The Role of Higher Education in Sri Lanka's Post-War Situation

1. Introduction

Excellency, Mr. Chancellor, Mr. Vice-Chancellor, ladies and gentlemen, dear students

I like to express my thanks to the Vice-Chancellor for inviting me to deliver the keynote address at this convocation ceremony of South Eastern University (SEU). It is both an honour and pleasure to do this. It renews the links I have had with SEU for a period of over ten years already. I gladly remember the work I have done with Vice-chancellor Dr. Mohamed Ismail, Mr. Mansoor Mohamed Fazil and Mr. Rameez Abdullah from SEU on a project called 'Sri Lankan Discourses on Peace and Conflict' in the years 2003-2005. The in total four articles they produced for the edited volume *'Dealing with Diversity'*[1] are considered among the first ones that systematically analysed the position of the Muslim community, especially in the East and South East, during the Sri Lankan conflict.[2] I also remember the sad occasion when the tsunami hit

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[1] G. FRERKS and B. KLEM, *Dealing with Diversity, Sri Lankan Discourses on Peace and Conflict*, (The Hague: Netherlands Institute of International Relations 'Clingendael', 2005).

[2] These articles comprise: R. ABDULLAH, 'Ethnic Harmony in Eastern Sri Lanka', in G. FRERKS and B. KLEM, *op. cit.*, pp. 183-190; M.M. FAZIL, 'The Muslim Factor in the Sri Lankan Conflict', in G. FRERKS and B. KLEM, *op. cit.*, pp. 161-182 ; M.R. ISMAIL, R. ABDULLAH and M.M. FAZIL, 'Muslim Perspectives from the East', in G. FRERKS and B. KLEM, *op. cit.*, pp. 151-

the SEU's community and the infrastructure at University Park was damaged. We were able to provide a small donation from the Dutch counterpart universities as a token of solidarity with SEU at those difficult times.

Maybe it is also appropriate at this juncture to remind us of the origin of the SEU[3], because that -in and of itself- links very much to the topic of my address today entitled 'The Role of Higher Education in Sri Lanka's Post-War Situation'.

Obviously, the establishment of the SEU fulfilled the long felt needs of the South Eastern region and it also fitted into the government's policy of extending higher education to the more peripheral and less developed regions of the country. Yet, its establishment was hastened by the ongoing militancy and civil unrest in the North and East of the country. Muslim staff and students that were expelled from the North by the LTTE in 1990 were first hosted at the Eastern University, but due to growing communal and security tensions in the Batticaloa area they were also forced to leave from there. On the initiative of Sri Lanka Muslim Congress leader the Hon. M.H.M. Ashraff who had been approached by affected students, the government established the South Eastern University College of Sri Lanka to provide immediate relief to this group of students and staff, with Mr. M.L.A. Cader as its first director. The college was inaugurated on 23 October 1995 and became Sri Lanka's 10th university with Mr. Cader as its Founder-Vice-chancellor in 1996. I do not have to

159; and M.R. ISMAIL, R. ABDULLAH and M.M. FAZIL, 'The Other Side of the Muslim Nation', in G. FRERKS and B. KLEM, *op. cit.*, pp. 191-200.
[3] Source: SOUTH EASTERN UNIVERSITY OF SRI LANKA (2002) *Handbook 2002*, (Ch. 1.2. The Beginnings of the South Eastern University of Sri Lanka), pp. 3-5.

highlight the further history, development and dynamic nature of the SEU since then, as you all are part of it and are aware of its achievements.

At the time of establishing the SEU, it could not be envisaged that the conflict that in a way gave birth to it, would last nearly another fifteen years. Today, exactly three years after the military conclusion of the war between the Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL) and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), it is a good moment to reflect on the role of higher education in the current post-war situation.

I like to distinguish here between two major types of tasks or responsibilities of the university in this respect. The first is the academic study of conflict and post-conflict contexts and the concurrent analysis of associated (post-war) debates and policies. The second is the actual practical contribution of graduates and staff to post-war reconstruction, healing and reconciliation. Both these tasks require education and research to be carried out on those topics and, consequently, that those topics form part of the curriculum. The works mentioned above on the position of the Muslim community in the Sri Lankan conflict are an example of the scholarship that universities can provide. Conflict and peace-building components of the curriculum, I may add perhaps superfluously, are not only relevant from a national Sri Lankan perspective, but are also needed to deal with regional and global tensions, wars and intrastate conflicts of all kinds. So much so, that the areas of conflict, conflict management and post-conflict peace-building interventions have become veritable professional fields on their own with ten-thousands of practitioners world-wide. Let me now first elaborate on the academic study of conflict and post-conflict studies.

2. The Academic Study of Intrastate Conflict and (Post)-Conflict Management[4]

Contemporary armed conflicts are rarely anymore an international confrontation between two state actors with their armed forces. Rather, they are commonly referred to as 'intrastate wars'. Yet, the state is often one of the conflict parties, like we have seen in Sri Lanka. In this context, the author Holsti has stated that the character of the state itself is a more important factor underlying current conflicts than the relations between states.[5] This implies that problems emanating from a society itself are the primary causes of contemporary wars. Misrule, identity-based state patronage, exclusion, mismanagement of scarce natural resources, underdevelopment, violations of human rights are some of the problematic aspects of state-society relations and prevailing forms of governance propelling conflict in many parts of the world. The relative importance of military aspects and arms in the explanation of earlier interstate rivalry has given way to an emphasis on dynamic historical, political, socio-economic and environmental factors within the state. However, this shift conceptually creates more problems than it solves, as the apparent complexity of conflict has only grown compared to what a Russian general once called 'the good old times of the Cold War'.

