

This shortcoming is all the more unexpected in view of Abdullahi An-Naim's own expertise on Islam and human rights,³ a subject that is addressed briefly in his introduction, and is broached by Richard Falk's subsequent paper on the quest for agreement on what is, or should be, "intolerable" to all traditions. Perhaps that is where Asian contributions are most needed for cross-cultural understanding: dignity and social justice, after all, lie at the heart of living traditions from Japan and Thailand to Singapore and Indonesia. Their voices ought to be heard within the mainstream literature,⁴ no less than in the hallowed chambers of United Nations committees in Geneva and New York.

We are, at best, only at the end of the beginning in the long quest for consensus and legitimacy on behalf of global human rights. This volume is an important contribution to the long process that lies ahead, and most of it deserves a wide readership.

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3. He has authored, *inter alia*, "Human Rights in the Muslim World: Socio-Political Conditions and Scriptural Imperatives", *Harvard Human Rights Journal* 3 (Spring 1990): 13-52; and *Toward an Islamic Reformation: Civil Liberties, Human Rights and International Law* (1990).
 4. A rare example is Ta Van Tai, *The Vietnamese Tradition of Human Rights* (Berkeley, California: Institute of East Asian Studies, 1988).

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Peace Accords and Ethnic Conflict. Edited by K.M. de Silva and S.W.R.D. de A. Samarasinghe. London: Pinter. 208 pp.

"The government is best which pays least attention to ethnicity."¹

The resurgence of ethnic conflict in the latter half of this century presents numerous dilemmas to both theorists and policy-makers. On the one hand, as Anthony Smith perceptively comments, "there is widespread feeling, popular and academic, that state interests and the imperatives of the system of states, economic as well as political, furnish both the causes and the issues for most wars". On the other hand, such a perspective,

1. Pierre van den Berghe, *The Ethnic Phenomenon*, new ed. (New York: Praeger, 1987), pp. 353-54.

Smith argues, “grossly underestimates the potency of certain kinds of identity and community and systematically fails to address the roots of successive ‘conflicts on the ground’”. Given that ethnic conflicts often assume a “chronic and bitter character”, such theoretical and policy concerns are pressing. Human beings are prepared to “sacrifice their lives and inflict violence on each other in strife that seems far from insignificant — or amenable to rational, peaceful solution”.²

A second problem is the complexity of the puzzle. One only needs to consult a current “geopolitical map” to realize the potency of ethnic conflict. Of the 180 states in the international system only a small number are ethnically homogenous. According to some estimates, there are more than 5,000 ethnic minorities in the world (*United Nations University Report on Ethnicity and Development*, 1987). Recent assessments by the Minorities at Risk Project (Maryland) indicate that ethnic groups are currently involved in more than 80 protracted conflicts throughout the globe. Another 240 ethnic minorities are involved in low-intensity struggles for self-determination.

A third difficulty is the absence of effective conflict management and conflict resolution techniques in areas where the problem of collective identity is significant. This is particularly true where the groups involved are not states but communities which often lack the commitment to and experience of conflict management practices. Recent events in Yugoslavia underscore this point. When the integrity of the Yugoslav state was first challenged by popularly backed secessionist surges in Slovenia and Croatia, a signal was sent out to the international community that the status quo inherent in the Cold War balance of power would no longer be sufficient as a source for conflict management policy. Initially, Yugoslavia was a situation to which the European Community and other Western states did not respond well. Only when the central government in Belgrade delegitimated itself by military action did international actors begin to move painstakingly from the hope of a harmonized settlement to recognizing Slovenian and Croatia claims to statehood. The former Yugoslavia now stands in international judiciary limbo, with external actors aligned behind the principle of self-determination for Yugoslavian minorities but unsure how this process of recognition might reflect on similar conflicts elsewhere and uncertain whether traditional methods of conflict management, including sanctions and the dispatch of peace-keeping forces, will be adequate and effective.

2. Anthony Smith, “Conflict and Collective Identity: Class, Ethnicity and Nation”, in *International Conflict Resolution*, edited by Edward Azar and John Burton (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1986), p. 51.

