Ethnicity and Ethnic Conflict: Comparing Cyprus and Sri Lanka

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CHAPTER TEN

ETHNICITY AND ETHNIC CONFLICT: COMPARING CYPRUS AND SRI LANKA

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"There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one"
—Galatians 3:28

Introduction

Ethnic conflicts are by definition the conflicts in which “the goals of at least one party are defined in (exclusively) ethnic terms, and in which the primary fault line of confrontation is one of ethnic distinctions” (Cordell & Wolff, 2010: 4-5). But to what extent is ethnicity the underlying cause of such conflicts? Given the lack of consensus on the role of ethnicity as a cause and driver of ethnic conflicts, as well as on the concept of ethnicity itself, this chapter addresses both relevant theoretical literature and empirical evidence from existing research on the cases of Cyprus and Sri Lanka. The primary aim is to address the changing role of ethnicity in ethnic conflicts, and the ways in which it complicates conflict resolution strategies. Although the focus is on two case studies, the comparative analysis aspires to provide generalizable conclusions.

Following a discussion of the concepts and methods used, the chapter is divided into three main sections: the Cyprus case study, the Sri Lanka case study, and a comparative analysis. The analysis of each case study seeks to assess the prominence (or lack thereof) of ethnicity in the conflicts in question. More specifically, in each case I look at the history from ancient times and through the different colonization periods, to the post-independence conflict period and the post-conflict era. The
comparison of the two case studies then allows for the identification of similarities and differences.

It is argued that ethnicity’s prominence changes over time and that the similar historical circumstances of the two conflicts play an important part in determining its role over time. Moreover, I argue that although the role of ethnicity can change or evolve during the course of a conflict, ethnicity essentially characterizes the nature of the conflict rather than its root causes (Carment, 2007: 63). Potential root causes are explored: political and economic factors, horizontal inequalities, the role of education, the exploitation of ethnic identity by elites, colonial history, nationalism, and so forth. Further, a distinction is made between these root causes and the actors and factors that trigger or exacerbate a conflict. The perception of these often differs between the groups that are involved in the conflict.

Finally, the conclusions suggest that, given the changing role of ethnicity in ethnic conflicts, the most prominent characteristic of the conflict should be identified at any given time in order for more effective conflict resolution strategies to be formulated.

**Concepts and Methodology**

Finding a consensus in the different approaches of scholarship to ethnicity and ethnic conflict is unlikely, given the diversity of thought on the matter. There are scholars who go so far as to suggest that “there is no sense in defining states and ethnic groups by the category of a nation” (Tishkov, 2000: 625), a view with which others would vehemently disagree. Although Tishkov’s kind of thinking could prove helpful in certain contexts, it can easily complicate things when it comes to adopting a working definition of ethnicity that captures the realities on the ground. Therefore, my plan is to adopt a more moderate methodological and conceptual approach to provide working definitions that facilitate analysis and help to draw conclusions and practical policy implications.

I take ethnicity to be “the state of being ethnic, or belong[ing] to an ethnic group” (Kellas, 1998: 6). In addition I accept Giddens’s (2009: 633) premise that the culture and attitudes (e.g. language, history, religion) of a certain group of people ethnically distinguish those people from other groups.

In the case of Cyprus the religious, linguistic and historical differences are those between Islam and Christianity; the Turkish and Greek languages; and Ottoman and Greek ancestry. In Sri Lanka the conflicting

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1 Other explanations are presented below.
religions are Buddhism and Hinduism; the languages are Sinhala and Tamil, while the Sinhalese have mainly North-Indian and the Tamils Dravidian/South-Indian descent (Zwier, 1998: 13-15).

Another important concept is that of nationalism. Nationalism is related to ethnicity—or ethnic identity—although they are not one and the same (Cornell & Hartmann, 1998: 37; Silva, 1998: 12-13). Nationalism, an older term, is mainly used to refer to an ideological/political movement that “puts the nation first before all other forms of social and political organisation” (Wolff, 2006: 32). I agree with Gellner who argues that nations do not create nationalism but rather nationalism creates nations; to this nationalist end, “Dead languages can be revived, traditions invented, [and] quite fictitious pristine purities restored” (Gellner, 1994: 64).

More specifically, and central to this chapter’s argument, is not the concept of civic nationalism, which defines a nation in terms of territory, but that of ethnic nationalism (or ethno-nationalism) which seeks the creation of an ethnically pure nation by excluding anyone who does not belong to a particular ethnic group. This type of nationalism is more prone to conflict (Gurr & Harff, 1994: 18; Wolff, 2006: 32). Thus, ethnic nationalism could be associated with “ethnocentrism,” although ethnocentrism is not so much bound to

a “nation” or a “race” and it mainly refers to the psychological explanations of an individual’s favourable feelings towards his or her own ethnic group and negative feelings towards other ethnic groups (Kellas, 1998: 6).

Given that a conflict is “a situation in which two or more actors pursue incompatible, yet from their own perspectives entirely just, goals” (Cordell & Wolff, 2010: 4-5) the goals of different ethno-nationalist groups, seeking to create an ethnically-pure nation and exclude other different ethnicities can lead to inter-ethnic conflict. As Kaufmann (1996: 138) put it, “Ethnic conflicts are disputes between communities which see themselves as having distinct heritages, over the power of relationship between the communities.” But this says little about why ethnic conflicts emerge. Further, as Carment (2007: 63) correctly notes, “To say that ethnic conflict arises because there are distinct ethnic groups is, at best, tautological.”

Instead, a good starting point for the exploration of the root causes of ethnic conflicts would be the acknowledgment of the incompatible goals of the conflicting parties and the ways they might be shaped by ethnic identity at different times and under different circumstances. Having said that, though, we should recognize that although the same patterns can be
found among different cases of ethnic conflict, the root causes will vary and each case will have its own particularities.

Possible explanations of the causes of ethnic conflicts emanate from several disciplines, ranging from political science and sociology to anthropology, economics, theology and psychology. A major social psychological work on ethnic conflict identifies three main categories of motives: a conflict between tradition and modernization; a clash of economic interests; and tensions between cultural homogeneity and pluralism (Horowitz, 1985: 95-140). In similar vein, but from a political science perspective, Wolff (2006: 68), drawing upon Brown (2001: 4-5), argues that four types of factors constitute the “underlying causes” of ethnic conflicts: structural, political, economic and cultural factors. Each one of these types of explanations can include a series of other (secondary) factors. This framework can be used to summarize the factors that have been identified by scholars as causes of ethnic conflict (see also Blagojevic, 2009: 2-8).

In many cases, although ethnic divisions and hatreds exist, they are not expressed through violent ethnic conflict: some other factors need to come into play. Such exacerbating factors, depending on the particular circumstances of the time concerned, could be, for example, the colonial administrative system (structural), elite manipulation (political), discrimination in economic (economic/social) or cultural policies (cultural) (Brown, 2001: 5). There is, of course, overlap between these categories, because actors such as religious or political leaders could be responsible for more than one of them. In short, these factors cause, exacerbate or prolong an ethnic conflict because they intensify the real or constructed ethnic divisions and hatreds.

There are two main approaches used to examine the extent to which ethnicity is responsible for conflict: the “instrumentalist” and the “psycho-cultural.” Whereas the former stresses the exploitation of ethnic identity by elites to accomplish political or economic ends, the latter sees ethnic identity and the perceptions of ethnic groups as the primary factors leading to an ethnic conflict (Kaufman, 2011: 91). The instrumentalist approach can also be associated with Circumstantialism, and the psycho-cultural one with Primordialism (Cornell & Hartmann, 1998: 59-60). Circumstantialism focuses on the circumstances that shape the interests of a group, rather than the interests themselves, and on the claim that circumstances and social change can “encourage” or “produce” identities without “the intervening mediation of interests” (Cornell & Hartmann, 1998: 59). Primordialism “focuses on the ways ethnic and racial identities are built, rebuilt, and sometimes dismantled over time,” and “places the interactions
between circumstances and groups at the heart of these processes” (Cornell & Hartmann, 1998: 72).

Ultimately I adopt a synthesis of Circumstantialism and Primordialism, named Constructionist (or Constructivist) by Cornell and Hartmann (1998). It builds on Circumstantialism by incorporating some insights from Primordialism, such as an individual's powerful attachment and commitment to an ethnic group which “can arouse the emotions, sometimes to the point of homicidal fury” (Cornell & Hartmann, 1998: 52). Specifically, once ethnic identity has been constructed, it becomes a central driving force of ethnic conflict. I think that the Constructivist approach can best account for the dynamic and changing nature of ethnic identity in ethnic conflicts.