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[4] Parts of this section are derived from: G. FRERKS, 'Human Rights Violations and Contemporary Violent Conflict: An Inquiry into Causes and Remedies', in I. BOEREFIJN, R. JANSEN, L. HENDERSON and R. WEAVER (eds.) *Human Rights and Conflict.* (Cambridge-Antwerp-Portland: Intersentia, 2012), pp. 56-75.

[5] K.J. HOLSTI, *The State, War and the State of War,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

This makes the academic study of conflict not only necessary and useful, but also sometimes controversial, as there is generally no consensus on what a particular conflict is about, and on what are its causes. This also applies to the conflict in Sri Lanka, where fundamentally different approaches and views on those issues can be found in scholarly as well as societal debates both in Sri Lanka and globally.

2.1.   Contemporary Wars as 'New Wars'?

The conduct of intrastate wars is considerably different from the classic interstate wars that dominated Cold War perceptions. Fighting in intrastate conflict takes place between variegated parties and temporary alliances, made up by state and non-state actors. It often becomes hard to discern who are combatants and who are non-combatants - an argument that also has been heard with respect to the different rebel and paramilitary groups in the Sri Lankan conflict.

Usually, the civil population is directly targeted by the perpetrators of violence and reportedly accounts for 90% of all victims, most of them being women and children. In addition, civil society is subject to widespread displacement combined with large-scale destruction of houses and other property. I do hardly have to highlight this, as the war in Sri Lanka has produced about 1 million refugees and over 800,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs), many of them displaced more than once. Displacement in Sri Lanka occurred due to the overt violence implied in the conflict, but also by the establishment of high security zones where people were not allowed to live anymore. The final stage of Sri Lanka's war has reportedly led to about 300,000 IDPs. The forced

exodus of Muslims from the Jaffna Peninsula in 1990 only concerned already about 100,000 persons. Though it seems long ago by now, only a few of them have managed to return so far.

Women often bear the brunt of intrastate violence, as they are usually left behind unprotected by male relatives taking part in the fighting. They are also less mobile, as they have to take care of young children and old or ill family members. Therefore, they are often unable to flee the onset of violence. In many societies, such as in Africa, women are targeted specifically as they are considered symbols of culture and identity. Attacks on them intend to demoralise and pollute the whole community.

Other characteristics of intrastate conflict are that international conventions and rules for warfare are often disobeyed. Violence directed against the civil population is prohibited under war-law and international humanitarian law, and this includes systematic rape, ethnic cleansing and starvation. Violence in intrastate conflicts is not bound to the battlefield, but is widespread and fragmented. Hit-and-run attacks are combined with urban warfare, and guerrilla, terrorist and counter-insurgency strategies. We have witnessed many of these characteristics in the Sri Lankan conflict as well.

Indeed, it is an academic challenge to define contemporary conflicts. Mary Kaldor has labelled them as 'New Wars' compared to 'Old Wars'.[6] According to Kaldor, New Wars are based on 'politics of identity', while Old Wars were characterised by 'politics of ideas'. Other analysts introduced notions like 'post-modern

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[6] M. KALDOR, *New & Old Wars. Organized Violence in a Global Era*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999), pp. 6-7.

conflict', 'ethnic conflict' or 'intrastate conflict' to describe and analyse these conflicts. However, none of these notions completely encapsulates the complex nature and distinctive features of present-day conflicts, underlining the need to describe and analyse them more fully in their time- and place-specific contexts. I, for example, have always resisted applying the notion of 'ethnic' or 'civil conflict' to the case of Sri Lanka, as if there was a violent struggle between the different ethnic or religious groups *per se*, which clearly was and is not the case.

The notion of intra-state conflict further may suggest, confusingly, that there is no 'foreign' involvement in these conflicts. But on the contrary, neighbouring countries, the United Nations, international organisations, international Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), foreign corporate firms, mercenaries, traders, and sometimes trans-boundary criminal networks are all involved in the pursuit of war or peace in these conflicts. Another international aspect is the diaspora phenomenon, which contributes to the spread, 'de-localisation' and 'de-terrorialisation' of conflicts, next to fund-raising and propaganda.[7] Nearly all those aspects could be observed in the Sri Lankan case as well, underlining again the international dimensions of what are commonly called intrastate conflicts.

Illustrative of the difficulty of grasping the nature of current conflicts, Goodhand and Hulme coined the notion of 'complex political emergencies', and stated that "contemporary conflicts are not merely complex, but they are . . . messes. They are not specific problems with identifiable causes that can be fully understood and

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[7] J. DEMMERS, 'Diaspora and Conflict: Locality, Long-Distance Nationalism, and Delocalisation of Conflict Dynamics', (2002) 9(1) *The Public*, pp. 85-96.

for which 'solutions' can be generated. At best, understanding will always be partial, contingencies will play havoc with linear notions of cause and effect and predictability will be at low levels."[8] This quotation puts critically into perspective the many ill-advised attempts in parts of literature to depict conflict as a number of fixed, subsequent stages on a curve with associated conflict management instruments. Such deterministic, linear approaches do not reflect the messy realities Goodhand and Hulme are talking about. Similarly, as Miall has observed, "many contemporary conflicts are protracted, crossing repeatedly into and out of violence and thus defying cyclical or bell-shaped models of conflict phases".[9] Again, something we have clearly observed in the Sri Lankan case, for example with a Cease-Fire Agreement (CFA) that was violated so often that it hardly deserved that name. The difficulties of understanding the complexities of the conflict have also affected the Norwegian peace efforts in Sri Lanka, as observed in NORAD's evaluation report.[10]

