

# Making Moderation Pay: The Comparative Politics of Ethnic Conflict Management

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**T**here is no guarantee that any three cases of a given phenomenon will adequately represent the range of variables that go into the making of that phenomenon. This is particularly so when the three cases are selected to represent yet another variable: geographic distribution. Consequently, the attempt in this volume to extract some recurring principles of conflict and conflict reduction from a European case, an African case, and an Asian case of “hot” ethnic conflict is problematic. The geographic criterion intrudes into a selection strictly according to theoretical preconceptions and makes the institution of even rudimentary controls in case selection difficult: Similarly, the other cases that are intended to serve as controls—because they manifest low levels of ethnic conflict at the moment—have also, of course, been selected because they possess ethnic conflict potential or history, and that renders them vulnerable to the possibility that they are not, in fact, controlled-conflict cases. Indeed, it can be asserted for Pakistan and Kenya, as we shall see, that the current tranquility is subject to change. Without the most careful matching of experimental and control cases to hypotheses, the effort to extract propositions from case studies is fraught with difficulty.’

Still, the strategy of this kind of comparison is by no means always futile. Not all of the control cases are miscast as controlled-conflict cases. Malaysia is assuredly more tranquil than Sri Lanka, Belgium and Canada are both in a more controlled state than Northern Ireland, and Nigeria has more effective restraints on conflict than Sudan. Close examination of these comparisons reveals that some portion of the difference between hot and cool ethnic conflict is a function of raw conflict conditions—the structure of cleavages, the history of group encounters, and so on—and some portion is attributable to measures deliberately undertaken to reduce conflict. It is difficult to say which is the more powerful explanation for reduced conflict worldwide. In the Western cases—particularly, Canada, Belgium, and Northern Ireland—a good case can be made that favorable raw conflict conditions have played a bigger role in moderating ethnic conflict than political engineering has. To put it differently, the West has been more fortunate than Asia and Africa in the

givens of its ethnic conflict. Asian and African leaders have had to be more inventive in meeting problems that emerge from relatively unfavorable conditions. Some have met the challenge. Many have not. For most leaders, most of the time, there are greater rewards in pursuing ethnic conflict than in pursuing measures to abate it. One of the great challenges of political engineers is to make moderation rewarding and to penalize extremism.

I shall say more about these themes as I proceed. At the outset, however, I want to note a few regularities in the high-conflict cases, some of which happen to be shared by the low-conflict cases; then I intend to identify what distinguishes the hot cases from the cool ones. Thereafter, I shall pursue in detail a paired comparison between Sri Lanka and Malaysia, in order to show that ethnic conflict is not just a function of the raw materials of cleavage and antipathy (though they are surely necessary conditions) but is also a function of the institutional structure in which conflict and restraint find expression. That institutional structure is amenable to change—it is willed and not merely given. In conclusion, I shall return to the predicament of the three states that find themselves in the midst of hot ethnic conflict.

#### Common and Uncommon Elements in Ethnic Conflict

Before I pinpoint some of the regularities in the cases, a more general observation is in order. It has to do with the relations between ethnic groups and the modern state.

The system of state sovereignty that emerged between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries in Europe has spread all over the globe in the nineteenth and twentieth.<sup>2</sup> To be sure, some governments do not control all of their territory. Some undertake more functions than others. The penetrative power and practice of states vary enormously. But virtually all states aspire in principle to control all their territory at some level of activity, and that control is what passes for sovereignty—in principle, the power to exclude the control of others. The matter of ethnic conflict needs to be viewed in the light of worldwide norms of sovereignty, for ethnic groups often find themselves in control of states, and others aspire to put themselves in that position or to escape from the control of others. Because the principle of sovereignty is qualitative—sovereignty is possessed or it is not—that principle becomes an obstacle to interethnic accommodation. That is why the joint participation of the Irish Republic and Great Britain in Northern Ireland, following the Anglo-Irish Agreement, is so novel. It seems to divide the indivisible, to grade the precipice. The recent Meech Lake Agreement between Quebec and the other provinces of Canada appears equally novel. It divides sovereign responsibilities in new ways.<sup>3</sup> That is also why various forms of devolution, including

federalism and regional autonomy, are so often resisted by central governments, although devolution is often well suited to reduce ethnic conflict. Devolution appears to be a partial concession of what can only be given whole, and as such, it is usually believed (often erroneously) to be but a step toward complete secession. So some part of the problem of ethnic conflict is a matter of finding ways around the stumbling block of contemporary conceptions of sovereignty.

One of the elements common to ethnic conflict in the modern world, therefore, is its highly focused relation to the state. Parties in conflict make demands of the state and, in severe cases, demands for some reconstitution or recomposition of the state. This particular uniformity is a remarkable tribute to the rapid worldwide spread of the modern state and its acknowledged power in conferring recognition of ethnic status and other satisfactions that ethnic groups seek.

The cases dealt with in this volume share a number of characteristics, the first of which is that their conflicts involve not merely the state but also the land. They involve the relation of people to territory, raising the question of who really belongs to the land and, hence, to the political community. In Sri Lanka and Northern Ireland, as well as in Malaysia and Assam, there is a sense of priority for some groups by virtue of earlier migration. The Sinhalese have a myth of their early arrival from North India that persists despite the fact that considerable numbers of Sinhalese actually came from South India, many in recent centuries, more recently than most Tamils did.<sup>4</sup> In Northern Ireland, the Protestant migration of the seventeenth century introduced what Catholics regarded as an alien element into Ireland and began a debate over whether the Picts had actually preceded the Irish, who could thus not be regarded as properly indigenous. In Malaysia and Assam, the term “sons of the soil” is used for the Malays and Assamese vis-à-vis non-Malays (especially the Chinese) and non-Assamese (especially the Bengalis) who share the land, despite the fact that Malays and Assamese are both recent amalgams of subgroups. In the 1985 Assam accord, the Indian government agreed to strike some 700,000 names from the electoral rolls and to deport a somewhat lesser number of Bengalis, who arrived in the state after March 24, 1971. In all of these cases, political claims and a variety of ethnic policies are justified—and disputed—on grounds of indigenesness.

Related to concepts of indigenesness in the whole country are notions of localized priority. If the Sinhalese claim all of Sri Lanka, the Sri Lankan Tamils claim the north and east as their “traditional homelands.” They want power over those areas, and they want Sinhalese settlers, largely sponsored by government colonization schemes, kept out. The same applies to the southern Sudanese, who fear that the Jonglei Canal scheme will bring in an influx of northerners. In 1974, there were riots in Juba after a rumor circulated among southern Sudanese that large numbers of Egyptian peasants would be

settled near the canal.<sup>5</sup> In Canada, Québécois made it a condition of their assent to the new constitution that Quebec be given some control over immigration into the province. And the one portion of Belgium's regionalization agreement that has not been implemented concerns the status of Brussels, lodged as it is in Flanders but possessing a French-speaking majority. Whose territory this is and who will live in each part of the territory are contested issues.

