure Buddhism’s protection and status¹⁵⁴.

The history of the island is drawn upon to paint a picture in which the conflict is the only, and natural, option in the pursuit of the rights due to the protagonists in the conflict. The construction and use of the past in the present has been “*partly enabled through the selective readings of ancient texts to suit the interests and purposes of colonial orientalist and recent nationalists alike*”¹⁵⁵. The role that an understanding of constructed identity plays, as portrayed in Sri Lanka, fits firmly with the notions of instrumentalism illustrated in the second chapter.

¹⁵² Obeyesekere, 1997

¹⁵³ The Pali-Vamsa’s and Macadamia are 6th century Buddhist texts the uses of which are highly significant in the understanding of the Sinhalese Buddhist perspective on history.

¹⁵⁴ Roberts, 1997

¹⁵⁵ Rajasingham, 1999, 101

Understandings of History

Having identified one of the approaches to identity outlined in the first chapter, Rajasingham demonstrates how different schools can be applied to understand lenses' through which the conflict is viewed.

The primordialist school traces the conflict back to a fight between the Sinhala King Dutugemunu and Tamil King Elara in 2nd century BC. This understanding of history is employed to provide a mythic charter for both Buddhist and Sinhala nationalisms. This school of thought asserts that there are perpetually existing mutually exclusive Tamil and Sinhala identity groups that have remained essentially unchanged since the 2nd century BC. Within this approach each of these groups are regarded as having always been basically homogenous and possessive of a unified ethnic identity and consciousness, and having always been in conflict in Sri Lanka.

A different school of thought focuses on modernity and colonisation in Sri Lanka¹⁵⁶. The construction of what have become fixed ethnic identities is argued to have occurred through the process and impact of colonialism¹⁵⁷, and to have created identity groups that are inherently antagonistic. There is however, a growing body of theory and writing in Sri Lanka that seeks to offer evidence that counter these claims of inherent or constructed identity antagonisms.

Rejecting the argument that historically Tamils and Sinhalese have always been in conflict, Rajasingham points to relatively recent history to demonstrate a record of Sinhalese and Tamil political cooperation. Rajasingham characterises the period between independence in 1948 up until 1956 as one of “*responsive cooperation*”¹⁵⁸ in which the Tamils participated in the government in the search for redress of inequalities. Similarly, following the Sinhala Only Act in 1956, until 1977 the period could be characterised by ‘*non-violent cooperation*’¹⁵⁹, despite the damaging effects

¹⁵⁶The anti-modern sentiment of this line of thought suggests that western involvement, for example through the INGO's and conflict experts, perpetuates the current conflict. For some, ethnic identities are modern constructions and thus at the root of the cause of the conflict, while others argue that the divide and rule tactics of the British are at the root of the current violence in Sri Lanka. These anti-modern approaches tend to “*absolve all except the British colonial powers and post/colonial modernity of negative agency*” (Rajasingham, 1999, 107).

¹⁵⁷ These identities are seen to be products of the colonial census and colonial anthropology and ‘western’ approaches to science and classification. Further detail of the impacts of the colonial census and anthropology can be found in Angell 1998, and for a key text in understanding how western forms of knowledge and ways of knowing were an integral part of colonisation see Said 1993

¹⁵⁸ *ibid*, 118

¹⁵⁹ *ibid*, 118

of the Act, which had huge negative impacts on the Tamil educational and employment opportunities.

The Construction of History

An understanding of history and its use as viewed through the lens of social constructionism offers yet more insights into how identities function in Sri Lanka. Here the influential work of Gunawardana¹⁶⁰ is taken as an example of the use of history in a rational, enlightened manner; an approach that the work of Burton, Horowitz and Smith reflects.

Gunawardana claims that attention to “*every scrap of evidence from the ninth century to the eighteenth century*”¹⁶¹ might offer a ‘true’ account of the history of Sri Lanka, which would then serve as the legitimate basis for political positions in the present. Rajasingham notes that there has been hardly any acknowledgement that such a project, even were it possible, might not offer the possibility of “*reading and translating ethnic labels across the subtle shifts in linguistic identity and consciousness*”¹⁶².

In his essay *People of the Lion* Gunawardana attempts to prove that through a ‘correct’ reconstruction of history it is possible to mount a successful critique of Sinhala nationalism, by exposing the validity of the history it rests on as constructed and false. Gunawardana’s claim rests, as does the Sinhala nationalist project, on a “*correct representation of social facts*”¹⁶³. Such a claim rests on the belief that there exists an objectively verifiable history, and thus reality. As Rajasingham notes, “*the dominant historical paradigm remains positivistic in presuming that the past might some day be adequately retrieved to tell the true tale of ethnicity and conflict in Sri Lanka*”¹⁶⁴.

As claims are made against Gunawardana’s (re)construction of the past¹⁶⁵, so the possibility of achieving a correct, objective understanding of the past is thrown into question, resting as they do purely on claims of ‘better’ scholarship. The exposure of Sinhala nationalism’s history, as the construction of a past based on myth to

¹⁶⁰ Gunawardana, 1990

¹⁶¹ *ibid*, 109

¹⁶² *ibid*, 109

¹⁶³ Scott, 1995, 18

¹⁶⁴ Rajasingham, 1999, 106

¹⁶⁵ See, for example, Dharmadasa, 1992

legitimise and construct a present, underneath which lies an objective, continuous and ‘real’ history, are thrown into question. In Scott’s words,

*“suddenly history, a rational, representable succession, is not confronted with its Other as it were – legend, myth, superstition – but merely with a different, indeed rival, position within its own discursive field of historicist history”*¹⁶⁶.

Discussing which elements of history are employed to legitimise and construct a particular identity is thus replaced by a discussion that centres on the conceptual understanding of the role of history. No longer an empirically verifiable entity, history is argued to exist as a site of significance only to the extent that it is employed and *“ought to be taken as what shall be thought”*¹⁶⁷ rather than what has been.

This social constructionist understanding offers the opportunity to comprehend and engage with identity groups in Sri Lanka through the process in which history is used; as a narrative to explain and justify the present, rather than a linear, rational and deterministic past. Gunawardana’s project is argued to be based on rational historiography, and that *“what it grants – implicitly of course – is that there is, in principle, a natural or anyway legitimate link between past identities and present political claims”*¹⁶⁸. Instead Scott argues, *“Singhala history moves not by continuities but by a play of breaks and discontinuities, and that the forms of collective identity that emerge within any moment of its movement are not natural but constructed”*¹⁶⁹.

A Reconceptualisation of History

Rather than an understanding of history as linear, Scott argues for a conception of history that reflects its location in the thought and understandings of the past in the present. History may thus be thought of as the stories, or narratives, in which its telling is located. Thus history belongs not to *“time, nor to succession, nor to causality, but to community; or to being-in-common”*¹⁷⁰. Community is understood by Scott as a project, and *“is not historical as if it were a permanently changing subject*

¹⁶⁶ Scott, 1995, 18

¹⁶⁷ *ibid*, 4

¹⁶⁸ Scott, 1995, 20

¹⁶⁹ *ibid*, 17

¹⁷⁰ *ibid*, 6

*within a permanently flowing time. But history is community, that is, the happening of a certain space of time*¹⁷¹.

Following Scott's critique of his earlier work, Gunawardana's new paper, *Historiography in a Time of Conflict*, breaks with his earlier argument, suggesting a more radical approach, and points to the implications, already noted by Scott, that this approach has¹⁷².

An understanding of the past as a constructed entity offers the possibility of reconstructing and, in the process, of addressing the imbalances in the portrayal of different groups. As Gunawardana notes, these constructions could

*“help give voice not only to the minorities, but also to underprivileged majority groups whose interests and activities tend to be ignored in overly state-centred constructions of the past representing hegemonic discourses”*¹⁷³.

This approach warns us that we must be mindful to the existence of multiple 'subaltern' and non-hegemonic discourses, and also to bear in mind that history is often interpreted to offer a view of concepts and institutions that accord them an unchanging and a historic character and thus justify their presence in contemporary times.

The process of social comparison, which was identified in the second chapter as central to Sherif's notion of identity formation, can be seen to have resulted in the consolidation of identity groups who engage in conflict. Renegotiating the process of comparison, and transforming interests into needs, offers a way of achieving the natural tendency towards assimilation and coexistence implied by Burton and Sherif. Tajfel argues that it is in the existence of distinct social groups that the source of conflict can be found. The actual nature of the group (the content of the identity or the process of its construction) are not as salient as the mere existence of difference between groups, which leads to inter-group conflict. However, if it is in the nature of the group that the source of conflict can be found, then the actual features which

¹⁷¹ *ibid*, 22

¹⁷² Gunawardana points to Dharmadasa's claims of ancient historical lineage of the Sinhala people as interpretations of history for purely political purposes, whose foundations rest on assumptions and whose conclusions are questionable. As such, Gunawardana critiques this approach for not recognizing the *“significant and radical breaks in identity formation as a historical process and assumes that contemporary labels carried the same meanings in the distant past”* (Gunawardana, 1995, 25)

¹⁷³ *ibid*, 60

define group identity becomes of significance, rather than simply the existence of inter-group difference.

It is not simply the existence of difference that leads to conflict, but the nature of that difference. If this is so, then Tajfel's approach to identity has significant limitations.

Sherif, and Burtons, hypothesis, that identity groups struggle over conflicting interests, which once removed or re-conceptualised as needs, assumes an inherent tendency towards assimilation. As with Tajfel, the actual content or characteristics of the identity groups in question is not problematised. This becomes a problem when identity is defined and expressed through an understanding which conceptualises itself as historically and congenitally in conflict with an identity group identified as an 'other'.

Theorising Race

The impact of the discourse of race is evident in the Sinhala claim to be a distinct people. Sri Lanka is presented as the only homeland for the Sinhalese, a minority group dominated by the multitude and size of 'others' in the Indian sub-continent. Similarly the Tamil claim to be a distinct group, in need of a homeland to preserve the Sri Lankan Tamil identity, demonstrates the utilisation of the theory of race. Also significant is the Muslim claim to ethnic uniqueness, which impacts on the degree to which either the Sinhala or Tamil visions of Sri Lanka are seen to provide for the security of Sri Lankan Muslim identity.