2.2. *The Different Types of Causes*

Before we discuss the different explanatory approaches to conflict in the literature, I want to underline that not all factors involved in conflict have a similar causal effect or intensity. Usually, four

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[8] J. GOODHAND and D. HULME, 'From Wars to Complex Political Emergencies: Understanding Conflict and Peace-Building in the New World Disorder', (1999) 20(1) *Third World Quarterly*, pp. 13-26, at p. 24.
[9] H. MIALL, 'Conflict-Transformation: A Multi-Dimensional Task', in A. AUSTIN, ET AL. (eds.), *Transforming Ethnopolitical Conflict, The Berghof Handbook*, (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2004), p. 69.
[10] NORAD, *Pawns of Peace. Evaluation of Norwegian peace efforts in Sri Lanka, 1997-2009.* (Oslo: Norad, 2011), p. xvi.

different types of causal factors are distinguished.[11] *Pivotal factors* or *root causes* are supposed to be at the root of the conflict and arguably need to be addressed to solve the conflict eventually. These are usually the larger issues such as identity, political exclusion, economic marginalisation and inequity. Such themes can be found in the discourses about the Sri Lankan conflict, but are simultaneously heavily debated and contested. *Triggers* are events that trigger off a conflict, such as an incident or a killing, but are neither necessary nor sufficient to explain it. A trigger would not work, if there were no pre-existing (root) conflicts that could erupt. A trigger is the metaphorical match used to light the fire. The ambush of thirteen Sinhalese soldiers in July 1983 in Tirunelveli in North Sri Lanka by the LTTE and the subsequent 'riots' in Colombo are often seen as the major trigger events of the Sri Lankan conflict. *Mobilising factors* induce groups to get involved into violent action. This relates to the insight that conflict does not fall out of the blue, but needs to be organised. Examples include the activities of political leaders and 'conflict entrepreneurs' as described by Tilly[12] and the role of discourses in violence, a topic I shall return to later in my address.[13] *Aggravating factors* add to the weight of mobilising or root factors, but are not sufficient on their own to cause conflict. An example of an aggravating factor is easy access to weapons. In many current debates no proper distinctions are made between the different types of causality and causal factors involved.

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[11] See among others: O. RAMSBOTHAN, T. WOODHOUSE and H. MIALL, *Contemporary Conflict Resolution.* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007), second edition, pp. 109-112.

[12] See C. TILLY, *The Politics of Collective Violence,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

[13] See V. JABRI, *Discourses on Violence: Conflict Analysis Reconsidered,* (Manchester - New York: Manchester University Press, 1996).

Brown distinguishes *underlying causes* (structural, political, economic / social and cultural / perceptual factors) and *proximate causes* (role of elites / political entrepreneurs vs. masses / followers). Brown argues there is a need to differentiate actions (in conflict management) according to these causal patterns, promoting a two-track strategy: sustained long-term efforts focused on underlying problems and more aggressive efforts focused on proximate causes.[14] It would be interesting and relevant to analyze how Brown's different elements have been dealt with in the conclusion of Sri Lanka's war and which components are still being in need of address and to what degree.

2.3. *Different Explanatory Approaches*

There are many competing conceptual and theoretical approaches as to the explanation of contemporary conflicts. Some authors focus on the lack of *nation-building* or *state formation*, while others tend to promote neo-Malthusian explanations about *resource scarcity* and population pressure. Some do believe that poverty breeds conflict or that conflict is propelled by 'greed'. Others talk about '*identity politics*' and even 'ancient hatreds'. Recently, more attention has been paid to the role of '*discourses of violence*' in the legitimisation and violent escalation of conflict.

Is it possible to choose from such a variety of explanations or do we need to combine them in an eclectic framework? In this

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[14] M. E. BROWN, 'Ethnic and Internal Conflicts, Causes and Implications', in C. A. CROCKER, ET. AL. (eds.) *Turbulent Peace, the Challenge of Managing International Conflict*, (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, 2001), pp. 209-226.

address, I can obviously not do justice to the extremely vibrant and varied debates on the nature of current conflicts. Yet, I shall briefly summarise some important issues from the current literatures.

At the most basic level, three major schools of thought can be discerned on the root causes of violent conflict. The *cultural school* argues that the root cause of contemporary war is cultural difference, often ethnic in nature. Violent conflict arises when grievances over this difference, directly or through elite manipulation, lead to political discrimination against minorities. The *economic school* asserts that intrastate war is caused by rebels seeking economic gain. This economic 'greed' argument is based on aggregated statistical analysis as well as demographic and environmental considerations. For the *political school*, the root of violent conflict lies in the absence of democracy or, more specifically, in the absence of proper governance mechanisms to redress societal problems between groups in society, including tensions between ethnic groups. The recent attention paid to weak and failing states also falls in this category. Within and between these schools there is a lot of debate and contestation as to the substantive, empirical and methodological validity of their arguments. Let me briefly say something about these three schools of thought.

2.3.1. The Cultural School

The Cultural School has two major approaches. One argues that conflict should be viewed as a context-specific socio-historical process. The second explains conflict using a discursive lens.