Several of the most serious conflict cases lie along a great divide between even larger categories of people. Sudan, like some other divided African societies, straddles Arab Africa and black African Africa. Northern Ireland is part of the "Celtic world" and the "Anglo-Saxon world," although most of the Protestants originally came from yet another part of the Celtic world, Scotland. The Tamil areas of northern and eastern Sri Lanka are seen as a southern extension of the Tamil-Dravidian world of Madras, and the Sinhalese see themselves as Aryans, rather than Dravidians, whatever historians and anthropologists may say about their actual origins. The Malays partake of a much larger Malay world—certainly many have affinities to and ancestral origins in Indonesia—and although very few Malaysian Chinese have any concrete attachments to China, there is a keen awareness in Malaysia of the proximity and power of China. There is an equal awareness among Assamese of the proximity of Bengalis, in both West Bengal and Bangladesh, who outnumber the Assamese at least fifteen-fold. Although none of these cases is really irredentist in the way the South Tyrol is (potentially, at least), there is a strong sense of external affinity.

There is an even stronger apprehension of external affinity felt by the groups that do not share the affinity. The Sinhalese have long sensed ties between Jaffna and Madras that were not very close until recently. The Malays have tended to believe that the Chinese were attached to China long after they were, and the Chinese have often discerned greater Malay kinship with Indonesia than exists, ignoring the ambivalence and occasional hostility that is expressed, especially toward the Javanese. Southern Sudanese have feared that the northerners might be more willing to be closely connected to Egypt, when many northern Sudanese were actually wary of the attachment. So the effect of external affinity is magnified by anxiety.

Underlying virtually every severe case of ethnic conflict is a fear of competition. The Malays, the Sinhalese, the Assamese, the southern Sudanese, the Pakistani Baluch and Pashtuns and Sindhis, the Québécois, the Catholics in Northern Ireland, several non-Kikuyu groups in Kenya, and the Nigerian Hausa-Fulani all have a sense that their antagonists—respectively, the Chinese, the Tamils, the Bengalis, the northern Sudanese, the Punjabis and Muhajirs, the English-speaking Canadians, the Ulster Protestants, the Kikuyu, and the Ibo—are, in some important ways, better equipped to deal with the world they confront.<sup>6</sup> They are often better educated and are seen to be more energetic or well organized or more hard-workine or clever.<sup>7</sup>

Where such sentiments are overlaid with an experience or fear of domination, the prospect of severe conflict is considerable. In 1966, what appeared to be an Ibo military coup was followed by a number of administrative measures, such as the unification of regional civil services and then the complete abolition of the regions. It looked as if an Ibo regime was bent on controlling the whole country. The northern reaction was violent—anti-Ibo riots, an anti-Ibo coup, and then the even larger scale riots that paved the way for the Biafra war. Likewise, when the northern Sudanese imposed a measure of Arabization and Islamization on the south—and even more when they sent northern civil servants to administer the south, virtually excluding southerners from succeeding to senior positions vacated by the British—southern Sudanese regarded this as a new colonialism that had to be resisted.

In most of the serious conflict cases, ethnically based political parties pervade civilian politics. That has been true in all three of the hot cases—Northern Ireland, Sri Lanka, and the Sudan—and in a good many of the others as well. It has certainly been true of Zimbabwe, where Shona and Ndebele are fairly well divided by party. In Kenya, the Kikuyu-Luo cleavage found its way into very clear party divisions until the Luo party was outlawed in favor of a single-party state in which Kikuyu and now Kalenjin domination is only thinly disguised. In the Nigerian First Republic (1960–66), parties were coextensive with the three main ethnic contestants. In Pakistan and Assam, there is some correlation between party and ethnicity, but it is not perfect; and in Malaysia, ethnic parties flank a dominant multiethnic coalition. In Belgium and Canada, there is a relation between party and ethnicity, albeit a changeable one, but party politics does not resolve exclusively around ethnic conflict.

### Distinguishing High-Conflict Cases from Low-Conflict Cases

To take a first cut at differentiating the three severe cases—Sudan, Sri Lanka, and Northern Ireland—from the others, several of the elements just discussed make a considerable contribution. All three of the hot cases have strong elements of external affinity that produce apprehensions-of being Arabized, or swallowed up by the South Indian and Tamil worlds, or submerged by the more fecund Catholics to the south. All three cases possess powerful, emotive group juxtapositions and stereotypes. All have a concrete experience of ethnic domination, ranging from tight Protestant control of Ulster, to the history of the Arab slave trade and the postcolonial administration of southern Sudan, to the progressive exclusion of Tamils from the public life of Sri Lanka and the occasional invocation of slogans such as "Sinhalese from Dondra Head to Point Pedro" (from the extreme south the extreme north). All have had

ethnically based parties, with sharp lines between them, and no significant interethnic parties or coalitions.

In all three cases, moreover, there has been significant intraethnic party competition, which has **exacerbated** interethnic tensions. As I shall show later, the two main Sinhalese parties have competed in outdoing each other at being anti-Tamil. Until their merger in 1972, the **two Sri Lankan Tamil** parties competed in being more resistant to Sinhalese pressure. After their merger and the emergence of armed Tamil movements, the Tamil guerrillas have been far more resistant to negotiations than the Tamil party has. The same intraethnic competition was present among both northern and southern Sudanese in the 1960s, as moderates were outbid by extremists. In the Northern Ireland of today, the Catholic, Social Democratic **Labour** party has had to contend with growing support for the Sinn Fein (and with the Irish Republican Army, the IRA), and the Unionists have been almost as seriously divided. Where ethnic hostility is reinforced by the exigencies of intraethnic party competition—and particularly by the vulnerability of ethnic parties to being accused of being too moderate—ethnic conflict is likely to take a nasty turn. And so it has in these three countries.

Does this suffice to distinguish the three from the states that have been asserted to be cooler (or at least more controlled) in ethnic conflict? In considerable measure, it does; and to the extent that some of the low-conflict cases resemble the high-conflict cases, it can be argued that the former are misclassified as controlled conflicts.

The cases from the Western world are the easiest. **in** Canada and Belgium, external affinities may be strong, but they are not threatening. Neither the recently rediscovered sentimental attachment of Quebec for France nor even the affinity of the Western provinces for the United States poses any dangers comparable to Unionist loyalty to Britain or Republican loyalty to Ireland. Likewise, Belgian independence is more than a century and a half old, and Flanders is as unlikely to rejoin the Netherlands as Wallonia is to join France. There certainly was an emotive content to Francophone-Anglophone relations in Quebec, but never enough to create majority support for separatism. Rather, the economic costs of even the “sovereignty-association” at stake in the 1980 referendum were quite sufficient to overcome **Québécois** nationalism. Comparable costs have not been **enough to** overcome a good many uneconomic ethnic separatisms around the **world in** countries **that** are more severely divided.<sup>8</sup> In Belgium, interethnic **antipathy** has been at a still lower level. The fear of domination and even a sense of being colonized have been present at times for the **Québécois** and the Flemings, but political relations have been negotiable in a way that they most conspicuously have not been in Northern Ireland, where they have had a distinctly zero-sum quality.

