

*Fifteen years ago, in July 1983, one of the darkest events in recent Sri Lankan history occurred. The organised ethnic violence against Tamils, perpetrated by extreme Sinhalese groups, with the patronage of the UNP regime, marked a total breakdown of Sinhala-Tamil ethnic relations.*

*As Darini Rajasingham-Senanayake points out, Sri Lanka's history was never to be the same. A fifteen year war has produced an internal momentum of its own, making prospects for a solution complex.*

# FROM ETHNIC CONFLICT TO DIRTY WAR: THE HIDDEN ECONOMIES OF ARMED CONFLICT

Darini Rajasingham-Senanayake

"As for the war machine in itself, it seems to be irreducible to the State apparatus, to be outside its sovereignty and prior to its law: it comes from elsewhere. Indra the war god is in opposition to Varuna no less than to Mitra. He can be no more reduced to one or the other than he can constitute a third of their kind". (Deleuze and Guattari: *A Thousand Plateaus*)

"On both sides many of the combatants see themselves as caught up in a war that has lost all meaning for them. All choices seem unenviable". (University Teachers For Human Rights (Jaffna), 1997)

**S**ri Lanka's armed conflict has generated a momentum and logic which exceeds its root cause - often glossed as ethnic - even as it has invented new collective identities. Yet, few of the numerous analyses of the conflict have asked how war transforms identities, borders, and territories, or generates the ethnicization and polarization of collective identities. In fact, anthropological analyses of political violence in Sri Lanka have rarely moved beyond the 1983 riots and its urban locales, when the lives and property of many minority Tamils were destroyed in a pogrom.

This paper argues that fifteen years after its commencement in 1983, the war between the military forces and the secessionist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) could sustain the violence long after devolution or a regional power sharing agreement, even conceding autonomy to minority ethnic Tamils of the north and east is reached as a means to end the conflict. As in Bosnia, Somalia, and Afghanistan, where war became the continuation of "economics by other means" (Clausewitz), and a way to acquire otherwise illegitimate profit, power, and protection, Sri Lanka's post-1983 armed conflict has generated a hidden economy and new identities which provide the war with its own internal momentum. This is particularly true of

the "border areas" (as they have come to be termed in popular culture and the media), of the north, eastern, and north-central provinces, where the conflict has been most brutal.

This paper traces the transformation of Sri Lanka's "ethnic" conflict into a dirty war, and its implications for conflict resolution. It analyzes the political economies of violence and population displacement developed after the escalation of tension between the Sinhala and Tamil communities in Colombo and Jaffna into armed violence in the border areas. There civilian administration and law and order have broken down and alternative and competing authority structures and paramilitary security regimes developed. Likewise, it assesses how older modes of ethno-religious co-existence, accommodation and integration among bi-lingual Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim communities have been destroyed in the Vanni, east coast, and north. So too have new collective identities been generated through the violence and ensuing displacement, as once ethno-religiously mixed towns and villages became segmented into ethnic enclaves. This process of ethnic segregation has been hastened by the fragmentation of communities and families, and displacement of persons due to violence and/or ethnic cleansing perpetrated by the LTTE, the army, and various other paramilitary groups. At the same time the paper also explores how the humanitarian industry which seeks to alleviate the conditions of people rendered homeless and displaced due to bombing, shelling, and terror might also inadvertently contribute to the growth of a hidden economy and an administrative structure. Needless to say, for a lasting peace, dismantling the hidden economies generated by the conflict and the return to a minimally recognizable pre-war social order will be necessary. Finally, the paper considers the challenge to devolution, posed by these complexities.

## From Ethnic "Riot" to Torture House: New Forms of Violence and Identity

The transformation of political violence from riots to torture-house killings and massacres arguably marks the demise of ethnicity in the Sri Lankan conflict, and the rise of Latin American style dirty war violence. For since 1983, "ethnic" violence in Sri Lanka has not been "riots" but organized, routinized, systematic, and clandestine violence characterized by disappearances, torture, rape, check point searches, massacres of entire villages in remote areas. These are also acts classified by the United Nations as "human rights violations". While these violations have been committed by all parties in the conflict, the LTTE has practised ethnic cleansing of the areas it claims, principally Jaffna and the border areas. Likewise, as violence between armed groups has progressed, the distinction between civilian and military, the unarmed and combatants, have been increasingly blurred in the context of widespread militarization of civil society, the proliferation of paramilitaries, and generalized violence.

