Symfiliosi, Cyprus

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Summer June, 2011

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Nicos Trimikliniotis
Wiebke Kiem

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Traps and pitfalls in comparatively analysing reconciliation – a critical epistemological contribution and a research agenda

Nicos Trimikliniotis and Wiebke Keim

[Chapter Ananta Kumar Giri (ed.) Pathways of Creative Research: Towards a Festival of Dialogues, Madras Institute of Development Studies, India, 2011.]

This paper is a contribution to ongoing debate around comparative perspectives on reconciliation processes.¹ For social researchers and activists alike, possibilities to draw parallels and make comparisons between conflicts and reconciliation processes in different historical, cultural and socio-economic settings are crucial – for adequate social scientific analysis as well as for appropriate political agency. While we find a huge body of literature around philosophical and methodological issues in international comparative endeavours, in recent times little has been said on the broader epistemological underpinnings of the debate. In how far are concrete social experiences and social knowledge derived thereof at all comparable to other contexts? What does the transfer do to the knowledge itself as well as to those who receive it? How far can the level of abstraction go in looking at concrete reconciliation processes? How context-bound and specific is each concrete case? Can particular achievements in one conflict-region be regarded as a success model for other concerned regions? And what does this model-status imply? Finally, we propose a research agenda that opens up the terrain for a sociology of reconciliation and conflict.

We attempt to integrate findings and insights from research from two different and often unconnected strands of knowledge: firstly, we draw on particular issues and concerns in the epistemology and theory of knowledge of the global South.² Secondly, we draw on critical research and engagement in the domain of conflict and reconciliation by the

¹ An early version of this paper was presented at the Annual PRIO Cyprus Centre Conference, Learning from Comparing Conflicts and Reconciliation Processes: A Holistic Approach, held 18-20 June 2009 at Nicosia, Cyprus. The contributions and the live discussion during the conference confirmed that there is scope for interdisciplinary approaches, critical thinking and cross-fertilisation of the reconciliation/conflict area of knowledge and theory of knowledge/epistemology. Also see Sitas 2008; 2011a; 2011b; Trimikliniotis 2011; 2012; giri 2011; Smith 2011 and Keim 2011.

² In particular we rely on previous work by one of the authors, see Keim 2008b, Keim 2009, Keim 2010, Keim forthcoming, Keim 2008a.
second author from a broader sociological perspective and from the particular perspective – the case of Cyprus, however intensively discussed with experts worldwide.

A survey sampling the global literature on various conflicts reveals various forms of distorted knowledge and/or partial/partisan readings which are situated in various assumptions, underpinnings and readings of the nature or process of the conflict as well as the recipes for resolution, peace and reconciliation. Zooming in the various ‘conflict zones’ which have attracted research, international aid and engagement we can see how such factors can affect both the analysis as well as the remedies proposed. Africa for instance is often depicted as ‘the hopeless continent’, in many cases stereotyped and homogenised as if it were a single country, ridden with ethnic conflict, corrupt warlords, backwardness, inadequate state formations and insufficient leadership qualities. More ‘refined’ versions of this stereotype and homogenise on a subregional level hence we have references to “the five Africas” (see Stock 2004, 35-36; Francis 2008, p. 3-4). The contest over which is the dominant explanation of the conflict is very much part of the political process for what sort of resolution or remedy to be provides: McGarry and O’Leary (1995) aptly refer to the contest over the ‘meta-conflict’, i.e. “a conflict about what the conflict is about” in the case of Northern Ireland, but this is a contest with each conflict situation. The Israel-Palestine conflict, very much a hotspot in the re-production of violence in the region, is as much a meta-conflict as it is a live violent conflict: for most Israelis it is ‘externally imposed’ by the Arab-Muslim neighbours and as such it cannot be compared to Apartheid in South Africa (Golan-Agnon 2008: 158-161), a view strongly contested by many Palestinians, or at least perceived as externally imposed by the West against the Arabs; the conflict over the explanation of the Sri Lankan conflict, as well as the Kashmiri and the India-Pakistan border conflict (Brewer 2010: 12-13). Even when examining so-called ‘frozen conflicts’, such as the so-called Cyprus problem, we are confronted with conflicting extreme positions of “exceptionalism” on the one hand and uncritical ‘copy and paste’ categorizations (Trimikliniotis 2009: 4 and Trimikliniotis and Bozkurt 2010; 2012). Scholars’ ideological assumptions and value judgments are often projected onto the conflicts: in the case of one scholar citing Cyprus as an example where “partition works”, without bothering to look at what is actually happening in such societies (Brewer 2010: 25). In this contribution, we would thus endeavour to deepen our insight into that problem, which is very common when comparing social phenomena internationally and

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more so if the “case” to be dealt with is located outside of Western Europe or the US. Even in the chaotic days of the “decline of American power” (Wallerstein 2003), the ideas about state the world, the conflicts and their reconciliation/transformation are shaped by the realities of knowledge production and hierarchies of world politics over the last 500 years. The projection onto notions of conflict resolution and reconciliation what Wallerstein (2006) refers to as ‘European universalism’, which is nothing other than “the rhetoric of power,” is apparent. The search for transcending ‘European universalism’ in the direction of achieving a ‘universal universalism’, to use another of Wallerstein’s concepts, and synthesise and respect particularism but equally accept solidarity in a truly internationalist perspective, is most imperative in the quest of a reconciliation which is not ridden in the traps presented in this paper.