Finally, in neither Canada nor Belgium has party politics been coextensive with ethnicity, and in neither has party politics revolved only around

ethnicity. In Belgium, social class and religious issues have alternated **with** ethnicity. In Canada as a whole, social class and regional issues have alternated with ethnicity, and even French-English ethnic issues are not the only important ones. Canada is bilingual but multicultural, and the other groups (Ukrainians, Italians, **Inuits**, and so forth) pose important challenges as well. Even in Quebec, the rise of the Francophone **Parti Québécois** (PQ) did not end the career of the provincial Liberals, although they were linked to Anglophone Canada. Instead, the Liberals and the PQ competed in Quebec for the **Francophone** vote. This situation is hardly typical of politics in ethnically aggrieved regions, where parties with extraregional, transethnic connections tend to be ousted. In Canada and Belgium, the major national parties have, in some measure, had to compromise ethnic claims within party councils as well as outside. On all of these dimensions, Northern Ireland looks more like Sri Lanka and the Sudan than like Belgium and Canada.

The southern Sudan resembles the Nigeria of the First Republic but not the Nigeria of the Second Republic (1979-83) or even the Nigeria of the current military regime. When Nigeria went back to civilian rule in 1979, it did so after dramatic changes in its institutional structure had greatly lessened **the** possibility of ethnic confrontation that could divide the whole **country**.<sup>9</sup> Nigeria's new federalism, with nineteen states, fractionated **its** overarching ethnic cleavages and set up alternatives to them. Its new constitution created a president elected separately from the legislature through **an** electoral system that placed a premium on interethnic appeals by presidential candidates and on the formation of parties that, in some measure, transcended ethnic divisions. Ethnic differences persisted, to be sure, but they had lost their ability to bifurcate the state. Chastened by a bitter civil war and determined not to return to the political system that produced it, Nigerian leaders consciously embarked on a program of ethnic engineering that bears study and **emulation**.<sup>10</sup> Many of its effects seem to have been carried into **the** period of military rule that began on the last day of 1983.

Much less persuasive is the case for regarding Kenya and Zimbabwe as low-conflict or controlled-conflict countries. Kenya's single-party regime long covered over but did not obliterate or even mitigate severe tensions while the Kikuyu were at the pinnacle of power. Now that **the** regime of Daniel **arap** Moi seems determined to create a new ethnic base of Kalenjin, Luhya, Luo, and some dissenting Kikuyu, it seems highly likely that it will trigger a massive Kikuyu response. Much the same general observation applies to Zimbabwe, deeply divided between Shona and Ndebele and now a one-party state. **Con**trary to what was once conventional wisdom, the single-party regime is typically not a particularly supple or effective vehicle for interethnic accommodation. There is nothing in Kenya or Zimbabwe that compares to the Nigerian determination to avoid protracted ethnic conflict and to create conflict-reducing institutions.

A case can be made that the raw material of Nigerian ethnic conflict is at least as potent as the raw material of the Sudanese conflict. How a conflict develops, however, is a function not only of raw materials but also of measures devised and implemented to reduce conflict. I shall argue shortly that Malaysia's considerable conflict potential has been reduced by the creation of an interethnic center, almost in spite of itself—that is, an interethnic coalition that occupies the middle ground and that, whatever the actual beliefs and sentiments of its members and leaders, fosters interethnic accommodation. Sri Lanka has no such center, just as Northern Ireland and the Sudan have no such center. In all three, moderation has few institutional supports and is largely unorganized.

The same may be true of Pakistan, held together partly because the large Punjabi majority can afford to make concessions to the minorities at the periphery and partly because, for those minorities, the alternative to staying within Pakistan is likely to be not independence but rather absorption into Iran or Afghanistan, both much less desirable prospects. In 1971, when the East Bengalis, who were very much harder to propitiate, saw that the alternative to political exclusion was independence, they took it.

There are few reasons to consider Assam a well-controlled case of ethnic conflict and no reason at all to think of it as a low-conflict case to begin with. What Assam has in its favor is India, a large state with a greater number of ethnic conflicts—some more serious, some less serious—scattered all over its territory, a state that can afford to make concessions to ethnic groups in localized conflicts. Nevertheless, it seems unlikely that concessions of that sort can, over the long term, reduce the Assamese-Bengali conflict. The Assamese have a powerful sense of indigeneness, a powerful fear of being displaced in their own state, and a powerful sense of the Bengali ability to displace them. As Sri Lanka discovered with the large number of Indian Tamils it agreed in 1964 to “repatriate” (really, expel) to India, having disenfranchised them in 1949, it is easier to disenfranchise people than to deport them and easier to agree to deport them than actually to send them on their way.

Although some of the control cases may be less controlled than we might wish, some really are controlled. It is possible to articulate differences that separate Northern Ireland from Canada and Belgium, the Sudan from Nigeria, and Sri Lanka from Malaysia. Those differences pertain both to raw conflict conditions and to the institutions that arise or are devised to reduce the conflict. Although raw conflict conditions and institutional setting relate to each other in subtle ways, they also have a degree of independent variation. Severe conflict can be reduced by deliberate action, whereas relatively moderate conflict—left unattended or, worse, nurtured under unfavorable political institutions—can grow into very serious ethnic problems. In support of these propositions, I offer two of the cases now rightly regarded as hot and cool: the contrasting cases of Sri Lanka and Malaysia.

## Conflict Prospect and Retrospect: Sri Lanka and Malaysia

If we were to go back to the time of their independence and ask which of these two countries was likely to have the more serious ethnic conflict in the decades ahead, the answer would have been unequivocal. Any knowledgeable observer would have predicted that Malaysia (then Malaya) was in for serious, perhaps devastating, Malay-Chinese conflict, whereas Sri Lanka (then Ceylon) was likely to experience only mild difficulty between the Sinhalese and Tamils. Certainly, that is what British officials thought, for in Ceylon they rebuffed attempts to secure special constitutional protection for minorities, whereas in Malaya they encouraged interethnic compromise and approved a constitution with many ethnically protective provisions. These views were based on a sense that conditions in Ceylon were more propitious for the containment of ethnic conflict.

First of all, the Ceylon Tamils comprised a mere 11 percent of the Ceylonese population. A small minority, its aspirations could easily be met, even if they entailed, for example, some modest degree of overrepresentation in the civil service. The Chinese were well over a third of the population of the Federation of Malaya and might reasonably have been thought indigestible; especially if the 10 percent Indian minority were added to the Chinese, the Malays were scarcely a majority and were not at all as securely placed in the Malayan economy as the Sinhalese were in the Ceylonese economy.

Second, the Ceylon Tamils arrived in Sri Lanka, on the average, close to a thousand years ago. The Chinese and Indians, by contrast, were relatively recent migrants to Malaya. The Ceylon Tamils were citizens; the Malayan Chinese and Indians, by and large, were not. The Ceylon Tamils were legitimate participants in the political system. Some of the early Ceylonese nationalists, such as Ponnambalam Arunachalam and his brother, Ponnambalam Ramanathan, were Tamils. The Malayan Chinese were not yet accepted as legitimate participants in politics. Around the time of independence, segments of the Malay press were advocating the return of the Chinese to China. The contrast between indigenous Malays and immigrant non-Malays was far more developed than was any comparable contrast between Sinhalese and Ceylon Tamils.<sup>8</sup> To be sure, the Indian (or Estate) Tamils, who had migrated to Ceylon some decades earlier, were disenfranchised in 1949; however, it is not they, but the Ceylon Tamils, who are involved in the current conflict, and no one would have dreamed of disenfranchising or deporting the Ceylon Tamils.

