A Comparative Analysis of Higher Education's Impact on Conflict Resolution/Management in South Africa and Cyprus

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Abstract

The paper assesses how and to what degree governmental policies regarding education, specifically higher education, contribute to enhancing non-cumulative patterns and decreasing cumulative patterns of conflict.

Effective conflict resolution and/or management rely heavily on the underlying patterns of conflict. Conflict resolution is the solving and elimination of the dispute at hand. Conflict management is the settling of conflict on a temporary basis or the mitigation of conflict to a level more acceptable to the parties involved. The theory of conflict management is based on the principle of rationality, i.e. maximizing gains and minimizing losses. Thus conflict management attempts to maximize the positive elements of conflict, e.g. creativity, focus, energy, change and cohesiveness, and to minimize the negative effects of conflict, e.g. destructiveness, paralysis, aggression, despair and violence.

Underlying patterns of conflict such as racial, ethnic, tribal, cultural, economic, social, psychological and political can enhance or diminish the prospect of conflict resolution and/or management. Conflict theory suggests the more non-cumulative the patterns of conflict, the more effective conflict resolution and/or management. Non-cumulative conflict is essentially conflict that does not add and/or re-enforce previous or other conflicts.

All countries have both cumulative and non-cumulative patterns of conflict. Conflict theory suggests the more cumulative the pattern of conflict the more likely conflict will become violent. Democracy ultimately requires effective, non-violent ways to resolve and/or manage conflict. South Africa and Cyprus have had and in the case of Cyprus currently continues an official governmental policies promoting cumulative patterns of conflict. For close to two decades South Africa has experienced anti-apartheid government rule. Yet despite its apparent success in transferring power from the minority to the majority, cumulative patterns of conflict in higher education still remain despite governmental efforts to decrease them. In Cyprus, cumulative patterns of ethnic, cultural, economic, social, psychological and political are the official policies of both the Republic of Cyprus (Greek Cypriots domain) and the Northern Republic of Cyprus (Turkish Cypriots domain). Therefore, South Africa and Cyprus do differ in the
degrees of educational integration. One area the paper focuses on is assessing the impact of these differences on conflict resolution.

Governments do not act in a vacuum. Economics clearly influences the choices and the range of choices available to public policy makers. Marxists and non-Marxist economists, however, suggest different outcomes for conflict resolution due to the impact of economic scarcity on educational policy. Social psychological contact theorists also suggest that the interaction of polarizing groups in the institutions of higher education may produce different outcomes depending on certain conditions. Thus a look at Cyprus and South Africa sheds light on whether governmental policy on education can in fact move societies towards effective conflict resolution.

Introduction

Currently South Africa is primarily governed by one political party, the African National Congress (ANC). Even though South Africa is a multi-party state, the ANC has governed Africa's wealthiest country ever since the ending of apartheid (policy of racial segregation) in 1994. Its popularity still remains high. The ANC won 61% of the vote in 2011 local elections only a slight decline from its greatest popularity in its first anti-apartheid election in 1994 in which it achieved 69% of the votes. Yet despite this political mandate, the country is rift with racial conflict.

Cyprus is a divided island country with two governments. The Greek Cypriot Government (Republic of Cyprus) is the internationally recognized government. The Turkish Cypriot Government (the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus) is recognized only by Turkey. Cyprus originally emerged as an independent state in 1960 after the Greek Cypriots rebelled against British rule. This anti-colonial rebellion, however, did not seek independence per se but only independence from Britain. The Greek Cypriots sought enosis, union with Greece. The Turkish Cypriots, the largest minority (18%), sought taksim, ethnic partition. From its inception, Cyprus showed every sign of falling apart. In late 1963, civil war broke out and the United Nations Security Council authorized the placement of a UN peace keeping force. Since the civil war, the two communities had grown increasingly politically, economically, socially and psychologically separated. The Turkish invasion of Cyprus in 1974 and the physical boundary drawn gave the Turkish/Greek Cypriots' separation a geographical and an ethno-demographic dimension. This physical and long-standing division "constitutes the main impediment to any reapproachment between the two communities."¹ The last major effort to unite the society under one government was the Annan Plan in 2004 worked out through the United Nations. The Greek Cypriots rejected the plan overwhelmingly (76% opposed) and the Turkish Cypriots strongly supported it (65%) in their respective referenda. The rejection was a major disappointment to those who supported ending the 48 year old dispute on the basis of a negotiated agreement. The on again, off again