**Theorising Conflict and Conflict Resolution**

Conflict is a generic term which entails different types, forms and intensities of ‘violence’ and ‘force’ in societies – from the most extreme as wars, mass murders and genocides to other so-called ‘milder’ forms of systematic forms of exploitation, oppression, restriction, exclusion and discrimination. There are good analytical reasons for distinguishing ‘violence’ from ‘conflict’ as conflict is broader: “conflicts, wars and revolutions cannot be reduced to large scale violence” (Kalyvas 2006: 20). This may hide the extent to which the blurring between the intra and interstate in current armed conflict which is often hard to distinguish: proxy wars are often fought in other countries. Violent/armed conflicts can be inter-state and intra-state; but the intrastate conflicts by far exceed the inter-state ones: one study shows of the 128 conflicts taken place between 1989 and 2004 only 7 were interstate.\(^5\) Michael Mann (2005), in his study of the most ‘extreme forms’ of violence, claimed that there is a danger zone within which creates the structural conditions for mass murder, ethnic cleansing and genocide to occur. Nevertheless, whilst acknowledging ‘milder forms of violence’ such as discrimination and exclusion are still practiced across the globe, Mann claimed that the ‘extreme’ forms of violence are somehow on the retreat in the 20\(^{th}\) and 21\(^{st}\) century.\(^6\) Such readings are highly problematic, for the intensity of violence is matter that requires much closer scrutiny: very

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\(^6\) This derives also from his important book, *The Dark Side of Democracy*. However, he made such a bold claim during a keynote lecture at the Queens University, Michael Mann (2007), ‘The age of nation-states is not yet over’, Conference entitled, *Beyond The Nation? Critical Reflections on Nations and Nationalism in Uncertain Times*, 12-14 September 2007, Belfast.
oppressive relationships, such as slavery, trafficking and forms of incarceration and exploitation, forms of racial and ethnic intimidation, sexual violence etc are also ‘extreme’. At least since Foucault’s studies of violence, discipline and punishment (Foucault 1975, 1977), ‘violence’ in society must be seen as something much more dispersed, transient and dynamic than the taxonomic readings which categorise definite forms of violence according to levels, quality intensity of violence. Specifically dealing with violence in ethnic-related conflict, what is often missed is that violence operates in multiple ways, often unexpected and unintended, many times long after the initial policy, ‘act’ or ‘practice’, if one can locate such a kick off point. Sometimes the impact or consequences outlast the origins and the institutions which originally set it in motion. Post colonial studies illustrate how colonialism by other means continues; national liberation movements may turn into oppressive regimes (Balibar 1991; Jackson 1990). Partitionism, borders and fencing or ethnic oppression and exclusions operate as institutionalised forms assume their own logic, unleashing new forms of violent realities in the present and the future (Brown, 2010). There is little doubt that “whenever a delineation of boundaries takes place - as is the case with every ethnic and national collectivity processes of exclusion and inclusion are in operation” (Anthias and Yuval-Davies 1992: 39). Borders, frontiers and boundaries are very specific creatures serving different purposes depending on the context and political reality (Balibar 2002; 2004; Brown 2010; Calame and Chalesworth 2009).

Another dimension of violence, as a force in society and history, is that it can be an operative force, even in its’ absence: memories of violence are powerful tools in shaping political, cultural and social institutions and performances, whilst the fear and anger of outburst of violence is an operative force at an individual and collective level that is difficult to measure. Moreover, what must not be generalised but properly contextualised and seen as an interconnected social whole, is the specificity of violence related to the unequal socio-economic positions and power-relations in terms of class, cast, gender, ethnicity, religion, age, disability and sexuality etc. Of course at this level of generality, the nuances of contextual sociological and historical analyses are limited to mere categorisations. The dialectic of violence versus non-violence has been a key debate in the arguments between those who argues for the necessity of violence to overcome oppression, colonisation, exploitation etc in the globe. However, the use of violence generates at some point such structures of power or contradictions in the system which essentially underpin the emancipatory, revolutionary and progressive potential of these forces/movements (Sitas 2008; 2011). Revolutionary
movements, once in power or on the way to power, are faced with systemic factors which generate more and/or new types of violence, oppression, exploitation; therefore he Fanon’s dictum that ‘violence has not been cathartic’ is not substantiated (see Sitas 2008; 2012a; 2010b; Trimikliniotis 2012). In the 21st century, violence has also become simultaneously more global and local (Panitch and Leys 2008).

Sociological interest in the general category of violence is not new; macro-sociological and historical sociological systems of analysis have examined the role of violence in the shaping of nation-states;7 recently attention has shifted also to the micro-sociological aspects (Collins 2008). However, a sociology of ethnic conflict and reconciliation processes as a singular mode of reading these phenomena is distinctly absent.8 Brewer (2010) insists on the virtues of a ‘sociological enquiry’ to what he refers as to ‘peace processes would be enriched by understanding ‘social peace processes’ alongside ‘political peace processes’. Even though he lays down some foundations on the subject, his analysis is problematic. It confirms the relation between war and peace processes this leads to sweeping, and largely unsubstantiated, conclusions about ‘cases’, which he cites no previous research: for instance, contrary to an array of studies on Cyprus, he cites this country as an instance where partition without any mention of how he concludes this or any reference on the subject. The lip service paid to the richness of a sociological enquiry is not followed through in practice: gender is dealt with a little more substantially, but it remains rather superficial; class, race/ethnicity and the rich debates on nations, nationalism and racism are ignored.9 If the dialectic of war/peace and conflict/reconciliation are to be addressed sociologically then the social divisions, fragmentations and polarisations deriving from the above must be dealt with.