Readers with an interest in the management and resolution of ethnic strife may find answers to these and other puzzles in *Peace Accords and Ethnic Conflict*. This book is the most recent effort from the International Centre for Ethnic Studies (ICES, Sri Lanka). It is the ninth in a series of excellent edited volumes on issues related to ethnicity. This latest contribution consists of nine chapters, including a comprehensive introduction by the editors, K.M. de Silva and S.W.R.D. Samarasinghe. The concluding chapter, by co-authors John Richardson and Jianxin Wang, had the formidable task of tying the disparate case studies together, an assignment which has been carried out with great care and insight. Both policy-makers and students of ethnic relations will find much of interest in this last chapter. In all, seven studies of ethnic conflicts in five different states are presented. Each case focuses on the formal attempts at reconciliation between ethnic separatist movements and the state. South Asia receives the greatest attention with two studies on the Punjab conflict and the Accord of 1985 and two analyses of the Indo-Sri Lankan Accord of 1987. The remaining chapters, covering negotiations in Cyprus, Sudan and Canada, provide an effective regional distribution of failed attempts at ethnic conflict management. Most of the chapters are accompanied by detailed appendices on the agreements.

As the editors point out, the inclusion of Canada's miscarried Meech Lake Accord makes for an interesting contrast to the other cases. It is the only conflict of the five in which international involvement and violence have been insignificant. Dale Thompson's analysis of French-English and immigrant-aboriginal peace accords precedes the collapse, in 1992, of a second comprehensive agreement. This latest attempt at national reconciliation involved negotiations between the federal government and the ten provinces. Among other things, the "Charlottetown Accord" was to grant Canada's aboriginal peoples greater autonomy, and for this it won the support of native Canadians. However, the agreement failed to convince a majority of Canadians, especially in Quebec and the Western provinces where it was soundly defeated. In view of these latest events, Thompson's concluding remarks about the problems associated with comprehensive solutions are particularly apt. Canada's experience at piecemeal solutions for ethnic conflict reduction has been far more successful. Until recently, the evolution of Canada's policies on bilingualism and multiculturalism was a model for other multi-ethnic countries to follow.

Thompson's analysis of peaceful ethnic conflict management in Canada is a reminder that conflict is not a synonym for warfare or aggression. There is an important distinction to be made between conflict and aggression. The term "conflict" properly refers to a situation of discord between two or more parties which can sometimes be resolved

peacefully or which may, in some circumstances, lead to aggression. "Conflict" means a perceived divergence of interest or a belief that the parties' current aspirations cannot be achieved simultaneously. As the Canadian case demonstrates, conflict can also have a positive impact by stimulating social change and by facilitating the reconciliation of people's legitimate interests. Most conflicts do not end with one party winning and the other losing; rather, there is a synthesis of the two parties' positions involving some integrative agreement. By virtue of these two functions, conflict can foster group and national unity.

Reed Coughlan's examination of ethnic stalemate in Cyprus demonstrates that conflict can also nourish national disunity and distrust. Coughlan's analysis covers the period 1989–92 and focuses on the perceptions of the leaders of the Greek and Turkish Cypriot communities as well as other participants in the negotiation process. The study is to be commended for its extensive use of interviews with key decision-makers. These interviews provide an insight into the world-views of the two opposing sides, their negotiating strategies and possible scenarios for peaceful resolution of conflict in the post-Cold War era. Coughlan is not optimistic about a successful negotiated settlement. He argues that in the absence of external intervention, the prospects for peace in the Cyprus conflict are remote. The interesting aspect of Coughlan's analysis of elite decision-making is that it accounts for the powerful relationship between individual and group behaviour. The Cyprus conflict is not to be seen as an aberration of state and nation-building but a problem in the construction of the whole of Cypriot's social and political world. The transition from individual perception to group conflict comes about when individuals control information to others. As more people come to share the same world-view, inter-group conflict ensues. The Cyprus case indicates a steady progression in the entrenchment of world-views that will be difficult to alter even in these days of international confidence.

Francis Deng's piece on the Sudanese conflict and K.K. Panda's and Sucha Singh Gill's studies of the Punjab embroglio are written in a similar theoretical vein. The central issues raised by these analyses is the extent to which the state is willing to concede formal group rights on a territorial or non-territorial basis. In the cases of Sudan and India, the answer is not very much. These analyses contribute to an understanding of the effects of withholding group rights. At worst, the withholding of group rights may serve to accentuate a minority identity and to make an ethnic problem more intractable. In the context of an ethnic minority that is small in size but geographically concentrated, as in the case of the Sikhs, these characteristics may predispose the state, should it so wish, to engage in the most coercive of policies. By contrast, if the minority is large in

size and is territorially concentrated as in the case of Sudan, it not only constitutes a greater threat but also possesses superior resources for its own defence; while the state may thus be ill-disposed towards it, its capacity for naked coercion is reduced.

