

**THE MAJORITARIAN LEADERSHIPS DILEMMAS IN  
FORMER COLONIAL MULTIRACIAL SOCIETIES:  
CASE STUDY OF CYPRUS, SRI LANKA,  
AND SINGAPORE**

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***Abstract***

*A common tragedy among former colonial small states is that they have frequently failed to accommodate national diversity. Nevertheless, leaders who took bold initiatives for political accommodation and implemented outward-looking policies enabled certain small pluralist societies to promote communal harmony even under conditions that would predict otherwise. This paper's analysis is primarily focuses on policies adopted by leaders in Cyprus, Singapore, and Sri Lanka. It also challenges existing theories by exposing that regardless of many structural conditions, management styles and leaders decisions are vital for peace and stability. The three case studies display the issues and limitations of the political systems accustomed in these islands and how outward-looking charismatic leadership qualities for political accommodations, and compromise decided the fate of the islands' success in achieving communal harmony domestically and internationally, or the failure leading to ethnic conflicts.*

**Introduction**

According to Robert Keohane, 'Lilliputians can tie up Gulliver, or make him do their fighting for them'.<sup>1</sup> Keohane believes that small states and their leadership can play an important role in influencing the global order and prosperity. Singapore serves as a great example of this phenomenon as it has managed to control several Gullivers and in the process, it has become a first world industrial nation with a harmonious multiethnic society.

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<sup>1</sup> Robert O. Keohane, "Review: Lilliputians' dilemmas: Small states in international politics", *International Organization*, vol. 23, no. 2, 1969, p. 310.

The following data (Table 1) from the historically oriented replication database, Uppsala (2010)<sup>2</sup> and the Central Intelligence Agency Factbook (2010)<sup>3</sup> exemplifies the state of some divided island societies that were former British colonies:

Island Societies	Former Colonizers	Conflicting Groups	Latest Conflict	Current Status
Northern Ireland	United Kingdom (UK)	Irish Republicans and British Loyalists	Until 1998	Divided
Cyprus	UK	Greek-Cypriots and Turkish-Cypriots	1974 onwards	Divided
Fiji	UK	Fijians and Indians	2002	Divided
Papua New Guinea	UK/ Australia	Melanesians and Papuans	1989 onwards	Divided
Borneo	UK/ Malaysia and Indonesia	Dayaks and Madurese	1996, 2002 onwards	Divided
Sri Lanka	UK	Sinhalese and Tamils	2009 onwards	Divided
Singapore	UK	Chinese, Malay, and Tamils	1963-64	United

Drawing on Keohane's theory, the paper focuses on multiethnic leadership in former British colonial small island states. It argues that governances under similar conditions demonstrate quite contradictory outcomes. While some are experiencing under-development and communal violence, there are others under similar conditions that are developed, accommodative, and prosperous societies. This paper will attempt to demonstrate the role played by leadership attributes, and domestic and foreign policies in these small island states that led to peace within and good standing in the international community. This paper will not attempt to favour one particular model over another, but rather it will focus on the leaders' politics of accommodations and policies that led societies to compromise in order to achieve communal peace and economic development.

<sup>2</sup> Marie Allansson, "Database: Uppsala conflict data program", at <<http://www.pcr.uu.se/gpdatabase/search.php>>

<sup>3</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, *CIA- the world factbook: 2013*, at <<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/>>

The paper will be utilizing qualitative comparative data analysis, systematic reviews and analysis of primary and secondary written literature on the cases of Cyprus and Sri Lanka's majoritarian leaders failing to politically accommodate their minority population's issues to Singapore's governance success in political accommodation. Conventional wisdom would have expected states such as Sri Lanka and Cyprus to modernize faster than Singapore because their economy, infrastructure, and institutions were still intact after the British left. On the contrary, Singapore was still recovering from the ravages of World War II, its separation from the Federation of Malaysia, and its own ethnic issues. However, Singapore prospered better than Sri Lanka and Cyprus in economic development, infrastructure, and especially in political accommodation, and communal harmony. In addition, the paper will attempt to discover whether the political policies these islands adopted had any correlation to their leaders' accommodative initiatives and attitudes. This is an interesting phenomenon for further research in order to discover what were the factors and situations that led to the rapid development and mutual harmony in some former British colonies versus others.

### **Case Study of Three Former British Island Colonies Using Comparative Analysis**

The case studies are Cyprus, Sri Lanka, and Singapore, former British Colonies. These islands were rather peaceful societies before their colonization period. The "divide and rule" policies adopted by the colonizers led to deterioration of public harmony among ethnic groups in these societies. After their independence, ethnic rivalry between majority and minority groups began to affect their nation's peace and its progress towards nation building. In Cyprus, the divisions were between the majority Greek-Cypriots and minority Turkish-Cypriots and in Sri Lanka it was between the majority Sinhalese and minority Tamils. In both of these former colonies, the majoritarian rivalries led to unfair policies that marginalized the minority groups as second-class citizens. When communal violence erupted in Cyprus, the government was under Archbishop Makarios III (a Greek-Cypriot), and similarly in Sri Lanka, all their main leaders in government were from the Sinhala group. The continuous mistreatment exacerbated the minorities' grievances that resulted in bitter violence. The violence not only affected their economic growth and nation building, it also brought security instability to their neighbouring states.