Third, events before and at independence were especially un conducive to peaceful ethnic relations in Malaya. The Chinese guerrillas who had fought the Japanese occupation forces during World War II had also fought Malay villagers who resisted their exactions of food and supplies. After the war,

the guerrillas emerged from the jungle, proclaimed the abolition of the Malay sultanates, and claimed control of the country. Until the British completed the reoccupation of Malaya, there were bloodbaths up and down the peninsula. Thereafter, the guerrillas returned to the jungle to fight the British and the largely Malay armed forces in a war that lasted officially from 1948 to 1960. Again, the hostilities had, de facto, an ethnic character, and they succeeded in undermining the Chinese political position in Malaya at a crucial period. There was nothing remotely comparable in Sri Lanka, which remained entirely peaceful. Sinhalese and Tamils had both joined the Ceylon Defense Force during the war and the Ceylon Army that succeeded it after independence. Tamil leaders had proposed a form of ethnically balanced representation for the postindependence parliament, but the British had rejected it. Independence nonetheless found the Tamils with ministerial portfolios.

Fourth, where Malay and Chinese elites had been divided by the structure of educational institutions in colonial and postcolonial Malaya, Sinhalese and Tamil elites had been brought together by the educational system in Ceylon.<sup>11</sup> Although common, English-medium education was available for Malays and Chinese, the Malay leadership class was disproportionately channeled to the Malay College at Kuala Kangsar, an institution self-consciously designed along British public school lines. No comparable monoethnic elite institution existed in Ceylon. Instead, a number of elite colleges were established, largely in Colombo, where both Sinhalese and Tamils were educated. The result was that, in countries of approximately the same population, Malay and Chinese political leaders were not on intimate terms, whereas Sinhalese and Tamil leaders, having been to school together, frequently knew each other well. It is fair to describe the Ceylonese elite at independence as a genuinely intercommunal elite, sharing many common values. The same description would not hold for the *Malayan* elite at independence.

Fifth, whereas Malay politicians were quite discriminating and cautious about whom they would deal with—and before independence, some Malay newspapers were urging “no diplomacy with the Chinese”<sup>12</sup>—the Ceylonese had what could only be described as a bargaining political culture. No agreement was automatically foreclosed. Tamil parties dealt with several Sinhalese parties, and vice versa. The question “What are your terms?” was frequently heard, and party discussions often revolved around whether a better deal could be obtained from a competitor of the party that had made the last offer. For purposes of interethnic negotiation, it would be reasonable to assume that such a bargaining political culture would be more advantageous than one that put a premium on personal relations, was hesitant to deal at arm’s length, and had a set of unwritten rules governing interethnic negotiation.<sup>13</sup>

Despite all these favorable conditions, Sri Lanka is now in the midst of an ugly ethnic war. Despite all its unfavorable conditions, Malaysia has been at peace. Its last serious episode of ethnic violence occurred in May

1969, when riots followed national and state elections. This contrast is not wholly fortuitous, and it does not vitiate the contrasting conflict conditions to which I have just called attention. Malaysia has had the more difficult problem, but it has also had better conflict management.

The outcomes of ethnic politics depend on the interplay of conflict-fostering conditions and conflict-reducing processes and institutions. As I noted earlier, Nigeria’s ethnic problems have been at least as serious as the Sudan’s, but whereas the Sudan is now in its second civil war, Nigeria seems far from the experience of its one civil war, the Biafran war of 1967-70. Again, the difference is attributable to the conflict management systems of the two states. And Northern Ireland, which admittedly has more intractable problems than either Belgium or Canada, also has practically no political institutions of conflict reduction in place. It is on the interplay of conflict conditions and institutions that I shall focus. For such an inquiry, there can be no more instructive material than the Sri Lanka-Malaysia contrast.

#### *Vote Pooling and Multiethnic Coalitions*

Without any doubt, the most important contrast between Malaysian and Sri Lankan ethnic politics has been the role of multiethnic political coalitions in the two countries. The dominant parties in the Sri Lankan system have all been ethnically based, whereas the dominant party in the Malaysian system has been the multiethnic Alliance and National Front.

The Ceylon National Congress, formed in 1919, was originally a multiethnic national movement, modeled on the Indian National Congress. Within two years, however, most Tamils had left the Congress in a dispute over the future mode of representation, and Sri Lanka settled into a pattern of representation by ethnically based political parties. Although there were still some Tamils in the mainly Sinhalese United National Party (UNP), which took power at independence, by the mid-1950s virtually all politically active Sri Lanka Tamils had opted for either the Tamil Congress or the Federal Party, leaving the UNP, the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP), and the various parties on the left to the Sinhalese. Consequently, Sri Lanka’s party system revolved around the competition of the two main Sinhalese parties for Sinhalese votes and the two main Tamil parties for Tamil votes until the two Tamil parties merged in 1972. With the exception of a brief period from 1965 to 1968, when a UNP-led coalition government included the Tamil parties, the dynamics of intraethnic competition, particularly for the Sinhalese vote, have pushed the parties toward meeting ethnic demands and have limited their leeway to make concessions across ethnic lines.

The rise of the SLFP as a competitor to the UNP in the 1950s went hand in hand with appeals to Sinhalese ethnic sentiment. After the resounding victory of an SLFP-led coalition in 1956, Sinhala-only legislation was passed,

and Tamil civil servants were discriminated against on linguistic grounds. Rebuffed at the polls, the UNP responded by becoming as ethnically exclusive as the SLFP was. When Prime Minister S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike attempted to cool Sinhalese-Tamil tension by a compromise agreement with the Federal party leader, S.J.V. Chelvanayakam, the UNP campaigned against it, and the compromise was abandoned. After Bandaranaike's assassination in 1959, his wife, Sirimavo Bandaranaike, became prime minister. Under her regime, from 1960 to 1965, there was an acceleration of favoritism toward Sinhalese Buddhists. Tamil protest was met with harsh measures, including an armed occupation of the Tamil areas from 1961 to 1963. Following the victory of the UNP-led coalition in the 1965 elections, concessions were made to redress some Tamil grievances, but a modest devolution to district councils was thwarted by SLFP opposition and the fear of UNP backbenchers that they would lose their seats to SLFP candidates if they went along. The Federal party left the coalition over this issue. Interethnic compromise was strictly limited by intraethnic competition.

Mrs. Bandaranaike's second regime, from 1970 to 1977, was characterized by an even more virulent anti-Tamil strain. In 1972, a new constitution was promulgated that gave Buddhism a "foremost place" and virtually ignored the Tamil presence in the country. A scheme for "standardizing marks" was implemented; its effect was to reduce the grades achieved by Tamil students on examinations that determined university entrance, thereby depriving large numbers of Tamil students of the university education for which they were plainly more qualified than many of the Sinhalese who were admitted.<sup>14</sup> By such measures, a half-generation of recruits for Tamil separatist organizations was created. By the time the UNP came to power in the 1977 elections, Sinhalese-dominated governments, always with an eye on Sinhalese political competition, had managed to plant the seeds of guerrilla warfare that the UNP government was later to reap.