Sri Lankan identity, and its political culture, has been significantly coloured by the impact of the colonial British in the eighteenth and nineteenth century. The development of Sri Lankan self-identity was heavily influenced by British experiences in India, to the extent that "*British orientalist and modernizationist constructions of India, geographically and culturally proximate and regionally dominant, still structure Sri Lankan self-constructions*"¹⁷⁴.

One of the theories the British brought was the concept of the Aryan race, which had already been applied in India to argue that the North Indians were of Aryan descent (and thus genetically closer to the British). The history of the Aryan theory in Sri Lanka has its most significant beginning with the Royal Asiatic Society Ceylon

¹⁷⁴ Rajasingham, 1999, 104

Branch (RACB) *Journal of the RASCB*¹⁷⁵. Applications of understandings of the concept of the Aryan began in Sri Lanka as a language theory¹⁷⁶, with Singhala portrayed as a direct descendent of Sanskrit, and thus linked to this “*common source, the Indo-European, or Aryan, language*”¹⁷⁷¹⁷⁸. The result of the application of the Aryan theory has been the formation of stereotypes that still function in contemporary Sri Lanka, which assert racial distinctions between Tamils and Singhalese, distinctions which “*resonate with British colonial constructions*”¹⁷⁹.

The consolidation of ethnic identities (through the colonial census) was transformed as the beginnings of electoral government shifted the locus of power away from ethnic groups to elective systems. The 1931 Donoughmore Commission replaced communal electorates with an elective system of government. This move threatened the position of minorities who saw the communal group system as a safety net against the quantitative imbalances between the ethnic groups. In fact, the ethnicity-blindness introduced in 1931 permitted the beginning of Singhala state domination¹⁸⁰. As the Singhalese were increasingly linked to the British through the understandings of the Aryan theory, so the development of the ‘other’ identity asserted the existence of the Tamils as ethnically or racially distinct from both the Singhalese and the British.

The interpretation of historical evidence has been shown to play an integral part in the nature of the identity groups that have developed in Sri Lanka. Identity groups become categorised as Tamils or Singhalese, and the content these signifiers implied included understandings which posit a history of perpetual conflict between two ethnically distinct groups, around which a raft of value-laden connotations lie. It is not

¹⁷⁵ In its approach to the theory, that in the 1880s the RASCB “*skewed the terms of the debate by taking a clear stance in favour of the Aryan theories of language and race*” (Angell, 1998, 43)¹⁷⁵ and “*conceived of the Singhalese as distant relatives of the large Aryan family, and therefore chose to publish articles and support arguments that painted a flattering portrait of the Singhalese race*” (Angell 1998, 43).

¹⁷⁶ Language was regarded by the British and Singhala and Tamil elite in Sri Lanka “*as a tool that could be manipulated to gain greater power*” (Angell, 1998, 46), the British using English as the language of administration and thus controlling the kind of people who could enter into positions of power, and the Sri Lankan elite recognising that linking their own language with that of the colonial ancestry would place them in a better position with their colonial masters.

¹⁷⁷ Angell, 1998, 45

¹⁷⁸ The influence of the British at the time was to assert a closer linkage between the Singhala identity and its own, which brought the Singhalese closer to the centres of power in the colonial island. Conversely, in 1886 an RASCB report on the Macadamia concluded that the text was interpreted to say “*the Tamil invaders had done nothing but plunder and ransack Ceylon throughout ancient history*” (Angell, 1998, 58)

¹⁷⁹ Rajasingham, 1999, 104

¹⁸⁰ Rajasingham, 1999, 115

the existence of these groups that are innately predisposed towards conflict but rather the manner in which they have been constructed. Implicitly, it is in the interaction, in the understandings and in the beliefs that are built up around the different groups that offers the greatest and most useful source of information, particularly in relation to understanding conflict between the different groups, and attempts to search for its transformation.

It has been shown that in Sri Lanka these identity groups, namely Tamil and Sinhala, have developed, through the use of history and application of colonial theories of race, to become identity constructions that have been written to include an historical heritage of apparently perpetual conflict between two ethnically distinct groups.

It is hoped that this chapter has shown that these are arbitrary constructions, that these groups have adopted conflictual identities, and the fact that they are constructions offers the possibility of the existence of other, less or non-conflictual identities. It will be shown later that there exists in Sri Lanka a rich source of material that offers ground on which to emphasise alternative identities and discourses of history and ethnicity in which coexistence and peace dominate over narratives of conflict and violence.

Identity in a Muslim Context

In the preceding pages it has been shown that the construction of identity in Sri Lanka has played a crucial role in the way the current conflict has developed and engulfed the island. It is also clear that the understandings of identity as constructed are consonant with the projection of an instrumentalist notion of constructed identity as posited by Horowitz and Brass in the second chapter. However, such a perspective has not offered an understanding of how the identity groups themselves contain sub-identities and groups that are excluded and denied validity under the domineering umbrella of monolithic identities, such as the all-encompassing Tamil identity. The applicability of identity theories that do centre on the individual in a context, the identity theories of Tajfel, Sherif and Kelman, offer perspectives in which the identities of groups such as the Muslims, (subsumed beneath the all encompassing Tamil identity as asserted by the LTTE), can be engaged with and given the space in

which to play a role¹⁸¹. However, these theories suggest causes of conflict that do not engage with the detail or content of the identity in question. It has been shown that in Sri Lanka it is in the very stories out of which identities are constructed that crucial understandings, motivations and justifications for violent conflict are to be found. Such stories, which the identity theories outlined in the second chapter do not engage with, are crucial in understanding and engaging with the conflict in Sri Lanka, and offer a useful resource in conflict transformation.

The Construction of Muslim Identity

The constructionist and instrumentalist approach to identity are suggested as a lens through which to approach identity in Sri Lanka. Such an approach seeks to expose that in using identity labels there is always a projection of interests “*that the identitarian would seek to elide*”¹⁸² and reflects the power of the identitarian to impose or assert a particular identity label. Within Sri Lanka the assertion of the LTTE that they speak for and represent all Tamils can be hides the fact that they represent a particular form identity. Swamy notes that the militant movement amongst the Tamils, from which the LTTE emerged, was initiated by individuals frustrated by the failure of the Tamil Federal Party to achieve redress for the Tamil people, and who set up the *Pulip Padai* (Army of Tigers) in 1961. By 1976 the *Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam* (LTTE) had been founded by Valupillai Prabhakaran. Prabhakaran has become the central figure of the Tamil movement, and it was noted by many interviewed¹⁸³ in the strongholds of the LTTE that they believed he was a fisherman, and thus represented the ‘working man’ of the Tamil people. The truth is, according to Swamy, that Prabhakaran came from a “*typical middle class family*”¹⁸⁴ whose father was a civil servant. The LTTE is founded upon the beliefs and struggles of particular elites, and while it might represent the interests of the wider Tamil people, its origins emerge from a minority group.

¹⁸¹ It is significant that it is only in this last peace process that the SLMC has been an active part in the peace talks. The inclusion, and recognition particularly by the LTTE, points to new awareness of the significance of the Muslim identity as a separate.

¹⁸² Angell, 1998, 58

¹⁸³ Personal interviews conducted 1/07/02-25/07/02 in Ampara District, Batticaloa District, Tincomalee District. Many people felt that the legitimacy of the LTTE was strengthened by the fact that Prabhakaran came from the same social context as many of those interviewed.

¹⁸⁴ Swamy, 1994, 49

The formation of a particular Tamil identity by LTTE meant that certain groups within the area, which had particular elements of their identity, challenged the homogenous, unified body of the Tamil people. Thus within the North and the East of Sri Lanka¹⁸⁵, Knoerzer notes “*the LTTE justified the mass expulsion of Muslims from the Northern Province as punishment for not having properly identified themselves as Tamils*”¹⁸⁶. At the same time the LTTE claims to represent all those who live in the North and Eastern areas¹⁸⁷.

Muslim identity has been constructed within the boundaries set by identity discourse in Sri Lanka, a discourse dominated by Tamil/Tamil difference. This hegemony has set the frames in which the discourse of identity takes place and the identity markers utilised to describe the difference; whether the difference was ethnicity and marked by language¹⁸⁸, or ‘racialised’, with blood and origin as a marker¹⁸⁹, Muslim identity had to be constructed within these predetermined signifiers, using religion, Islam, as its defining point of ‘otherness’.

Whatever the validity of either claim, the important point is that in order to consolidate and secure a Muslims identity a process of *social creativity*, to use Tajfel’s term, is employed to construct an identity that is defined in opposition to the Sinhala other. This process of identity formation has specific consequences for the actual nature of the identity that emerges from the process. For example the wearing of the Hijab (Muslim headscarf) became as prevalent as it is today only in the last twenty years. Wearing the “*Hijab functions politically as a visible means of asserting*

¹⁸⁵ UTHR notes in Special Report 1 that “*from the end of 1987 the LTTE launched a campaign of assassination against civilians suspected of being collaborators with India or potential opponents of LTTE*”. UTHR Special Report 1, 1990

¹⁸⁶ Knoerzer, 1998, 152

¹⁸⁷ Jeganathan, 1998. This can also be understood from the fact that the LTTE has consistently sought to eradicate all alternative forms of representation in the North and East areas, engaging in assassinations and intimidation of those who attempted to set up alternative bodies of representation (UTHR Special Report: Bombing of Jaffna, 1990). It is only recently that the Muslim polity has been accepted as a distinct and separate political entity by the LTTE.

¹⁸⁸ As ethnicity and language the salient features of Sri Lankan identity, sociologist Mohamed Marouf claimed that Sri Lankan Muslims had their own language, Arabic-Tamil, unique to the Muslim community. This claim is critiqued by Ismail, as the Education Minister at the time of Marouf’s writing, himself a Muslim, had not called for education in the Muslims national language, and indeed a few years previously had stated that because the Muslims had no language of their own, they should be permitted to be educated in English.