Viewed from the long duree of post/colonial ethnic politics, it is hence arguable that the 1983 pogrom/riot, marked a decisive break, not because of its spread and unprecedented nature, but because it was the last wide-spread national level riot, easily identifiable as ethnic. Since 1983, riots have more often than not occurred in local feuding between the two dominant Sinhala political parties during local and national elections, while feuds between Tamil political parties have been settled by assassinations. Meanwhile, the "ethnic" conflict has taken the sinister form of organized violence between trained armies of the Sri Lanka government and the LTTE.

Yet, analyses of the Sri Lankan conflict by anthropologists and political scientists have continued to focus on riots as a symptom of the conflict, and ethnicity as its cause. Stanley Tambiah in a wide ranging study of ethno-national violence in South Asia read through the prism of the "riot" has suggested that, "a radical state of civil war and insurgency is frequently the end process preceded by episodic civilian riots..." (1997: 28). One infers here the linear progression of violence: from ethnic tension, to riot, to armed conflict, rather than the dialectical production of identity through violence; even as riots come to signify the presence of ethnicity in a work which otherwise acknowledges that ethnic identities are constructed rather than trans-historical phenomena.

Taking as its starting point the transformation which has occurred in the forms of political violence in Sri Lanka, this paper explores the dialectics of identity formation in armed conflict and its implications for conflict resolution in Sri Lanka. It begins with the premise that if ethnic and cultural difference generates conflict, conflict too generates cultural differences. On this premise, this paper attempts to demonstrate how armed violence has resulted in the polarization and hardening of identities in a region where

identity borders were not so clearly defined in ethnic terms, even if they were not completely porous. Finally, the paper traces how the hidden economies and new identities generated in the interstices of the fifteen years of armed conflict sustain the war and prevent acceptance of the peace proposals.

My analysis is based on ethnographic field work conducted in the northern, eastern and north central provinces of the island—in the areas now called "the border" which stretches across the island from Puttalam, to Vavuniya, to Batticaloa—during various field work stints over a number of years (1994-1998). These areas of the island have experienced cycles of war and peace - violent armed conflict—including repeated bombing and shelling of civilian populations, and population displacement. Additionally, the displacement of civilian populations has resulted in the making of de facto ethnic enclaves, and the slow segregation of historically mixed territories. Implications of the unmixing and polarization of mixed communities for a lasting peace in the context of the proposed devolution package will concern us in the final part of the paper.

### Sri Lanka's Latin Americanization

Since 1983, violence associated with the ethnic conflict has been akin to Latin American dirty war violence and protection rackets - terror, torture, disappeared bodies, and traumatized souls. Carolyn Nordstrom (1992) is one of the few anthropologists who have studied the Sri Lankan armed conflict from the perspective of the border, and characterized it as a "dirty war". While I am in agreement with Nordstrom that the armed conflict in Sri Lanka since 1983 is closer to a dirty war than to what is commonly understood to be an ethnic conflict, I recognize the limits of the dirty

war analogy for Sri Lanka, even as it critiques the anthropological fetishism of riots and ethnicity in Sri Lanka.

Nordstrom uses the notion of the dirty war to characterize the violence in Sri Lanka as a conflict where non-combatant populations are targeted in order to control a nation's political process through

the construction of a "culture of terror", which seeks to "undermine the very foundations of culture". Nordstrom draws from analyses of Latin American conflicts and extrapolates it to the conflicts in Mozambique and Sri Lanka. She defines culture as "the very structures of knowledge and action that give definition and identity to a population in general" (1992:26). In Nordstrom's reading, "culture" constitutes a positive force, Durkheim's functional social glue, rendering unity and peace in a society. Her presumption seems to be that culture is peaceful except in situations of terror, and questions of power and inequality which arguably are at the heart of such conflicts are hence ignored. Nordstrom's reification of culture yet does not enable us to ask: how does conflict itself generate culture?

