

RATIONALITY AND SUB-OPTIMIZATION OF OUTCOME: REVISITING THE THEORY OF NEGOTIATION

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The question this paper intends to pose reads as follows: Can the conventional negotiation theory that was developed in relation to conflict settlement between parties in the business/corporate sector be applied to negotiation between parties engaged in identity-based conflicts? The conventional negotiation theory is based on the premise that the parties may develop an optimal outcome (win-win solution) through negotiation if the parties to the conflict act rationally. This rational action includes moving away from positions, sharing information, and mutual trust. These principles, originally developed by the Harvard Business School, are treated as principles that may be equally valid in resolving all types of conflicts, including identity-based conflicts. The records suggest that the negotiated settlements in identity-based conflicts have not been successful except in small number of cases. This paper questions the concept of rationality deployed in the above theory and suggests that a different concept of rationality be developed in analyzing the actions of identity-based collectives. The principal thesis of this paper is twofold: First it argues that the concept of nation cannot be explained by methodological individualism and the national identity formation and the concepts of nation and national identity have to be located in the sphere of life world in which we-ness may prevail. Secondly, it posits that in the context of colonization of life world by the state power and money, nationalist collective action is guided by the rules of instrumental rationality so that those actions demonstrate similarity with the actions by the corporate sector (private power) or military establishment (state power). It suggests that this paradox be resolved by deploying the notion of decolonization of life world and developing a negotiation theory on the basis of the difference between the strategic negotiation and communicative negotiation. The paper also argues that such theory would recognize the multilateralism of identity-based conflicts and the necessity of process widening and process deepening in negotiation. The paper is based on recent experience of the Sri Lankan peace process.



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