Transforming Conflict and Building Cohesion through Identity

Prepared by Dr. Bruce White and the 2013 Spring class students of the "International Conference Planning and Presentation" course.

On the 5-6th July 2013, academics and practitioners from over eight countries came together at Doshisha University, Kyoto to explore the current theory and practice of transforming conflict and building cohesion utilizing an understanding of identity dynamics.

The conference was hosted by the Graduate School of Global Studies and its Global Resource Management Program, and invited many members from the Organization for Intra-Cultural Development. The conference was divided into four sessions.

In Session One, five speakers covered the psychological, anthropological and epistemological theories and practices that define their disciplines' approach to understanding identity and conflict. The session was chaired by Prof. Nakanishi, an expert on conflict resolution in the Middle East. What stood out in this session was the necessity of a more holistic approach towards an understanding of the mechanisms of identity and change. Only this holistic approach, taking in multiple identities and broader expansive ideas of cultural identity, can help practically in increasing the effectiveness of real world projects.

Chaired by the Former Special Representative for the Secretary General, UN Mission Timor Leste, Prof. Hasegawa, Session Two attempted to compare and contrast different approaches to utilizing identities, or an understanding of identities, in directly promoting cohesion and transforming conflict. What became clear through Prof. Hasegawa's closing remarks was the importance of interdisciplinary cooperation in both

formulating theory and practicing effective methodological approaches.

The regional contexts that define the nature of conflict transformation/cohesion needs are broad and various. In Session Three, chaired by Pierre Sané, Former Secretary General of Amnesty International & Assistant Secretary General, UNESCO, the speakers detailed case studies from Israel-Palestine, Zambia &West Africa, former Yugoslavia & the Caucasus. Despite the seemingly intractable problems related to each region, the presentations demonstrated how understanding identity as the root cause of conflict also had the potential to question how those same dynamics may be utilized in the building of solutions.

Session Four showcased the work that the GS/GRM students had been produced over the duration of the semester. Six students were divided into two teams and their detailed reflections are as follows:
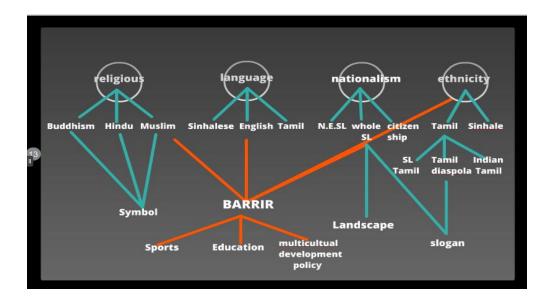
【Team: Sri Lanka】

Guneshwor Ojha , Nazgul Emilbaeva, Aya Kainoh

1. Research process

First of all we decided to focus on the post conflict situation of Sri-Lanka. We found the post conflict situation still complicated as its peace was not an outcome of a negotiation between the government and the rebels. This called for a research on the socio-economic and political history of Sri Lanka. We started with the ancient history of Sri Lanka to assess its current situation marked by fragile peace.

We found that Sri Lankan society enjoyed peace and harmony in its modern history until the colonial period. The problem started with the British policy of divide and rule and discriminatory policies of the subsequent governments. We did 'mapping' of Sri Lankan conflict as featured below identifying key concepts and barriers among major ethnic communities: Sinhalese (Buddhist) and Tamil (Hindu) resulting to the conflict. We also figured out connections to unite the diverse ethnic communities of Sri

Lanka.

As part of research we also reached out to some Sri Lankan nationals who provided us with much needed inputs. Thus, we were able to explore the identity issue among the dominant ethnic communities, mechanism of 'othering' and different factors behind the violent conflict. We combined our individual research to develop a clear picture of Sri Lankan conflict. We used many symbols and pictures to make the presentation effective and also came up with some intervention measures besides media campaign aimed at the lasting peace of Sri Lanka.

2 **"Transforming Conflict and Building Cohesion through Identity"**

International Conference "Transforming Conflict and Building Cohesion through Identity" organized by Global Recourse Management Office of the Graduate School of Global Studies, Doshisha University in Kyoto, was held Japan on July 5th and 6[th,] 2013.

First of all we would like to note the high level of organization and professionalism in holding this conference. Professors and Doctors of

sciences from different universities all over the world were invited to take a part in this event, where they gave their lectures and presentations on aforementioned theme. This conference was the first experience for all of us. In spite of warm and friendly atmosphere of the conference we felt some nervous and emotional. The hard part of the presentation was to answer the questions from speakers and participants. Undoubtedly, it was very significant and fruitful event, during which experts and students shared their views in solving the issues of identity which is important part of whole life of humanity. Moreover, it helped students to open up and get acquainted with interesting people.

3 Outcome of the presentation at International Conference Student Session – 2013

Our presentation on Sri Lanka invited several comments from scholars. While they appreciated a well-coordinated presentation by the team featuring Sri Lanka as a post conflict country struggling for a lasting peace, the scholars also drew our attention on different aspects of research procedures. They stressed that an academic research needs to involve diverse research sources in order to authenticate its finding. An example cited was that instead of relying only on the BBC as part of media research, it is important to refer to Al Jazeera as well. Scholars identified that students severely lacked empirical source in this project. They have encouraged us for field works while undertaking such a research. Scholars also stated that identity can serve both as the source of conflict as well as an effective peace building tool. Experts mentioned that justice is another key point besides identity in any conflict situation. By observing scholars present in the first day we got acquainted with academic presentation skills and applied those during our presentation in the second day. We have realized that the program has boosted our confidence and aptitude for research activities. The project has immensely improved our analytical skill as well as the ability to interact with people.

【Team: Darfur】

Team Darfur: By Megumi Inaka, Kaho Suzuki, and Atsushi Takabatake

For this year's international conference, we gave a presentation about the Darfur Conflict, and provided our own observations to construct possible solutions in mitigating the genocide through identity. Throughout the class semester, we had researched and prepared for the conference by having study sessions every week in discussing about the information that we had gathered, including newspapers, magazine articles, dissertations, and many more. In order to understand the current situation of the conflict and find ways in illustrating relationships among different key ethnic groups, we created a mind map diagram as a way to brainstorm ideas and drew concepts and ideas which could be utilized in easing the tension in Darfur. From the research we had undertaken, we noticed that the ongoing conflict in Darfur was not just a fight between two ethnic groups, (Black Africans and Arab Africans) but was primarily by the Khartoum government. In short, the Khartoum government has been using identity as an integral tool in manipulating the inferior race and exploiting their land and resources; for the purpose of their personal interests in gaining national wealth. Therefore, it was important for us to review the Darfur Conflict and research more in depth on different ethnic groups and its correlation with concepts and ideas, so that we could derive some symbolic interventions in resolving the conflict.

Having reflected on our overall work in this class, the feedback we had received, both from professors and speakers at the conference, made us realize that there is a lot of room for improvement. Since it was our first presentation to give as a graduate student, having listened to presentations given by renowned professors, we were very nervous. During our presentation, we had assigned each person to give a presentation about their designated topics, using *Prezi* as our visual aid in illustrating important points. That being said, we thought that the presentation itself was well put together and went smoothly. However, at the same time, the questions and feedbacks from the audiences, we believe, were the most challenging part of the conference. Most of the questions were beyond our expectations, and we were not well-prepared for that part of the session. Despite that

challenge, many of the audience were very supportive and provided us with positive comments and feedbacks. With that being said, and for our future presentations, we will need to find more resources from a wide array of perspectives, and be well-prepared for some criticisms that we may get from the audience. We had learned a lot from this whole experience, and hopefully this experience could be put in good use for those students who wish to take this class.