¹⁸⁹ Rebutting claims that the Muslims were simply converted Tamils, Abdul Azeez, a leading ideologue in the early 1900s, published an article that claimed the Muslims had made a conscious migration to Sri Lanka (thus marking them as foreign and distinct from the Tamil community) identifying Sri Lanka as a home for Muslims when God banished Adam to Ceylon from Paradise (Ismail, 1995, 70). Such claims distinguished the Muslims from the Tamils, gave them a natural right of abode in Sri Lanka, and provided them with myths of origin that could support and legitimate their presence in Sri Lanka. At this stage, race was the defining category of identity. By the 1980s, the sense of Muslim ethnic identity was seen by the Muslim elite to have been ‘lost’, according to Ismail.

a more clearly defined Muslim identity”¹⁹⁰. The increased attention paid to the purity of Islamic practices, has resulted in the deliberate banning of some traditional customs deemed to close to Tamil Hindu practices, thus “*increasing the chasm between the Tamil and Muslim communities*”¹⁹¹. Furthermore, Muslim members of the UNP have been attacked for not being ‘pure’ Muslims¹⁹². Here the relationship identified by Sherif between membership group and reference group can be applied to those who reject such blurring of the boundaries between membership group (Muslim) and reference group (Hindu-Tamil). However, Sherif’s notion is unable to shed light on the process of *how* these groups came to be; they are presumed to be already in existence, and from such a primordial beginning develop through the process Sherif presents.

The Muslim identity (and the same applies to the Sinhala and Tamil identity) is defined in an increasingly polarised manner: more different, more distinct and more ‘other’ in relation to the other identity groups surrounding it, with Islam as the key feature of distinction between other Tamils and the Sinhala identity. The process of social comparison put forward by Sherif offers a useful explanation of the way in which a uniquely Islamic identity is created and asserted against the Tamil (and Sinhala) other, while Tajfel’s notion of self-categorization offers a conceptual account of the increasingly defined and rigid formulation of Muslim identity in which submission to Islam is the keystone of difference and boundary.

A Hegemonic Muslim Identity

Ismail argues that a Muslim identity has been created and asserted by the Muslim elite, and as such reflects exclusively their particular sense of self and economic, class and political interests. Thus “*the Muslim social formation is read here as an ideological construct signifying the hegemony of the (Southern, male, bourgeois, trader, etc) Muslim elite*”¹⁹³. Despite the common perception that all the Muslims are wealthy traders, the reality is that the North and Eastern parts of Sri Lanka “*has an average per capita income slightly lower than the low country Sinhalese*”¹⁹⁴. The

¹⁹⁰ Knoerzer, 1998, 155

¹⁹¹ *ibid*, 155

¹⁹² e.g. Ali Zahir Seyed Moulana of the UNP singled out because his wife is Tamil

¹⁹³ Ismail, 1995, 58

¹⁹⁴ Knoerzer, 1998, 146

political elite comes from the five percent that are in the business sector, a group that has little in common with the poor of the North and East. Thus

*“the interests of the Muslims in the Singhalese areas are fundamentally different from Eastern Muslims. While the vast majority of the Tamil district are farmers and landless peasants, those living in Singhalese areas are petty businessmen, artisans and urban workers”*¹⁹⁵.

Leaders of the SLMC tend to come from the Muslim elite in Colombo, and *“for the most part have remained the unchallenged representatives of Muslim interests”*¹⁹⁶. Not only at a discursive level but also at the level of political representation, the formation of Muslim identity reflects the interests, agenda, and identity of the Muslim elite. Such a disparity paves the way for a split between the North Eastern Sri Lankans, the poorer agricultural Muslims, and the wealthier Western Central, primarily urban commercial Muslim group.

When the SLMC first began it drew on the support of the poor of the North and East, even campaigning in the 1989 election on a platform of the creation of a separate N.E. province for the Muslims¹⁹⁷. Currently however, the leader of the SLMC, M.H.M. Ashraff, *“transforming the SLMC into a conventional body of Muslim representation”*¹⁹⁸ is working to create a party that has national appeal; not an exclusively Muslim party. The risk is that *“if the SLMC does not meet the expectations of the young, educated eastern Muslims it has attracted in the past, they may leave the SLMC and form a more radical group”*¹⁹⁹. The identity proffered by the SLMC is thus seen to be out of touch with the reality of those living in the North and the East, and consequently runs the risk of being rejected, as people seek to find a political voice for the reality they experience.

More recently however, Muslims have asserted themselves in the political arena. Indeed,

“the transformation of Muslim politics in Sri Lanka is a central issue concerning Sri Lanka's political future, as the ethnic conflict has moved from

¹⁹⁵ Ismail, 1995, 94, while Knoerzer makes similar points (Knoerzer, 1998, 145)

¹⁹⁶ Knoerzer, 1998, 140

¹⁹⁷ *ibid*, 1998, 145

¹⁹⁸ Knoerzer, 1998, 159

¹⁹⁹ *ibid*, 160

being exclusively a Tamil-Tamil issue to becoming a Muslim-Tamil-Muslim issue"²⁰⁰.

In the recent peace talks held during September 2002 the LTTE's Chief negotiator Anton Balasingham stated, "*the north and the east is the traditional homeland of the Tamils and the Muslims*,"²⁰¹. This statement highlights a significant difference between previous peace talks. For example in the 1987 Indo-Lanka Accord the Muslims were not consulted on the issue of devolution. The inclusion of the Muslims within the notion of a Tamil homeland represents a significant concession by the LTTE, particularly in view of the mass expulsion of Muslims and other minorities from certain areas in the North and the East.

Identities within Identities: the case of the Sufi's

It is suggested that the macro-identities of Sinhala's, Tamils, and Muslims "*are designed by elite leaders or organisations that have a vested interest in constructing macro identities*"²⁰², and that the propensity towards the elite construction of macro-identity as a monolithic entity, subsumes alternative identities and denies the possibility of membership of multiple identities. Significantly, the conceptualisation of identity in Sri Lanka has revolved around the notion of the other as a non-self, which through processes of social comparison and categorisation contribute to the definition of identity.

However, as Witharana notes²⁰³, there exist within these macro-identities schisms and micro-identities that challenge the hegemonic representation in elite driven macro-identities. Within this macro-identity there exist further micro-identities, which offer challenges to the dominance of traditional Muslim identity. The case of Sufism in Sri Lanka offers a helpful example of this issue and the processes that surround it.

The construction and reproduction of a Sufi identity is challenged by orthodox Islamic groups such as the Tablighi Jama' at, which regards the more esoteric and mystical Sufi religious practices as impure abominations of pure Islam, particularly in relation to its links with Sinhala Buddhism. Sufi groups or brotherhoods are mainly found in the Eastern Districts, such as Ampara, but the itinerant nature of the leaders

²⁰⁰ *ibid*, 139

²⁰¹ PTD net, 18/09/02

²⁰² de Munck, 1998, 111

²⁰³ Witharana, 2002, 101

particularly makes it hard to pin down their location²⁰⁴. The Sufi identity in Sri Lanka is intimately associated with the local, shrines such as the Seashore mosque in Kalmunai and of course Kataragama²⁰⁵. In contrast the Tablighi Jama'at offers a global Islam, a Muslim identity that possesses power (and offers positive self-esteem) through its links with a trans-national Muslim identity. This process entails “*a rejection of local histories, dislocating villagers from their past*”²⁰⁶ and from their fellow Sinhala villagers, uniting them in a global community of Islam. However, de Munck notes that this alternative reading of Islam is accepted only to a certain extent, and does not enter into village and personal life to the extent that Sufi Islam does. Recruiters of Tablighi Jama'at are always outsiders, while the Sufi leaders maintain a presence in the deepest parts of the village life. However, Tablighi Jama'at's degree of influence over the powerful of the village suggest to de Munck the “*eventual replacement of a syncretistic Sufi identity with a more puritanical Muslim identity*”²⁰⁷, which is due the fact that

*“the representatives of the Tablighi Jama'at, their actions and preaching, express an identity and a connection to a global community that is more powerful and inclusive than one that Sufism can offer.”*²⁰⁸.

The degree of positive self esteem that identification with a global Muslim identity offers is thus fraught with tension because identifying with this community necessarily divorces and separates them from the community around them who maintain a different identity.

Alternative identities in Sri Lanka

While clearly the theories of Smith, Barth, Brass and the work of the Social Identity school can be applied to the functioning identity groups, and offer conceptual frameworks onto which the functioning of identity can be mapped, they do not offer insights into the existence of the multitude of sub-identities and tensions that exist

²⁰⁴ McGilvray, 2002

²⁰⁵ *ibid*, 2002

²⁰⁶ *ibid*, 121

²⁰⁷ *ibid*, 116

²⁰⁸ de Munck, 1998, 111

between them. Indeed, the identity theories outlined in Chapter Two are only able to offer explanations of the functioning of dominant identity groups as the parties present them. The conceptual lenses of traditional identity theory are not able to tease out the existence of subaltern, alternative and multiple identities. In the next section the existence and significance of alternative and alternate forms of identity will be drawn out. The notion of hybrid identities employed by Rajasingham²⁰⁹ will provide a theoretical backbone on which these alternative readings of identity will be based. It is argued that the existence of these identities present significant challenges and potential alternatives to the hegemonic identity formations already identified.

Hybrid Identity

In contemporary Sri Lanka Sinhala and Tamil nationalist histories “*mirror and mimic each other in inventing ethnically pure identities, territories and homelands*”²¹⁰. Tamil and Sinhala historical narratives of mutual exclusion “*elide other histories of mixed settlement, intermarriage, and bilingual and bicultural communities in many parts of the island*”²¹¹. Rajasingham asserts that through the process of hegemonic monolithic identity formation the notion of hybrid identities, mixed marriages and multiple stories of a multicultural island have been “disabled” by the power of ethno-nationalist history.