Methodologically, I adopt the technique of focused comparison or comparative case study. The cases are “small N” studies, as they focus on comparing a specific political phenomena in a small number of countries. Although an overarching theory is not necessary for a case study analysis, I shall employ a Constructionist approach, for the reasons elaborated above, while the case studies fall into the category of ethnic conflicts (Hague & Harrop, 2001: 71-73). Cyprus and Sri Lanka are both cases of ethnic conflict, they both experienced British colonization, comparable social and political changes at similar times, and they both have a long history of difficult intergroup relations, horizontal inequalities and of nationalist and secessionist movements.

George and Bennett (2005: 69) say that analysis of case studies requires the study of relevant variables that differentiate them. Similarly, Dion (1998: 127) notes that comparative case studies “often rely on ... choosing some phenomenon of political interest, gathering data on occurrences of the phenomenon, then determining what characteristics the occurrences have in common.” In this chapter, I am trying to explain (the break-out of) ethnic conflict. My aim is to examine the extent to which ethnicity can be a causal factor in producing, exacerbating and prolonging an ethnic conflict. I conclude that the answer varies over time and depends on particular circumstances.

**Cyprus: From Antiquity to Today**

The history of Cyprus has bequeathed us a complex social structure of several ethnic groups; the most important in terms of population are the Greek-Cypriots (GCs) and Turkish-Cypriots (TCs). This case study seeks to explore the roles of past colonizers, the Greek-Orthodox Church, and
political parties in the ethnic conflict, and ultimately to analyse the developing role of ethnicity in the conflict.

Neither GCs nor TCs have lived on the island since the beginning of time. Both groups are products of migration and other historical processes. Cyprus did not have an Hellenic character until 1200 BC when it received a massive influx of Mycenaean/Greek settlers from Peloponneseus. This was due, most probably, to an earthquake and/or raids by seafaring neighbours. Their arrival had a direct effect on all aspects of life and ultimately, according to many, Hellenized the island (Peristianis, 2008: 42). Further, the passing of the island to Byzantine control (395 AD) played a decisive role in shaping the Hellenic character of Cyprus.

There were no TCs on the island until 1571, when the Ottoman Empire conquered Cyprus. Ottoman rule followed hundreds of years of other non-Hellenic domination of the island, by such groups as the Persians, Romans, Latins, and lastly the Venetians and Genoans. In 1572 Sultan Selim II ordered a transfer of population to Cyprus from elsewhere in the Ottoman Empire. Initially, 2,580 families came. By 1853 the Ottoman population census for Cyprus showed 14,983 Muslim men and 29,223 non-Muslim men (Halaçoğlu in Kızilyürek, 2009: 19-20). It is important to note that the Muslim count is probably inflated: by that time, there were also Christians, both Orthodox and Catholic, who had been converted or feigned conversion to Islam.²

During the first centuries of Ottoman rule relations between the Muslims and Christians were peaceful, and religious differences were tolerated. Importantly, the Ottoman Empire granted autonomy to the Orthodox Church of Cyprus. Nonetheless, the Ottoman authorities maintained a much harsher attitude toward the non-Muslims, treating them as inferiors (Kızilyürek, 2009: 20-23).

Two main elements played an important role in generating ethnic consciousness among the Orthodox Christians of Cyprus. First, the enlightenment (and particularly the so-called Hellenic enlightenment) and the nineteenth century development of capitalism brought nationalism and a desire for nation-states to the forefront of attention (Litsas, 2003: 5). Second, the Greek nationalism that emanated from the revolution in Greece against the Ottoman Empire from 1821 produced a desire for the reunification of all the Greek-inhabited lands of Europe and Asia Minor (Litsas, 2003: 5). The ideas of the Hellenic Enlightenment first touched

² Those who feigned conversion did so for a number of economic, social and security reasons and were called “Linobambaki” (literally, cotton-linen, a reference to the Biblical prohibition of mixing two kinds of material in one garment, in Leviticus 19:19; see Michel, 1908).
Cyprus’ Greek bourgeoisie through the commercial bonds it had with Greece, which led it to identify itself as ethnically Greek. As a result, it was the first group to express opposition to the Ottoman occupation, opposition which spread to the rest of the Cypriot Greek community, leading to its differentiation from other (non-Greek) Christians and to its committing revolutionary acts against the Empire (Litsas, 2003: 5).

The year 1878 brought changes to Cyprus. The Ottoman government in Istanbul (the Porte), aware of the Empire’s weak position, agreed to rent Cyprus to Great Britain in exchange for British support in its war with Russia. Greek-Cypriots perceived the arrival of the British as a salutary development that would deliver them from Ottoman oppression (Kızılyürek, 2009: 28-29). Given “the overwhelming ethnic Greek character of the island,” Cypriots found the opportunity safely to express their wish for unification (enosis) with the Greek state (established in 1830), an idea that had first been suggested as early as 1828 by the governor of Greece, Ioannis Kapodistrias (Fouskas, 2001: 101; Panteli, 1990: 59-60). Greek Cypriot enthusiasm stemmed, among other things, from the fact that in 1880 William Gladstone was elected Prime Minister in Britain (Aleksandrou, 2010: 21). Gladstone’s name was associated with delivering the Ionian Islands to Greece in 1864. Belief that it was Britain’s intention to do the same with Cyprus was also periodically encouraged by statements, such as Winston Churchill’s highlighting the “Hellenic” character of the island, and adding that it should be unified with Greece (Fouskas, 2001: 101). In summary, domestic and external elites had a significant role in the construction of the Greek ethnic identity.

Over time, Greek ethnicity became politicized thus creating a “mass movement” which sought enosis. As a reaction, a TC nationalist movement emerged, advocating Cyprus’ return to Turkey, or, by the 1950s, for the partition (taksim) of the island along ethnic lines (Mavratsas, 1996: 77). Consequently, the relationship between the elites of the two ethnic groups deteriorated while the British system of administration worsened the situation (Kızılyürek, 2009: 30). Initially the British colonial authorities enacted a proportional administrative arrangement based on the population of each community; after TCs complained about unequal treatment the British rearranged the system so that the number of British appointed representatives together with the Muslim representatives was equal to the number of GC representatives (Kızılyürek, 2009: 31). The Governor’s casting vote could thereby ensure that the GC’s could always be overruled. Such an arrangement was part of the British strategy of “divide and rule,” which aimed at maintaining better control over the island. At the same time the GC political quest for enosis created a convenient political
environment for the colonial authorities to strengthen their co-operation with TCs, against GC ambitions.

Later developments caused tensions between the two communities. Most of the TCs adopted the modernization ideas of the Young Turk movement (1908) and later Atatürk’s reforms, which caused rapid change within the TC community. In parallel, GCs acquired more confidence in promoting unification with Greece, owing to the integration of Crete into Greece in 1912 and, later, the Ottoman Empire’s defeat in the First World War; this in turn exacerbated TC concerns. Further tensions were created in 1915 when Britain offered Cyprus to Greece in exchange for its participation in the First World War, though this never came to fruition. In 1930-31 massive GC uprisings demanding *enosis* occurred, and the British authorities turned Muslims against Greeks by recruiting Muslims as “gendarmes and security personnel,” thus underpinning “the transformation of Cypriot Muslims into Turkish nationalists” and diplomatically involving Turkey in Cyprus (Fouskas, 2001: 104-105; 2003: 73).

Despite growing separation between the two groups, and the occasional small-scale but violent clashes, tensions were mostly contained among the elite at the political level, while among the lower, mainly rural, classes there were still peaceful inter-ethnic relationships because both Muslims and Christians of the working class faced common problems (Kızılyürek, 2009: 38). Over time this changed and the elites’ animosities gradually infected the lower levels of society, through factors such as ethnically based education and the Orthodox Church’s propaganda promoting and supporting divisions.

Anagnostopoulou (1998/1999: 199-200) rightly argues that *enosis* was gradually imposed as Cypriot national policy among the GCs in parallel with the gradual recognition and imposition of the Church’s leadership on Orthodox Cypriots. The greater acceptance of *enosis* by the Church politicized it and rendered it legitimacy as the leading authority of the national struggle for liberation. “True” Cypriots were only those who were politically under and recognized by the Church as Greek Orthodox Christians. This meant that Cypriot identity was equated with being ethnically Greek. Within this framework Turkish-Cypriots could exist only as part of a minority of “other Cypriots,” or as “Turks.”

The first political parties emerged during the Second World War: the communist GC AKEL and the TC KATAK. The creation of workers’ unions that followed marked the ethnic division within the working class. The first one was meant to represent both TCs and GCs, but it adopted as policy the promotion of *enosis*, thereby driving TCs away and to the
creation of separate TC unions. As a result, a big gulf was generated between the communities by the 1950s (Kizilyürek, 2009: 45-49).

In this climate, 1955 saw the establishment of the GC EOKA militant organization with the goal of Cyprus’ liberation and enosis. As a reaction to the creation of EOKA, the British created a police force manned by TCs while in 1957 Turkey funded the creation of the TC counterpart of EOKA, TMT, which had as its ultimate goal the partition of the island. After bloody clashes and the diplomatic involvement of Britain, Turkey and Greece, the British withdrew and the Cyprus Republic was established in 1960 (Kizilyürek, 2009: 52-53).