The two remaining inquiries include the most comprehensive examinations of the Sino-Sri Lankan Accord to date. The first of the two is written by K.M. de Silva and focuses primarily on the events leading up to and following the imposition of the Accord by India on Sri Lanka in July 1987. The second of the two analyses, by co-authors S.W.R.D. Samarasinghe and Kamala Liyange, attempts to determine why the Accord failed. Samarasinghe and Liyange argue that although the Accord did not measure up to expectations, it did contribute to the long-term settlement process of the conflict. In sum, the two studies of the Sri Lankan conflict serve as a warning to the world. Identity politics can be extremely divisive. The assassination of President Premadasa is only the latest in a long line of political killings that have ripped the country apart. The failure of the Indo-Sri Lankan Accord is notable for another reason. Both studies suggest that the potential for transforming existing state structures without the presence of a third party is minimal. In this sense, third party involvement has the potential to do two things. As the Sri Lanka case exemplifies, external involvement can reduce levels of conflict between secessionist groups and the state-centre when there is support for the state-centre. If, on the other hand, one side supports secessionist independence through military intervention, which has the potential of defeating the state-centre, then the possibility of higher levels of conflict diffusion is greatly increased. The latter example is a more accurate description of the Yugoslavian case and other post-Cold War scenarios because of the potential for involvement by external actors, including Islamic states concerned about the welfare of Muslim minorities in Bosnia, and the EC states concerned about the demonstration effects of conflict for ethnic strife elsewhere.

In general, all the case studies and theoretical chapters in this volume contribute to our understanding of ethnic conflict management. However, some puzzles remain unsolved. A central concern is that the volume focuses only on formal conflict management processes of those states experiencing secessionist-based turmoil, rather than dealing with the universe of ethnic conflicts (including irredenta and low-intensity ethnic strife). To carry out this task would require co-ordination between investigative bodies such as ICES and the Minorities at Risk Project, but the benefits would be immeasurable. Such integration may lead the way to theories and policies of preventative peacekeeping. It would have also been useful to focus on regions where multi-ethnic states may provide

lessons for those states that are not coping well. An equally important but under-emphasized set of factors in the study of peace accords relate to prevailing international norms towards seceding minorities and its impact on conflict diffusion. The kinds of conflict management presented in these cases are based on the assumption that compliance and cooperation between states unfold in response to the application of law and the exercise of force that fluctuates under changing circumstances, namely, norms, practices, habits and other components of statism. More specifically, states or other entities in the system at large can respond to ethnic strife in one of three ways: by (1) diffusion and encouragement; (2) reconciliation; or (3) isolation and suppression. Since 1945, secessionism has not been viewed favourably by most states within the system, U.N. declarations of self-determination notwithstanding. Domestic conflicts involving secessionism have largely produced restraint by intervening states and attempts at reconciliation or suppression by the international community. During the Cold War, even when an internal conflict involved a diversification of issues and protagonists there was the potential that a radical solution entailing complete separation of a state would be counterbalanced by more moderate power-sharing solutions and conflict management by one or both of the superpowers. Events of the past three years suggest that prevailing norms are undergoing a significant transformation. This transformation is notable for three reasons: (a) change in the means of involvement, as evidenced in the use of force by the international community (that is, the United Nations) with the aim of resolving ethnic strife within and between states (for example, Yugoslavia); (b) change in the objectives of involvement, as evidenced in increasing intervention in conflicts within states in order to end civil strife (for example, Somalia); and (c) change in the justification for involvement, including the violability of state boundaries and notions of de-legitimated sovereignty (for example, Cambodia). Given that all of the conflicts presented in this volume have yet to be successfully resolved, it will be interesting to see what impact the evolving international system will have on each.

In conclusion, the approaches in this volume assume that resolution of ethnic conflicts can be achieved once underlying causal mechanisms are identified, namely, problems associated with values and identity. In this sense, the theories in this volume are relatively optimistic about the possibility of resolving discord where ethnicity is salient but the prescriptions offered remain to be realized.

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