This process is argued to have significant implications for processes of conflict transformation. Jeganathan warns against defining the “other” as a radically exclusive conception, particularly in relation to (Sinhala) Self, which has the Tamil as its traditional ‘other’, especially given that historically this ‘other’ has been “*both a sought after ally and hated enemy, wife and invader*”²¹². The tendency of constructed identities to ignore histories or evidences of alternative identity forms suggests that there exist elements that could be constructively utilised to generate alternative discourses of coexistence and cultural mixing. Jeganathan points to the Macadamia myth and argues that the dichotomy generated by traditional readings of the text by Sinhala Buddhist fundamentalists fails to reflect the complex mix of antagonism and

²⁰⁹ Rajasingham, 2002

²¹⁰ *ibid*, 44

²¹¹ *ibid*, 44

²¹² Jeganathan, 1995, 89

alliance, distinction and mixing that occurred between the different identity groups in Sri Lanka.

More contemporary evidence can be found in the lives of the Sufi's living in close proximity to Sinhala neighbours. Here the villagers "*explicitly recognise the ritual and functional parallels in their worship of saints and local Buddhist-Buddhist worship of the gods*"²¹³. The relationship between the hegemonic forces of Sinhalese Buddhism is linked to the practice of minority religious practices. Drawing on her own fieldwork, Rajasingham argues that

*"in Vavuniya there was a pattern of coexistence that had elements of ethnic and caste spatial segregation, which was counterbalanced and interpellated by social mingling and linguistic hybridity"*²¹⁴.

The boundaries of the group are defined, yet porous, and while some of the practices and objects of practice conflated, they retain their distinctiveness, allowing the groups to maintain a distinct and unique sense of self²¹⁵. Here Barth's notion of boundaries and the necessity of the need to express a unique sense of identity, offers a conceptual grounding in which to place these practices.

Rajasingham argues, "*Sri Lanka's de facto ethnic partition then replaces an ancient border zone of ethnic and cultural mixing*"²¹⁶. Within these border areas there lived "*a hybrid people with multiple and overlapping linguistic, ethnic, caste identities*"²¹⁷. The existence of these hybrid identities stands as a direct challenge to the pre-given notion of identity groups as presented by Tajfel²¹⁸. Rather than the mutually antagonistic groups he suggests, in the border areas of Sri Lanka not only do identity groups coexist, but are porous and include sites of mixing and hybridity. It is in times of conflict that these sites are challenged and individuals' retreat to dominant, more secure identities, which are sometimes held in opposition to other secure identities,

²¹³ de Munck, 1998, 131

²¹⁴ Rajasingham, 2002, 58

²¹⁵ Further evidence of coexistence and interactions that challenge the dominant discourses of identity exclusion can be found in the practice of festivals in the village. Villagers share the celebration of the premier village festival, the Burdha Kandoori, which "*unites Muslim and Sinhala, legitimising a socio-religious identity of historical depth and power*" (de Munck 1998 123). Both groups experience a coalescence of micro identities into macro identities that unites them across the group lines, with such practices providing the "*socio-cultural elements for constructing and organising more inclusive (macro) identities*" (de Munck, 1998, 123).

²¹⁶ Rajasingham, 2002 60

²¹⁷ *ibid* 50

²¹⁸ Tajfel, 1978

such as the Tamil/Tamil, or Muslim/LTTE, identities. One explanation for these identities is offered by the Eriksen's²¹⁹ approach to identity referred to in Chapter Two. In the context of multiple identity groupings, relations between these sites of difference generate identities that incorporate and reflect the context out of which they emerge. Despite the threats posed by the history of conflict in Sri Lanka and

“despite past and present localized conflicts between various groups, ethnic coexistence and cultural hybridity was, and still is, a way of life along the coastal areas and in urban centres of the island, but it is gradually being eroded”²²⁰.

The existence of these alternate identities and histories of hybridity, calls for efforts to support, strengthen and stimulate processes that build on this tradition of coexistence. Given that these porous and hybrid identities are threatened and subsumed beneath dominant and secure identities, it is recognised that such efforts are more likely to succeed in a context of post-conflict peacebuilding.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored identity in Sri Lanka. It was noted that the understandings of identity referred to arose out of the context of Sri Lankan identity. These approaches critiqued the idea of national identity as homogenous and stated that such a notion ignored the existence of difference within a pluralistic notion of national identities. Reflecting the idea that identity must be of use to individuals, a notion of national identity was rejected in favour of individual or micro-identities.

It was noted that it was at this level that community solutions to community problems were more likely to be found. It was argued that this might, in part, be prevented because identity in Sri Lanka is typically framed as ‘ethnic’ violence, a notion that reflects the hegemony of a narrative of ‘bi-polar ethnic imagination’.

In accordance with Smith and the constructionist perspectives, it was shown that history, especially the historical text of the Macadamia, was employed to present the conflict as primordial and thus inherent between the people of Sri Lanka. The

²¹⁹ Eriksen, 2001

²²⁰ Rajasingham, 2002, 62

underlying epistemology supporting the use of notions of history, race and identity was shown to restrict the creation of alternative histories and marginalize or disable subaltern identities. It was also shown that the political culture and discourses of identity that underpins it were products of colonial interventions. The conceptual framework through which history is conceived was critiqued and instead it was suggested that history might be more usefully understood as a 'moment in time', and that approaching history in this manner offered the possibility of engaging with the minority identities that are present in Sri Lanka. The discourse of race was also seen to be a product of Western classificatory systems, and it was argued to have constructed identities that were framed in relation to the inherently conflictual 'other'. In exploring the existence of minority identities in Sri Lanka, and exposing the dominance of bi-polar ethnic identities, the importance of Muslim identity was recognised. Although the construction of Muslim identity was seen to have occurred within the parameters of the theoretical boundaries of Tamil and Sinhala identity, the existence of sub-identities within the hegemonic assertion of an elite formed Muslim identity was also recognised. Similarly, the subjection of the minority Sufi Islamic identity under the aggressive domination by orthodox Islam was deemed significant in the political context of a more vocal Muslim voice, and concerns over the truly representative nature of the SLMC was raised.

Understanding identity as constructed offered the possibility of deconstructing conflictual identities implicated in violence, and the assertion of alternative identities that reflect the potential for co-existence and acceptance of difference. Here the notion of hybrid identities and histories of shared lives, religious practice and festivals²²¹ in the 'border' regions of Sri Lanka was employed as examples of alternative identities to the exclusive, bi-polar and antagonistic identities that dominate the understanding of the conflict in Sri Lanka.

The existence of subaltern, alternative identities, and the use of narratives and individual experience of identity are recognised as significant in Sri Lanka. In the next chapter the possibilities of integrating these understandings with the conclusions drawn from the conflict resolution and identity theories presented in the first two chapters will be explored.

²²¹ The assertion that there is a history of coexistence and hybridity does not imply that there exists a conflict free history of Sri Lanka, as the occurrence of pre-colonial conflict between the kingdoms of the island stands as evidence against such a claim, but instead that against these much publicised histories of conflict there exist alternative histories of coexistence and hybrid identities.

Chapter Four

Identity, Conflict and Transformation

In the previous chapter the epistemological base of historical, racial and identity theory was identified as having significant implications for construing alternatives to conflict-saturated discourses and narratives. The experience of identity in a context of lived relations with difference raised questions about the applicability of much of the identity theory presented in Chapter Two. This was particularly the case in the application of the exclusionary conception of self-other and inherent intergroup conflict, where in the border areas histories of mixing and hybridity suggested that instrumental identity creation by elites²²² was implicated in conflict.

This chapter will seek to explore how these disjunctures between theory and actuality impact on understanding the principles of Conflict Transformation and the practice of a workshop type scenario.

Identity, Human Needs and Conflict Transformation

As noted in chapter Two, Gillard points to the assumption that in SIT the self is built on the perceived mutually exclusionary nature of the self and the other. The problems that approaching resolution of conflict through theory that has at its core the belief that individual and group identities are inherently exclusionary, poses a significant problem, and one that Gillard emphasises. For SIT:

“any attempt to nurture alternate identifications that transcend the division between communities divided by violent conflict is to threaten the very self of the individuals involved. It is this impasse that is the source of barriers to conceptualising processes whereby intercommunal relationships, severely damaged by war, might be rebuilt”²²³

²²² These claims are intended to open up debate and understanding in the analysis and approach to comprehending identity and identity functionality. The reality of those experiencing conflict rarely fits into such neat and ‘nice’ logical understandings, and this is recognised as being significant in any approach to conflict. The approaches considered here are intended to further discussion and debate, and hopefully assist in the development of initiatives that might contribute to the transformation of conflict.

²²³ Gillard, op cit 8

The origin of the impasse lies, according to Gillard, in the epistemology of the social science it is rooted in. For Gillard, *“the objectivist epistemology that underpins much of social psychology stems from a belief that social reality can be objectively observed and known”*²²⁴.

Similarly, for Vayrynen, analysis and explorations of the difference between ethnic groups reaffirms their importance in social life. Instead, she suggests that examining how the ‘other’ ethnic group comes to be perceived as ‘other’ and different might generate understandings of the processes that contribute this construction of their ‘imagined community’²²⁵.

The application of theories of identity and conflict that are rooted in the same conceptual ground as the explanations used for describing and justifying conflict is critiqued by Gillard. He argues that the social psychological theory base that it draws on limits development of conflict resolution. This restricts the insights that it might offer into the dynamics of the conflict, and the extent to which these insights might generate constructive, durable solutions. For Gillard,

*“objectivist theories of identity and conflict, as represented here by the cognitive social psychological and psychodynamic discourse – are entirely inappropriate as conceptual tools to provide insight into conflicts that are predominantly described in terms of a (nationalistic) discourse founded on similar epistemological bases”*²²⁶.