The establishment of the Republic “brought about a regime of independence ‘supervised’ by three foreign ‘guarantor’ nations (UK, Turkey and Greece)” and shattered the dreams of both communities (Trimikliniotis, 2009a: 391). It entailed abandoning the goals of enosis and taksim. The Republic’s constitution was based on a communally-based system of shared power that made a distinction between the two ethnic communities (GCs 78% and TCs 18%) and barely acknowledged other minority groups (the Maronites, Armenians, and Latins).

The social and political environment after independence was not as one would expect if genuine rapprochement between the communities had taken place. Nationalism, particularly on the part of GCs, was ever more openly expressed. Stavrinides (1999: 36), writes:

On Sundays, and on “national” occasions, memorial services were held in honour of the dead of the struggle, in which Makarios [the President and Archbishop] himself, his Greek ministers and other politicians made patriotic speeches. Streets and squares, social clubs and athletic games were named after EOKA heroes. The Radio and Television put out programmes extolling the heroic exploits of EOKA and the Greek people in general.

It is obvious that the establishment of the Republic was not the kind of independence the GCs had wanted. President Makarios did not see himself and act as the President of all Cypriots but rather as the Ethnarch of GCs. He is on record as saying, later, that “Independence was not the aim and purpose of EOKA struggle...Foreign factors have prevented the achievement of the national goal, but this should not be a cause for sorrow [...] Greek Cypriots will march on to complete the final victory” (16 August, 1974, quoted in Stavrinides, 1999: 37).

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3 TMT, the Turkish Resistance Organization was the TC military counterpart of EOKA which fought to achieve taksim—the secession of the TCs.
The quest for _enosis_ was not abandoned. Statements by GC officials after independence gave GCs the idea that _enosis_ was still an achievable goal. This provoked negative feelings and attitudes within the TC community, despite the protections the Constitution afforded it. Arguably, even the “constitution itself could be described as a blueprint for further partition” (Mallison, 2005: 34). Disputes emerged over different aspects of the constitution such as the creation of separate GC and TC administrations in the largest towns, taxation, and the armed forces. Disagreement about the last of these led to the creation of different unofficial militias by the two sides, but the problems did not stop there. The GCs saw that the degree of the TC participation in the Republic’s institutions was “disproportionately large in relation to their numerical strength” (Emilianides, 2003; Mallison, 2005: 42), which allowed the TCs to form a blocking minority in the Parliament, as well as giving the TC Vice-President veto powers.

In 1963 Makarios, supported by former EOKA leader, Georgios Grivas, submitted thirteen constitutional amendments to all three guarantor powers and the TC leadership. Makarios’ “thirteen points” were drafted with British help and sought to resolve deadlock by eliminating most of the TC’s veto powers. Both Turkey and the TCs rejected the proposals (Drousiotis, 2005: 111; Mallison, 2005: 208, endnote 13). This caused rising tension in both communities, as TCs opposed the GC efforts for a “just” constitution. It did not take long for the tensions to be expressed in violence.

The first large scale ethnic clashes were in December 1963. The TCs withdrew from the government and parliament, formed their own institutions, and many TCs moved into camps in north Nicosia and to other areas where there were concentrations of TCs. North Nicosia and the other TC enclaves served the ethnocentric purposes of both GC and TC nationalists by forming ethnically homogenous communities (Drousiotis, 2005: 151-156). Thereafter ethnic violence spread while Turkey and Greece undertook an active role: the former attempted air-strikes and threatened an invasion, which was stopped by American diplomatic involvement; and the latter sent about five thousand troops into Cyprus to reinforce the paramilitary GC groups. The problem was internationalized; the first UN forces arrived in Cyprus in 1964 soon after the first geographic separation line (“Green Line”) was drawn in Nicosia (Drousiotis, 2005).

GCs associated EOKA and its members with the liberation struggle against the British that would produce _enosis_. Thus, one could argue that the prominence of EOKA members within the GC community, together
with Makarios’ nationalist rhetoric, gave a boost to opposition to the constitution, striving still for _enosis_ and attacking the TCs who did not accept Makarios’ proposed constitutional amendments. This could mean that both the people who engaged in the ethnic clashes of 1963-1964 and the nationalist political elites sought to exploit the feelings of GCs for freedom and self-determination in order to accomplish their own ethnic nationalistic aims, and thus to accentuate the role of ethnic identity.

Further, the media narratives on both sides and the involvement of the two “motherlands” played a crucial role in the exacerbation of the conflict and intensified the clashing nationalisms. After 1963, GC actions consolidated both the geographical and social cleavages between the two communities. TCs were either removed from or abandoned administrative positions, the Greek national anthem was adopted and played on official occasions, the TCs were politically isolated and the Turkish language was unofficially abolished even though, according to the constitution, it was one of the two official languages of the Republic (Trimikliniotis, 2009b, pp. 44-45).

Education played an important role too. The GC educational system was based on that of Greece. Schools had been promoting Greek culture and the “national links of Cyprus with Greece” since the British colonial period (Persianis, 1981: 11). Although there was disagreement among GCs on whether education should become independent from Greece (i.e. more Cypriot), it was still “modelled upon that of Greece in order to preserve ‘Greekness.’ Education was not only politicized, but also became part of the conflict since it “influence[d]...the attitudes, the loyalties and the ideals of the people” (Persianis, 1981: 11, 22).

The 1964-67 period was relatively peaceful. Generally, although GCs had not forgotten the “_enosis_ ideal,” they were now more absorbed into problems of everyday life, thus becoming less aggressive. As Stavrinides (1999: 68-69) argues, this was because the situation which came about after the isolation of the TCs and the passing of all administrative positions and political power into GC hands was very convenient. But in 1967 another crisis took place when the GC National Guard under Grivas’ command attacked two TC-majority villages (Kofinou and Agios Theodoros, in Larnaca district). Their aim was to disarm the TC militant organization TMT which controlled the villages and created problems for their GC populations (Drousiotis, 2007). Turkey reacted by sending an ultimatum to the GC leadership warning of an invasion. Once again the US played the role of the mediator while Grivas and the Greek military division were removed from Cyprus to de-escalate the situation (Heraclides, 2006: 105).
In 1971 EOKA B' was established by Grivas, because Makarios had stopped pursuing enosis (Stavrinides, 1999, pp. 65-66). EOKA B', with the support of the Greek junta, and after a series of attempts against the life of Makarios and others, conducted a coup against the Makarios government in 1974. This provided the pretext for Turkey to invade Cyprus in order to "restore the constitutional order" and "protect the TCs," according to the official Turkish position (Drousiotis, 2003). The invasion took place in two parts (Attilas I and II) and led to the occupation of 37 percent of the island.

The Turkish invasion of Cyprus was catastrophic, creating thousands of refugees, and was responsible for many deaths and missing persons on both sides. TCs perceived Turkey's involvement as saving and protective, a fact which enhanced their positive ethnic feelings towards the "motherland." The situation on the other side was similar. The grievances, hatreds and feelings of injustice which the Turkish invasion caused within the GC community developed an intensified nationalism which associated TCs more directly with the Turkish nation and created a perceived equivalence of identity between the two. In addition, the post-invasion status quo entailed, among other things, the direct diplomatic involvement of Greece, and the Cyprus problem remains one of the main problems between Turkey and Greece. These external implications of the conflict played an important part in solidifying the two nationalisms and preventing TCs and GCs from resolving the problem on their own (Kızılyürek, 2009: 101-124).

After the invasion a kind of political system emerged in the north, with political parties and administrative structures. An illegal state was established in 1983, called the "Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus" (TRNC) and recognized only by Turkey, and thousands of settlers were brought to the island from Turkey in an effort to alter the local demographic balance. As of 2007, the population in the occupied territories was approximately 256,000, of which only 120,000 were "of full Turkish Cypriot parentage," whereas Turkish settlers were estimated to be about 77,000, although some argue they number more than that (Bahceli, 2007). The south is still controlled by Republic of Cyprus and the 1960 constitution, as amended, is still in force.

After 1974 a Cypriot identity (Cypriocentrism) became more prominent, mostly in the GC community, leading to a balanced co-existence with the Greek one. This was reflected in "symbolic official double-talk"—the use of both Greek and Cypriot flags together and the "simultaneous use of the Cypriot flag with the Greek national anthem" (Papadakis, 1998, p. 153). A similar situation can be seen in the TC
community where, for example, the TC and Turkish flags are used “to impress upon all the existence and authority of the Turkish Cypriot state” (Papadakis, 2005: 87-88).