In the field of Conflict Resolution (CR) the juxtaposition is held to be between ‘conflict’ and ‘resolution,’ or in the more critical and dynamic readings ‘transformation’. However, the meaning of ‘order’ in the context of a ‘non-violent’ situation in society is often taken for

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7 Apart from the founders of sociology, in the late 20th century for instance scholars such as Barrington More 1966; Tilly 1990; Skocpol 1984; Mann 2005; Giddens 1985; Castells 1997 have contributed to the debates. Moreover, important in this field are the development of a critical reading in class, gender and race studies (see Rex 1996; Miles 1989; Balibar, Wallerstine 1990; Anthias and Yuval Davis 1992; Walby 1996; Yuval-Davis 2006; Balmer and Solomos 1999 ). A flavour of the various approaches is contained in debates around ‘mapping the nation’ (Balakrishnan 1996).

8 The author organized a conference precisely in an effort to bring together these two aspects of social science and expertise in 2009, Learning from Comparing Conflicts and Reconciliation Processes: A Holistic Approach, PRIO Cyprus Centre Annual Conference, 18-20 June 2009, Ledra Palace, Nicosia.

9 From Cox to Stuart Hall and the CCCS, to postcolonial studies; the Research Committee on Racism, Nationalism and Ethnic Relations (RC05) of the ISA has very much carried forward the work on this subject.
granted as ‘normal’ in CR perspectives. Whilst it has by now become common sense amongst sociologists that ‘order’ is but another social construct, this is not so for many political theories and conflict resolutionists. Analytical framework as to the nature of particular types of conflict, that seem to last a long time, referred to as ‘protracted social conflict’ proceed from the common to conflict theory that “conflict is an inseparable part of social interaction” (Azar 1986: 5). Many CR approaches insightfully critique the compartmentalisation and differentiation in social sciences, instead of perceiving social conflict as a “single ontological entity” proposing a “multi-disciplinary and holistic approach”. They also correctly recognise the blurring of the demarcation of ‘internal’ and ‘external factors’, adopting models of multiple causal factors and dynamics and not clear starting and terminating points of conflict; they may well have a “communal content”, which means that the conflict occurs on the basis of ethnicity, religion, language or culture. The genesis of these conflicts is the result of a colonial legacy, with the employment of a ‘divide and rule’ tactic by the colonialist, and/or a historical pattern of rivalry and contest between the ‘communal actors’. These conflicts are likely to re-emerge over and over again as soon as there is any change in the balance of forces, even if a ‘solution’ is provided because the ‘solutions’ fail to account for certain crucial characteristics. The argument is that there is an “infrastructure for intractable conflict: multi-ethnic and communal cleavages and processes of disintegration, underdevelopment and distributive injustice” (Azar 1986b: 29).

Even more sophisticated models and versions of CR theory that recognise the importance of the wider social, international and political factors, often tend to essentialise and effectively reduce conflict down to individual psychology /ontology. Observations of how ‘deep-rooted’ the conflict seems to be may well describe the effect of the conflict rather than the cause of conflict. Recommendation for the creation of decentralised models of government and such state structures are based on the premise that these structures can be “designed to serve psychological, economic and relational needs of groups and individuals within nation-states (Azar 1986: 33-34)”.

A similar set of assumptions is apparent in other conflict resolution analyses. One of the most common assumptions of ‘conflict resolutionists’ on the nature of ‘ethnic conflict’ is that, at least partly, but at the end of the day principally, it is a problem of ‘historic hatred’ and ‘ethnic antagonism’: what they consider as the ‘core’ of the ‘problem’, the essential aspect of the conflict is basically the application of the ethnicist or essentialist approach to nationalism which sees ‘ethnic core’ in modern nations and nationalisms. Both at theoretical and at concrete level, this thesis is questionable as it consistently underplays the
role of modern political factors and show a consistent bias in the role of Western or other regional powers in making and continuation of the conflict. One can see how some Western-trained ‘specialists’ read ‘third world ethnic conflicts’, whether by default or by intention, or even essentialist manner, whilst they tend to remain rather uncritical as far the role of the West.\textsuperscript{10} Interestingly, CR has been criticised by American right-wing thinkers who consider it to be left-wing and promoting agendas foreign to the West.\textsuperscript{11}

Sophisticated models which provide for different types of ‘actors’, such as individuals and states and provides for international linkages, the importance of the state-related institutions as a mediating forces, in most cases however, they ultimately reduce ‘ethnic conflict’ down to ‘human needs’ for identity and security. ‘Identity’ is often taken as \textit{given} and the ‘ethnic’ dimension thus becomes an essential part, if not core, of ‘identity’. In most cases the social order is taken as ‘given’ and ‘necessary’. There is often a conservative bias towards the particular social order. Yet, even critical approaches with CR and reconciliation theorists (e.g. Long and Brecke 2003) have rather conservative social theoretical models with functionalist assumptions: when ‘explaining the sociality’ and its maintenance and “asking how groups of individual actors maintain social order despite competition and conflict among themselves” (Long and Brecke 2003: 1), their response is an anti-equalitarian reading and projection of society-to-be. Hence we read quotes\textsuperscript{12} which define as “order” as “the creation of “logical, symbolic, effective hierarchical […] which enable society and culture to form organized units” (Long and Brecke 2003: 169). So certain types of hierarchies are ‘functional’ and ‘good’ for society and must thus be enhanced and utilised for reconciliation purposes. This is a status quo-centered reconciliation, as long as it halts mass murder and violence.