This epistemology underlies the basic human needs approach to conflict resolution, and is evident in the process of the PSW. Here, the facilitators seek to build an environment in which the participants can analyse their own interests to determine the underlying needs. Like Gillard’s, a social constructionist approach critiques the notion that it is possible to arrive at an objectively known and agreed reality, arguing instead that reality is subjectively experienced by each individual, and agreed interpretations arrived at through the intersubjective relationship between individuals and between individuals and the social structures in which they are located. If social reality is understood to be created in this way, then

²²⁴ *ibid* 9

²²⁵ Jabri, *op cit*, 125

²²⁶ Gillard, *op cit* 10

“the notion of the subjective self knowing the object other is replaced by the idea that different selves interdependently negotiate knowledge of the other...and the autonomy of the self is replaced by a continuity between selves”²²⁷.

If social reality is understood as constructed, then mounting challenges to the reality in which conflict is experienced must occur through a conscious reworking of that reality

The Positioned Self

This conception of social reality and the functioning of the individual offer alternative ways to understand the processes of the PSW and to conceptualise peacebuilding practices that can build on this understanding of reality and the individual. The primary focus of the PSW is shifted from an emphasis on determining the individual needs of the participants to an understanding of the dynamics of the relational continuity that exists between individuals; in this case, the participants. A key factor in the selection of participants is that they are able to engage in working with these dynamics and continuities, and this clearly requires participants of a particular type.

Jabri suggests an understanding of identity and the self as a positioned entity; *“constructed through and constitutive of the structural properties of patterned and regularised social systems”²²⁸.*

The autonomy of the self is rejected in favour of an understanding the individual as located within a social context, mutually constitutive, and engaged in intersubjective relations with other individuals who also inhabit this intersubjectively constituted reality. Such approaches to identity possess a broader application, being able to recognise the existence of societies in which collective identity and responsibility are prioritised above the individual and their associated rights.

The understanding of the world around us is thus constructed through our relationships with both other individuals, the social structures²²⁹, and through the

²²⁷ Gillard, op cit 19

²²⁸ Jabri, op cit 120

²²⁹ These societal structures are understood to be constituted through the affirmation of individuals who act in response to and thus maintain them.

typifications, which sustain an intelligible order for the world around us. Characterisations of the situation in Sri Lanka as a bi-polar ethnic conflict offer an easily intelligible understanding of the surrounding world. However, this narrative discourse hides sub-narratives, as noted by Witharana in the previous chapter. The struggle over Muslim identity formation illustrated by Ismail is thus understood as a contest for the hegemonic assertion of a particular narrative of identity.

Talking Reality

In a narrative context;

*“discourse is both the process of talk and interaction between people, and the products of that interaction. Talk tends to happen in recursive patterns within particular locales, and we can therefore speak about these patterns as particular discourses”*²³⁰.

Exploring the discourses in which people operate exposes the perceptions of individuals, and the nature of a particular conflict. It also depersonalises, and unlike traditional approaches to conflict resolution, and identity theory, which emphasise the individual and his or her motivations, a narrative approach focuses on *“the way meaning is constructed within discourse, rather than on the individual as the sole producer of discord”*²³¹.

Kelman, a PSW practitioner, points to the importance of language in understanding the world, and hints at the significance of this, stating *“the way we talk about our identity affects the way we think about it, and ultimately the way we act on it”*²³².

The impact that the notion of Aryan, as portrayed initially through language, had on the creation of linguistically distinct entities in Sri Lanka is emblematic of the products of this process.

Although Kelman points to the importance of language, he refers only to its performative function, in which language is a tool for the expression of an independent, pre-existing identity and reality. Yet he also notes *“as individuals,*

²³⁰ Winslade & Monk, 2000 42

²³¹ Winslade & Monk, op cit, 42

²³² Kelman, op cit, 210

groups, we make sense of who we are now, in part, by looking back and creating stories, about our self, our ethnic group, about our nation"²³³.

Applying Stories: the Narrative Approach

These stories come to be understood as the reality of the world that is described. In interventions aimed at transforming situations of violent conflict, the role that stories, narrative accounts of the individual become of critical importance. According to a social constructionist approach that places narratives as central in our understanding of reality, *"the talk we create in mediation is actually constructing experience"*²³⁴. As for Kelman, within a narrative approach language is a form of social action. Drawing on the implications within social constructionism, the role of language is extended, until its use is understood as constructing the world around us. This is described by Winslade and Monk, who note, *"the world constructed includes the internal world of the individual and the supports in which social structures can be built"*²³⁵. Such an approach is distinct from traditional conflict resolution and problems solving workshops, where language is simply a passive tool employed for the transmission of thoughts and feelings.

As people construct stories to make sense of their context, so reality, as the individual understands it, is constructed from those stories, and confirms the position of the individual within those stories. However, as Winslade and Monk put it, *"stories take on a life of their own. Thus, when a conflict story takes root, it generates a momentum that does not reflect the facts or realities of a situation because stories mediate our knowledge of reality"*²³⁶.

The relationships that individuals hold with each other, and with the social structures in which they are located, are expressed and constituted through narratives that emerge from these relationships. Implicit within this understanding is the idea that if these narratives can be opened to analysis and debate then the underlying disjunction between realities, and the cause of conflict, can be transformed. The task of the

²³³ Jussim et al, op cit, 217

²³⁴ Winslade & Monk, 2000 39

²³⁵ ibid, 2000 40

²³⁶ ibid, 2000 52

workshop facilitator then, rather than trying to steer the participants to a point where the issues within the existing story, as told by the parties, are negotiated to a win-win solution, but to “*work with the parties to create an alternative story*”²³⁷.

Dialogue: Talking Transformation

Given that the reality of individuals and the social world is understood and constituted through narrative, the language employed by individuals, and the language available to individuals, becomes of critical importance, as Kelman suggests. Gillard emphasises this, arguing that we must look at how individuals speak of themselves, of others, to determine their understanding of conflict, and their location within conflict. One process that might reflect these understandings is the notion of dialogic communities and institutions. The idea of a dialogic process is put forward as an alternative to the instrumental approach of traditional conflict resolution (such as the needs theory of Burton).

*“The dialogic community is moral conversation in which the capacity to reverse perspectives, that is, the willingness to reason from others point of view and the sensitivity to hear their voice, is paramount...[...]...The aim of dialogue is not consensus or unanimity, but the anticipated communication with others who I know I must finally come to some agreement”*²³⁸

As a practical tool it finds application in the process of deconstructing the dominant narratives held by individuals. Table 1. offers a representation of how a dialogic process might be carried out²³⁹. The emphasis on relational involvement of both the participants and the third party demonstrate the shift in emphasis of parties from a results based or goal oriented approach characteristic of Burton and Azar’s approach to a process characterised by work on the relationship between the parties. The

²³⁷ *ibid*, 2000 53

²³⁸ Vayrynen, *op cit* 10

²³⁹ Table 1. is taken from Winslade & Monk’s *Narrative Mediation*. As such it refers to the role of mediator and parties. in the context of a conflict resolution workshop process, these terms can be reframed with the mediator as the facilitator of the workshop, the parties as the participants and the context no longer a mediation but a facilitated workshop. Two key differences between the workshop as presented by Burton and Azar and the one suggested here is the emphasis on relations between parties (including that of the facilitator) and the importance of process, rather than achieving outcomes.

involved and situated nature of the third party reflects the stress Lederach places on the integrated nature of peacemaker²⁴⁰. Dialogic practices assist in the deconstruction of the conflict-dominated story, and allow alternative versions to be explored. Thus

“deconstructing the conflict in the problem-saturated story assists the mediator/facilitator in opening the space necessary for alternative, or conflict-diminished descriptions to be entertained”²⁴¹.

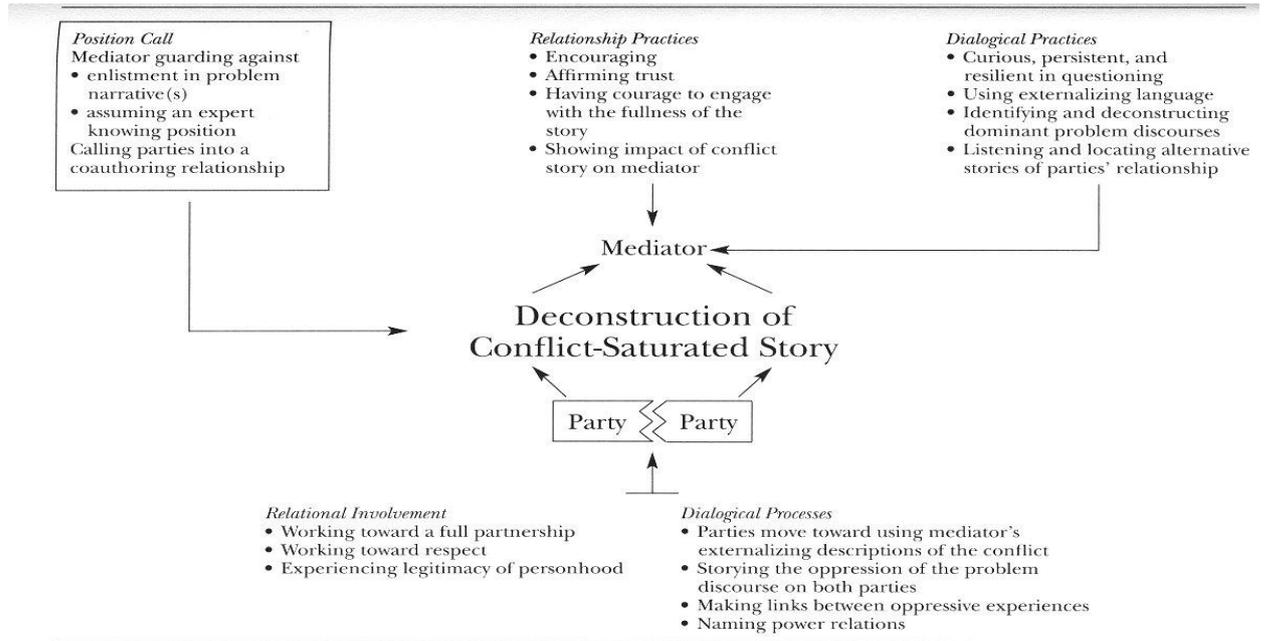


Table 1. Diagram of a dialogic process of deconstruction. *Source: Winslade and Monk, Narrative Mediation, 2002*

Underlying a dialogic process is an idea of an alternative to the instrumental rationality found within Burton and Azar’s approach to conflict resolution. A dialogic process utilises a ‘discursive rationality’ which “does not transcend particular traditions”²⁴², and “presupposes an understanding of the possibility of and fruitfulness dialogue”²⁴³. Discursive rationality opens the door to dialogue based on an understanding of the cultural and conceptual frameworks, the discourses, of the other party, rather than instrumental approaches to achieving their goals of satisfying their

²⁴⁰ Lederach 1997
²⁴¹ Winslade & Monk, 2000 82
²⁴² Vayrynen, 2001, 124
²⁴³ ibid, 140

needs. Within a discursive process, “*the emphasis need not be on rational agreement so much as on sustaining those dialogical practices and moral relationships.*”²⁴⁴.