bicommunal negotiations led by the UN envoy do not seem very promising. Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon's visit to Cyprus, Alexander Downer, the UN envoy stated, "We have to be honest. I think the negotiations could be going better than they are going." He also seemed pessimistic about the environment for future negotiations given the fact that the Republic of Cyprus (Greek Cypriots) takes over the presidency of the European Union in July 2012 and will have presidential elections in February 2013.

Contact and Social Identity Theory

People cannot be simply understood as utility maximizers. They do more than maximize material benefits. While there are powerful lessons to be learned from, the analytical perspective of the rational choice/economic paradigm, values, culture, history and institutions need to be brought into the mix in understanding conflict in South Africa and Cyprus.

In the latter half of the 20th century, largely due to the work of Gordon Allport, The Nature of Prejudice (1954), many social psychological theories assumed that inter-group contact allows people to recognize similarities between themselves and consequently inter-group antipathy would be reduced. Known as the contact hypothesis, Allport was careful to note that certain conditions were necessary for contact to lead to improvements rather than heightened inter-group conflict:

Prejudice (unless deeply rooted in the character structure of the individual) may be reduced by equal status contact between majority and minority groups in the pursuit of common goals. The effect is greatly enhanced if this contact is sanctioned by institutional supports (i.e. law, custom or local atmosphere), and of common interest and common humanity between members of the two groups.³

Contact was viewed as a means to improve inter-group relations because it would either reveal interpersonal similarities or create them through the process of assimilation.

Perhaps the most notable challenge to the contact hypothesis is from the work of researchers who advocate social identity theory. Social identity theory places key emphasis on the psychological need of people to identify with a group and the need "to differentiate their group positively from others to achieve a positive social identity."⁴ To differentiate the in-group, there is a tendency for people to compare the in-group with other groups. Social identity theory focuses attention on the importance of establishing inter-group differences and the search for distinctiveness of the in-group. In contrast to contact theory that claims a positive result from the discovery of similarities when groups

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² Cyprus Mail (March 23, 2012).
interact social identity theory predicts that similarity, whether of attitudes or status will have repulsive effects on relations between groups.

The questions of coming together or staying apart is an issue for the theory of conflict management and conflict resolution. Conflict management assumes that some conflicts are not resolvable and therefore keeping people apart in these situations is better than forcing them to interact because interaction may lead to violence. Conflict resolution assumes that all conflict is resolvable and therefore with the right focus, energy, time, and resources, it is possible to eliminate conflict. The assumptions of irreconcilable and completely resolvable conflict distinguished the works of Samuel Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations*, and Frances Fukuyama, *The End of History*, on the macro level of analysis. Huntington argues that the world is divided by different civilizations and forcing interaction among these cultures can only lead to violence and war. At the heart of these civilizations are core values that are irreconcilable. Fukuyama on the other hand believes that the world is evolving in a linear way to the adoption of a universal set of values manifested by liberal democratic capitalism. Globalization will result in the world coming together and embracing the objective values of materialism, rationalism and individualism.

Political scientists also distinguishes between the elite and the masses. Elite theorists argue that change and direction must be embraced by the elites in order to be effective. Change may occur with the masses in a revolt or a rebellion but without leadership and elite articulation, change will be ephemeral. In the case of South Africa and Cyprus, these theories do not provide us a formula for predicting the future for these societies but helps us come to grips with understanding the challenges they face.

Higher Education's Role in Conflict Management and Resolution

The existence of conflict between communities and among groups in society makes it inevitable that many of the institutional forms and structure of society will be examined with respect to their relationship with the conflict and their possible contribution to its solution. Educational institutions have traditionally been seen as a structure that reflects the social differences that exist in society and which are reproduced from generation to generation through socialization. In regard to conflict management and resolution theory, education, however, is viewed as having the capacity to create social change by identifying the sources of conflict and developing policies to ameliorate them.