‘Order’ is better understood as a constantly evolving and renegotiated system which is premised on a balance of social forces pulling and pushing in different directions. The underlying contestations lead to renegotiation, or even violent disruption, depending on the historical context and various factors (global, regional, local etc), which means social change

\textsuperscript{10} Edward Said’s concept ‘Orientalism’ as a systematic way the East, the orient, is distorted by Westerners in many ways applies here (1978).
\textsuperscript{11} Criticisms have been aimed at peace and conflict studies from outside the realms of university system, claiming that “Peace studies do not produce practical prescriptions for managing or resolving global conflicts because "ideology always trumps objectivity and pragmatism" and for being focused on putting a "respectable face on Western self-loathing". Also right-wing academics like Donald Horowitz was amongst those coming against peace studies, see \url{http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peace_and_conflict_studies}
and order transformation. This is very schematic but describes the essential features of transformation. It is nicely captured by Lederach’s *Conflict Transformation* (2003: 4) underscores this basic premise: “Conflict is normal in human relationships and conflict is the motor of social change.” Rather than having a static model of society which speaks of ‘resolution’ of conflict, or even one that considers conflict as inevitable and unchanging and refers to ‘conflict regulation’ he speaks of conflict transformation. Johan Galtung (1969), one of the founders of CR, speaks about ‘negative peace’ (i.e. the mere absence of violence, killing etc as opposed to ‘positive peace’, which is the achievement of justice, fairness, social redistribution. Galtung (2004) has returned the basic idea in his introduction to conflict work by insisting on transcend and transform as the basic motto.

A major problem with CR is that the very way different conflicts are categorized, classified and compared to other conflict is prone to paradigmatic distortions and pitfalls.

**Paradigmatic Distortions**

Exceptionalism and “copy and paste” both refer to the structure and the scope of the argument that is being made regarding the status of one conflict when compared with other conflicts; the way of comparing the Cyprus conflict with other conflicts as a good example illustrating our argument. We add a third and fourth figure of argument to the two initially mentioned: ethnocentrism and distorted universalism. These concepts apprehend different types of problems that can occur when we try to view a given case in relation to other cases and thus represent an analytical framework for a meta-reflection on comparative studies of reconciliation. In the following section, we will first provide the analytical framework for understanding each of these four figures of argument. We will then include concrete empirical reflections on various conflicts and reconciliation processes through the suggested analytic framework. We thus hope the suggested framework may help to systematize issues of comparison of conflicts and theorising on conflicts. We conclude with some reflections on how we could read conflicts and reconciliation processes in ways that would at least avoid the pitfalls we have located, until new ones are discovered and put forward a research agenda for the future of a sociology of conflict and reconciliation.

What is exactly meant by ethnocentrism, distorted universalism, intellectual dependency and exceptionalism? These concepts refer to four traps or troubles in internationally
comparative work. Often variants of some or all of the four traps are found within the very same instances of schools of thought or individual scholars in the form of assumptions underpinning the analyses of the conflict in terms of the roots, development and potential for overcoming or reconciling the warring parties. It is not surprising that the ‘recipes’ are depended on the diagnosis; hence the recent caution exercised in drawing conclusions and about the limitations of various forms of intervention, including aid. The trends in conflict analysis is to demonstrate ‘conflict sensitivity’, in other words to take into account the positive and negative impact of different forms of intervention. Sitas (2008) refers to the ‘self-reflexivity of the West’ as a source of what he refers as the emerging ‘ethic of reconciliation’, which is seriously challenging the currently contested hegemonic order producing a logic of fragmentation and polarisation in the globe. However, ‘conflict sensitivity’ is not necessarily part of Sitas’ ‘ethic of reconciliation’ as it can be a mere management technique for effective intervention recognising the limits of intervention but not the order underpinning it.

I. Ethnocentrism

According to Oxford Dictionary of Sociology, ethnocentrism is “sometimes described as the cardinal sin of the comparative method, this is the practice of studying and making judgements about other societies in terms of one’s own cultural assumptions or bias” (Ethnocentrism, 2005). Ethnocentrism refers to a figure of argument that sees any other “case” from the perspective of the own case. The Other is analysed from the viewpoint of the own collective experience. The most well-known and probably today most criticized form of ethnocentrism is Eurocentrism: any case outside Europe has to fit into the conceptual schemes developed out of the European experience. We will see in the following paragraph, however, that Eurocentrism often takes a more sophisticated form – that of distorted universalism.

*Ethnocentrism*
The graph illustrates the manoeuvre undertaken in ethnocentric arguments: Whatever does not fit into the framework of the own experience cannot be adequately taken into account. The other cases are always seen as resembling the own one and thus the solutions proposed are the same or similar to the ones applied at home.