Such a process is clearly ambitious, and emerges from a sense of the ideal of conflict transformation, rather than the practice of reality. Although open to criticism, the application of a narrative approach has a precedent in its application in mediation, suggesting that possibility exists for the application of a narrative approach in a workshop context.

However, the dialogic community offers a beacon to aim for in the transformation of conflict resolution theory and practice away from the instrumental negotiation and facilitated mediation over interests and needs to a space where the dialogue itself, rather than the content of the exchange, is the act of transformation.

Identity in a Workshop Setting

Having explored the operation of a narrative form of identity, emerging out of a social constructionist context and its relation to the theory of conflict transformation, this next section will explore how these findings are applied to the practice of the conflict transformation workshop.

The relational and narrative understanding of identity and conflict suggests that it is in the relationships themselves, rather than the interests of the parties to the relationship, that alternatives to conflict must be sought. Although the PSW of Burton emphasises the role of elites Witharana and the social constructionist perspective emphasise the importance of community and the individual. The identification of a community role in peacebuilding by Witharana suggest that while the *aims* of the PSW may not be suitable or met within a community or individual context, the *process* of the workshop (no longer a *problem solving* exercise) offers potential as a tool in the transformation of conflict.

Within traditional conceptions of the workshop it is assumed:

*“that when conflicting parties have a chance to meet face to face in an analytical and supportive environment it will encourage them to change, for example misperceptions and to humanise their mutual images”*²⁴⁵

²⁴⁴ *ibid*, 125

²⁴⁵ Vayrynen, *op cit*, 120

The act of personal interaction is seen to be conducive to the transformation of the mutually exclusionary ‘self-other’ relationship to an inclusive ‘we’ relationship. This understanding draws heavily on Allports²⁴⁶ ‘contact hypothesis’, in which he states:

*“Prejudice (unless deeply rooted in the structure of the individual) may be reduced by equal status contact between majority and minority groups in the pursuit of common goals”*²⁴⁷.

Vayrynen argues that face-to-face interaction is not necessarily sufficient to enable to transformation. There are cases where *“contact has proved detrimental to community relations by reinforcing stereotypes and distrust”*²⁴⁸. Within the workshop it is conceivable parties would maintain the adversarial positions and perceptions that are at the core of the conflict. The fact of face-to-face interaction is not in itself sufficient to transform the underlying structures that perpetuate the situation of conflict; mutually exclusionary positions and discourses still exist and threaten the stability of any transformation achieved through the process of the workshop.

Jabri argues that although traditional conflict resolution practices may not challenge, or may even reinforce, exclusionary positions and discourses, *“the very fact of their occurrence provides scope for transformation”*²⁴⁹. There are other processes and factors within the workshop process that must be revealed to explain the functioning of the workshop, and that once identified, can be built on in order to make the a workshop process more effective a capable to generating the kind of change required for true conflict transformation.

Although Vayrynen recognises that interpreting conflict in terms of needs has some benefit in that *“it helps the parties to recognise commonalities they are assumed to share”*²⁵⁰, in order to be an effective and durable transformation, it must go further than simply facilitating the recognition of commonalities. Individuals, groups and collectivities are different, and it is these differences that, as Barth noted earlier, are emblematic of their unique identity. Indeed, Barth argues that to determine the requirements for harmonious coexistence *“we must ask ourselves what is needed to*

²⁴⁶ Allport, 1954

²⁴⁷ *ibid* 281

²⁴⁸ Church et al, 2002

²⁴⁹ Jabri, *op cit*, 154

²⁵⁰ Vayrynen, *op cit*, 123

*make ethnic distinctions emerge in one area*²⁵¹. Instead of reducing differences to the commonality of universal basic human needs, facilitators could point to the “*multiple and coexistent identities which are defined and emphasised in accordance with the situation*”²⁵². That these exist as powerful alternatives is evident from the assertion of histories of hybridity and coexistence noted by Rajasingham²⁵³.

Within such an approach “*the social context is seen as the key to understanding self and identity*”²⁵⁴. The self, and identity, is constituted by context, which itself is constructed through and from the operation of discourse.

The role of the facilitator is also critical in the conducting of an effective workshop process. From the Basic Human Needs perspective, the role and skill of the facilitator are based on the understandings of social science and social psychology²⁵⁵, and the language employed within the workshop context defined by these understandings of group processes²⁵⁶. The language of the facilitator is seen to contribute to the process of the workshop. However, using the language of psychology frames the reference and portrayal of the participants as isolated individuals, who are best understood through understanding of their individual psychological processes (such as *needs* for security, recognition and identity). This emphasis ignores the communication patterns and interpersonal processes which are, through a social constructionist lens, regarded as crucial in understanding and transforming the situation of conflict²⁵⁷.

Given that people operate within discourses, a conflict transformation initiative benefits from the interveners knowledge of the context, and its dominant, and subordinate, discourses. Unlike Burtons approach to conflict resolution that asserts a context-independent facilitator of process, a narrative approach affirms the importance of the third party’s understanding, location and relationship with the context; “*the more mediators know the discourses that are significant in the dispute, the more likely they are to help identify a way forward*”²⁵⁸. As mediators and third parties become more involved in the practice of these discourses through their very

²⁵¹ Bart 1969, 17

²⁵² Vayrynen, op cit, 123

²⁵³ A corollary of this is that identity is much less stable, coherent and monolithic in nature than traditional approaches to conflict and understandings in identity theory suggest. Instead the ‘multiply positioned subject’, in which identity is composed of a multiplicity of identifications, positions and memberships, gives rise to a notion multiple identities with varying degrees of importance, significance and utility.

²⁵⁴ Winslade & Monk, 2000 44

²⁵⁵ Azar 1990, Burton, 1990, 1990a, Kelman 2001, Kelman 1990

²⁵⁶ Azar, 1990, Vayrynen 2001)

²⁵⁷ Vayrynen, op cit, 124

²⁵⁸ Winslade & Monk, 2000 42

presence, as Lederach notes the situated and ‘insider-partial’²⁵⁹ nature of the intervener offers potential for the effective transformation of conflict. This does of course presume that the intervener will act for the ‘greater good’ and the positive transformation of conflict.

Peacebuilding, Conflict and Transformation

Clements recognises the significance of the problem solving workshop, and argues that such processes provide not only the ‘backdrop’ to the development of “*deeper understandings of the dynamics of the conflict itself, or in changing images of one's own party and of the adversaries, but it is essential to the development of a successful peacebuilding strategy*”²⁶⁰. For Clements it is the changes in understandings and relationships that are of critical importance. He argues that traditional problem-solving approaches have focussed on altering the political environment without adequate attention being paid to the expansion of more developmental objectives. It has been demonstrated that the problem solving process brings parties together, but that the relationship-building element is a precursor to discussions focussed on specific issues within the conflict that can transfer these changes “*via influential participants to decision-making bodies*. A focus on the relationships between the parties, and the nature of the dialogue process, offers a means in which to place a change in the reality of the participants at the centre of the process. The emphasis within the workshop is the renegotiation of mutually exclusive identities through the anticipated emergence or highlighting of already existing identities that offer more constructive opportunities for cooperative relations.

Annex 5. portrays a representation of how a traditional conception of hegemonic identity might operate differently if the narratives of individuals were engaged with. The interplay between different identities is presented as having the possibility of being transformed into one in which those aspects salient to a particular relationship are granted legitimacy and a notion of multiple identities is legitimised.

If, instead of identity as a monolithic all encompassing entity, it is characterised as a relationship with the other (Annex 5 diagram 1 against diagram 2), then the

²⁵⁹ Lederach, 1995

²⁶⁰ Clements, 1997

commonalities between people become emphasised and more significant. Similarly, in conflict, within the conflict exploring points where the relationship between the two protagonists is more positive, and exploring the potential for building on it, offers a useful way forward.

The use of narratives to tease out these commonalities in identities offers a way forward. Rather than an instrumentalist approach to identity that is goal-oriented and outcome focussed (does this identity achieve/satisfy/meet that which I require of it?) a narrative or expressive form of identity is an end in itself. It reflects the experience of the individual or group. As such it is more likely to be accessible at the level of a micro-identity rather than a macro.

If reality is perceived to be understood and created through the narratives people hold about the world in which they live, conflict is understood as breakdowns in shared stories, or at least the break down of stories of coexistence and free of violence. In a narrative approach “*conflict is understood from the outside in as the almost inevitable result of diversity, rather than as the result of the expression of personal needs or interests*”²⁶¹. Similarly, “*conflict is likely because people do not have direct access to the truth or to the facts about a situation. Rather, they always view things from a perspective, a cultural position*”²⁶². In this understanding, rather than facts being empirically and scientifically valid phenomena, they are “*simply stories that are generally accepted*”²⁶³. The narrative approach to conflict transformation is thus focussed on the deconstruction of conflict-saturated stories (such as the imagined bipolar ethnic conflict of Sri Lanka, and the homogeneity of identity, as demonstrated by the Muslims in Sri Lanka), and the reconstruction of narratives in which plurality, mixing and harmonious coexistence occupy privileged positions in the narrative of identity. It is in this reconstruction that a key role for the workshop can be found. Instead of goals for strategies to end the conflict, the objective of the workshop can be understood as the formulation of an understanding of reality and the reworking of the relationships between the parties into one in which conflict, if not altogether transformed, is able to be handled differently. Table 2. offers an outline of how such a reconstruction process might occur.