One of the most consistent findings in social research on racial/ethnic attitudes is the negative association between educational attainment and racial/ethnic prejudice. In other words people with higher education are less prejudiced toward ethnic out-group than are those with lower education. This relationship has been established in empirical

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research across time as well as in different countries.\(^7\) There is also empirical evidence that people with higher education are less prone to in-group favoritism than are people with lower education.

There are some notable exceptions to the theory that higher education leads to greater tolerance and the acceptance of cultural/racial differences. Even in the United States, a country that prides itself on racial integration, there has been and to a certain extent continues to be concerns about the creation of a separate and unequal higher education system for European and African American students. While legal efforts to desegregate began in higher education in the 1960's, litigation regarding the affirmative action policy still continues today to make its way through the courts. During the 1980's a race riot on the campus at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, a liberal state and what was considered a liberal community, shattered the hopes of many that higher education would serve as a model for a multicultural society. In the Presidential address delivered at the 1995 Midwest Sociological Society's annual meeting, Richard T. Schaefer encouraged his audience to consider more closely the explanation that education will "necessarily lead to a more enlightened [population] in terms of addressing racial inequality."\(^8\)

Schaefer, however, does suggest a caveat to his questioning of the axiom that education leads to prejudice reduction and that is the content of education. Mixing bodies of different races in educational institutions does not in of itself seem to be sufficient to reduce prejudices. There obviously needs to be content to the education that addresses the issues of racial/ethnic conflict and inequality. Even in integrated schools if the issues of race/ethnic conflict is avoided or only superficially addressed then very little will change in the stereotypical view members of groups will have of one another.

**South Africa: Higher Education**

The role of higher education is conflict management and resolution in contemporary South Africa cannot be understood without a basic understanding of higher education during Apartheid. The legacy of Apartheid makes it difficult to speak about higher education as a system having monolithic identity. Universities as institutions did not themselves, with the exception of a few serve as major levers of power against the Apartheid regime. Only when higher education institutions are disaggregated into their various constituents does the role of each sector with respect to social transformation become apparent.

During the Apartheid period, black students at historically black institutions made higher education an important launching area for student protest. Other elements of


opposition to Apartheid within higher education such as black students at historically white universities and to a lesser degree activism of progressive white students and academics and even to some extent professional staff at the English liberal campuses all contributed to eroding the legitimacy of Apartheid. While higher education cannot be viewed as decisive in defeating Apartheid, it certainly can be said to play an important part in creating the crisis for Apartheid rule in the 1980's. It was a broad spectrum of internal resistance, together with global, regional and national factors that brought an end to the Apartheid regime.

Cyprus: Higher Education

The 2004 Annan Plan in Cyprus was significant not only for its overwhelming rejection by the Greek Cypriots and very strong acceptance by the Turkish Cypriots but because it also marked the end of the total isolation of the two communities. Relaxing traveling restrictions opened up the door for more contact between communities and among Cypriots in general. For the first time in years Greek and Turkish Cypriots were able to meet and travel without the certainty of violence. Despite the major step forward Cyprus still is a very divided country. The two communities had separate educational systems which to a large extent were governed by their respective religious institutions. For the Greek Cypriots the teachers were Orthodox priests. For the Turkish Cypriots the teachers were Muslims. Their school curriculum either primary or secondary was based on the educational curriculum found in Greece or Turkey. Both curricula placed heavy emphasis on the culture of what they referred to as the Motherland (Greece or Turkey) not Cyprus. The long history of Greek-Turkish rivalry with all its biases, suspicions, and animosity was a central feature of each of their curricula. Each community embraced all the national symbols including national anthem and flag of its mother country.