The superficial and eclectic reference to various cultural and ideological frames within which ‘reconciliation’ or ‘synphiliosis’ can be located, anchored and embedded merely aimed to labour the ‘universalizing’ potential of societal processes already there, producing material results. It merely points to the usefulness and greater scope for comparative research as well as more regional and global readings of reconciliation not only as conflict resolution models or normative frameworks. In fact, our critique is that the vast majority of these models are too narrowly constructed in political science/peace studies laboratories often with Eurocentric underlying biases and conceptual tools with no connection to local realities. The ‘implantation’ of such models from top to bottom, or via selection of those perceived as ‘community leaders’ or elites fail to draw on local traditions of struggles for cooperation, co-existence and linkages across the ethnic/communal/national divides.

II. Distorted universalism

If an argument is supposed to be valid and applicable in any context, space and time, it is said to be universal. Science as an intellectual endeavour aspires at finding universally valid propositions on reality. The social sciences, however, are a special case, where the levels of possible abstraction from particular contexts of emergence of theories and concepts are always in doubt. Whether or not social sciences are at all capable of
formulating universal propositions, or whether the social scientific results are always context-bound, is an unresolved matter.

The figure of “distorted universalism” is thus often found in the social sciences. A universalist argument can be considered to be distorted in as far as it relies on a General that encompasses the Own and the Other, although the Other is different from the own case. The particular Own and the Other are thus inadequately subsumed under a common General, while the assumed General is an abstraction and generalisation from the Own case\(^\text{13}\). Thus, the distinction of what is specific about a particular case on the one hand, and what is general, common to all cases, and therefore universal, is being blurred. The underlying logic partly resembles that of an ethnocentric argument: Distorted universalism as well poses the Own above the Other, but in a more sophisticated way – making it look like an abstract General.

The following graph illustrates the functioning of the argument:

*Distorted universalism*

![Image: Source: own illustration]

\(^\text{13}\) This corresponds to the definition of “logocentrism” as given by Waldenfels. According to him, logocentrism “miraculously encounters the particular Own in the General and the General in the particular Own” Waldenfels 1997, S. 49 (translation WK). However, we prefer the term “distorted universalism” to that of “logocentrism”, as the latter is usually associated with Derrida and deconstructionist thought where it takes a different meaning.
Distorted universalism is a theoretical manoeuvre that is often used by Eurocentric arguments as soon as they manage to hide their particularistic determinants and make the European perspective appear to be “naturally” universal. It is for historical reasons that distorted universalism has for a long time been a major problem of the North-Atlantic social sciences. As Dussel put it: “Only modern European culture, from 1492 onwards, was a center of a world system, of a universal history that confronts (with diverse types of subsumption and exteriority) as all the other cultures of the earth: cultures that will be militarily dominated as its periphery. For philosophers, it has gone unnoticed that, because of this fact, the problem of universality should have been formulated for modernity in a never-before-undertaken manner. Eurocentrism consist precisely in confusing or identifying aspects of human abstract universality (or even transcendental) in general with moments of European particularity, in fact, the first global particularity (that is, the first concrete human universality). Modern European culture, civilization, philosophy and subjectivity came to be taken as such abstractly human-universal” (Dussel 1996, pp. 132/133).

It is interesting to note that Southern theorists may be accused of distorted universalism: Budeiri (2009) criticized Sitas’ “Ethic of reconciliation” (Sitas 2009) that he is generalising the South African experience, making it look like a universal ethical current. This is not to say that the authors adhere to this criticism, but to highlight that there is a growing awareness of the problem and critical voices are raised even regarding social scientific endeavours emerging out of the South. We hope to shed light onto the specific figure of thought criticised here, naming it as distorted universalism.

III. Intellectual dependency

Common in much of the EU-related practice in what refer to as “copy and paste theorising” (Trimikliniotis 2009) has been more largely discussed as “intellectual dependency” (Alatas 2003; Hountondji 1990; Alatas 1974; Alatas 2006; Waast 1996; Keim 2009, Keim forthcoming). Lack of own ideas, lack of research staff and funding, lack of an own intellectual tradition of research in a given domain, combined with the recognition and higher prestige of theories developed elsewhere, can lead to intellectual dependency. i.e. uncritically borrowing or importing theories, concepts and methodologies that have been developed in a different context. Another reason for intellectual
dependency is the pressure to publish or perish that pushes researchers everywhere to publish, if possible internationally. This means he or she has to write about topics, in a language, with references and frameworks that are widely recognized in the international community of researchers, and this often means Northern dominated research. Current research policy in most countries thus encourages intellectual dependency on already existing theories or concepts.

Intellectual dependency forms somehow the counterpart to, or more precisely, the inversion of ethnocentrism and distorted universalism. Intellectual dependency means to see the own reality through the analytical eyes of the other. However, through the uncritical import of either ethnocentric or distortedly universalist approaches, it often appears in a strange combination, where the actual problem of dependency is less obvious.

Two figures of intellectual dependency

Source: own illustration
Intellectual dependency causes problems with regard to the social and theoretical relevance of approaches thus imported. In how far are the “copied” concepts adequate and relevant for the understanding of the own realities?