The structure of political competition made it incumbent on each of the major Sinhalese parties to champion the cause of Sinhalese ethnic assertion against Tamil interests, and segments of each party were militantly chauvinist. The anti-Tamil riots that followed the elections of 1977 and did much to encourage a Tamil resort to arms, and the anti-Tamil riots of 1983, which accelerated the armed warfare, were both alleged to have been organized, at least in substantial part, by activists associated with the UNP.<sup>15</sup>

Underlying this process of bidding and outbidding for the Sinhalese vote was an electoral system that translated small swings in popular votes into large swings in seats. The system was first-past-the-post in mainly single-member constituencies. With multiparty competition in the Sinhalese south, it was often possible to win a parliamentary majority on a plurality of 30 to 40 percent of the vote. In every parliamentary election between 1952 and 1970—in fact, six times—there was alternation in office. In the south, the

vast majority of constituencies was Sinhalese-dominated. As a result, parties derived rich rewards from appealing to Sinhalese ethnic sentiment and conspicuously opposing government proposals to conciliate the Tamils. The combination of largely homogeneous constituencies, plurality elections in mainly single-member constituencies, and a competitive party configuration on the Sinhalese side that produced two main contenders for power and two plausible contenders for nearly every seat created a system that was exceedingly sensitive to Sinhalese opinion and inhospitable to interethnic accommodation.

Several of these conditions were later altered. In 1978, the UNP government promulgated a new constitution that made some important electoral changes. In a major departure from the parliamentary system, a separately elected presidency was instituted. The president is elected by a system of preferential voting that accords weight to voters' second choices in a way that they are not weighted in plurality parliamentary elections. Tamil second preferences might, under some circumstances, actually provide the president his margin of victory. Prudent presidential candidates could hardly ignore Tamil interests under such conditions. In parliamentary elections, first-past-the-post in mostly single-member constituencies was changed to a party list system of proportional representation in multimember constituencies. Small swings in votes should no longer produce large swings in seats. Under normal conditions, Tamil candidates might also find a place in Sinhalese party lists in constituencies with Tamil minorities, and parties might be more moderate in ethnic appeals now that every vote in each constituency counts. In short, under normal conditions, the new electoral system might produce a change in the character of the party system.

Soon after these changes came into effect, however, conditions were anything but normal. The Tamil United Liberation Front (successor to both the Federal party and the Tamil Congress) had been excluded from parliament, separatist violence had begun in earnest, and Sinhalese and Tamil opinion had so polarized that, in the short term at least, no electoral system could foster moderation. In addition to accommodative arrangements, therefore, timing must be taken into account. Thus far, the new arrangements have had no impact on moderating the conditions fostered by the old.

It is necessary to emphasize the combination of conditions in Sri Lanka that made ethnic extremism so profitable and interethnic moderation so costly. Very few conditions were different in Malaysia, and yet the results have been dramatically different. Like Sri Lanka, Malaysia has had first-past-the-post elections, entirely in single-member constituencies. Like Sri Lanka, there has been a good deal of party competition on both the Malay and the non-Malay sides, much of it revolving around attention to mutually exclusive ethnic claims and demands. Unlike Sri Lanka, however, interethnic compromise has also had a claim on party attention, and moderation, as well as extremism, has paid some dividends.

Three differences between Malaysia and Sri Lanka have produced a different balance of incentives. The three relate to timing as well as to structure. The first, which in some measure was fortuitous, is that the Malaysians began working on interethnic accommodation early in relation to independence. They had had a bitter taste of ethnic violence during and after World War II and did not wait, as the Sri Lankans had, until accumulated grievances again reached the threshold of widespread and sustained violence.

The second difference is that there have been significantly more ethnically heterogeneous parliamentary constituencies in Malaysia than in Sri Lanka. This was not always the case. In 1955, more than 84 percent of the registered voters for the Malayan parliamentary elections were Malays. But, largely because of compromises reached by the multiethnic coalition that I shall cite presently as the third difference from Sri Lanka, the composition of the parliamentary electorate changed quickly. By 1959, the electorate was already more than one-third Chinese; and by 1964, it was 38 percent Chinese and 8 percent Indian.

As the electorate as a whole was heterogeneous, so were individual, single-member constituencies. By the early 1960s, 40 percent of the parliamentary constituencies had Chinese pluralities and, in toto, non-Malay majorities of registered voters. An additional 20 percent had a registered electorate that was at least 30 percent Chinese, and in only about 20 percent of all constituencies did registered Chinese voters comprise less than 10 percent. (The constituency delimitation of 1974 effected considerable changes, to the disadvantage of non-Malays,<sup>16</sup> but this was long after the structure of party politics was established.)

The Sri Lankan figures are in marked contrast. In only 11 percent of all parliamentary constituencies were Ceylon Tamils a plurality as late as 1976 (based on 1971 census figures), and in all but one of those (where they comprised 49.5 percent), they were actually a majority, usually an overwhelming majority. In only one additional constituency out of 160 did Ceylon Tamils comprise between 30 and 50 percent, and in only another 8 percent were they between 10 and 30 percent of the constituency. In 81 percent of all constituencies, Ceylon Tamils were less than 10 percent, usually far less. The comparable figure for Malaysian Chinese was that in only 18 percent of all constituencies did they comprise less than 10 percent.

It is important to underscore that these figures reflect not merely that Malaysian Chinese were three times as numerous as Ceylon Tamils in proportion to the total population of the country, but that the Tamils and Sinhalese are much more regionally concentrated than the Chinese and Malays are. This point is easily demonstrated by noting that in ten of the eighteen constituencies in which Ceylon Tamils were a plurality or majority, they were actually a majority of more than 90 percent.

What difference does regional concentration make? It has a bearing both on

party positions and on the prospects for interethnic coalitions based on the exchange of votes. In first-past-the-post elections, if the Sinhalese comprise 70, 80, 90, or even 95 percent of the voters—as they did in a large number of constituencies—and two main Sinhalese parties compete for those votes, there is hardly any restraint on the anti-Tamil positions than can be taken. The 1 or 2 percent of Tamil voters in such constituencies can offer nothing to the party that is more moderate on ethnic issues. The same is true at the party level nationwide: where constituencies are largely homogeneous, a Tamil party has little to offer a Sinhalese party that is inclined to moderation on ethnic issues but fearful of the loss of Sinhalese votes as a result of its moderation. There were many more Sinhalese votes to be had by being extreme than there were Tamil votes to be had by being moderate. Likewise, no Sinhalese party had very much to offer Tamil candidates to help them win marginal seats. For the Tamils, there were no such marginal seats. Tamil candidates either won overwhelmingly, or they did not win at all. With constituencies and electoral rules structured as Sri Lanka's were until 1978, interethnic coalitions based on the exchange of votes between the partners—the most durable and important kind of interethnic coalition—were highly improbable and indeed, with the one short-lived and partial exception referred to earlier, did not come into being.

Malaysia's heterogeneous constituencies made ethnic calculations more complex. In many constituencies, Chinese voters could punish Malay extremists and reward moderates. There were not always more Malay votes to be gained than Chinese votes to be lost by taking extreme positions. By the same token, Chinese and Malay parties could exchange votes profitably at the constituency level and come out ahead. Where there were more Malays than Chinese, a Chinese party could urge its supporters to vote for a friendly Malay candidate—and vice versa when there were more Chinese than Malays. Parties might still evolve along wholly ethnic lines, but—especially if there were more than one party per ethnic group—there would be countervailing incentives fostering an interethnic coalition. Such incentives are now also built into Sri Lankan electoral arrangements, especially in presidential elections, whereby the whole country is one large heterogeneous constituency and Sinhalese divisions make it likely that the election will be decided on second preferences, including Tamil second preferences. But in the formative period of Sinhalese exclusiveness and Tamil separatism, all of the incentives were the other way.