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Conflict academics adhering to the *first approach* argue that underlying causes are less important than is often assumed. Some even state that the debates about conflict causation are in fact rather futile and that dynamics during and after conflict do matter more, as conflicts are anything but static and are subject to continuous change. Often these conflict dynamics are unrelated to the origins of the war. Therefore, the challenge is to analyse conflict as a process and study the way it is organised, rather than trying to grasp the origin or cause of conflict. Richards argues that conflict should be studied in its normal social setting without awarding it special status or foregrounding it.[15] From this perspective, he pleas for an 'ethnography of conflict' that is able to study it in its social setting and foremost as a social process.

Discourse analysis is a *second major approach* within the Cultural School. It highlights how actors discursively frame a conflict and how people act upon those frames. Discourse is the way we perceive of and talk about phenomena; it can be considered as a system of representation that attributes meaning.

Both conflict and peace get discursively legitimised and contested. Groups use discourse in the articulation of political grievances against the state, for mobilising support for armed struggles and for legitimising these in the eyes of the wider public and international audiences. Governments fighting insurgents need to convince their constituencies and the international community of the urgency and appropriateness of military and other emergency measures. Through discourse, they (re-)interpret the past, define

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[15] P. RICHARDS, 'New War: An Ethnographic Approach', in P. RICHARDS (ed.), *No Peace, No War: An Anthropology of Contemporary Armed Conflict*, (Athens, OH - Oxford: Ohio University Press / James Currey, 2005), pp. 1-21, at p. 3.

the image of the enemy and reshape social identities and boundaries. In Sri Lanka, the stances of both the LTTE and the GoSL can be profitably analysed by using a discursive approach.

Discourse is intimately connected to power and action. Discourse constitutes the 'power to define' and is continuously translated into concrete social actions. This is not something innocent as people fight, kill and die for a particular discourse. This performative capacity of discourse or, in Jones and Norris' phrase, "discourse as action" boils down to the question: "How do we do things with words?" and "What do words do to us?"

Discourse, for example, determines 'which conflict' and 'whose conflict', and 'which peace' and 'whose peace' we are talking about. The meaning of and path to 'peace' is discursively constructed. Peace operations by donors and corresponding NGO activities are subject to discursive manufacturing and contestation. Whereas in many post-conflict societies there is a negotiated peace agreement between the conflict parties concerned, in Sri Lanka there is currently a so called 'victor's peace', where the victorious party, in this case the GoSL, is able to define the post-conflict trajectory unilaterally.

From the above it will be clear, that discourses are dynamic social phenomena and are all the time contested and renegotiated or - in academic parlance - socially constructed and deconstructed. In practice, we encounter multiple discourses at the same time, whether they are dominant, alternative or subaltern discourses. In our own fieldwork in Sri Lanka, we distinguished at least ten different discourses about conflict and peace among the different

Sri Lankan stakeholders and audiences.[16] This included an emergent Muslim discourse, partly derived from the Oluvil Declaration, issued by students of the SEU on 29 January 2003, arguing that the North-eastern Muslims have their own identity, homeland and, consequently, a right to an autonomous political entity.[17]

The framing and the lived experience of a conflict become factors that in themselves influence the conflict and may lead to a different constellation of issues and attitudes than in the beginning. Often we see a hardening of conflict and a radicalisation of viewpoints, while growing hate and passion confound an easy solution and lead to heightened demands of revenge. Even the prospect of peace may impinge upon the conflict. This refers to both the 'fears of peace'[18] and the phenomenon of spoilers, which both tend to compound attempts to reach peace.[19] It is not difficult to recognise these issues in Sri Lanka's conflict and in the failed attempts to reach a negotiated settlement. Also, the management of peace itself

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[16] See: G. FRERKS and B. KLEM, Dealing with Diversity, Sri Lankan Discourses on Peace and Conflict, (The Hague: Netherlands Institute of International Relations 'Clingendael', 2005).

[17] M.R. ISMAIL, R. ABDULLAH and M.M. FAZIL, 'The Other Side of the Muslim Nation', in G. FRERKS and B. KLEM, Dealing with Diversity, Sri Lankan Discourses on Peace and Conflict, (The Hague: Netherlands Institute of International Relations 'Clingendael', 2005), pp. 191-200, at p. 192-194.

[18] See S. J. STEDMAN, 'Negotiation and Mediation in International Conflict', in M. BROWN (ed.), The International Dimensions of Ethnic Conflict, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1996), pp. 341-376.

[19] See K. AGGESTAM, 'Internal and External Dynamics of spoiling: A Negotiation Approach' in E. NEWMAN and O. RICHMOND (eds.), Challenges to Peacebuilding: Managing Spoilers During Conflict Resolution, (Tokyo – New York – Paris: United Nations University Press, 2006), pp. 23-39; S. J. STEDMAN, 'Spoiler Problems in Peace Processes', in M. E. BROWN ET AL. (eds.), Nationalism and Ethnic Conflict, (Cambridge, Massachusetts - London: MIT Press, 2001), pp. 366-414.

is full of pitfalls in view of the fact that a majority of present conflicts are recurrences of earlier ones, where it has proven impossible to maintain the peace over time.[20] An analysis of the current situation in Sri Lanka may learn us to what degree such mistakes have been avoided in the post-war trajectory and what risks remain to be addressed by the different stakeholders concerned.

2.3.2. The Economic School

The role of economic factors in today's wars is also subject to considerable debate. In the 1990s, scholars questioned how wars were funded and how they spread by looking at resource exploitation and control. This brought into focus the role of non-state actors and the functioning of 'economies of violence', where wars were fought for the enrichment of state and non-state elites who had no interest in ending them. An early study on the 'benefits of war' was done by David Keen who argued that wars were not 'irrational', but pursued in an attempt to benefit economically from them.[21] Wars were not to be seen as 'politics by other means', as once observed by Clausewitz, but as 'economics by other means'.