The uncritical copy and paste modeling refers to intellectual dependency, but also to distorted universalism, in so far as out of a particular local, historical experience – generally Western European – abstract, apparently general or universally valid models are developed. These models, theories or concepts are then imported to Cyprus and used to analyse and understand the Cyprus conflict. The case of Cyprus is then subsumed under this apparently general model, although the model has been developed on a rather limited empirical base, and Cyprus was not part of that empirical basis. For instance an uncritical import of ethnocentric views on what is defined as ‘civil society’ deficiency, without examining the specific historical context, the role, structure and quantity of Cypriot civil society is problematic. Studies on civil society monitoring often fail to properly engage with the richness of local traditions of social struggles which cannot but form an essential part of “civil society” (see Trimikliniotis 2007; 2010).

VI. Exceptionalism
Exceptionalism follows a different logic than the other three figures outlined above. An exceptionalist argument describes the “case” in question as a particular, or more precisely and more radically, as a singular, unusual and extraordinary case that does not compare to any other case and that cannot be apprehended through more generally valid explanations and principles.

Exceptionalism
Exceptionalist arguments usually require in-depth cultural and historical knowledge of the case in question. Exceptionalism, or in German, “Sonderweg”, initially occurred within the broader current of historicism, i.e. the assumption that each historical phenomenon is unique in itself and can only be understood out of itself, implying also a rejection of any teleological idea of progress or development. The case in question was the German way into modernity – authoritarian, half-absolutist monarchy and national-socialism – that were seen as being exceptional, especially in comparison with France and England. With its emphasis on individual traits, the exceptionalist attitude easily inhibits any effort of comparison.

The dangers of overstretching the arguments of uniqueness that no norms can fit in the context are apparent: all situations have their uniqueness as well as commonalities with other contexts. The question is how to treat the situation in Cyprus. To what extent can we compare and contrast the Cyprus conflict? Is the situation analogous for all intends and purposes to other cases or, is the situation so fundamentally different, deriving from the wholly unique situation in Cyprus? One scholar aptly spoke about the “Cypriot states of exception”¹⁴ which is used and abused in different ways. In order to make sense of Cyprus within the world, we need to address what some scholars referred to as “the peculiarity of

Cyprus”.\textsuperscript{15} Holland and Markides (2008: 162) refer to “the unusual limitations in the age of decolonization” imposed on the Republic and they trace the roots of the different historical path when compared to Greek islands which united with Greece: “the island was always surrounded by externalities, uncertainties and ambiguities”. The so-called “peculiarity” entails the theoretical and ideological trap of ‘exceptionalism’, which blurs our conception of the political reality as part of world at large. Constantinou ‘Cypriot states of exception’ exemplifies the multiple exceptionalism that defines the political-legal order of Cyprus, where one exception generates another. This brings us to the heart of ‘the Cyprus problem’, which cuts across the country and naturally intersects with the operation of the acquis in a de facto divided country. The invocation of ‘exception’ is blurring the distinctions between legality and illegality, normality and abnormality and opens up ‘opportunities’ for those in power to extend their discretion. We dispute taking this ‘peculiarity’ as a given without questioning it: ‘our case is so sui generis that makes it incomparable to anything else’; hence the defensive line hinders any potential for learning by comparison.

\textbf{Consequences of the four figures of argument...}

If the critiques of ethnocentrism, distorted universalism and intellectual dependency highlight the difficulties in any internationally comparative endeavour, the implications of an exceptionalist argument that refuses comparative work is just as problematic. The refusal to compare across cases and countries can easily lead to an essentialist attitude – the assumption of the essential nature of a given case as opposed to acknowledging a variety of contingent features that have led to a given situation. Furthermore, exceptionalism can easily lead to a broadly relativistic attitude. Any meaningful communication, mutual understanding and criticism become impossible. For the activist domain, any cross-fertilization and learning from others’ experiences is also inhibited – the ultimate consequence being that international solidarity also becomes impossible.

These consequences lead us to reflecting on the necessary pre-conditions for successful comparative analysis that avoids or overcomes the four traps.

\textsuperscript{15} See for instance the chapter by Holland and Markides (2008).
For a Public Sociology of Conflict and Reconciliation: Going Beyond Sociology?

We are calling for a sociology beyond sociology and a reconciliation from below as much as we need a reconciliation ‘from above,’ calling for an expansion of the scope of reconciliation. This probably runs counter to what appears to be ‘common sense’ amongst many practitioners and theorists of conflict resolution and reconciliation. They insist with good reason that the narrower the scope, the more effective the policy and practice of reconciliation, as (a) attention and resource are more focused and (b) the logic of war applies here as one does not open too many fronts at the same time in building coalitions and consensus. We are not denying the merits of having a sense of priority strategy, tactics and timings on the contrary we consider these are essentials for a successful reconciliation. What we are proposing here is the epistemological basis for broadening our conception of reconciliation within society. In other words, we propose that locate the processes of reconciliation within a dynamic, conflict ridden and polarised social reality of knowledge-seeking as it exists and as it evolves with the contradictions and polarisations this contains. For instance in attempting to reconcile two ethnic groups who have been in conflict for years we cannot just ignore the presence of a sizeable number of migrants, settlers and others for instance who may be there too.