**The "ethnic conflict" has taken the sinister form of organized violence between trained armies of the Sri Lanka government and the LTTE.**

On the other hand, political scientists who have emphasized the point that armed conflicts generate a culture and economy which benefits the military industry and elites (Stanley, W: 1996 Reno, W: 1998) tend to take a purely instrumentalist approach to the violence and focus on the benefits that the war brings to military establishments, war lords or political elites. That armed conflicts benefit the military industry and arms dealers, local and foreign, is well known among specialists and civilian by-standers of modern wars. Rather, my analysis here pertains to the dirty war which is most apparent along the border line which the war has established - an unofficial partition or border which splits the island into two, dividing the land controlled by the Sri Lanka government in the South from the no man's land run by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam in the North Central Vanni regions. Villages on this unofficial partition line are today called "border villages". It is this border which operation *Jaya Sikuru* begun in 1997, set out to erase, a border which the LTTE has attempted to consolidate by intimidating and destroying ethnically mixed villages and urban centers.

### **Proliferation of Paramilitaries**

**T**he armed conflict between the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) fighting for a separate State for the Tamil minority community and the Sri Lanka Government's armed forces has generated a number of armed paramilitary groups and benefited many players in the violence. As state and terrorist violence have mirrored each other, blurred into each other, and turned inward, paramilitary organizations have proliferated. Many of these groups work with the Army to combat the LTTE. The militants have been trained either by the State, or by militant groups which claim to be liberators of the Tamil minority community. Additionally, they have benefited from training in violence from various foreign experts including the Indian Peace Keeping Forces (IPKF) as well as war experts from Israel and the U.S.

Among these paramilitary groups are the Peoples Liberation Organization of Tamil Eelam (PLOTE), Tamil Eelam Liberation Organization (TELO), Eelam Peoples' Democratic Party (EPDP), the Rafik Group and various Home Guard organizations, promoted by the Sri Lanka Army. All these groups, mainly youth, carry guns. Some of them are bank-rolled by the Sri Lanka government, but remain outside the authority and discipline structure of the armed forces, which are marginally better trained and better aware of humanitarian law, otherwise known as the Law of War which pertain to the protection of non-combatant civilian lives and property. Thus, the paramilitary carder tend to have a relatively freer reign than government forces to terrorize people, torture them, and extort money at gun point. These groups sometimes collaborate with the army to fight the LTTE, and perform local law and order functions which spill into disorder and torture. At the national level,

their leaders are installed as members of Parliament and they support the government in power.

Civilian populations in the so-called cleared areas and border zones of the conflict have learned to live amidst overlapping regimes of terrifying security. Alongside the Sri Lanka government's military regime of passes and check points, the LTTE's security regime, and the sub regimes of the other armed groups - the Eelam Peoples Revolutionary Front (EPRLF - East coast), People's Liberation Organization of Tamil Eelam (PLOTE - Vanni) and Eelam People's Democratic Party (EPDP - Jaffna). As the Sri Lanka government attempts to clean up the image of the armed forces, largely as a result of international pressure from Human Rights groups, paramilitary groups have gained greater clandestine visibility and power to conduct the dirty war in the war zones.

Often those who wield guns in situations of armed conflict tend to be youth, including teenagers and children, many of whom have been involuntarily inducted into the conflict. Needless to say, these youngsters with guns have little or no knowledge of humanitarian law, otherwise known as the laws of war, which pertain to the protection of non-combatant civilian populations in situations where military considerations are foremost.

### **Hidden Economies: Population Displacement, Terror, and Taxation**

**Often those who wield guns in situations of armed conflict tend to be youth, including teenagers and children.**

**C**ivilians become tools of war in dirty wars, and the displacement and/or confinement of people in camps constitutes a profitable exercise for armed groups. In the border areas and in the conflict regions paramilitary groups have developed various systems of taxation of traders and civilians, through control of the main transport routes (and the

movement of persons and goods) through an economy of terror, scarcity and fear. In the Sri Lankan conflict, the LTTE pioneered this system of taxation on the movement of people and goods. Since then, the Army has also resorted to curtailing the freedom of movement and goods, more often than not in the name of security and military operations. Additionally, where the army issues passes and identification papers, there is a high degree of corruption. Residents of high security areas complain of being asked to pay large sums of money to army personnel before they are issued with identification papers and passes to traverse the border.