Cypriocentrism is also evident in the political parties that dominated the political scene, especially in the GC dominated post-1974 Republic of Cyprus. The two biggest, and ideologically opposite, parties that the majority of GCs support are the left-wing AKEL and the right-wing DISI. AKEL promotes a rapprochement with TCs and advocates a Cypriot identity; DISI, having been formed mainly by pro-enosis right-wing parties or groups, honours and commemorates enosis heroes such as Grivas, promotes policy solidarity with Greece against Turkey and uses phrases such as “Cypriot Hellenism” to refer to GCs (Papadakis, 1998: 153-156). The differences between these two parties reflect the main political and ideological divisions within the GC community that have existed since the 1970s. Whilst these parties have contributed to the identity dualism they have also played a part in prolonging ideological divisions.⁴

On both sides the projection of ethnically-based policies is not solely verbal. The different flags, as mentioned above, their provocative uses, military parades, and more, had different meanings for each community and resulted in their alienation from one another. As Anastasiou (2008: 163) puts it,

This nonverbal but powerful and ever-present exchange of meanings through national symbols resulted in the perpetual undermining and often annihilation of the conditions necessary for genuine communication.

After 1974 the de facto situation of absolute geographical division worsened the situation at the societal level. The strict division made communication across the Green line almost impossible for ordinary Cypriots. Non-communication led each side to develop its own account of history that intensified the “otherness” and hatred towards the other. This could be explained by Gordon Allport’s social-psychological “contact

⁴ TC political parties also started to form around the same period, although the unilateral declaration of independence of the “TRNC” came later. Rauf Denktas, who was the founder of the “TRNC,” also founded the National Unity Party (UBP) in 1975 which dominated the TC political scene with its nationalist agenda and pro-secession policies. It contributed greatly to the consolidation of nationalism in the TC community. Serious opposition to UBP’s policies mainly arose with proposals for federalization and the demonstrations against the Denktas administration in the early 2000s. (Anagnostopoulou, 2004: 364-403)
hypothesis” or “intergroup contact theory,” which suggests that the lack of contact between groups results in the construction of mistaken images and prejudice for one another thus alienating them (Allport, 1954; Chrysohoou, 2005: 176-177). The contact hypothesis fits with the Constructionist approach as well, given the emphasis on the construction of certain perceptions under circumstances of non-communication.

The political climate summarized above characterized the first 20 to 30 years after the invasion. The situation on the island during this period (and in more recent years) has been characterized as “silent” or even “comfortable” (Adamides & Constantinou, 2012). Prior to 2000, many rounds of negotiations took place and plans for a settlement were suggested (e.g. Boutros Ghali’s “Set of Ideas”), while an important development was the granting of the status of candidate state for EU membership to Turkey in 1999. This was also the year when the efforts which led to the Annan Plan commenced.

The years from 1999 to 2004 constituted a crucial period in the negotiations, resulting in the 2004 referenda on the implementation of the “Annan Plan.” In addition, in April 2003 massive TC protests against the policies of their leadership and the poor living conditions in the north led TC leader Rauf Denktas, with Turkey’s support, to partially withdraw the restrictions on movement between the two communities (Theophanous, 2006: 82-83). As a result the tensions in the occupied area were effectively de-escalated and a new period of more intercommunal interaction began.

However, only a relatively small number of people on each side travelled regularly across the Green Line and developed contacts with the other side (and along with this more favourable attitudes towards reconciliation and co-existence) (Psaltis, 2008). The majority of the people in the two communities saw the withdrawal of travel restrictions as a political action undertaken by the TC leadership to accomplish economic development and the indirect recognition of the illegal “TRNC” (Psaltis, 2008: 40-41).

The referenda on the Annan Plan finally took place in April 2004. 75% of GCs voted against it (“NO”) and 65% of TCs voted for it (“YES”). The GC response received international condemnation and the Republic of Cyprus was blamed for not wanting a settlement. Explanations of the GC “NO” vote vary and are still debated. Media narratives, the obscurity of some of the Plan’s points and the intensive negative portrayal of its flaws, and fear-mongering played a very important role in the negative poll result.

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5 These were likely people who had pre-1974 relationships with persons of the other community.
(Christophorou, et al. 2010; Heraclides, 2006: 380-397). Nationalist rhetoric was also very prominent: the most significant example is perhaps the attitude of the President Tassos Papadopoulos, who adopted highly theatrical and dramatic language in his final public statement before the vote, strongly urging GCs to say “NO.”

The post-2004 period presents some small but important developments at the societal level of the two communities. First, it was predictable that the TCs would be disappointed with the outcome of the 2004 referenda, given that most of them were in favour of the proposed settlement. On the other side of the Green Line, the massive “NO” of the GCs led to renewed solidarity within the community against an “unjust settlement” that would once again, according to the mainstream GC narrative, favour the TCs and Turkey. Although this is a majority opinion among GCs, there are, however, also those who are in favour of reconciliation and believe that a good opportunity for re-unification was lost.

What is significant after 2004, and this is not necessarily attributable to the referenda outcomes but could be a response to economic woes, is the emergence of small extreme GC nationalist groups that reprise the kind of nationalism of the 1960s. The Cypriot Orthodox Church, which used its influence to encourage the GCs to reject the Annan Plan, shares many of the ideas that these groups have on such issues as immigration, which both see as excessive. These nationalists occasionally undertake violent actions against TCs, migrants, and other ethnic groups (Avgi, 2013; Mcdonald-Gibson, 2013). Likewise, the Archbishop makes polarizing distinctions between Christians and non-Christians and often uses a pro-Hellenistic nationalist rhetoric by referring, for example, to GCs as the Hellenistic population of Cyprus (Tselepis, 2011: 11). It is clear that the religious elite and nationalism are still intertwined and that they contribute to building and prolonging ethnic polarization.

But in contrast to the growth of negative perceptions, there is a promising aspect. Over the past few years the number of initiatives from civil society and international organizations that promote reconciliation and peace has increased significantly. Increasing co-operation has led to bi-communal conferences and research programmes on the relations between the two communities. The aim is to create a shared narrative, alleviate hatreds, and deconstruct negative images and prejudice (see, for example, AHDR, 2012; Öztoprak, 2000; Seeds of Peace, 2014).

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6 Such tendencies also exist in the north, and are becoming significant in causing the greater polarization of society there (Trimikliniotis, 2010: 63).
Sri Lanka: From Antiquity to Today

The Sri Lankan case, although a more violent and protracted example of ethnic conflict, is in a sense less complicated than Cyprus since it is essentially domestic, limited to the conflict between the two major ethnic groups (Tamils and Sinhalese) on the island; no other parties or “motherlands” are actively involved. This section examines the role of ethnicity during the different periods of conflict and assesses the importance of other factors in exacerbating and prolonging conflict.

Buddhist tradition, derived from religious texts and mythology, says that the Sinhala people arrived on the Island of Ceylon—it was renamed Sri Lanka in 1972—in 500 BC, that their ancestors were Aryans from north India, and that their “arrival coincided with Gautama Buddha’s nirvana” (Ram, 1989: 32). Tamils have a different version of history, claiming that Sinhala and Buddhism arrived to the island after they did.

An early confrontation that has contributed to the construction of the two communities’ distinctive narratives is dated to 101 BC, when the Tamil kingdom in Anaradhapura was defeated by the Sinhalese king Duttugemenu; after that there were several further Tamil invasions of the Sinhala kingdoms. The Tamil king, Elara or Eelala, gave his name (as “Eelam”) to the Tamil secessionist movement which emerged in the 1980’s, over 2000 years later (Ram, 1989: 32). According to the Sinhalese, the victory of king Duttugemenu preserved Buddhism; it contained the dangerous Tamils and saved the Sinhalese nation (Weiss, 2011: 15-16; Bartholomewsz, 2002: 55-64). However, this narrative has been softened over the years: what is now known of this ancient history is much more nuanced than the Sinhalese nationalist version. For example, archaeological evidence has shown that the Tamils arrived in Sri Lanka as early as the Sinhalese and that “there were many Tamils in Duttugemenu’s army, while many Sinhalese fought for Elara” (Weiss, 2011: 17).

Around the 5th century AD a clash between Tamil dynasties in the south of India affected Sri Lanka, and led the Sinhalese gradually to move to the south of the island thereby triggering the development of a distinct Sinhalese identity. Thus the island was loosely divided; although there were several heterogeneous areas, the north was mostly populated by Tamils and the south mainly by Sinhalese: this separation lasted until the 20th century (Weiss, 2011: 17-18).

Things changed for the kingdoms of the two groups when the first colonizers, the Portuguese, arrived in Sri Lanka in 1505. At the time there were three kingdoms on the island: two Sinhalese and one Tamil. The Portuguese managed to conquer the Tamil and one of the Sinhalese
kingdoms (Ram, 1989: 33). Both Portuguese (1505-1658) and Dutch
(1658-1796) colonizers focused their efforts on the island’s coasts, leaving
control over the interior to the other, unconquered, Sinhalese kingdom
(Kandy) (Peebles, 1990: 34).