Greek-Cypriots educated their children for trade and professions. The Turkish Cypriots gave priority to algebra, natural sciences and the Turkish language. Books written by authors with extreme nationalistic fervor were promoted in both educational systems and both relied on textbooks produced by the mother country. Most notably absent in both communities is the spirit of Cypriotism, the feeling of love toward Cyprus as a birthplace, a spirit of patriotism.

In regard to higher education, there is little or no direct contact between Greek and Turkish Cypriots in universities. Each have their own institutions of higher education and each community sends many of their students abroad. There are some notable exceptions of integrated schools at the lower levels of the educational system but it is miniscule in comparison to the numbers of students educated in non-integrated settings. Most parents send their children to either Greece or Turkey for their university education. Some send them elsewhere such as the United Kingdom and the United States. In 2009/2010 for the first time ever the majority of the Greek Cypriots university bound students chose to remain in Cyprus for their education. Turkey sends a sizeable number of its university bound students to Northern Cyprus's educational institutions.
The driving force behind efforts to reunite the Cypriots under one government and integrate the country has been the international community primarily represented by the United Nations and the European Union. The United Kingdom as well as the United States have attempted from time to time to use its influence to address what has become known as the Cyprus Issue. The double minority concept illustrates some of the complexities of the Cyprus Issue. The Turkish Cypriots are the minority on the island but the Turks are the majority in the region. Therefore, Turkey with its strong military presence in Northern Cyprus and virtual control over the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus along with Greece plays a fundamental role in any proposed settlement.

Most of the initiatives for integration comes from outside of Cyprus. For example at the educational level, the U.S. Embassy recently announced the production of innovative educational materials by teams of Greek and Turkish Cypriots working together with international experts. The Multiperspectivity and Intercultural Dialogue in Education (MIDE) project was funded by US AID through the United Nations Development Program, Action for Cooperation and Trust. The materials can be used in a variety of educational settings and cover key topics in Cyprus' history. Available in Greek, Turkish and English the curricula focuses on the multi-perspective approaches to the teaching and learning of history. Rather than perpetuate stereotypes and conflict, these materials are designed for educators, researchers and students to foster intercultural dialogue while developing historical understanding and critical thinking.

Setting the Stage

Daniel Kahneman, recipient of the Nobel Prize in Economic Sciences, for his seminal work in behavioral psychology challenges the rational choice theory. In his book, Thinking Fast and Slow, Kahneman explains that we think in two ways. He refers to the bimodal thinking as System 1 and 2. System 1 is fast, intuitive, and emotional. System 2 is slower, more deliberative and more rational. The intuitive System 1, Kahneman asserts, is more influential than most people would admit, and it unconsciously shapes and determines many of the choices and judgments people make. He also discusses a theory of two selves as opposed to the concept of rational self-interest. One self is the remembering self and the other is the experiencing self (the more rational self). He illustrates the influence of the intuitive System 1 by providing a situation where people are exposed to two painful experiences. One of these experiences is objectively worse than the other, because it is longer. But he maintains that the automatic formation of memories—a feature of System 1—can result in the worst episode leaving a better memory. When people later choose which episode to repeat, they are irrationally led by their remembering self to submit their experiencing self to unnecessary pain. He concludes that, “The distinction between two selves is applied to the measurement of well-being, where we find again that what makes the experiencing self happy is not quite the same as what satisfies the remembering self.” He concludes that the distortion the two selves create in decision-making raises some difficult questions,

"both for individuals and for societies that view the well-being of the population as a policy objective."\textsuperscript{10}

Those in the field of conflict management and resolution often find it difficult to understand why people/groups make irrational choices, i.e. decisions that produce negative results for themselves and for others. In their best selling book, Roger Fisher and William Ury, \textit{Getting to Yes}, suggest that effective negotiations separates the people from the problem. They advocate that one should be hard on the problem and soft on the people. In other words tackle the problem with all available intellectual and material resources but problem solving in and of itself is insufficient. One needs to recognize that people are human with emotions, memories and feelings. Addressing these emotions, according to Fisher and Ury, are necessary to get to yes or a positive outcome.\textsuperscript{11}