For a deeper understanding of what are profoundly these social issues we need a sociology of ethnic/state conflict and reconciliation. Whilst recognizing that there are crucial political, psychological and anthropological aspects requiring collective ‘solutions’ which are political and legal, a sociological analysis would uncover essential social underpinnings and practices. In this paper it was hopefully demonstrated scholars and practitioners in CR and international relations have relied upon underlying sociological paradigms, explicit or latent, which tend to be problematic, if not obsolete, often failing to take into account of the richness and nuances produced by current sociological thinking. Introducing sociology to the peace specialists and practitioners or highlighting the sociological contribution to the understanding of conflict, peace and reconciliation processes is only one part of the reason for the importance of developing further this branch of the discipline.16 Sociology itself as a discipline, like all others, is in constant need of renewal; as the world is getting more complex, more unstable, uncertain about its’ future, and arguably more polarized, as social scientists we are forced to

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16 Both Brewer (2010) and Malesevic (2010) refer to these as rationales for their respective publications.
develop our explanatory frames in areas which constitute protracted ‘social problems’ and are threatening the lives and wellbeing of people.

This paper proposes as the parameters for a framework of a sociology of conflict/reconciliation as follows:

Firstly, it must be a public sociology (see Burawoy (2007), i.e. an engaging discipline with wider publics well beyond the university community, but it will also crucially ‘merge’ and draw upon professional, critical and policy-orientated sociology. The debates on ‘public sociology’ with the pitfalls and nuances articulated can be extremely valuable in defining the territory of a sociology of conflict/reconciliation: activism, critical thinking and professionalization of the fields of war, conflict resolution, cooperation reconciliation make the debates all the more relevant. Moreover, the increasingly expert specialisation and professionalization generates professional, economic and ideological interests in the field which require sociological unpacking.

Secondly, it must study reconciliation together with conflict (i.e. conflict/non-conflict, post-conflict as well as reconciliatory/cooperation forces) as two cannot be separated. Whilst it is recognised that there may be a focus on one, it must be clarified that the two are intimately connected and one cannot cut corners with superficial conflict analysis without a deeper readings into the context. Any notion of transitional justice must be closely scrutinised and properly rooted in the socio-historical, political, economic and cultural setting. This requires a ‘thick’ sociology produced within the specific contexts but fully versed and engaged with an ever more globalised sociology, and more globalised knowledge.

Third, the underlying assumptions (philosophical, political, moral), the related political agendas and policy-implications of readings of conflicts/reconciliation processes must be closely scrutinised and questioned. Important critiques of established models of specific conflict, peace and reconciliation processes have emerged, illustrating how political and ideological underpinnings can hinder understanding and serve the function of encouraging specific models of conflict resolution/reconciliation as ‘recipes’. For instance, the imposition of the ‘liberal peace model’ in Africa is not only producing partial, distorted and western-biased readings of the conflicts and their resolution, but is is neglecting, undervaluing the potential of home-grown resources and traditions of struggle and reconciliation (Francis 2008).
Where ‘local traditions’ are utilised, these are often distorted by appropriating and subordinating them within western models rather than genuinely questioning or reversing such western ‘norms’: due to structural power of Western peace-making, even when ‘traditional’ approaches are adopted as alternatives peace-making methods, what we see is not a coexistence of both but “we are more likely to see the co-option of indigenous and traditional by Western approaches” (Mac Ginty 2008). Any sociological enquiry ought take note of the important critiques of western traditions of CR, seen as implicated or somehow connected to the ‘liberal peace’ project. It is no wonder that there are efforts to ‘rescue’ CR from such ‘entanglements’ (Ramsbotham et al 2011: 3). The disastrous western entanglement in Afghanistan, Iran, the Middle East, the Balkans and most recently Libya. Moreover, critiques of more covert and latent Eurocentric/ western assumptions about the use of models in (Salem 1993; 1997; Trimikliniotis 2000; 2007) must critiqued by developing epistemological foundations for understanding conflict, peace and reconciliation. It is also crucial that the various ‘non-western’/southern traditions are neither idealised, nor uncritically accepted as ‘the norm’ in what are assumed to be ‘non-western’/ southern settings; rather they must be subjected to a sociological enquiry and test. It is high time that the debates around the sociology of the South are taken seriously in research in war-making of war, peace and reconciliation (see Sitas 2006; Alatas 2006; Patel 2006; Elizaga 2006).