Things changed again when the British drove the Dutch out during the
Napoleonic wars. By 1815 the island was under full British control, and its
administration had been centralised. British colonization brought about
changes to inter-group relations within the framework of the colonial
economy. For example, the Tamil community grew as Britain brought
more from India to work in the tea plantations. The immigrants, though,
were seen as distinct from the indigenous Tamil community, whom they
soon outnumbered (Ram, 1989: 33). This immigration had a significant
impact on the demographic and social dynamics of the island. Many
Tamils were taught English by American Christian missionaries who went
to the Tamil-dominated Jaffna peninsula to “teach and proselytize”
(Weiss, 2011: 21). Moreover, as the favoured community of the British,
the Tamils began to enter the civil service, the colonial administration, and
the more prestigious professions by exploiting their knowledge of English
(Weiss, 2011: 21-22). It is often argued that these developments in the
Tamil community generated hatred in the Sinhalese community. But this is
not the case: the Sinhalese had no problem with the administrative or other
professional careers of the Tamils, at least not until the early 20th century.
It was mainly a post-independence Sinhalese re-interpretation of 19th
century history that was wrongly but intentionally used by the post-
independence Sinhala administration to enhance nationalist feelings
among the Sinhalese (Weiss, 2011: 21). Divisions between the Tamils and
Sinhalese could also be found in religion and culture.

During the nineteenth century, some members of the Sinhalese
community became rich because of the privileges they had over “tax
collection, the brewing of alcohol and running gambling and cock-fights”
obtained through good relations with the colonial authorities (Weiss, 2011:
19). This emerging new middle class of Sinhalese was “heavily engaged in
the construction of a social and religious culture of nationalism that would
reconnect them with traditions from which they felt themselves previously
alienated due to the cultural imperialism of the Europeans and the British”
(Kapferer, 2001 paraphrased in Ali, 2006). As such the Buddhist element
within the Sinhala community was enhanced, generating divisions
between the two groups (Wolff, 2006: 69). Also during the 19th century
German theories of “Aryanism” influenced the Sinhala elite, enhancing
their ethnic consciousness while, in reaction, the Tamils reinforced their
own ethnic identity by recalling their Dravidian descent (Peebles, 1990: 31).

In the early 20th century the British introduced a representative system of government based on ethnic and religious divisions, allegedly for the better management of a multi-ethnic polity. This effectively led to the creation of two different political groups, each of which promoted its own political agenda and ethnically-based policies (Ram, 1989: 34). Universal male suffrage was granted to the whole island in 1931. Voting for members of the legislative council that Britain established in 1933 was determined by ethnic and religious categories (Tamils, Sinhalese, Europeans) leading to the perception that there was a need for different, ethnically based, political platforms (Ram, 1989: 34). By the time of independence in 1948 political parties were divided along ethnic lines, which contributed to the intensification of political, ethnic and religious differences. The situation in the legislative council, and later in the parliament, clearly favoured the Sinhalese since they constituted the majority of the population (75%). Consequently, after independence they easily won power, and did not face any difficulty in implementing policies that discriminated against the Tamils.

The result of these processes was a background of polarization which provided the conditions that produced the hostile relationship between the two ethnic groups after independence. Only then were the hatred and feelings of resentment expressed which led to tensions and violence, much as in Cyprus.

The United National Party (UNP) had won the 1947 elections and formed the first post-independence government. The Colonial constitution of 1931 was replaced by a new western-style more democratic one. However, this new constitution “was ineffective in safeguarding the pluralistic nature of the island” and so much of the post-independence ethnic violence can be attributed to its ineffective safeguards (Ram, 1989: 35). As the Sinhalese constituted the majority and could form the government without reference to Tamil concerns, they could rule in the interests of the Sinhalese and make few concessions to the Tamils.

Democracy allowed the Sinhalese to enact discriminatory policies, such as the “Sinhala only” Act which established the Sinhalese language as the official language of the state. Generally, “leaders from both sides of the conflict [were] elected simply based on their willingness to redistribute resources to their particular ethnic groups” (Carment, 2007: 65). Thus the

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7 Lord Soulbury was the chairman of the British-appointed Commission that produced the constitution.
new constitution and “electoral politics” (Silva, 1998: 21) were two of the factors that played a crucial role in transforming the silent ethnic divisions into salient tensions, and later violent clashes, between the two groups.

Kellas (1998: 158-159) describes the situation in post-colonial Ceylon in this way:

Where the former empires ruled indirectly through local princes or elite groups, the new “nation-states” seek direct authority and social homogeneity. Thus, official languages are introduced and one ethnic group often carries the “national” identity of the state. This leaves all the other ethnic groups and languages at a disadvantage, and their reaction takes the form of ethnic nationalism. Thus in Sri Lanka the introduction of Sinhalese as the official language...and the consequent privileges granted to Sinhalese speakers in state employment, education, and so on, provoked the Tamil nationalist reaction. The partition of Sri Lanka into two nations or federal units is the Tamil nationalist solution to the threat posed by Sinhalese nationalism.

Language, religion and education policies increased the segregation between the ethnic groups and helped delineate distinct ethnic identities. The “Sinhala only” Act, for example, aimed at entrenching Sinhalese domination of public administration and, more generally, at reviving the ancient glory of the Sinhalese (Oberst, 1988: 182-184). The constructed images of overrepresented Tamils in the colonial administration were used by the Sinhalese elites to justify the ethnically-based discriminatory policies (Peebles, 1990: 32). The same political and religious elites exploited and distorted ancient Sinhalese Buddhist myths and texts, as mentioned above, to suggest that there were ancient (pre-existing) hatreds between the groups (Ali, 2006). Thus they managed “to create an overarching identity that has transformed... [the Sinhalese] ...into a distinct nationality” (Peebles, 1990: 31).

In education important divisive policies were introduced during the 1970s. It was much harder for Tamil students to gain entry to university as they needed higher marks, while at the same time they were also unable to access foreign currency to enable them to study in India (DeVotta, 2009: 1026). Ethnic divisions were further intensified when school and university textbooks, administration, and teacher training became ethnically based (S. Perera, 2008). In general, pro-Sinhalese policies played a very prominent role in the conflict as they weakened the “Tamil presence in education and thus also in the professions and civil

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8 The Act made Sinhala the official language of Ceylon, replacing English and alienating the Tamils.
administration,” leading Tamils to think they were “perceived as a marginal community” (S. Perera, 2008).

These policies were enacted within a wider social and political climate of tension, where Tamil protests were repressed as a new anti-Tamil constitution was unilaterally drafted by the Sinhalese to replace Lord Soulbury’s. Introduced in 1972, the new constitution further undermined the multi-ethnic and pluralistic nature of Sri Lanka by diminishing the status of all religions apart from Buddhism, which was now supported by the state. In addition it ignored the Tamil desire for autonomy within a federal state (Ram, 1989: 44). In other words, the 1972 constitution was a “blatant expression of the Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism that had dominated the island’s politics since 1950” (Ram, 1989: 45).

In the same year, as a reaction to the new reality of discriminatory policies and political system, the Tamil New Tigers organization was formed, and four years later became the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). It was a patriotic organization which believed that secession through guerrilla warfare was the only way to achieve its aims. Although there were other Tamil political parties, it was the LTTE that became the leader of the Tamil nationalist movement, because it expressed Tamil demands and opposed the 1972 constitution and other forms of unjust treatment by the Sinhalese. The LTTE demands for a homeland were based on a historical narrative claiming that until the arrival of the Portuguese the Tamils had their own state—the Kingdom of Jaffna (Ram, 1989: 48). The LTTE was countered by a Sinhalese militant group, the “People’s Liberation Front” (JVP).9

It is important to stress, though, that neither community was monolithic or static in terms of their politics or stance. The pacifist efforts of both Sinhalese and Tamils prior to the emergence of the LTTE need specifically to be acknowledged. One of the most important examples of rapprochement was the Bandaranaike-Chelvanayakam Pact of 1957, an agreement between Sri Lanka’s Prime Minister Solomon W. R. D. Bandaranaike and the leader of the Tamil Federal Party (ITAK) Samuel J. V. Chelvanayakam, which sought to bridge intercommunal friction by making Tamil one of the national languages and by encouraging more Tamil engagement in local administration through a less centralized power structure. The agreement eventually failed owing to strong opposition

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9 JVP started as an ethnically-inclusive Marxist group, with goals that were primarily socialist. It organized a revolt in 1971. This failed, and JVP went through an ideological transformation, becoming increasingly aligned with Sinhalese ethnic identity. It was banned in the late 1980s after it tried again (and failed) to prevent the granting of Tamil autonomy and the presence of Indian troops in Sri Lanka.
from Buddhist monks and Jayewardene’s UNP. Although Bandaranaike continued to believe in the pact and tried to push for it within his Sri Lanka Freedom Party, strife between the ITAK and UNP-led mobs led to its failure. The decisive blow came when Buddhist monks demonstrated outside Bandaranaike’s house. The monks refused to leave unless the agreement was cancelled. Bandaranaike succumbed to the pressure, coming from the UNP and from within his party as well as from the monks, and repudiated the agreement, citing the agitation that was threatening to lead the country into chaos. This climb-down, though, served to increase unrest among the ITAK-led Tamils, which sparked Sinhalese reactions. The upheaval quickly turned into riots and political violence between the two communities. Violence de-escalated later, in 1958, but the events of 1957 further reinforced perceptions of ethnic division, and became the prelude to the Tamil quest for secession (Ram, 1989: 39-41; Zwier, 1998: 53-54).