Those discussions in turn gave rise to the greed-versus-grievance debate where analysts disagreed on the relative importance of politico-ideological factors (grievance) as compared to economic

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[20] J. DARBY and R. MACGINTY, *The Management of Peace Processes*, (London: McMillan Press, 2000), pp. 228-261.
[21] D. KEEN, The Benefits of Famine: a Political Economy of Famine and Relief in Southwestern Sudan, (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1994).

factors (greed). Paul Collier, at the time Director of the Development Research Group at the World Bank, is closely related to the greed argument. Collier submitted that rebel groups only adopted grievance discourses in an attempt to raise their legitimacy, but that grievances *per se* were not driving the conflict. The possibilities for predation and for 'doing well out of war' were the real drivers of conflict.[22] Though Collier's work has been criticised on substantive and methodological grounds, there seems to be a fundamental logic in his argument that rebel movements need money to fund their wars and, for Sri Lanka, the involvement in licit and illicit economic activities by the LTTE is a case in point.

Scholars from the economic school focus on the connection between resources and conflict and some of them have predicted global wars around scarce resources, including water, land, oil, and minerals. These studies were later accused of being overly alarmist. Most current studies conclude that resource conflicts are rarely only about resources as such, but rather about the rules and procedures for its allocation. Resource issues also may become flashpoints for other struggles with deep historic roots. Unfair or inequitable resource governance regimes become a factor in creating conflict and here one may find the key for conflict resolution, too. This factor has sometimes been referred to in analyses of the Sri Lankan conflict as well, especially by Tamil writers and the LTTE, as one of the conflict protagonists.

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[22] P. COLLIER, 'Doing Well out of War: An Economic Perspective', in M. Berdal and D. M. Malone (eds.) *Greed and Grievance: Economic Agendas in Civil Wars*, (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2000), pp. 91-112.

The present position in the academic debate revolves around the recognition that resource issues may play a role in the rise and continuation of conflict, but that it is seldom the only or most important factor. Environmental issues have to be become politicised before they lead to violent mobilisation. As observed by Karen Ballentine "The correlation between natural resource dependency and conflict risk is not direct: variations in the state's governance are critical intervening factors".[23] This qualified position amounts to a debunking of a simple (neo-) Malthusian approach that emphasises mono-causal or reductionist explanations in which scarcity directly leads to conflict. As properly put by Paul Richards: "There is no Malthus with guns".[24]

2.3.3. The Political School

The Political School looks at issues of state formation and the functioning of the state in terms of democratic structures and other forms of governance. Scholars from the Political School investigate the relationship between how well a state performs its function and the levels of conflict. From this perspective, several countries, including many post-colonial states, have not yet reached a full, consolidated form of statehood in which different identity groups can work out conflicting interests and ideas in a peaceful public forum, sometimes referred to as the 'governance state'. Other

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[23] K. BALLENTINE, *Program on Economic Agendas in Civil War: Principal Research Findings and Policy Recommendations*, (New York: International Peace Academy, 2004), at p. 4.
[24] P. RICHARDS, 'New War, An Ethnographic Approach', in P. RICHARDS (ed.), *No Peace, No War: An Anthropology of Contemporary Armed Conflict*, (Athens - Oxford: Ohio University Press, 2005), pp. 1-12, at pp. 6-8.

theorists adhere to the democratic peace thesis, which argues that only mature democracies are able to guarantee peace.[25]

However, this view has been widely criticised. In recent policy analysis much emphasis has been put on the prevalence of 'weak states' or of 'failed' or 'failing' states as responsible for conflict in many developing countries.[26] However, a strong Northern/Eurocentric bias is apparent in many of these approaches. These analyses have been criticised for comparing the prevailing situations with the nation-states of Europe, conveniently ignoring those states' own bloody genesis. Moreover, they often ignore other non-state forms of governance in those areas, sometimes labelled as 'hybrid political orders' that continue to function in place of or alongside weak state institutions.[27]

Another strand of critical analysts has suggested that the Western world has been complicit in creating and allowing chaotic borderlands, and subsequently used this chaos to justify

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[25] For a discussion on the democratic or liberal peace thesis, see among others: R. PARIS, At War's End: Building Peace after Conflict (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).
[26] S. CHESTERMAN, M. IGNATIEFF and R. THAKUR, 'Conclusion: The Future of State-Building', in S. CHESTERMAN, M. IGNATIEFF and R. THAKUR (eds.), Making States Work: State Failure and the Crisis of Governance, (Tokyo: United Nations University Press, 2005), pp. 359-387; S. VON EINSIEDEL, 'Policy Responses to State Failure', in S. CHESTERMAN, ET AL. (eds.), Making States Work, pp. 13-35.
[27] V. BOEGE, M. BROWN, K. CLEMENTS and A. NOLAN, (2008) 'On Hybrid Political Orders and Emerging States: State Formation in the Context of 'Fragility', in Berghof Handbook Dialogue, No. 8. (Berlin: Berghof Research Center for Constructive Conflict Management, 2008), pp. 21; B. BAKER and E. SHEYE, 'Multi-layered Justice and Security Delivery in Post-Conflict and Fragile States', (2007) 7(4) Conflict, Security & Development, pp. 503-528; T. DEBIEL and D. LAMBACH, How State-Building Strategies Miss Local Realities', (2009) 2(1) Conflict, Security & Development, pp.22-28.