Getting to yes, however, is not always readily possible. In the case of Cyprus, the Cypriots are a far away from resolving their differences. Higher education can and hopefully will play a more constructive role in reducing the prejudices and negative feelings. At present its role is minimal. South Africa on the other hand has invested greatly in higher education as a transforming agent to its racial society. It is clear that the declared policy of the state is far from the reality people experience. The capacity of the state to steer change is complicated by South Africa transition from Apartheid to a democratic society. It is further constrained by the demands of globalization and the needs to create a skilled workforce. Moreover, it faces stiff resistance from significant cultures that are more comfortable with a racial system of higher education. Nevertheless, the South African state under the rule of the African National Congress, while unable to transform society to its vision immediately, is employing higher educational institutions to change its racial society through the normal function of education.

For both societies the absence of group violence is critical to move its people from thinking fast (Kahneman's System 1) about conflict. A non-violent environment is conducive for thinking slow (System 2) and rational about conflict resolution. Conflict management, however, may be necessary until the more deliberative process can take place. It is clear that conflict management is the modus operandi in Cyprus. The \textit{Cyprus Mail} in a recent article noting the 48-year anniversary of the U.N.'s direct involvement in Cyprus, quoted an experienced U.N. official who during one of those years told a new colleague to Cyprus: "You understand that this is not really about solving problems, because you can't solve it, it's about managing it."\textsuperscript{12}

Whether the Cyprus issue is ultimately un-resolvable is unknown. Observers of South Africa in the 1960's and 1970's might have thought the same thing regarding Apartheid. Change, however, we do know is inevitable. It does not always come in ways we want or predict but it does come. Chance often plays a role in change greater than we predict. Nevertheless, there are forces internally and externally operating at both the

\textsuperscript{12} Envoys We Love to Hate," \textit{Cyprus Mail} (February 5, 2012).
macro and micro level compelling both societies to adapt to change. The effect of globalization is having both positive and negative impact on reconciliation in both societies. Globalization according to Huntington will exacerbate conflicts between and among different cultures. Fukuyama believe globalization will lead to different cultures assimilating into the Western culture or liberal democratic capitalism. In fact, we do not know for certain how globalization will ultimately impact on Cyprus and South Africa in terms of its conflict.

Conclusion

The analysis of higher education's impact on Cyprus and South Africa's societal conflict reveals societies at very different stages of conflict management and resolution. At one extreme higher education has a little or no role currently in addressing societal conflict in Cyprus. On the other, the South African state has placed great hope and investment in higher education as a transforming agent for positive social change. Those working for reconciliation of the Turkish/Greek Cypriots place great hope in education and non-ideological curricula to start the process. Unfortunately the elites in both the Republic of Cyprus (Greeks) and the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus have not bought into reconciliation and despite the absent of a monolithic view in the populace on both sides of the divide, reconciliation is at best in a distant future.

In this context the discovery of large deposits of natural gas off Cyprus shores is viewed as a blessing and as a curse by the Cypriots. A blessing in that these gas deposits could contribute to Cyprus' economic well being. It is a curse because the division in Cyprus will inevitably focus governmental leaders on who should reap the rewards. If the economic rewards are significant it may invite military action from Turkey as a consequence. In South Africa, globalization is demanding less focus on internal social problem and compelling greater preparation to compete internationally. Ironically, the homogenizing of world cultures Fukuyama predicts as a result of globalization may lead to the exacerbation of the heterogenous mix of cultures in South Africa. In a competitive budgetary climate, the state and higher education are forced to spread funds over a curriculum to produce a skilled workforce for the so-called "knowledge society" and a curriculum that reflects the experiences, histories, cultures and politics of marginalized citizens of South Africa.

Conflict management will buy time for both societies to work out these issues. Time is required to a more deliberative process to take place. The positive resolution of these issues will take focus, effort and resource. Change will occur regardless of the success of these societies in addressing their issues. The worst outcome for both Cyprus and South Africa is to employ violence to address these issues. Peace, however, cannot be taken for granted and requires effort on all sides to avoid embracing violence as a way out of a perceived quagmire.
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