Even as late as 1976 the biggest Tamil party, the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF), was still advocating for a peaceful partition. But a year later the Sinhalese-dominated coalition government fell, and the ruling Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) and its Leftist allies lost the elections. UNP won a decisive majority of seats in parliament (140 out of 168), which gave it almost untrammelled power and the ability to change the constitution unilaterally (Silva, 1998: 37). UNP took the opportunity to introduce a new constitution in 1978. \(^\text{10}\) Although this constitution improved the positions of Tamils in the civil administration, it also granted great power to the President instead of the Prime Minister. \(^\text{11}\) Sinhala remained the official language, and a new “Prevention of Terrorism” Act gave the police very broad power to intern suspects without trial. Furthermore, the Jayewardene administration emphasized its support of Sinhalese Buddhism in an effort to emulate the glory of the ancient Buddhist kingdoms while also trying to associate Jayewardene himself with the great kings of the pre-colonial era (Zwier, 1998: 57).

The discriminatory Sinhala policies bolstered support for the LTTE. The limited efforts of the Jayewardene government to make concessions to

\(^{10}\) Although UNP appeared willing to solve the country’s ethnic divisions it did not move far enough in that direction to de-escalate the tension; it was a case of too little, too late.

\(^{11}\) This was important as the UNP leader and architect of the new constitution Richard Jayewardene served as Prime Minister 1977-78, and then became President.
them were seen as inadequate by the Tamils. The relations between the two groups once again became increasingly tense in the late 1970s and early 1980s when anti-Tamil riots and gunfights broke out. According to Hoffman (2006: 139), the LTTE was the first to draw blood by attacking Tamil policemen and anti-secessionist politicians who had contacts with the government.

The year 1983 is often seen as the beginning of the Sri Lankan civil war. It was then that the intensified hatred and tensions of previous years exploded. Among the fragmented guerrilla movement and the weakened TULF (which was deprived of its participation in Parliament), the LTTE became the most influential organization among Tamils (Ram, 1989: 54-55). During the preceding few years, the LTTE had been stepping up terrorist attacks. These had started as a response to the provisions of the 1978 Constitution that gave Sinhala language and Buddhist religion special status. Its actions where countered by the military while Sinhalese gangs responded by attacking Tamils areas, thus triggering a series of bloody clashes between the Tamils and the LTTE on the one side, and the Sinhalese and army on the other. These “development[s] marked the militarisation and the steady brutalisation of the Sri Lankan ethnic conflict” (S. Perera, 2008).

Throughout Jayewardene’s time in office (1977-1988) linguistic and religious policies were not the only factors responsible for the escalation of the conflict; political and economic factors were also important. One Sinhalese action that caused an intense Tamil nationalist reaction was the Sinhalese settlement of the northern Dry Zone and other areas with traditionally Tamil majorities. Although Dry Zone colonization has a long history, the handling of the situation by the government during the 1970s and 1980s helped fan the flames of ethnic conflict. Sinhalese settlement aimed to increase agricultural production, but it also had the effect of altering the demographics of the Zone (Carment, 2007: 64). The government also worked with the local Muslim community to accomplish this goal, as the Muslims did not support the Tamil notion of “a traditional Tamil homeland in the North East region.” The Sinhalese could therefore engineer a clash between the Tamil and Muslim communities as well (S. Perera, 2008).

In its effort to emphasize Sinhalese ethnic supremacy, the government equated the Dry Zone colonization with similar actions of Sinhalese peasants in the past, making it an “integral part of Sinhalese-Buddhist
nation-building” (S. Perera, 2008). Re-worked Sinhalese myths about the Dry Zone reinforced the idea that Tamils posed a threat to Sinhalese life there (Peebles, 1990: 32). According to Horowitz (1985: 175-181), constructed fears affect the psychology of groups, leading to the development of a survival instinct. But this action did not leave the Tamils unaffected; based on their own ancestral stories, they claimed a “Tamil homeland” in the Zone. These mutually-exclusive historical narratives eliminated any basis for rational management of the problem, given that the argument was ideologically driven and emotionally charged (Peebles, 1990: 32).

Even though Buddhism teaches non-violence, the Sinhalese government organized and funded Buddhist ceremonies which took place before important battles, in order to excite the ethnic and religious passions of the troops. As Kent (2010: 173) put it,

“When a monk preaches before a group of soldiers, he walks a fine line between serving the needs of the soldiers as individuals suffering...and serving the Sri Lankan government, which needs soldiers willing to fight and die for its cause.

Within the framework of nationalist feelings, fanaticism, and the climate of conflict, the non-violent but government-sanctioned Buddhist ceremonies served the Sinhalese cause. It might seem odd that a Buddhist might resort to violence (Kent, 2010: 173); but it appears that the religious obligation of non-violence “can be overruled by the obligation to protect the Buddhist religion” (Bartholomeusz, 2002, paraphrased in Kent, 2010: 162).

Another important aspect of the conflict is the role of the elites and of the Diaspora. Elites play an important role both in causing and in prolonging a conflict: ethnic leaders and elites can use ethnic divisions and conflict to acquire more power and control over their supporters. Ethnic identity and nationalism are often used to draw the attention of those living overseas who financially support their own ethnic groups at home, giving the elites an opportunity to capture this economic support (Carment, 2007: 62-63). For example the Tamil Diaspora in Tamil Nadu, south India, provided a lot of aid to the Tamils in Sri Lanka (Kellas, 1998: 159; Silva, 1998: 193-194). And the Diaspora can sometimes nudge its host country into action.

As the conflict unfolded, India became more involved in the island’s internal affairs. Until 1990 it acted as a “principal mediator” in the conflict and the “presumed protector of the interests of the Tamil minorities in the island” (Silva, 1998: 194). The regional superpower pressurized the
Jayewardene administration to resolve the conflict. After Sri Lanka’s negative response, India repudiated the embargo that had been imposed on the Tamils by the Sri Lankan government, which led the government to sign an agreement with the Tamils (Zwier, 1998: 63-64). But the agreement was not acceptable to the rest of the Sinhalese body politic; bloody riots broke out, and Indian troops arrived on the island. This peacekeeping force (IPKF) tried to stop the Tamil violence, but initially had little success. A ceasefire could eventually be enforced, and the Indian forces left in 1990.

But the conflict did not end. Violence continued, and all talks between the Sinhalese government and the Tamil rebels were suspended in 1995 when the LTTE ended a truce by attacking a Sri Lankan naval base. The Tamils had rejected a government proposal to cede more control over their own affairs as it stopped short of granting a Tamil homeland in the north. In response to the LTTE offensive the government launched a large-scale counteroffensive, capturing Jaffna before the end of the year (see Schaffer, 1996). Despite the government victory, the guerilla war continued. In the late 1990s Norway became involved as a mediator; this intervention was fairly successful, and a ceasefire was signed in 2002, with many concessions having been made by both sides. But the LTTE, which by that time had become more extreme, and no longer represented the views of the majority of Tamils, withdrew from the negotiations and once again resumed terrorist attacks.

In 2005, the Tamil Tigers assassinated the Tamil Foreign Minister, Lakshman Kadiringamar, because of his involvement in the peace process and because he “played a key role in getting the group listed as a banned militant organization in the US and the UK” (BBC, 2005). Large-scale fighting re-started in July 2006 when “the LTTE closed the sluice gates of the Mavil Aru (Mavil Oya) reservoir... and cut the water supply to 15,000 villages in government controlled areas” (T. R. Perera, 2009). At around the same time the LTTE pulled out of ongoing peace talks, escalating the violence. The government finally repudiated the truce agreement in 2008, and launched a major offensive against the LTTE the following year. This action led to the displacement of hundreds of thousands Tamils, the killing of tens of thousands of civilians, and ultimately to the defeat of LTTE.