Paramilitary groups have benefited from the uncertain security situation. In Vavuniya, PLOTE has a monopoly on the fish and coconut industry, through its control of transport into the town. Fish traders, in order to travel to the coast, have to pass PLOTE check points and are heavily taxed at these points. The authority which paramilitary armed youth and home guards have gained though wielding guns have begun to rebound and resonate in their communities. The incidence of paramilitary carders and military deserters

using their weapons for crimes or to settle personal vendettas has risen dramatically.

Simultaneously, the armed conflict, which is now in its fourteenth year, has resulted in the creation of a new elite - the armed forces personnel and their families. While thousands of soldiers and paramilitary carders have died, others, especially in the higher ranks, have grown rich through a hidden economy of corruption which is maintained by the so-called security situation. For instance, passes are necessary for people to move about and such passes can often only be obtained through the payment of sums of money to the military personnel who issue such passes. The same is true of the LTTE's military hierarchy.

For those in the conflict regions, the right to set up residence in an area of one's choice and the right to movement is seriously restricted by the LTTE and the Government's security regimes. While the Sri Lanka army severely restricts the movement of Tamils displaced southward, the LTTE will not permit Sinhalas to move or settle in the North. In fact, both the LTTE and the Sri Lanka government have used displaced persons as security shields or buffers during military campaigns.

The lack of mobility of displaced and host populations living in the border areas is perhaps one of the main reasons as to why youths join armed groups. The disruption of life, education and mobility, which displacement restriction to camps entails, results in the frustration of the best and brightest of the youth. Restrictions on mobility and the pass system particularly affects young women who are body searched.

Check point rape and murder is well documented in Sri Lanka. In this context, militant groups who infiltrate camps have very little difficulty in recruiting new carders from deeply frustrated and resentful youth, men and women, girls and boys.

Given these circumstances, the importance of enabling internally displaced persons (IDPs) who wish to return, as well as the provision of sustainable livelihoods and educational opportunities for those who do not wish to return home until a lasting peace has been achieved, cannot be overstated. While peace initiatives often focus on the two major contending parties in armed conflicts, there is a tendency to overlook smaller armed factions. The role of the paramilitaries, who are more involved in community level intelligence and terror, needs to be recognized and addressed in the peace process.

### **Displacement, the Relief Industry and Local Politics**

**H**umanitarian relief for the displaced and traumatised also generate their own structures and imbalances. In the context of increased media interest in humanitarian emergencies, civilians are increasingly used in propaganda wars concerning human rights. As the Euro-American world pays more money to stem the tide of refugees and contain refugee populations within refugee generating

States, the growing humanitarian industry which seeks to mitigate the effects of war on displaced civilians also creates various economies of dependency which structure the internal dynamic of armed conflict.

Often, conflicts between impoverished sectors of the host population and IDPs are prone to arise as a result of humanitarian interventions. Poorer segments of the host population often feel that the IDPs are receiving more assistance than they deserve, especially in light of the fact that the IDPs are seen to have adversely affected the local economy by over supply of wage labor, whilst driving local rents up.

Since the armed conflict commenced in Sri Lanka, numbers of displaced people have fluctuated from half a million to a million at various points, depending on the intensity of the fighting. While initially "refugees" fleeing violence received sympathy and assistance from host populations, six years later the hosts feel that they have overstayed their welcome. Thus, tensions between some of the local communities and the refugees have developed. For instance, in Puttlam, the infusion of all Muslim IDPs to the area has unbalanced the ethnic mix of populations and exacerbated tensions between the host community and the guest population. There is a possibility that conflict between the various ethnic groups might erupt if the situation is not carefully managed.

**Humanitarian aid appears to have generated its own economy of dependence.**

Many landlords who, for five years, did not charge refugees rent and allowed them the meager produce of the land, now want their land back. In May 1996 during a visit to a camp in Puttalam, I recall that there were rumors that a fire has been spread by the local landlord to hasten the departure of unwanted guests

from a camp on his land. Displaced populations often place a strain on local economies. Over supply of (wo)men power drives wage labor in the local economy down and usually affects the poorer members of the host community. At the same time, more wealthy refugees who can afford to move out of camps tend to rent houses, buy land and try to integrate into local the life and economy.