The third difference between Sri Lanka and Malaysia, which relates closely to the first two, is that a permanent multiethnic coalition in Malaysia, established before independence, occupied the center of the ethnic spectrum. Whereas the main Sinhalese parties were driven by electoral logic to espouse ethnically exclusionary positions, the leading Malay party found itself impelled by coalition logic to moderation and compromise, albeit without

altogether foreclosing extreme claims. The Malaysian Chinese, who at independence had neither assured citizenship nor full acceptance in the country, did not have their presence in the country delegitimized and devalued, as the Sri Lankan Tamils did.

The formation and persistence of the Alliance party is a complicated story. The principal motivation for its formation was the fact that town council elections, in which electorates were heterogeneous, preceded the first national elections, in which they were not. Both sets of elections took place before independence. The town council elections, conducted in 1952-53, were regarded as a kind of trial heat, and it was important to win them. The multiethnic Independence of the Malaya party (IMP), led by Dato' Onn bin Ja'afar, was well organized all over the peninsula. Dato' Onn had resigned in 1951 as leader of the United Malays National Organization (UMNO), the leading Malay party, because UMNO had refused to accept non-Malay members. As a result, Onn's multiethnic credentials were very much in order. The vast majority of the urban population and the majority of the town council electorates consisted of non-Malays. To compete with Onn's IMP, it made sense for UMNO to align with a non-Malay party. Malay votes alone could not win town council elections. As it happened, the local leader of the Malayan Chinese Association (MCA) in Kuala Lumpur was **opposed** to the IMP, so the MCA made an agreement with UMNO, later replicated in other towns, to run candidates on a joint "UMNO-MCA alliance" slate against the IMP. The slate was successful in Kuala Lumpur and elsewhere, and the local alliances ripened into a national multiethnic coalition—the Alliance **Party**—which later won all but one of the parliamentary seats in the 1955 elections. For interethnic accommodation, there could hardly be a **more** convincing demonstration of the power of formal incentives to induce informal arrangements.

The 1955 parliamentary elections preceded the grant of citizenship to most Chinese and Indians, and, as I mentioned earlier, **Malays** comprised an 84 percent majority of the national electorate. Had these national elections preceded the town council elections, UMNO would not have found the formation of a multiethnic coalition to be in its interest. Instead, it would have responded exclusively to Malay demands; and the independence constitution of 1957, which consisted of an elaborate package of carefully negotiated compromises, would not have been possible. Malaysian politics would have looked more like Sri Lankan politics. The liberal **citizenship** provisions for the non-Malays that were part of the independence bargain **would** not have been enacted. Fewer non-Malays would then have become citizens, and the electorate, which by 1964 had become only 54.1 percent Malay, would have remained overwhelmingly Malay, as it was in 1955. Malay parties would have competed with each other, as Sinhalese parties did, by pursuing the interests of their own group at the expense of the other half of the population.

What happened was quite different. Committed to a permanent coalition and to interethnic compromises, the Alliance (and later the National Front) created opportunities for parties representing **Malays** and **non-Malays** to line up on the flanks and accuse the ruling coalition of selling out the rights of the **Malays** and the rights of the non-Malays, respectively. Once this happened, the Alliance was locked into place in the middle of the ethnic spectrum. All alternatives looked worse than the status quo. For the MCA, UMNO was, on ethnic issues, the most moderate Malay party with which to form a coalition. Even if the other Chinese parties had been agreeable to a coalition with the MCA (which they were not), no combination of non-Malay parties alone could control a majority of seats to form a government. For UMNO, the MCA was likewise the most accommodating Chinese party. The only plausible Malay coalition partner in a possible all-Malay government was the **Pan-Malayan Islamic party (PMIP)**, which most UMNO leaders, secular as they were, regarded with deep suspicion. Moreover, the *raison d'être* of the **PMIP** was opposition to **UMNO's** compromises with the Chinese. On the other hand, neither the MCA nor UMNO could form a government alone. The two together controlled about half the popular vote. Although UMNO controlled many more votes than the MCA did, it could still not count on forming a government by itself. The MCA candidates received more Malay votes from UMNO supporters than UMNO candidates received from MCA supporters, but the heterogeneous nature of more than half the parliamentary constituencies made it impossible for UMNO to count on going it alone. Although relations between UMNO and the MCA were not always cordial, each side knew very well that electoral arithmetic made the other the lesser evil by far. The Alliance coalition had created opposition that divided the party system into three blocs: non-Malay opposition, Malay opposition, and the Alliance. **Re-**division was not practicable, so the coalition, however unsatisfactory, was self-perpetuating.

### **Party Systems and Ethnic Policies**

The exchange of votes thus formed the underpinning of compromise, as it might have done in Sri Lanka if the present electoral system had been in force earlier. To see the difference in ethnic effects, one needs only to contrast the Sinhala-only legislation of 1956 with the Malaysian language act of 1967 or the 1972 Sri Lankan constitution with the 1957 Malaysian constitution and the 1971 amendments to it. The Sri Lankan language policy and state religion provisions symbolically wrote the Sri Lanka Tamils out of the polity. The Malaysian language act, by contrast, provided for the continued "liberal use" of English, Chinese, and **Tamil**—much to the chagrin of Malay language extremists. The Malaysian constitution safeguarded a "special position" for the **Malays**, subject to the "legitimate interests" of the other groups. After the

1969 riots, the constitution was amended to preclude any challenge to the special position of the Malays and also to preclude any challenge to the citizenship of the Chinese. These amendments were enacted in an environment that could only be described as unfavorable to the non-Malays. Despite that, the potentially tenuous citizenship of the non-Malays was solidified permanently, at the same time as the Sri Lanka Tamils, unquestionably citizens, were increasingly being regarded as and treated like aliens in their own land.

The explanation for the course Malaysian ethnic politics took lies in a combination of incentives, leadership, and chance. The future coalition partners responded to electoral incentives in the early 1950s and, by their action in agreeing to non-Malay citizenship, changed the composition of the electorate in a way that created new electoral incentives to compromise. Of course, it was sheer good fortune that the local elections preceded the national ones. And it was equally fortunate that the main competitor of UMNO was the multiethnic IMP. Had a militantly pro-Malay competitor party existed, UMNO would surely have hesitated to make a lasting arrangement with the MCA. Fortunately for both, the strength of the PMIP grew as a reaction to the Alliance, rather than antedating it. Not heterogeneous constituencies alone, but heterogeneous constituencies plus no serious intraethnic competition, made the coalition possible. It also took good leadership, particularly on the part of Tengku Abdul Rahman, the national UMNO leader. The leadership recognized the long-term utility of the Alliance format and decided both to approve it locally and to pursue it nationally, even though the composition of the national electorate was initially radically different. Once again, therefore, it was not any particular condition—not incentives, not chance, not political will alone—but a combination that governed the choices that were made and the effects they had.