²⁶¹ Winslade & Monk, 2000 41

²⁶² *ibid* 41

²⁶³ *ibid* 41

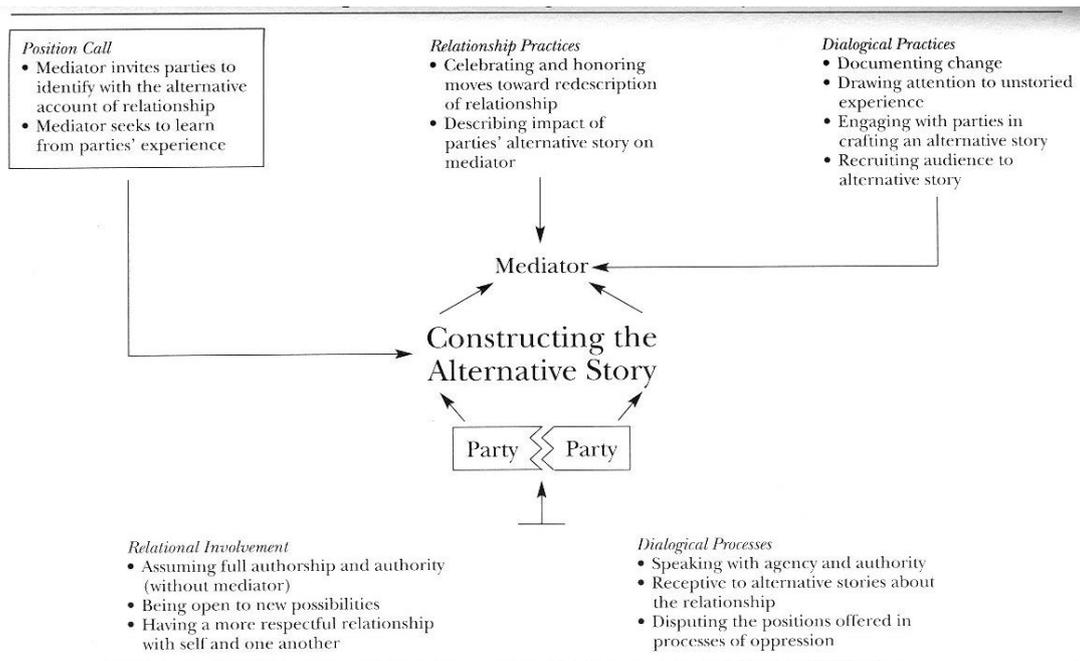


Table 2. Diagram of a dialogic process of reconstruction. *Source: Winslade and Monk, Narrative Mediation 2002*

Conclusion

This paper has explored conflict resolution and identity theory, and their applicability to the conflict in Sri Lanka. It was found that an understanding of identity as constructed, relational and defined by context pointed to the importance of the process of the problem-solving workshop in dealing with conflictual identities. The use of narrative as a tool in understanding the way sense is made of conflict and reality offered new directions worthy of future study in formulating processes that could contribute to peacebuilding practices.

In conflict resolution theory the totalist approach was recognised as being insensitive to context, and that its biological determinism and universal rationality relegated to a minor consideration context and cultural location of parties in conflict. The conflict resolution approach of Burton, and the identity theory upon which it drew, was seen as unable to engage with the notion of multiple identities formed by the relationship between individual and social structure.

The identity theory upon which conflict resolution theory draws was also found to be functionally antagonistic, and thus resistant to conceptualising processes in which the coexistence of different identities could be developed. The understanding of identity from a social constructionist perspective, and the approach suggested by Eriksen, emphasised the contextual and relational nature of identity, which was seen to tease out the existence of multiple, alternative identities.

The homogeneous nature of identity found in the conflict resolution theory of the needs approach was argued to be misleading, at least in the context of Sri Lanka. The hegemony of dominant narratives, such as the 'ethnic' nature of the conflict, and the use of history to support it, was seen to disable the potential of communities to deal with conflict in their own way and within their own context. The existence of micro-identities, sub-identities and complex hybrid identities was seen to pose a challenge to the hegemony of fixed discourses of exclusive and exclusionary identity, and yet be threatened by the power of the latter.

The use of narrative to characterise and engage with the understanding of reality and identity as the experiences of individuals and groups was seen to offer a useful tool that could encompass the recognised complexity of identity, and respond to the existence of marginalized identities.

The process, rather than the goal, of the conflict workshop was identified as offering a structure in which the employment of a narrative approach to conflict transformation could be exercised. Such recognition necessarily indicates a reconsideration of the objectives of the conflict resolution workshop. Instead of agreed goals and a reworked understanding of *why* conflict occurs, a workshop process based upon relations and the exploration of narratives was suggested. In such a process it is the understanding *what* conflict is, and individual roles within it, that offer useful areas for exploration. This revised nature of workshop offers a more sophisticated and nuanced process, with different objectives and time frames, which recognises long-term goals as the most effective approach to sustainable conflict transformation. Within this context, and through this process, it is argued that the process of reformulating relationships and reconstructing realities and identities free from violent conflict is conceivable. An understanding of identity as a complex, relational construction suggests reconstructing identities is possible as a fundamental component of the peacebuilding project. This dissertation has sought demonstrate this, and point to windows through which these future peacebuilding practices might be discerned.

Annex 1: Population by religion and district, Census, 2001

	2001*						
District	Total	Buddhist	Hindus	Muslims	Catholics	Christians	Others
Sri Lanka	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
Colombo	2,234,146	1,573,329	196,238	243,278	173,555	43,986	3,760
Gampaha	2,066,096	1,479,246	42,575	94,325	420,791	27,913	1,246
Kalutara	1,060,800	890,453	35,966	94,865	34,827	4,298	391
Kandy	1,272,463	930,644	135,708	173,837	22,345	9,336	593
Matale	442,427	349,889	42,893	39,993	8,102	1,466	84
Nuwara - Eliya	700,083	276,427	359,336	20,000	32,919	10,649	752
Galle	990,539	931,656	15,356	35,870	4,304	3,050	303
Matara	761,236	715,883	17,902	22,730	2,747	1,870	104
Hambantota	525,370	508,922	1,427	13,100	882	955	84
Jaffna	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
Mannar	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
Vavuniya	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
Mullaitivu	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
Kilinochchi	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
Batticaloa	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
Ampara	589,344	231,101	101,609	245,285	7,968	3,156	225
Trincomalee	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
Kurunegala	1,452,369	1,291,654	14,022	99,677	39,973	6,719	324
Puttalam	705,342	304,009	30,395	133,697	230,336	6,677	228
Anuradhapura	746,466	642,223	4,363	61,552	6,255	1,943	130
Polonnaruwa	359,197	320,675	6,697	27,501	3,600	561	163
Badulla	774,555	554,810	160,147	42,499	12,353	4,530	216
Moneragala	396,173	373,989	11,916	8,145	1,482	609	32
Ratnapura	1,008,164	871,300	99,587	21,818	10,643	4,507	309
Kegalle	779,774	660,494	52,883	52,872	8,889	4,487	149

* Provisional

Source - Department of Census and Statistics

Annex 2: Percentage distribution of the population by religion and district, Census, 2001

	2001*						
District	All	Buddhists	Hindus	Muslims	Roman Catholics	Other Christians	Others
	All	Buddhists	Hindus	Muslims	Roman Catholics	Other Christians	Others
Sri Lanka	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
Colombo	100.00	70.42	8.78	10.89	7.77	1.97	0.17
Gampaha	100.00	71.60	2.06	4.57	20.37	1.35	0.06
Kalutara	100.00	83.94	3.39	8.94	3.28	0.41	0.04
Kandy	100.00	73.14	10.66	13.66	1.76	0.73	0.05
Matale	100.00	79.08	9.69	9.04	1.83	0.33	0.02
Nuwara - Eliya	100.00	39.48	51.33	2.86	4.70	1.52	0.11
Galle	100.00	94.06	1.55	3.62	0.43	0.31	0.03
Matara	100.00	94.04	2.35	2.99	0.36	0.25	0.01
Hambantota	100.00	96.87	0.27	2.49	0.17	0.18	0.02
Jaffna	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
Mannar	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
Vavuniya	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
Mullaitivu	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
Kilinochchi	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
Batticaloa	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
Ampara	100.00	39.21	17.24	41.62	1.35	0.54	0.04
Trincomalee	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
Kurunegala	100.00	88.93	0.97	6.86	2.75	0.46	0.02
Puttalam	100.00	43.10	4.31	18.95	32.66	0.95	0.03
Anuradhapura	100.00	90.05	0.58	8.25	0.84	0.26	0.02
Polonnaruwa	100.00	89.28	1.86	7.66	1.00	0.16	0.05
Badulla	100.00	71.63	20.68	5.49	1.59	0.58	0.03
Moneragala	100.00	94.40	3.01	2.06	0.37	0.15	0.01
Ratnapura	100.00	86.42	9.88	2.16	1.06	0.45	0.03
Kegalle	100.00	84.70	6.78	6.78	1.14	0.58	0.02
*Provisional	Source - Department of Census and Statistics						