interventions aimed at creating a neo-liberal world order.[28] Expectably, the role of globalisation is subject to critical analysis in this body of literature. Also in Sri Lanka donors and NGOs have been accused of re-colonising the country.[29]

2.3.4. The Present Position: Converging Towards Consensus?

The major explanatory schools are each contested on substantive, methodological, and empirical grounds. None of them, on their own, appears to satisfactorily explain current conflicts. This demonstrates the impossibility to isolate one overriding root cause of conflict. Therefore, we need a more eclectic and flexible approach that combines the strong points of each school and is tailored to the empirical situation at hand. We must focus more on conflict dynamics. In summary, we should use the different theoretical positions as a photographer uses his lenses, enabling us to understand and focus on particular aspects of reality at one moment for one purpose, but changing them when looking at something else in a different way at another moment.

In this way, we may easily agree that contemporary conflicts are usually caused by a set of complex factors built up over a long and

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[28] *See generally* M. DUFFIELD, 'Social Reconstruction and the Radicalization of Development: Aid as a Relation of Global Liberal Governance', (2002) 33 *Development and Change*, pp. 1049-1071; M. DUFFIELD, *Human Security: Development, Containment and Re-Territorialization: The Globalization of Security*, (ESRC, 2005); M. DUFFIELD, *Development, Security and Unending War: Governing the World of Peoples*, (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2007).
[29] S. GOONATILAKA, *Recolonisation, Foreign Funded NGOs in Sri Lanka*, (New Delhi / Thousand Oaks / London: Sage Publications, 2006).

dynamic history of increasing tension. Most conflicts seem to have a fundamentally political aspect, as they are fought over power, authority, norms, symbols and resources. Simultaneously, they are expressions of existing social, political, economic and cultural structures and cleavages.[30] They tend to occur in societies where state legitimacy and popular representation are low, or where the state is failing to some degree. Particular identity groups may be excluded from power and political participation, and feel discriminated against. This is compounded by a lopsided distribution of goods and services, where equitable access to scarce resources is limited or altogether denied by the state or power elites. Additionally, the religious or cultural identity of these groups is often suppressed. In this way, grievances build up over time. Initial demands and peaceful protests are ignored or actively suppressed.

In these contexts, the situation may gradually escalate into violent conflict. Deprived groups may be easily mobilised to violence by conflict entrepreneurs and political opportunists through a variety of discursive techniques and frames. Such an approach builds on all three schools mentioned above and acknowledges the relevance of both greed and grievance. While social and cultural grievances provide underlying motives for group mobilisation into violence, economic motives also play a role when the war has gained momentum and a scramble for personal gain erupts under armed factions and warlords. Even if the latter is not the case, funds have to be raised for conducting the war. Moreover, leaders and followers may be motivated by different sets of factors and their motives may change during the course of the conflict. It also is

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[30] J. GOODHAND and D. HULME, 'From Wars to Complex Political Emergencies: Understanding Conflict and Peace-building in the New World Disorder', (1999) 20(1) *Third World Quarterly*, pp. 13-26.

clear that conflict dynamics and the social organisation of conflict play a large role, and that many aspects of conflict should be understood as part of a constructed discourse.

Only a multi-causal, multi-actor and multi-level dynamic analysis can explain the complexity of current conflicts. Moreover, conflict is a moving target. Therefore, a good conflict analyst must know when situations on the ground change and thus warrant a different perspective or theoretical angle. Hence, any mono-causal or static approach is doomed to fail. The search for one encompassing root cause or a prototypical root conflict underlying current wars is an elusive undertaking. It is the teaching and study of this complexity that needs to be performed by universities that want to understand and act upon violent conflict and subsequent peace-building.

3.   Changing War, Changing Peace: The Need for Different Conflict Management Approaches and Practical Contributions

The characteristics of contemporary conflict described above necessitate other approaches to conflict prevention, conflict management, peace building and reconciliation. The approaches used in the post-Cold war period were largely state-centred and military-strategic, and often still based on (hard) realist schools of thought in international relations. Current conflicts do not fit that category. The conventional methods of peacemaking through diplomacy, 'high politics' and negotiations between governments no longer suffice. Likewise, the instruments of peacemaking and conflict resolution embodied in the Charter of the United Nations are largely focused on conventional wars between member states and are not easily applicable to current intrastate conflicts.

In the field of policy practice, we gradually witnessed new developments in the 1990s in response to the lacunae in prevailing international conflict management approaches. Starting with the United Nations *Agenda for Peace*[31] - with its emphasis on conflict prevention, peace building and the emergence of the 'second generation of peacekeeping' - a broader conceptualisation of security came about that explicitly included economic and development concerns. The second generation of peace missions, for instance, encompassed a mandate not only to maintain the military status quo, but also to build durable peace. Operations started to include demobilisation and reintegration of combatants, humanitarian assistance to returning refugees, the training of police, election monitoring as well as promoting human rights. Consequently, these projects became much more civilian in nature.[32]

Another major landmark was the notion of 'human security' introduced by the United National Development Programme (UNDP) in 1994[33] that focused on broader economic, social and environmental threats to people's everyday security, compared to earlier state-centred and military-strategic views.[34] Human security approaches became premised on the idea of empowerment and responsibility at all levels of society and required the concerted initiatives of a variety of governmental and non-governmental actors and organisations.