Still less was it a matter of goodwill or interethnic tolerance that was determinative. Goodwill was not always present in Malaysia; at most times before the recurrent Sri Lankan violence began in earnest, there was probably more interethnic tolerance in Sri Lanka. Rather, the course of Malaysian politics was determined by a series of responses to constraints that hemmed the decision makers in at any given moment. To say this is to denigrate the part played by heroic action for ethnic harmony and to elevate the role of simple good judgment and rational response to the predicament in which decision makers find themselves. Implicit in this assessment is the possibility for still other decision makers, working within the constraints that impinge on their choices, to alter the predicaments that will face future decision makers—to alter them in such a direction that they, too, will respond in ways conducive to interethnic accommodation.

It might be thought that an ethnically balanced coalition, even one slanted somewhat more toward the interests of one group than another would tend to immobilism, that such a coalition could not institute policies that might

impinge on vested ethnic interests. The only policy it could have would be a predictable compromise. There were some tendencies toward immobilism in the Malaysia of the 1960s, although even then not everything was compromise and not everything was predictable. In the 1970s, however, there were dramatic departures in ethnic policy regarding language, education, and the economy. On some subjects, Malaysian ethnic policy went in the same direction as Sri Lankan policy; on others, Malaysian policy was even more ethnically exclusive. But in virtually every case, Malaysian policy appeared to be more carefully planned and implemented in a more controlled and less threatening way.

In language policy, Malaysia moved to make Malay the medium of instruction in nearly all the schools, one grade level at a time, beginning in 1969, soon after the Kuala Lumpur riots. This was a ministerial decision, not contemplated by the previous policy—and it went much beyond the Sri Lankan two-stream policy of education in Sinhala and Tamil—but it was implemented without very much difficulty and was widely accepted. What was by no means accepted—and therefore not implemented—was the abolition of the Chinese primary schools, broached from time to time by Malay extremists.

In higher education, the Malaysian policy of the 1970s resembled the Sri Lankan policy, but again it was put into effect—and altered—in a more orderly and confident way. In the early 1970s, there was a sense that the Malaysian Chinese and the Sri Lankan Tamils, respectively, were overrepresented as students in higher education. As the Sri Lankans adopted standardization of marks, the Malaysians also altered admission criteria to universities, so that many more Malay students were admitted and more Chinese and Indians were refused admission. In both Malaysia and Sri Lanka, the policy precipitated strong reactions from the groups that suffered the exclusion.

Once again, the action taken as a result illustrates the blend of chance and structure in determining outcomes in the two systems. The Malaysian Chinese, with considerably higher average incomes than the Sri Lanka Tamils, responded, first, by sending students in the thousands abroad for higher education. Many fewer Sri Lanka Tamils were able to go even to India, much less to Britain, Australia, Canada, or the United States. Beyond this, however, in 1978, the MCA—its electoral fortunes then at one of many low points in recent years—made it clear that it could no longer accept declining quotas in higher education at home. The MCA and UMNO jointly agreed that university admission quotas for non-Malays would be revised upward in stages until they reflected the ethnic composition of the population as a whole. In Sri Lanka, the UNP committed itself in 1977 to abolishing standardization of marks. Upon assuming office, it attempted to do so but provoked a Sinhalese backlash. The result was a series of partial amendments that have opened

university admission to *more* Tamils than were enrolled under standardization but many fewer than before standardization. The Malaysian **agreement**, a product of the coalition, was implemented as planned. The Sri Lankan policy repeal was implemented only in part. Both because of the Malaysian Chinese ability to absorb higher educational costs and because of the way the respective policies were put in place and amended, the Sri Lankan educational preferences have been far *more* damaging to national unity than the Malaysian preferences have been.

In ethnic restructuring of the economy, the Malaysians have gone much further than the Sri Lankans. Following the riots of 1969 in Malaysia, a consensus developed within the government that the source of the violence lay in Malay economic grievances. In 1971, an extensive program, called the New Economic Policy (NEP), was put into place to achieve ethnic proportionality in employment and 30 percent Malay share ownership by 1990. Policies were also devised to increase loans, government contracts, licenses, and franchises available to Malays. As the NEP was put in place at a time of Chinese political weakness, it would have been difficult to oppose. But in fact, most Chinese political leaders shared the view that augmenting Malay economic resources was necessary. Moreover, the stated policy was that the changes would be accomplished without expropriating existing business-only future opportunities would be affected—and the policymakers were flexible about implementation. Strict employment quotas were not enforced. Well-connected Chinese found ways to profit from the new policies. Although the full balance sheet on the NEP remains to be drawn up, dramatic changes in economic power were achieved without major disruptions of the economy or the polity.

As this was happening, the multiethnic coalition was also undergoing enlargement, to embrace all of the peninsular Malaysian parties except one party on the Malay flank (the PMIP, which joined the coalition briefly) and one on the Chinese flank. The MCA—and the Chinese voice in **general**—became somewhat weaker in the National Front than it had been in the Alliance, but Chinese votes were still important to victory, and the coalition was unwilling to dispense with any of the Chinese political parties. Beginning in 1983, a protracted leadership battle in the MCA was endured in the coalition in a way that demonstrated the strongly held sentiment that, even in bad times, the coalition was better than any alternative.

### *The Rewards of Moderation*

Taken together, Malaysia and Sri Lanka show that small **differences** can produce big differences; that, once a multiethnic coalition gets going, **multiethnicity** can become a habit; that interethnic accommodation does not **preclude** major structural changes in ethnic relations; and that **in** the absence of **accommodative** arrangements, governmental actions that could otherwise have been

either endured or modified can be so provocative as to produce violent responses. The Malaysians took no chances with ethnic conflict in the **1950s**, and the structures they established could later be modified to take account of changed conditions. The Sri Lankans were reckless with their milder ethnic conflict in the **1950s**, and their failure to establish sound structures left them defenseless later, when conflict became more serious. Contrast what followed the Malaysian postelection riots of 1969 with what followed the Sri Lankan postelection riots of 1977. The Malaysian response to the riots was to tilt toward Malay economic aspirations. Within a year of the Sri Lankan riots, the UNP government had enacted a constitution likely to provide Sri Lankan Tamils with more political influence than they had ever previously enjoyed. At worst, little harm, in terms of ethnic conflict, came out of the Malaysian response. At best, little good has come, so far, out of the **Sri Lankan** response. By then it was well established that interethnic moderation pays in Malaysia, whereas extremism pays in Sri Lanka.

### Conciliation, Early and Late

It is all well and good to learn that the arrangements made by the Malaysians thirty-five years ago saved them many difficulties that the Sri Lankans have experienced because they lacked such arrangements. One way to read this comparative experience is simply to conclude that earlier is better. There are a good many **aphorisms**—about an ounce of prevention, for example—that attest to the same general lesson. That particular lesson is not very helpful, however, to those countries for which it is not only no longer early but in fact very late. What are the Sri Lankas, Northern Irelands, and Sudans to do when they are already **in extremis**?

