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John Richardson. *Paradise Poisoned: Learning about Conflict, Terrorism and Development from Sri Lanka's Civil Wars.* Kandy: International Center for Ethnic Studies, 2005. xvi + 764 pp. $25.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-955-580-094-5.

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Protracted Violent Conflict: A Case Study and Generalization

Generalizing from a single case is always a tricky undertaking. John Richardson brings several advantages to the challenge, including: this particular case study (Sri Lanka) with a long and well-documented history of conflict taking many forms; the author's attempts to explore the interaction among several complex processes (development, deadly conflict, and terrorism); and the author's extensive experience as a systems dynamics modeler, who can bring a simulation framework to his effort. Although the first two advantages are necessary, many other substantial case studies in the histories of conflict, genocide, and terrorism already exist. It is Richardson's focus on articulating the Sri Lankan example within a systems dynamics framework that provides the unique contribution of this book.

The overall case study is rich in detail and covers a long duration in depth. Richardson appears humane and troubled by the emergence of genocide and the failure of effective prevention. He draws on as much evidence (i.e., demographics, historical patterns, economics, as well as policies and their effects) and brings as many tools to bear as is feasible. This includes economic successes and failures, the evolution of social tensions, and analysis of interaction between the two. The study is thoroughly grounded in social science literature and theory.

There are five sections to *Paradise Poisoned*, the focus of which may be summarized as: prospective linkages among analytical factors; early sources of quasi-stability, however illusory it may have been; symptoms of Sri Lankan breakdown, as well as the control efforts that they evoked; an overview of ineffectual policy interventions; and assessment of the patterns and further analysis. Thus, for the purpose of policy insight, the case study is primarily articulated as an analytical (rather than an event-structured) narrative.

An overview of the multi-decade conflict that Richardson analyzes may help establish the context. Sri Lanka has a relatively diverse ethno-linguistic structure with 74 percent Sinhalese, 12.6 Sri Lankan Tamil, 7.1 Muslim, and 5.6 Indian Tamil (p. 24). In the mid-1950s, Sinhalese was made the official language of Sri Lanka. Tamil protests were violently suppressed, leading to riots and other forms of ethnic conflict. Over the next several years, hundreds of Tamils were killed and thousands forced to relocate.

In the 1970s, Tamil books, magazines, and films were suppressed, and Sinhalese quotas were established in the universities, significantly reducing Tamil enrollment. Shortly thereafter, the ideas of separatism and independence began to be popularized among the Tamil-speaking population, giving rise to a Tamil political movement.

In the early 1980s, proscription and separatism transmuted into civil war. Tamil riots were violently suppressed, resulting in thousands of deaths and giving rise to charges of genocide (although the scale of victims was small relative to a prototypical genocide). A guerilla movement was formed, coercively integrated (and polarized) into the Liberation Tigers.[1] From the consolidated movement emerged an early and large-scale campaign of suicide terrorism. Subsequent Indian involvement, designed to help the Tamils, was followed by intermittent negotiations, promises of disarmament, and their abrogation.

During the last two decades, the Sri Lankan government began to revoke discriminatory policies and recognized Tamil as an official language. These policies were accompanied by charges of reverse discrimination. The recurrent pattern of conflict, negotiation, agreement, and subsequent breakdown into renewed conflict has repeated itself.

Rather than develop a narrative, Richardson's focus is strongly causal. In the early chapters, he broadly outlines the correlated nature of conflict, terrorism, and development. He uses the analogy of charting a fever to track and integrate the rise of multiple violent trends such as

demonstrations, riots, strikes, and assassinations. Potentially critical causal factors are identified, but they seem to be an odd mixture of well-defined and plausible correlates of civil violence, such as economic exploitation and discriminatory policies, coupled with factors that are more complex and contentious, such as privatization and "too much democracy" (pp. 39-41).

In his effort to be broad and inclusive, Richardson demonstrates a penchant for list construction. However, while the enumerated factors sprinkled throughout the book do convey the breadth of his analysis, as the previous example suggests, they sometimes appear to be relatively casual labels suggesting a lack of depth. That is, lists of relatively generic factors cannot, in themselves, bridge effectively from micro-social structures to aggregate outcomes. Accordingly, the historical discussions have comprehensiveness but sometimes lack richness.

Inevitably there is a question of how a case study, even a long-term diverse case study such as this one, can be integrated with an aggregated systems dynamics model. The variegated case study helps ground the generic model, however, the interface between them seems problematic. Part of the problem is the highly abstract nature of the model, which, although it incorporates a stylized causal structure, is ill-equipped to incorporate the elaborated details of a singular historical process. Conversely, attempting to align those details with a generalized causal model inevitably suggests an arbitrariness that, in turn, undermines the general credibility of the model.

Over time, Richardson has assembled a generally articulated view of how patterns of oppression, development policies, and violence influence each other. This perspective arises out of his experience in Sri Lanka, and shapes his interpretation. The view is well formed and coherent, but it is ultimately one among many analytical interpretations. The categories it draws upon provide a possible checklist for similar case studies, but their effective application will necessarily be determined by the history and structure of the specific historical conjuncture. For all of its components, case study, narrative, analysis, and modeling, the longer-term contribution of the study will depend on the applicability of the policy framework it develops.

Analytically, the pivotal discussion in the book is found in chapter 5, the "Development Deadly-Conflict System." Richardson suggests that the publisher discouraged too many complex diagrams, so his system dynamics models are all presented in this chapter. He provides an overview of what the methodology is, and describes a set of models and their linkages at an aggregate level. The components include: leadership and governance; economic structures and processes; meeting people's wants and needs; attitudes, identities, and organizations; state-sanctioned violence; and political feedback.

While both the generalized model and the case study clearly add value to the research project, it is possible that more modern modeling techniques, such as social agent simulation, would bridge these two levels of detail more effectively. However, even this type of innovation would still face the difficulty of discussing human motivation in a notional, almost anecdotal way. Chapter 22, which concludes a six-hundred-page book with ten imperatives for avoiding deadly conflict and terrorism, unfortunately reads like ten columns on an editorial page, filled with homilies and commonsense remedies. It is a disappointing outcome for a project so seriously undertaken.

To some extent, the author is limited by difficulties that bind us all. Without substantive and methodological advances in the social sciences, we are likely to continue to fall short in modeling and fully understanding complex social phenomena such as genocide. There are elements of this work from which we can learn, and thereby advance our general goal. However, overall, it stands as a decent-quality case study that points in the direction of the need for more generalized modeling, but falls short of fully articulating an analytical exemplar.

Note

[1]. Polarized in that those Tamils unwilling to cooperate with the guerilla movement that was being coercively integrated were left to work with the Sri Lankan government, albeit sometimes reluctantly.

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