Annex 3: Population by ethnic group and district, Census, 2001

District	Total	Singhalese	Sri Lankan Tamil	Indian Tamil	Sri Lankan Moor	Burgher	Malay	Sri Lanka Chetty	Bharatha	Others
Sri Lanka	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
Colombo	2,234,146	1,707,401	249,915	26,036	203,558	16,138	19,421	1,236	754	9,687
Gampaha	2,066,096	1,881,854	64,450	7,388	80,320	10,274	12,333	6,328	798	2,351
Kalutara	1,060,800	923,893	13,527	28,769	92,775	739	706	70	13	308
Kandy	1,272,463	940,963	50,405	106,259	168,960	2,080	2,210	84	17	1,485
Matale	442,427	354,985	23,982	23,329	38,867	419	474	57	3	311
Nuwara - Eliya	700,083	280,236	41,445	359,386	17,557	538	600	36	12	273
Galle	990,539	934,381	11,596	8,553	35,346	276	134	59	17	177
Matara	761,236	716,780	4,791	16,983	22,378	146	97	4	2	55
Hambantota	525,370	510,063	1,957	243	5,506	114	7,385	8	0	94
Jaffna	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
Mannar	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
Vavuniya	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
Mullaitivu	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
Kilinochchi	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
Batticaloa	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
Ampara	589,344	231,771	110,180	410	245,089	1,008	169	6	1	710
Trincomalee										
Kurunegala	1,452,369	1,332,426	16,991	2,732	97,778	654	1,223	125	68	372
Puttalam	705,342	520,330	48,689	2,161	131,864	668	666	540	45	379
Anuradhapura	746,466	677,667	5,064	517	61,503	167	200	44	3	1,301
Polonnaruwa	359,197	324,342	7,185	147	27,272	62	34	5	7	143
Badulla	774,555	558,218	32,230	141,087	40,455	606	1,390	112	21	436
Monaragala	396,173	374,553	5,579	7,660	8,047	113	83	19	1	118
Ratnapura	1,008,164	873,265	34,335	78,581	20,871	405	245	49	2	411
Kegalle	779,774	667,536	14,163	45,647	51,699	209	188	56	9	267

*Provisional

Source - Department of Census and Statistics

Annex 4: Percentage distribution of population by ethnic group and district, Census, 2001

District	All Races	Singhalese (Low Country and Kandyan)	Sri Lankan Tamils	Indian Tamils	Sri Lankan Moors	Burghers	Malays	Sri Lankan Chetty	Bharatha	Others
Sri Lanka	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
Colombo	100.00	76.42	11.19	1.17	9.11	0.72	0.87	0.06	0.03	0.43
Gampaha	100.00	91.08	3.12	0.36	3.89	0.50	0.60	0.31	0.04	0.11
Kalutara	100.00	87.09	1.28	2.71	8.75	0.07	0.07	0.01	0.00	0.03
Kandy	100.00	73.95	3.96	8.35	13.28	0.16	0.17	0.01	0.00	0.12
Matale	100.00	80.24	5.42	5.27	8.78	0.09	0.11	0.01	0.00	0.07
Nuwara - Eliya	100.00	40.03	5.92	51.33	2.51	0.08	0.09	0.01	0.00	0.04
Galle	100.00	94.33	1.17	0.86	3.57	0.03	0.01	0.01	0.00	0.02
Matara	100.00	94.16	0.63	2.23	2.94	0.02	0.01	0.00	0.00	0.01
Hambantota	100.00	97.09	0.37	0.05	1.05	0.02	1.41	0.00	0.00	0.02
Jaffna	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
Mannar	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
Vavuniya	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
Mullaitivu	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
Kilinochchi	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
Batticaloa	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
Ampara	100.00	39.33	18.70	0.07	41.59	0.17	0.03	0.00	0.00	0.12
Trincomalee	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
Kurunegala	100.00	91.74	1.17	0.19	6.73	0.05	0.08	0.01	0.00	0.03
Puttalam	100.00	73.77	6.90	0.31	18.70	0.09	0.09	0.08	0.01	0.05
Anuradhapura	100.00	90.78	0.68	0.07	8.24	0.02	0.03	0.01	0.00	0.17
Polonnaruwa	100.00	90.30	2.00	0.04	7.59	0.02	0.01	0.00	0.00	0.04
Badulla	100.00	72.07	4.16	18.22	5.22	0.08	0.18	0.01	0.00	0.06
Monaragala	100.00	94.54	1.41	1.93	2.03	0.03	0.02	0.00	0.00	0.03
Ratnapura	100.00	86.62	3.41	7.79	2.07	0.04	0.02	0.00	0.00	0.04
Kegalle	100.00	85.61	1.82	5.85	6.63	0.03	0.02	0.01	0.00	0.03

*Provisional

Source - Department of Census and Statistics

Annex 5. Identity Relations Schematic

The Difference between relations between identities based on hegemonic identity and between a narrative, relational understanding of identity. In the first diagram, relations are dominated by a fixed, all encompassing identity (the triangle). In the second diagram the points of contact between different identities are characterised by the context in which the contact takes place, and thus open the possibility of multiple, complex identities.

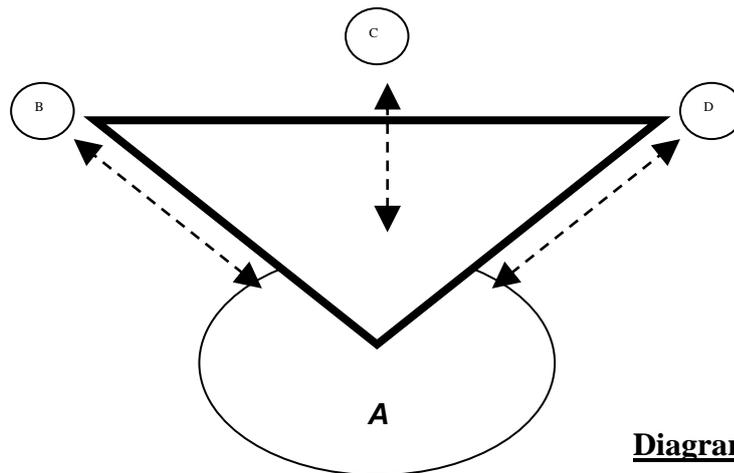


Diagram 1.

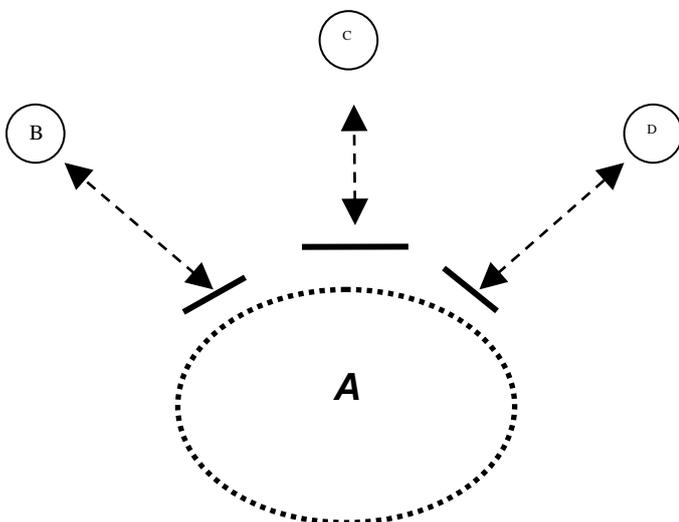
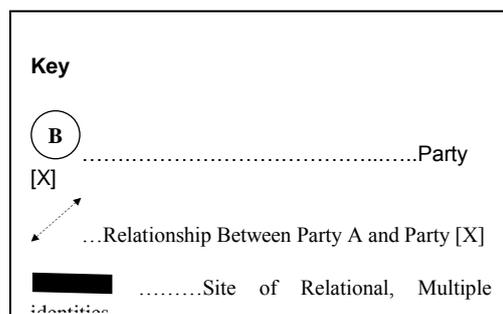
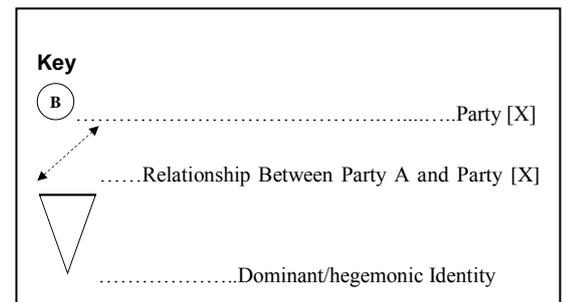


Diagram 2.



(Annex 5. Cont.)

In diagram 1, a unified, monolithic identity (the Tamil identity) stays static in relation to other identities: it simply is as it is, and the context in which it operates has no impact on the manner of its operationalisation and presentation.

However, when the relationship between individual A (Sufi Muslim) and individual B, who is similar (another Sufi Muslim) is conducted in the same way with individual C, who is different and unable to accept that identity (Tamil), the relations between A and C become complex, and fraught with tension, as the identity of Sufi is not recognised as legitimate or worthy of individual treatment.

The traditional conception of identity asserts a monolithic conception of identity, such as a Muslim identity. Within this conception, the identity holder is expected to function the same, irrespective of whom s/he engages with. If both A and B are Muslims, their interaction is characterised, coloured and influenced by the fact that they are both Muslims. If relations between A and C, who is not a Muslim, are carried out in the same way, with Islam still maintaining the central reference point for A, then the context in which they interact is dominated by the assertion and prominence of individual A as a Muslim. For party C, perhaps a Tamil, there is no recognition of the legitimacy of the Islamic identity, and thus party A, a Muslim, feels unrecognised and excluded.

If both A and C are farmers, then they in actual fact have more in common than A and B, who is a Banker in Colombo. Similarly, while A and C might both be farmers, but C is not Muslim, they might be in competition over land, yet their conflict may, through the dominance of A as a Muslim, be characterised as an ethnic/religious Non-/Muslim conflict.

In diagram 2, rather than a monolithic identity asserting and imposing itself over the relationships between individuals, a narrative understanding explores the relationships between A and B, and suggests that it is the relationship between A and B that constitutes an identity that offers a useful point of entry and exploration in which to conduct peacebuilding attempts.

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