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[31] UNITED NATIONS, *An Agenda for Peace*, (New York: United Nations, 1992).
[32] J. VAN DER LIJN, Walking the Tightrope: Do UN Peacekeeping Operations Actually Contribute to Durable Peace? (Amsterdam: Rozenberg Publishers, 2006), pp. 17-19.
[33] UNDP, *Human Development Report 1994*, (New York - Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994).
[34] G. FRERKS and B. KLEIN GOLDEWIJK, *Human Security and International Security*. (Wageningen, NL: Wageningen Academic Publishers, 2007).

The human security debate coincided with the growing argument that, in particular circumstances, a right or obligation to intervene exists for the international community and that this may supersede the principles of sovereignty and non-interference.[35] Thus, a lack of human security became associated with the 'responsibility-to-protect' (R2P), a concept that was advanced by the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty in its report of 2001. The Commission argued: "Where a population is suffering serious harm as a result from internal war, insurgency, repression or state failure, and the state in question is unwilling or unable to halt or avert it, the principle of non-intervention yields to the responsibility to protect".[36] In such circumstances, state sovereignty, and implicitly state security, becomes subordinate to considerations of human security. Suggestions that the Sri Lankan case would qualify under this R2P regime, were vehemently resisted by the GoSL.

In addition, the relationship between human security, human development and human rights became part of the UN reform process, as shown in the United Nations Secretary-General High Level Panel on Global Threats, Challenges and Change (2004) and the UN Secretary-General's report *In Larger Freedom: Towards Development, Security and Human Rights for All* (2005). The High Level Panel proposed new structures, policies and instruments to deal with global challenges including a new Peace Building Commission, the establishment of the Human Rights Council, and changes in the Security Council. Further, the Panel reasserted

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[35] *See, inter alia,* INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION ON INTERVENTION AND STATE SOVEREIGNTY, *The Responsibility to Protect,* (Ottawa: International Development Research Centre, 2001).
[36] INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION ON INTERVENTION AND STATE SOVEREIGNTY, *The Responsibility to Protect,* (Ottawa: IDRC, 2001), p. xi.

the importance of peace building, conflict prevention, preventive diplomacy and mediation. The Panel also endorsed the idea of a responsibility-to-protect. In his report *In Larger Freedom*, the Secretary-General highlighted the integrated nature of the issues at stake. He famously argued that: "The world must advance the causes of security, development and human rights simultaneously, otherwise none will succeed. Humanity will not enjoy security without development; it will not enjoy development without security and it will not enjoy either without respect for human rights".[37] This new, integrated human security discourse has taken root in international academic and policy debates concerning conflict and has influenced the analyses, policies and practical approaches to conflict over the last decade.

Recently, more radical donor attempts were made towards state-building in so-called weak or failed states, as discussed above. This included giving support to institutions in the judicial and penitentiary domain, support for forming political parties as part of building a democratic culture, support to free media, and support to a variety of other civil institutions. In cases like Afghanistan and Iraq, support was given to virtually all imaginable government services at central, provincial and local levels. Results show a mixed record at best, and the (in-) appropriateness of this approach is presently hotly debated.

At a more practical level, concrete efforts have been made to sensitise development-related activities to the issue of peace and conflict. Presently, scholars recognise that development efforts do not automatically contribute to the enhancement of peace, but also

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[37] In Larger Freedom: Towards Development, Security and Human Rights for All, Report of the Secretary-General, UN Doc. A59/2005, at p. 1.

could help increase conflict.[38] Therefore, there is need to systematically look at what impact development-related aid has on promoting peace, or conversely, on inducing conflict.[39] So-called peace and conflict impact assessment (PCIA) tools have been developed to enhance the conflict-sensitivity of such actions.[40]

Irrespective of its successes or failures, present conflict policy can be characterised as being 'comprehensive' and 'integrated'.[41] This so-called '3-D approach' incorporates diplomacy, defence, and development simultaneously. This comprehensive and integrating understanding of security on the one hand, and the conflict-sensitive approach to development on the other, has become accepted in policy circles over time. Yet, for some time, the 3-D approach was hotly debated among academics, NGOs, and civil society organisations, as they feared that, in practice, development was relegated to the background and military and political concerns remained dominant. This concern became particularly urgent when the War on Terror started to overshadow the non-

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[38] G. FRERKS, 'Conflict, Development and Discourse' in: G. FRERKS and B. KLEIN GOLDEWIJK (eds.) *Human Security and International Security.* (Wageningen: Wageningen Academic Publishers, 2007), pp. 45-63.
[39] K. BUSH, 'Commodification, Compartmentalization, and Militarization of Peacebuilding', in T. KEATING, and W. A. KNIGHT (eds.), *Building Sustainable Peace*, (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2004), pp. 23-45.
[40] *See* FEWER, INTERNATIONAL ALERT, AND SAFERWORLD, *Conflict-Sensitive Approaches to Development, Humanitarian Assistance and Peace-Building - Resource Pack*, available at www.conflictsensitivity.org/resource_pack/introduction_280.pdf.
[41] A. M. FITZ-GERALD, 'Addressing the Security-Development Nexus: Implications for Joined-up Government', (2004) 5(5) *Policy Matters*, pp. 5-24; PRIME MINISTER'S STRATEGY UNIT (2005) *Investing in Prevention: An International Strategy to Manage Risks of Instability and Improve Crisis Response*, (London: Strategy Unit, 2005).

military components in the 3-D approach. Many felt that the resulting militarisation of aid was harmful. The dominance of military aspects compromised the development goals at stake, humanitarian principles, and the safety of development workers, it was argued.