Fourth, it is needless to say that sociology from its’ inception is necessarily comparative, as insisted by Durkheim. Having recognised this, this is not to argue that single societies ought not to be investigated; on the contrary, we are arguing that the best sources for a global sociology of conflict and reconciliation must draw on the richness of existing sociological studies, most of which are delving into the specificities of particular societies. Such studies provide the necessary sociological depth to draw out the comparisons (similarities and differences between various conflicts, peace and reconciliation processes). Studies which compare and contrast cases require the necessary tools to properly analyse the context, but also to define the differentia specifica in the case studies: how else can we understand why and how certain violent conflicts develop, escalate or deescalate, or how reconciliation processes come about? Important conceptual tools are drawn from different disciplines conflict resolution, comparative politics, international relations, social psychology and anthropology etc. However, caution is required as to the reasoning behind the comparisons: why compare x to y? It is trendy to compare in order to ‘go global’, but there must be a good rationale behind such comparisons. There may be different reasons why one chooses to
compare and contrast; however, what is essential is that we need to locate what the primary features of the conflict in a particular society and then we can decide what is comparable and what other country. As Ehrlich (2009) aptly points out that for meaningful comparisons essential is a good grasp of specific context, the historical and structural aspects, the dynamics and balance of forces and their potentialities and contestations in the regions and states. If we are in search of the potential for cooperation/reconciliation, we must first locate the underlying nature of the conflict to draw on the experience and knowledge produced there. For instance, a shared past under the same colonial master may make sense in understanding common features in different conflicts (e.g. territories of former British colonial empire). However, the potential for reconciliation (in whatever shape or form this takes) may be a completely different affair. If one is to compare the conflict and potential for reconciliation in Israel/Palestine and Cyprus, which are located very near each other and have both been subject to British colonialism, one cannot be struck by the completely different trajectories in the potential for reconciliation: both are ‘partitioned’ and the partition is ‘dysfunctional’ (i.e. causing harm and misery in different ways that make the status quo not sustainable), but the violence is quantitatively and qualitatively different which places the two in a different league; in the former the talk of reconciliation seems far away as there is violent death almost on a daily basis, whilst in the latter the potential is much closer (see Sitas, et al 2008; Trimikliniotis 2007; 2011; Ehrlich 2008).

Fifth, the inter-disciplinary nature of the exercise must be such that is cross-disciplined but not a-disciplined. The terms of engagement with other disciplines must be carefully observed to avoid becoming an eclectic ensemble with little coherence or sense. We need a sociology that draws on different aspects of knowledge that allows for creative integration that is theoretically sound, empirically robust and policy-relevant. It will be a sociology seeking to break of self-referencing and would be examining the potential for reshaping ideas, practices and modes articulation beyond the traditional empiricism.

Sixth, the sociology of conflict/reconciliation is best located within or at least heavily draw on the rich debates generated by the sociology ethnic-related phenomena, the study of nations and nationalism, ethnicity, race and racism and war. Moreover, these debates are entangled with questions relating to the inter-relation between ethnicity/race, class and gender, the sociology of the state and power as well as global sociology, postcoloniality and globalisation. The theorisation of ‘nations’ and nationalism as well as global/international power relations
must be properly theorised. Questions relating to the various political projects and ideologies and the complexities of state formations, contradictions and class–relations must be developed.\textsuperscript{17} After all it has long been argued that nationalism “a theory of political legitimacy” (Gellner 1983), or Andersonian “imagined community” or at least a political project “claim for a separate political representation of a collectivity” (Anthias and Yuval-Davies 1992). In order to address the global tasks before an ever-uncertain humanity, the sociology of conflict/reconciliation needs to feed on the above branches of sociology so as to understand wars/ ethnic-related conflicts (intra-state and inter-state) and the potential for peace, cooperation and reconciliation. It is within this rubric that the sociology of conflict and reconciliation must be developed.

Seventh, the specificity of gender-related violence in conflicts, cooperation and reconciliation processes must be considered not as ‘add ons’ only historical sociologists had an interest in dealing with such phenomena.

Eight, this paper is calling for a sociology beyond sociology and a reconciliation from below as much as we need a reconciliation ‘from above’. This is an expansion of the scope of reconciliation. This probably may appear to run counter to what appears to be ‘common sense’ amongst many practitioners and theorists of conflict resolution and reconciliation. For the latter insist with good reason that the narrower the scope, the more effective the policy and practice of reconciliation, as (a) attention and resource are more focused and (b) the logic of war applies here as one does not open too many fronts at the same time in building coalitions and consensus. This paper is not denying the merits of having a sense of priority strategy, tactics and timings on the contrary; all these are essentials for a successful ‘reconciliation’. However, we argue that there is a necessity to broaden our conception of reconciliation within society. We cannot ignore the presence of social conflicts and issue which are seriously affecting social relations (gender-relations; class relations and struggles; homeless and excluded/marginalized/ landless etc.; migrant struggles e.g. undocumented). All significantly alter social and political relations in ways which are not always predictable and linear and often such factors may complicate and aggravate issues. For instance, migration may significantly change the population which may warrant rethinking the nature of the conflict; it may be further complicated or it may alleviate some of the historical baggage etc. Gender, ethnicity,

\textsuperscript{17} An attempt to theorise such has been made in the context of Cyprus, see Trimikliniotis and Bozkurt 2010; 2012.
religion and class are ‘hard variables’ which may reinforce polarisation and division. However, in other contexts gender, religion and class can become an issue that opens up the terrains of struggle for peace and reconciliation.

Finally, we contend that there is a need to analyse in-depth specific conflict situations, out of their local context, and then see what elements diverge from others and which elements resemble others – i.e. highlighting the particular and the general. With regard to ‘imported’ approaches, we stress the need to critically adapt and re-appropriate any sort of import, always asking: “Does it really fit the particular context?” at the same time we contnd that international exchange of ideas, experiences and encounters are crucial antidotes to ethnocentrism and exceptionalism: If researchers, activists and concerned people from very diverse contexts and from diverse positions meet and discuss their experiences and approaches, then it does not matter so much if we start from an exceptionalist, ethnocentric, distortedly universalist or dependent viewpoint, because then others are there to contest our views. Knowledge builds up incrementally and through dialogue, discussion and often confrontation.
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