13 The agreement included merging the northern and eastern provinces; the end of the state of emergency in the north and east; immunity for militants who surrendered their weapons; the return of around 130,000 refugees from India; recognition of Tamil and English as official languages alongside Sinhala; and the possibility of posting an Indian peace-keeping force in Sri Lanka. (Zwier, 1998: 64-65)
The aftermath of LTTE’s defeat has not solved the problems of Sri Lanka. Political and social turbulence remain, and a continued government crackdown on Tamil activists has meant that violations of human rights have continued. The island’s constitution was amended in September of 2010, removing the two-term limit on the presidency, abolishing the constitutional council,\textsuperscript{14} and giving the president the authority to appoint members of the supreme court and putatively independent commissions on human rights, the police, and elections (Economist, 2010). The Economist took issue with the new constitution for subverting democracy in Sri Lanka, and for the complete lack of any reforms to alleviate Tamil grievances. The only significant attempt to rebuild ethnic harmony was the establishment of the “Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Committee” (LLRC). However, the credibility of this committee is in serious doubt: it is made up of pro-government civil servants; it has only a limited mandate to address war crimes; it does not provide a witness protection programme; and more often than not it “works to exonerate the government and undermine its own limited calls for further inquiry” (ICG, 2011).

The government is obviously reluctant to embrace reconciliation wholeheartedly or to proceed with any kind of genuine “political power sharing as an element for long-term ethnic conflict resolution” (Uyangoda, 2010, p. 111). Hence, in the words of Uyangoda (2010: 111), “The LTTE’s military defeat may not necessarily mark an end to the ethnic tensions in Sri Lanka, but rather may simply redefine the tensions and tools to political ones in the post-civil war phase.” From today’s vantage point, we could argue that this has indeed been the case since 2009.

A Comparative Analysis

Having looked at the two case studies, I now turn to identifying the causes that exacerbated and prolonged these two ethnic conflicts at different times during their history. An analysis of the role of ethnicity in the ethnic conflicts in question makes it clear that there were not always ethnic divisions or hatreds, at least not in their current form. More specifically, ethnicity cannot be seen as a causative factor in these conflicts, or, at least, not for the majority of the time. There were religious and cultural

\textsuperscript{14} The Constitutional Council was introduced in 2001 by the 17\textsuperscript{th} constitutional amendment in an effort to democratize and de-politicise public institutions, but it faced many shortcomings and failed to function properly. It was replaced in 2010 by the Parliamentary Council under the 18\textsuperscript{th} amendment (AHRC, 2006).
differences, but whatever tensions they produced were not salient. Somewhere along the way, especially since British rule, certain actors and factors played an instrumental role in constructing ethnic identities, intensifying ethnic divisions, and triggering violent conflict.

The identification of these actors and factors, as well as when they were prominent, is essential in order to understand how ethnically-based these conflicts really are. Based on the case studies analyses, Table I shows the different actors who contributed in the emergence of the ethnic conflicts in Cyprus and Sri Lanka, and the time period of their prominence. The underlined elements are those common to both conflicts.

Table I: Actors who caused, exacerbated and prolonged the conflicts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time Period</th>
<th>Cyprus</th>
<th>Sri Lanka</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-Colonial</td>
<td>- Greek Orthodox Church</td>
<td>- Religious Leaders</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Economic Elites</td>
<td>- Kingdoms Leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- “Motherlands” (Greece, Ottoman Empire)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colonial</td>
<td>- Colonizers</td>
<td>- Colonizers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(British)</td>
<td>- Nationalist/Paramilitary Groups</td>
<td>- Political and Economic Elites</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Greek Orthodox Church</td>
<td>- Political Parties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Political Parties and Unions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- “Motherlands” (Greece, Turkey)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-Colonial</td>
<td>- Nationalist/Paramilitary groups</td>
<td>- Nationalist/Paramilitary groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Greek-Cypriot Government</td>
<td>- Political Parties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- “Motherlands” (Greece, Turkey)</td>
<td>- Sri Lankan Government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Political Parties</td>
<td>- Political and Economic Elites</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Religious leaders</td>
<td>- Sri Lankan leaders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict</td>
<td>In Cyprus the Post-Colonial Period coincides with the Conflict Period</td>
<td>- Nationalist/Paramilitary groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Period</td>
<td>(1960-1974) and thus the exacerbating factors remain mostly the same.</td>
<td>- Sri Lankan Government – Army</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Political Parties and Elites</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-ConFLICT</td>
<td>- G/C Political Parties</td>
<td>- Sri Lankan Government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Period</td>
<td>- Greek Orthodox Church</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- “Motherlands” (Turkey)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Communities Leaders</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The actors of the pre-colonial era created the first divisions among the communities by triggering ethnic consciousness within each group. Those of the colonial and (most importantly) post-colonial period were the ones who exploited what had been mostly silent divisions, leading the groups into violent conflict. Table II presents the ways in which policies and actions (factors) undertaken by the actors during the various time periods accomplished this. The factors labelled "exacerbating" are those that ignited the conflicts by turning silent divisions into violence; in each case the starting point lies in the British colonial period.

Table II: Factors that caused, exacerbated and prolonged the conflicts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time Period</th>
<th>Cyprus</th>
<th>Sri Lanka</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-Colonial</td>
<td>• Church Policies&lt;br&gt;• Ottoman Policies&lt;br&gt;• The nationalist influence of &quot;Motherlands&quot;</td>
<td>• Religious disputes&lt;br&gt;• Territorial disputes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colonial (British)</td>
<td>• Colonial Administration System&lt;br&gt;• Colonial dividing policies&lt;br&gt;• Political Elites’ quest for Enosis and ethnically based education policies&lt;br&gt;• Church’s quest for enosis and dividing propaganda&lt;br&gt;• Bi-communal Political Parties and Unions adopted enosis&lt;br&gt;• The “Motherlands”” nationalist rhetoric</td>
<td>• Colonial Administration System&lt;br&gt;• British brought demographic changes&lt;br&gt;• Horizontal inequalities (e.g. Sinhalese privileges)&lt;br&gt;• Construction of ethnic and religious supremacy from elites&lt;br&gt;• Colonial ethnically based constitutions&lt;br&gt;• Political parties’ ethnically based political stands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-Colonial</td>
<td>• Terrorist actions from paramilitary groups&lt;br&gt;• Government ethnically based education and linguistic policies&lt;br&gt;• Electoral and Parliamentary system&lt;br&gt;• Colonial drafted constitution&lt;br&gt;• G/C proposed constitutional amendments&lt;br&gt;• “Motherlands” support to the respective communities&lt;br&gt;• G/C dominated administration (after 1964)</td>
<td>• Terrorist actions from paramilitary groups&lt;br&gt;• Electoral and Parliamentary system&lt;br&gt;• Ineffective colonial constitution&lt;br&gt;• Government ethnically based education and linguistic policies&lt;br&gt;• Sinhalese amended constitution&lt;br&gt;• Buddhist religion strengthened over the others</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Conflict Period | • Geographical divisions (1964)  
• Church was associated with G/C Liberation | • Sinhalese dominated government  
• Sinhalese run administration system  
• Mythical and distorted historical narratives |
| • Military and paramilitary activity  
• Government linguistic and religious policies  
• Government (Sinhalese) colonisation of Tamil lands for territorial and economic reasons  
• Ethnic supremacy construction based on historical narratives  
• The use of religious extremism by Government  
• Elite’s exploitation of ethnicity for political power and economic support from Diaspora |

| Post-Conflict Period | • The “Cypriocentrism” and “Greekcentrism” narratives of the G/C political parties  
• Orthodox Church’s nationalism  
• The “Motherlands” influence – especially in T/C leadership’s policies | • Government’s reluctance for reconciliatory reforms  
• Creation of biased reconciliation committee |

Based on the above data it appears that there is, indeed, a pattern in the elements (both actors and factors) that played a role in creating, intensifying and prolonging the conflict. There are, of course, distinct and unique particularities in each case, but the general pattern can be summarized by grouping elements into four categories: (a) Religion, (b) Colonialism, (c) Majoritarian governance and discriminatory policies, and (d) Elite economic and political interests.

During the colonial and post-colonial periods ethnicity was not salient in the sense that it was not the primary lens through which Sinhalese and Tamils saw or defined their interests. Instead, until the time of independence, other processes and circumstances triggered ethnic consciousness, gradually constructing ethnic identities, and creating the first divisions along ethnic lines. Furthermore, clashes of interest, prior to
the actual conflict, were mainly between the elites of the ethnic groups. Later, when the elites gained power, they implemented policies and undertook series of actions that emphasized ethnic differences and communicated these differences to the lower classes of society. Educational and linguistic policies, coupled with the rhetoric and actions of political parties produced this result.

As the elites’ interests had been expressed in ethnic terms and passed on to the lower classes, the conflict assumed a more ethnic character. Consequently, when violence broke out between groups, ethnicity played a more prominent role since hatred towards the “other” was effectively embodied in society: indeed, it could be argued that now ethnicity was functioning as an independent explanatory variable of conflict. Nonetheless, even during the conflict, the political and economic elites on both sides, especially in the Sri Lankan case, were able to profit financially from the unrest (Orjuela, 2003: 206).