4. Conclusion: Intrastate Conflict and Post-Conflict Peace-building and Reconstruction at the SEU

Based on the above, I feel that SEU can embark on a number of important challenges with regard to the study of and teaching on conflict and post-conflict management.

Starting from the societal need to have qualified people that can contribute to post-war reconstruction, peace-building and reconciliation, it seems to me that for all graduates a basic understanding of conflict studies and conflict management, including post-conflict issues is a minimum requirement. This will enable them to operate in a conflict-sensitive manner in the reconstruction tasks they may carry out in the post-war trajectory. An active knowledge of the Tamil language seems to me a definite advantage in view of the fact that most needy conflict-affected areas speak Tamil as their mother tongue. Graduates from SEU may have a comparative advantage, if they combine substantive knowledge with language skills.

If future graduates want to further specialise in this field, it is of the essence that specialist courses on peace building, trauma healing and reconciliation are made part of the curriculum. Examples of curricula both domestically and internationally are

available and staff can be trained to deliver those, if this is not already being done currently.

I also believe that institutes of higher education can play an important role in the understanding, documentation and critical analysis of both conflict and post-conflict events and processes, and the associated policy interventions.

It seems to me that there is much about the war in Sri Lanka that merits further academic attention. I am not referring to the hotly debated and controversial issue of the alleged human rights violations by the protagonist parties towards the end of the war, which has received a lot of national and international attention as of recent and may – at least in my mind - not be an easy matter for Sri Lankan academia to look into. There are, however, many other interesting topics that could be studied properly and to which university staff could gain access to without constraints.

What we hardly know, for example, is how it was to live one's daily lives during the war. I believe that thorough academic ethnographic studies can help us to understand the everyday lived experience of war. How has war been lived through by peasants, housewives, students, shopkeepers and minor civil servants? How did they cope with the challenges faced and how did they engage with the warring parties? What forms of resilience could be observed under such conditions? How was it to live daily under the control of the LTTE or under strict security restrictions? How were these areas administered by those in power? We do not know much about these 'low politics' of everyday survival and there are hardly any detailed ethnographic studies done and published on

such issues.[42] In particular, there is a dearth of information on the Muslim communities that have been affected by the conflict and also on what has happened to them since the war is over.

With regard to the post-war trajectory it may be of the essence to see whether original root causes of conflict and associated grievances are sufficiently addressed to sustain the peace. Our earlier work on discourses of conflict could very well be expanded to look into current discourses on peace. It seems that a particular discourse on what is needed and done in the post-war trajectory is being promoted by the government, but that there are also alternative discourses developing that may differ in content and emphasis. Here it would be highly interesting and relevant from both an academic and practical viewpoint to see what differences emerge and how these could be addressed in order to make post-war reconstruction and peace building meaningful to the largest possible group of stakeholders and thereby hopefully help sustain the peace.

Other pertinent issues that may deserve academic attention include the material success or otherwise of post-war reconstruction, resettlement and reintegration programmes by the government and international donors. Close monitoring may help prevent mistakes and dissatisfaction, and provide voice to the intended beneficiaries.

A more difficult topic to investigate is how inter-communal relations have developed since the war is over and whether or how

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[42] A notable exception is: T. GAASBEEK, *Bridging Troubled waters? Everyday inter-ethnic interaction in a context of violent conflict in Kottiyar Pattu, Trincomalee, Sri Lanka*, PhD thesis, (Wageningen: Wageningen University, 2010).

reconciliation is possible in case violence has driven communities apart. This can only be understood by in-depth, local and community-embedded, longitudinal studies, something that the SEU would be ideally suited to provide.

Excellency, Mr. Chancellor, Mr. Vice-Chancellor, ladies and gentlemen, dear students. I shall not try to be exhaustive. Yet, I hope to have indicated that teaching and studying conflict and post-conflict issues is a sensible thing to do, both from a national and a regional and global perspective. For students it may be an extra qualification to find a job in a quickly expanding field of expertise.

However, these endeavours are also relevant for any attempt to reach a sustainable and acceptable peace that may overcome painful memories of conflict and suffering, and provide a basis for a peaceful co-existence. Recent data show that three-quarters of all conflicts of the last ten years have been recurrences of earlier conflicts.[43] Whereas post-war moments can be a window of opportunity for establishing stability, justice, reconciliation and development, this opportunity is often squandered in practice. As Darby and Mac Guinty show, the 'management of peace' is full of obstacles. Factors contributing to failure include: ignoring fundamental conflict issues and key actors; weak institutions; failure to implement reconstruction programmes; continuation of corrosive violence; lack of economic development, failure to enter into negotiations and strike deals.[44] Independent, critical, rigorous

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[43] J. J. HEWITT, J. WILKENFELD and T.R. GURR, *Peace and Conflict 2010, Executive Summary.* (Maryland: University of Maryland, 2010).
[44] J. DARBY and R. MACGINTY, *The Management of Peace Processes,* (London: McMillan Press, 2000); and J. DARBY and R. MACGINTY, *Contemporary Peacemaking, Conflict, Peace Processes and Post-War*

and thorough academic research can provide the information to prevent the unravelling of peace and provide a basis for successful post-war interventions.

Ladies and gentlemen, I am convinced that the SEU can play this important role, not only for the benefit of its Muslim constituency in the South East, but for the benefit of the country as a whole. Thank you for your attention!

Reconstruction, 2nd edition, (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).