Yet, by most accounts, the economies of several border towns such as Puttalam and Vavuniya have also expanded over the past five years with the infusion of humanitarian aid and the aid agencies. In turn, humanitarian aid appears to have generated its own economy of dependence among the poorer IDPs who remain in camps six years after they arrived.

As armed groups (including State military personnel) have gained increasing control over civilian life, and the movement of persons and goods by means of controlling major transport routes and creating new security structures and protection rackets. The existence of these alternative structures and the displacement of populations is an obstacle to a return to lasting peace and to the conflict resolution process. Further, these processes are apparent to a lesser extent in other parts of the island and there is a danger of the unmixing of populations and ethnic polarization spreading to other ethnically mixed areas in the south which have not experienced

armed combat and to areas where people who have already been displaced by the conflict moved.

Many residents of open relief centers and camps in the conflict areas have been displaced for over five years. For the children under five years of age, home is a refugee camp. For the middle aged and elderly, home has become a space to be painfully forgotten. Without security, their home, houses, and fields they say are useless. Some refugees who have married into local families say that even after a durable peace has been worked out, they would prefer to stay where they are now. Others, particularly farmers whose livelihood stems directly from the land, wish only to return. Displacement affects those who live off the land most. Farmers, unlike service and/or government workers, have found it most difficult to integrate into the local economy because of the scarcity of land.

And, if it were possible, to what would the refugees return? Today the houses left behind by Muslim and Sinhala refugees cleansed from the Jaffna peninsula by the LTTE in 1990, house Tamil refugees. The government administration which subsequently recaptured parts of Jaffna resettles displaced Tamils in the houses of departed Muslims, Sinhalas and Tamils.

Return and repatriation if and when peace returns will mean yet another chain reaction of displacement, given that the length of the conflict and displacement has altered the displaced People's sense of home. In the South circumstances enabling displaced persons to build sustainable livelihoods is particularly necessary if the ethnic conflict is not to spread to new areas where the displaced have found refuge and are often perceived to be in competition with poor local populations.

### **IDPs and the Relief-Development Continuum**

**T**hose who have given up the dream of return are in a paradoxical position. They are being materially and psychologically displaced by the very human rights and humanitarian instruments, discourses, and practices that define them as victims who need to be returned to their original homelands for their protection. Their return is also needed for the restoration of national and international order and peace. From the point of view of internally displaced persons, involuntary displacement and settlement in territories of refuge is a continuum in long-term armed conflicts, since coping with displacement entails constructing new homes, identities, and "imagined communities". Yet, many displaced people in camps on the border, who do not wish to return due to fear of personal security or trauma, are being kept dependent on relief handouts rather than being assisted to build new lives, livelihoods and communities. The assumption of return evident in State, international and NGO policies vis-a-vis the internally displaced means that assistance to build sustainable livelihood is not avail-

able. Ironically, the very humanitarian relief meant to assist people who fled homes many years ago might be keeping them in a state of limbo and displacement.

Under these circumstances, an approach which conceptualizes humanitarian work as part of a development continuum with post-conflict intervention is especially necessary. This is especially so since the armed conflict has lasted for several years with communities experiencing cycles of war and peace and displacement. Equally, developing a systematic policy vis-a-vis IDPs is necessary. Those who wish to return, particularly youth, who are vulnerable to being inducted into militant groups should be enabled to do so as fast as possible. At the same time, those who do not wish to return should be enabled to build sustainable livelihoods in the places where they have found refuge from the conflict. Often, IDPs have found refuge in areas where they have relatives and friends. Systematic policy will reduce aid dependency of traumatized and displaced populations and the vulnerability of youth to be inducted into the paramilitaries.

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### **Ambiguities of the Conflict: Women's Empowerment**

**A**rmed conflicts generate ambiguous social transformations, and many women who have suffered the trauma of losing husbands, fathers, and brothers, have also gained greater authority and mobility in communities and families, as they are increasingly forced to play the role of head of

household. In short, the evidence suggests that some changes such as to the gender status quo which war has brought has benefited women whose freedom and mobility were restricted by traditional morality and convention in peace time.