As things progressed, ethnically-based policy-making did not cease, which intensified both the conflict and ethnic hatred. In Cyprus, violent conflict technically ceased in 1974 after Turkey’s invasion and the de facto division of the island. However, since then, amidst a kind of “silent” conflict, the rhetoric and symbols used by nationalist and populist political elites on both sides have played an important role in prolonging the saliency of ethnic divisions and perceptions of otherness. A similar reality is reflected in today’s Sri Lankan politics and society. Although the conflict technically ended in 2009 with the military defeat of LTTE, the Sri Lankan government’s majoritarian and undemocratic policies continue to stir up inter-communal turbulence and instability.

An important development of Tamil ethnic identity after 1995 and especially during the 2000s was the separation of the Tamil Tigers from the rest of the Tamil community as LTTE had gradually focused only on its own extremist goals. LTTE is a good example of how an ethnic organization that was created to oppose discriminatory ethnic policies and seek secession became overwhelmingly driven by ethnic nationalism with more extremist goals than the elites who created it (Kellas, 1998: 159-160).

The situation in Cyprus in 1974 was very similar. EOKA B’ attempted a coup against Makarios and his government mainly because he was seen to have abandoned the goal of enosis. In the early 1960s Makarios had a very good relationship with many of the militants. EOKA B’ was a relatively small group whose aims (and especially its actions) did not reflect the opinion of the majority of the GCs by the early 1970s. On the TC side, and especially in the 1960s, the militant organization TMT and
nationalist TC leaders both played important roles in consolidating TC ethnic identity. The territorial division of the two communities was furthered by the 1974 Turkish invasion, while the self-declaration of autonomy of the “TRNC” largely realized the TC nationalist goals.

Apart from these common patterns between the two conflicts, there are differences that make the cases unique and so limit the validity of any generalizations that may come out of this analysis. For example, the Cyprus case is much more complicated than the Sri Lankan one owing to the larger number of actors involved. The Cyprus case could be characterized as a liberation struggle (1950s), an ethnic conflict (1960s), a civil war in the GC community (early 1970s, as pro-Makarios groups clashed with EOKA B’) and an international conflict (1974). It could also be characterized as an extra-state and internationalized conflict. Violent ethnic conflict in Cyprus was limited to a shorter time period than in Sri Lanka, but whereas in Cyprus violence started before independence, in Sri Lanka it was almost exclusively post-independence.

There is also a significant difference between the two cases in the way in which violence started. In Cyprus, for GC and TC militants to have the capability for armed conflict, the two “motherlands” had to play an important role in exacerbating the ethnic nature of the conflict by adding a nationalist element: the two communities were “threatened” not only by the other ethnic group on the island but also by the involvement of Greece and Turkey. In the Sri Lankan case, while it is true that the Tamils received external help from the Tamil Diaspora and that both Sinhalese and Tamils used stories of their ancestry in order to construct their ethnic supremacy, there was no desire from either group for unification with their ancestors’ lands. For example, Indian Tamils did not seek territorial and political separation from Sri Lanka in order to establish a political union with India. GCs and TCs on the other hand sought to be united with their respective perceived “motherlands.” In addition, neither India nor any other third party did anything to provoke such a desire.

This section has demonstrated how the prominence of ethnicity in these two ethnic conflicts has changed over time, and how other factors built and accentuated ethnic identities that soon led to violence. The similar historical experiences, actors, and factors, and the similar chronological ordering of developments in both conflicts, allow me to make certain, rough, generalizations that might apply more broadly. One would expect that the prominence of the role of ethnicity changes over

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15 Extra-state conflict is the conflict between a state and a non-state political actor. One example is the conflict between Turkey and EOKA B’.
time in other ethnic cases of conflict that have a similar history to Cyprus and Sri Lanka. Even so, these conclusions have little value if nothing follows from them. In the next section, I suggest practical policy proposals arising from the analysis of the case studies that might assist with resolving ethnic disputes.

Conclusions and Implications for Conflict Resolution

The case studies provide evidence for the claim that ethnic identity does not, in itself, cause conflicts. Rather, ethnic identity, after being constructed and emphasized, can shape the motives and methods of certain actors to produce an environment prone to ethnic conflict. Competing incompatible goals of the parties in both the cases have been shaped by considerations of ethnic identity. Depending on the particular circumstances of the time, and on how "ethnicized" the clash of interests is, approaches to conflict resolution should be tailored appropriately in order to address the most prominent factors that are likely to extend the conflict.

Högglund and Svensson argue that changes in the peace-making methods used may have a negative impact on their effectiveness. But they also acknowledge that, particularly in the Sri Lankan case, the international community shifted its approach because of the "parties' intransigence" and the "lack of progress in the peace process." They also stress the fact that the increasing autonomy and violent activity of the LTTE led the international community to deal with it as a terrorist group (Högglund & Svensson, 2011: 178-179).

The most usual kind of international peace-making efforts are based on a "sticks and carrots" logic which aims at using a fixed set of incentives to bring the conflicting parties to an agreement. But this approach cannot produce positive results at all stages of a conflict because the dynamics that drive a conflict do not always remain the same. At the very least, the carrots and sticks need to change. It is vital that a correct assessment needs to be made at each state of a conflict in order for the right policies and actions to be undertaken.

Bearing this in mind, the importance of the analysis of the case studies becomes clear. As the role of ethnicity in ethnic conflicts changes, the timing of action targeted at managing and resolving an ethnic conflict is crucial. The best way to resolve a clash of the parties' goals (especially when these are deemed to be incompatible) is to make structural changes as soon as possible in order to address perceived inequalities between groups and thus remove the pretext for violence. If, however, the tensions
boil over into violence, the underlying factors that originally caused the tensions cannot be effectively addressed. As the conflict becomes ethnically driven and the initial political and economic causes are no longer seen as important as the more salient ethnic aspect of the conflict the approach needs to change. This is where Primordialism becomes relevant: it can explain the failure of most of the settlements reached between conflicting parties after the break-out of an ethnic conflict (Kaufman, 2010: 214).

In Sri Lanka, the failure of the 1995 peace talks demonstrates that when ethnic nationalism becomes radicalized and powerful within a group within an ethnic community (the LTTE in the Tamil community), then reconciliation efforts are unlikely to be fruitful, since the goals of the parties have become diametrically opposed. In Cyprus, although the 1960 constitution had set the foundations for a possibly-viable settlement, it was still incompatible with the ethnic goals of ethno-nationalists from the two groups (enosis and taksim). In addition, the various attempts at a resolution have always depended on the involvement of third parties (Greece, Turkey, Britain and the United Nations). The failure of those efforts cannot be attributed solely to the incompatible goals of the two communities, as these externally-conceived solutions often did not accommodate the requirements of one or both of the parties.

The idea that conflict resolution strategies should adapt as the relative importance of ethnicity is different at different stages of a conflict reflects similar ideas and theories of state- and peace-building. In principle, every effort for conflict resolution or settlement should recognize from the start that conflicts are social activities and therefore very complicated, with multiple aspects that need to be taken into account (Clausewitz, 2007, p. 100). Other theories of conflict resolution take seriously the cultural and religious dynamics of the conflict and even the ways in which cultural particularities could promote peace and reconciliation (Ramsbotham et al., 2010: 301-315). Indigenous approaches to peace-building can also contribute to achieving more effective results. Further research is needed here, using case studies (Ginty, 2008). Lastly, from a sociological point of view, Weber (2005) argued that the institutions of a political system should embody a set of ideas, values, and cultural and religious particularities of a civilization that would allow its political arrangements to be the expression of its people. If conflict resolution, a proposed settlement or a peace-building process disregards these realities it can easily end in failure.

To conclude, although ethnicity may not be the underlying cause of ethnic conflicts, it is evident that it can easily become the most important
factor of their prolongation. The role of elites is important in constructing ethnic identity, even if elite perceptions of the conflict are mostly based on their own distinct interests, with ethnic identity used as a tool to garner support for those interests. The dynamic of the changing role of ethnicity during an ethnic conflict is directly associated with indigenous culture and social structures, as the very concept of ethnicity includes such elements. Ethnicized policies, the expression of interests in ethnic terms, and the exploitation of ethnic identity by elites come, more often than not, to be based on cultural distinctions. Therefore conflict resolution strategies should take into account such distinctions, not to intensify or solidify them, but to integrate them into possible settlement plans.

Though it would be unrealistic to completely "de-ethnicize" an ethnic conflict, it would not be impossible to bridge antithetical ethnically-defined interests. Drawing upon Apostle Paul's words in Galatians 3, cited in the beginning of this chapter, a way of accomplishing this could be through appealing to what is common across the conflicting identities. For Paul, divisive identity barriers became irrelevant because of a common denominator: Christ. Conflict resolution strategies should trace the appropriate common elements through the history of the conflicting parties, and use these as a stimulus to work towards overcoming divisions.

References


AHDR (2012) Cyprus Critical History Archive, Association for Historical Dialogue and Research