The first thing they might do is read the Malaysian (and Nigerian) lesson more broadly. Above all, the Malaysian arrangements made moderation pay, and by now it is hardly a secret how one goes about doing this. **The most reliable way, under conditions of democratic elections, is to make politicians reciprocally dependent on the votes of members of groups other than their own.** In the Malaysian case, as I have shown, highly heterogeneous constituencies (plus some unusual early **conditions**—namely, multiethnic rather than ethnic-flank competition) were the main vehicle for facilitating interethnic vote exchange. In post-1979 Sri Lanka, alternative voting was another way, especially suitable for countries where territorially demarcated constituencies are likely to be homogeneous. In the Nigerian Second Republic, electoral distribution requirements for the winning presidential candidate were yet another. Neither the wishful abolition of ethnic parties nor a solemn admonition to politicians to think of national rather than ethnic interests is a good substitute for providing concrete incentives to multiethnic behavior. Pure heart

is not the issue-decent behavior is. And heterogeneous constituencies, together with incentives to vote pooling across ethnic lines, are the key to moderate behavior. Where territorial constituencies are homogeneous, it remains possible, as in the Sri Lankan and Nigerian presidential elections, to turn the whole country into a single, heterogeneous constituency.

Where groups are territorially separate, of course, arrangements for devolution may also be in order, especially if separatist organizations have arisen and are fighting. Here the obstacles to agreement are formidable; Federalism has a bad name in many countries that could benefit from it. Sovereignty, as I argued earlier, seems, in principle, to be indivisible, and it requires a substantial modification of conventional thinking in a world of putatively sovereign states to envision the benefits of dividing up territory. The potential costs come much more readily to mind. In particular, it is widely thought that devolution paves the way for separatist independence. On this, there is good evidence that the way to prevent the loss of a region to which power is devolved is to keep some substantial portion of the population of that region occupied in rewarding roles outside the region, particularly at the center. In the case of the Sri Lanka Tamils, nearly one-third of whom have customarily resided outside the north and east of the island, this should be easy to arrange, provided that their security can be assured. The case of the Ibo, who returned to northern Nigeria after the civil war—and remained undisturbed—provides one of many models of sustained group interests outside the group's home region. The Pathans of Pakistan provide another such example, for they are heavily employed outside the North-West Frontier province.

Beyond this, it is insufficiently recognized how much intraethnic and interethnic conflict is likely to arise—and, with it, how much resistance to independence-within self-governing regions that appear homogeneous from the outside. This is the way to think about whether there should be one or two Tamil territorial units in Sri Lanka and one or three, or more, southern Sudanese territorial units—and what powers they should have. In states such as Sri Lanka and the Sudan, there will be a good many counterincentives to separatism once devolution is accomplished. The southern Sudan from 1972 to 1993 illustrates precisely this point.

If we know roughly what incentives to build in—and I believe we do—what we assuredly do not know is what incentives to dangle before the parties to the conflict to secure their assent to the requisite arrangements once the conflict has gone as far as the Sri Lanka, Northern Ireland, and Sudan conflicts have gone. For in a sense, we have come full circle. Interests in pursuing the conflict—even intraethnic interests—outweigh interests in reducing it. The non-Vellala caste composition of the leadership of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam is a good example. For the Tiger leadership, normalization probably conjures up images of renewed Vellala dominance, for the Vellala have dominated Tamil political parties since independence. Fighting may seem

preferable to anything resembling the status quo ante. At the same time as interethnic issues are addressed in a negotiation, therefore, intraethnic issues must be considered and proposals developed that appeal to the specific interests of the relevant actors, not just to the group as a whole.

Unfortunately, the leading examples of accommodative arrangements following warfare are not very helpful. The Nigerians decided on accommodation after fighting a thirty-month war to a military conclusion. The Sudanese in 1972 agreed to end their nine-year war because both sides had become significantly weaker at roughly the same time. Even laying aside the fact that the Sudanese agreement was later abrogated, it would take an unusual concatenation of circumstances to replicate the occasion for agreement in 1972. And pushing a bloody civil war to a decisive victory—in order to achieve a widespread Nigerian-type desire not to repeat the bloodshed—would be self-defeating.

One hopeful general circumstance is that external actors rarely wish, by their assistance, to bring into being the events most feared by central governments in power. The Indian government would scarcely benefit from a Tamil secession from Sri Lanka that made the ex-Sri Lankan Tamils poor dependents of India or, worse, that incited a comparable secessionist movement among the 50 million Tamils of Tamil Nadu. The Irish Republic would presumably not be keen to absorb a Northern Irish segment that was significantly more heterogeneous and conflict-prone than Protestants and Catholics now in the Republic are. Ethiopia and other black African states that assist the Sudan Peoples Liberation Movement and Army would not likely take comfort in a dismemberment of the Sudan that would provide a nearby example of success for dissident minorities that have already taken up arms in Ethiopia. If, then, the interests of states that are offering assistance do not lie in the most extreme results, there is room for actions to induce them to abandon their assistance.

These actions are of two types. First, when the help of the assisting state is based on some political interest other than ethnic affinity, there is room for state-to-state negotiation to induce a change in policy. The abruptness with which Iran ended its support to the Kurds in Iraq in 1975 when it received an unrelated quid pro quo provides an apt illustration. Despite some trans-border affinities, Uganda ended its assistance to Anyanya rebels in the southern Sudan in 1972 when Idi Amin's Muslim and Arab connections increased. Ethiopia's support for the Sudan Peoples Liberation Army is not based on ethnic affinity and is therefore susceptible to state-to-state negotiation. Second, when the help of the assisting state is based on ethnic affinity—as in occasional, if unofficial, Irish indulgence toward the Irish Republican Army or the former Indian support for the Sri Lankan Tamil guerrillas—domestic opinion in the assisting state will be moved only by concessions on the outstanding ethnic issues.

Such concessions, however, are subject to the constraints of domestic

opinion in the state affected by the ethnic violence. Or, to put the point differently, this is a matter of foreign policy that is coterminous with domestic ethnic politics. Groups that have a history of dominating others or anxiety about the capacities and aspirations of others—and some combination describes the Ulster Protestants, the northern Sudanese, and the Sinhalese—are unlikely to be able to reach the requisite determination to settle. This is particularly true if their governments continue—as all three do—to be subject to intraethnic competition that is alert to any signs of concession, such as that embodied in Mrs. Bandaranaike's anticoncession "movement for the defense of the nation." Even so, the increasing concessions offered at virtually every stage of the armed conflict—concessions that easily would have conciliated their antagonists at earlier stages—will be insufficient to placate the determined leaders of armed movements or the outraged public opinion among the relevant segment of the assisting state. Only when disaster is impending are the parties likely to be brought to new ways of thinking. Although it is too late in such cases for the Malaysian ounce of prevention, it still needs to be driven home just how serious are the costs of ignoring some such prophylaxis in a severely divided society. After protracted armed conflict, if the lessons are widely enough understood, it will not necessarily be too late for the survivors to apply the Nigerian pound of cure.

#### Note

a. The indigen&immigrant dichotomy had been reinforced by recent colonial policies and policy reversals, at the time of the Malayan Union (1945-46) and Federation of Malaya (1948) schemes, which had incorporated radically different notions of the relations of the various ethnic groups to the country.

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9. I have described some of these changes in my earlier chapter in this volume (chapter 8) and in *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*, pp. 602-13, 635-38.
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