Long-term conflict and displacement has, ironically, provided windows of opportunity for greater personal and group autonomy and experiments with identity and leadership for displaced people, particularly for women (Institute of Agriculture and Women in Development, 1995; Sachithanadam, 1995). Certainly this has been the case for many displaced Tamil women, many of whom have lost husbands and sons in the conflict. It is hence important that relief aid should be conceptualized to:

- (i) sustain women's empowerment and leadership roles which initially arose as an effect of the conflict;
- (ii) empower women within an altered family structure.

The need to conceptualize relief should be an integral component of a development continuum and development as part of a long term strategy for confidence building so that displaced populations might return as particularly evident on the gender issue.

## The (Un)making of Identity in Violence and Displacement

This paper has attempted to sketch how armed violence has transformed collective identities in the border areas. Aspect of the description might be extended to other parts of the island where violence has established a culture of suspicion. Neighbors and friends mistrust each other if they speak different languages, dress differently, or worship other gods; it is also destroying the border culture of ethnic co-existence and hybridity. For, as the conflict has progressed migration and movement of persons has increasingly come to be seen as a security threat by local communities, the military, and the Sri Lanka government. The evidence is clearest in Vavuniya where a vicious pass system prevents the movement of people from north to south and vice versa. Simultaneously, there has been a growth of an ethnic enclave mentality which presumes that people of different cultures cannot share the same neighborhood, village, city, places of religious worship or public space. Cumulatively, the armed conflict might be seen to have generated its own momentum and identities. As Deluze and Guattari predicted, the war machine once set in motion is indeed irreducible to the State, beyond its sovereignty, and prior to its law.

Understanding the cultural dimensions of armed conflict and how conflict can create polarized cultural logic is a prerequisite for conflict resolution. Constructive attempts to resolve the conflict in Sri Lanka concentrate largely on legal and constitutional matters - principally the devolution of power which will confer power to the regions dominated by the minority Tamil community. But the devolution package should not be considered a panacea for conflict resolution since devolution could also solidify ethnic thinking and ethnic absolutism if not properly envisioned to protect local minorities. In fact, devolution if not envisaged properly could actually become a blue print for more war as in the case of Bosnia with the creation of safe havens.

### Challenge of Devolution: Protecting Local Minorities

Fifteen years of armed conflict has destroyed much of Sri Lanka's mixed cultural geography and patterns of settlement, as in the former Yugoslavia, where groups of Bosnian Serbs undertook the war to ethnically cleanse territory which, like much of Sri Lanka and the Indian sub-continent, was culturally mixed. The excessive violence of genocide and ethnic cleansing practised in that war reflect ironically the depths of the roots and history of friendship and co-existence between many Croats, Serbs and Muslims in places like Sarajevo. In Sri Lanka thus far, the South of the country has been spared ethnic cleansing by armed factions, but this is an ever increasing possibility as a culture of suspicion and mis-trust of neighbors, friends and even relatives who may be

ethnically mixed, develop due to the war and the national security situation.

For devolution to work the magic of peace in Sri Lanka, it must turn back the clock on the displacement and unmixing of populations, as well as the culture of mistrust, insecurity and suspicion which has built up over the past 14 years of conflict between armed factions at the expense of a culturally mixed civil society. It must eschew the dominant political wisdom which has long said that Sinhalese are an absolute majority, and Tamils, Muslims and all others an absolute minority in Sri Lanka and focus on local minorities. For in the Tamil-speaking north it is the Sinhalese, Muslims, and various mixed others who constitute the minority. In other parts of the Muslim dominated South East Coast, Sinhalese and Tamils are in the minority. And it is only in the Sinhala dominated South and Central regions of Sri Lanka that Muslims, Tamils, and others are a minority. Moreover, it is the local or regional minorities who have suffered disproportionately in Sri Lanka's 14 year old war and who will constitute the litmus test for the success or failure of regional power sharing.

For devolution to work, it should hence focus on the protection of local minorities. The concept of a local minority and local majority enables us to think beyond abstract constitutional structures, to their relevance and applicability to current realities and political culture.

It is in this context that the first premise of the devolution of power, which concedes a long needed sense of self-determination to communities which have suffered due to (mis)rule from a centralized bureaucracy oblivious of local issues, should (i) enshrine the guarantee of respect and protection for local minorities, be they Sinhala, Tamil, Muslim or others of different castes, classes or faiths than the local majority; (ii) aim to preserve and nurture Sri Lanka's pattern of mixed settlement and cultural hybridity. This alone will ensure the preservation of Sri Lanka's long history of multi-faith, multi-lingual, multi-ethnic co-existence which is evident in the mixedness of urban areas as well as the coasts of Sri Lanka, particularly in the east coast and the Vanni regions.

The danger with devolving power on the basis of ethnic demographics alone is that it reproduces the logic of the ethnic nationalists. It turns regional self determination into an ethnic homeland or ethnic enclave. It officialises the ethnic enclave mentality and fear and suspicion of cultural difference which has built up during the years of war. Devolution will have to guarantee the safety and security of local minority Sinhalese and Muslims in Jaffna and the North

of Sri Lanka, minority Muslims and Tamils in Galle and the South of Sri Lanka, and minority Sinhalese and Tamils in Muslim dominated areas in the East coast areas of Pothuvil and Samanthurai. And this cannot be achieved by the creation of Sinhala, Tamil, or Muslim ethnic enclaves.

**Devolution if not envisaged properly could actually become a blue print for more war.**

At the same time, rather than demanding local majority ethnic enclaves, Sinhala, Tamil and Muslims politicians should begin by promising security and respect to their local minority communities and guard against majoritarian chauvinism, whether Sinhala, Tamil or Muslim. It is only then that even the most perfect devolution package might ensure a just peace and security for all communities in the country. The measure of the success of devolution will finally be the preservation of mixed settlements and the return of displaced persons.

The proposed devolution package concedes the freedom to move, as well as autonomy to local communities while holding on to the possibility of multi-cultural, ethnic co-existence. It recognizes the long felt need for local communities—Sinhala, Tamil, Muslim or Vedda—to gain control of their lives. Yet it should not succumb to the ethnic enclave mentality the logical end of which is ethnic cleansing and ethnic absolutism.

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### Notes

1. This process is however reflected everyday in debates in the national press over the Tamil Homelands myth propagated by the LTTE, as well as in the rhetoric of the Sinhala Commission's paranoid nationalism generated by fifteen years of armed conflict. Much ink has however been spilt on the invention of nationalist histories and traditional homelands myths. The history/homelands debates reveal the thinness of the line between history and nationalism, scholars and nationalists. For a good deconstructive account see Daniel (1997).

2. Sinhala and Tamil chauvinists who continue to debate the rights and wrongs done to each other since Elara and Duttugemunu are not as different from historians, anthropologists, and social scientists fixated on "ethnic" riots have rarely recognized this.

3. At the end of December 1995, the Ministry of Rehabilitation and Reconstruction in Sri Lanka estimated that there were 1,017,181 internally displaced people in Sri Lanka while 140,000 were displaced overseas, (some of the latter have sought asylum status). Figures of displaced persons are however controversial. The University Teachers for Human Rights, Jaffna (1993) estimates that half a million Tamils have become refugees overseas. The decennial census of Sri Lanka scheduled for 1991 was not taken due to the conflict. Estimates are that 78% of the internally displaced are ethnically Tamils, 13% are Muslims, and 8% are Sinhalas (Gomez, 1994). Many displaced people, Tamils, Muslims and Sinhalas alike, fled Sri Lanka Army and LTTE brutalities.

4. Among internally displaced Muslim women, however, the pattern is slightly different. Depending on the location of camps and the resources that families had, some women feel they have gained autonomy in their new situations while others complain of greater segregation.

5. It has taken long enough to put women on the development agenda, and in situations of emergency and conflict, women tend to be once again marginalized, as quick responses become the primary agenda of humanitarian aid agencies.

6. Since the crisis in the former Yugoslavia where unprecedented ethnic cleansing was practised for all the world to see, the international community has been concerned to define the right of civilian minorities to remain in situations of conflict as a fundamental human right. This concern was reflected in the thrust of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Sadako Ogata's address to the Human Rights Commission in 1993, which was in turn spurred by the on-going conflict in Bosnia as well as the situation in Palestine/Israel.

Dr. Darini Rajasingham-Senanayake is a researcher affiliated with the Social Scientists' Association, Colombo.