

# Sense and Prejudice in the Study of Ethnic Conflict: Beyond System Paradigms in Research and Theory

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## The Challenge

What if a policymaker, charged with crafting a peace arrangement for an ethnic-conflict situation, asked an academic what practical wisdom the theories of ethnic conflict and nationalism could offer to help draft such a plan? One could hardly wish to be the academic in this unenviable position. Even assuming that the answer would not fall within the usual lines of normative theory, applicable to a world where both justice and the capacity to do what is right are universally and evenly distributed, it is doubtful that useful advice could be summoned. If the academic is a constructivist, the answer might be that the groups involved should be taught a completely new version of their ethnogenesis and history of conflict, one showing that they belong to group a or group b merely by chance, and their ancestors killed each other because they had been taught an inaccurate history. If the academic is a primordialist, the answer might be that groups inherit a culture as a given and that solidarity within one's cultural kin is so strong that ethnic groups are essentially unable to understand and show any sensitivity toward the needs of other groups. If the academic is an instrumentalist, the answer might be that because ethnic enrollment is the shortest way to profit, maximizing groups are bound to mobilize sooner or later and try to get the spoils from other groups.

Advice falling into one or another of these categories has indeed been given, and an entire cottage industry of history textbooks, written with the sole task of deconstructing other history textbooks, has emerged. From the Republika Srpska to the Dnestr Republic, however, ethnic warriors know precisely the small amount of history they want to know and refuse to learn a new one. The international community accepted ethnic cleansing when drawing new—even if initially internal—borders on the grounds that coerced cohabitation cannot be enforced by democratic means. All the while coerced separation, a preferred policy of nondemocrats, is often a fact of life. The international community also pushed equal economic opportunities, in the hope that such reform would bring ethnic peace, even when different groups had made it clear that they do not seek fairness but only their own advantage. On top of it all, in the early nineties, as nobody seemed willing to step between the ethnic groups,

who had a history of conflict, the soundest advice seemed to be containment, not the resolution of such conflicts.

Resolving ethnic conflict seems to be a lost cause for both policy makers and academics. But does it need to be? Can there be a bridge between the world of academia—suffocated by political correctness and ambition driven system paradigms<sup>1</sup>—and the world of those who craft policies to promote interethnic peace and cooperation, with little knowledge of theory, scarce time to do proper research, and limited financial resources? This is the challenge this book tries to address. It is a book by academics with experience as policy advisors, from the Balkans to Chechnya, and, while not theoretically blind altogether, it is strictly grounded in empirical research. Beyond theoretical postulates and normative ideals, considerable experience has been accumulated in the postcommunist world on ethnic conflict and nation and state building. This experience needs to be revised, now more than a decade after the fall of the Berlin Wall. What does the postcommunist experience of ethnic conflict share with other nationalisms and ethnic conflicts, and what, if anything, is special about the postcommunist experience? What is the best way to manage ethnic conflicts within a state or between neighboring states? What institutions work and under what circumstances?

Being so policy oriented, some chapters of this book include little theoretical discussion; some actually draw on what were originally policy reports. This introductory chapter will therefore sketch briefly the essential debates of nationalism and ethnic-conflict theory with relevance for policymaking. Nationalism and ethnic-conflict theory are two partly overlapping, partly distinct bodies of knowledge. Nationalism is an umbrella term, covering elements such as national awareness and mobilization, the expression of national identity, and loyalty to the nation, labeled by some authors as patriotism. The exercise of nationalism is a community's assertion of sovereignty in the form of a nation-state. Nationalism as an ideology "(...) calls on its supporters to subordinate the common interests (based on class, religion or party, for example) that they share with their fellow citizens to those that they share with other members of the national group" (Barry, 1987: 353). Nationalism as an expression of identity defines the nature of an individual's relationship to a collectivity. Much has been written on what turns an ethnic group into a nation. There is enough evidence that every ethnic group has the potential to become a nation, given the proper circumstances, and some academics have gone so far as to claim that every ethnic group is a nation without a territory of its own (Oomen, 1997).

Ethnonationalism, the political principle postulating that every ethnic group which considers itself a nation has a legitimate claim to sovereignty, should be dis-

1. The term was coined by Janos Kornai.

tinguished from patriotism, which is individual loyalty toward one's country or state, manifested in the respect for a national contract (such as the willingness to answer positively when drafted for military service). Contemporary states are communities of redistribution, regardless of the ethnicity of their inhabitants and the fairness underlying the redistribution process. Ethnonationalism only occurs when ethnic groups regard the state as their own—not of the entire body of citizens—and try to use the state for their sole purpose and in virtue of some ethnic attribute, not of individual citizenship. In practice, it is not so simple to distinguish between the two. This is due to the long practice of states of being ethnically biased toward the majority group. But as long as the official state position is one of impartiality, meaning that citizenship is ethnically blind and rights are individual, ethnonationalism designs precisely the opposite situation.

The body of contemporary research on these topics is so complex and vast it resists easy classification along the three directions sketched above. Nor can the three arguments summon consistent research endorsing one position, as no empirical research can fairly support explain-all theories. Therefore system paradigms should be approached with extreme caution, as wars among their adepts seem more often than not, as Ludwig Wittgenstein would have put it, wars over vocabulary, not facts. Rather than embarking on the usual exercise of attributing labels to literature and scholars that never fit well, this introductory chapter attempts to illustrate that enough knowledge exists to articulate a *middle-ground* theory of ethnic conflict, one to cover both contemporary and historical cases, and provide the basis for fair predictions and sound policies. In this approach, we follow Donald Horowitz in his plea for an intermediate stand and agree to his “radical claim—that the attraction of analysts to seemingly irreconcilable hard and soft positions on all these issues are themselves a manifestation of the same underlying propensities to cleavage, comparison, and self-definition by opposition” which inform the conflicts they are trying to explain (Horowitz, 1988: 35). Therefore, this introduction examines the most popular false dichotomies in theories of ethnic conflict and nationalism to illustrate that, in recent years, considerable grounds were gained by an intermediate approach that is able to inform policy. A classification of ethnic conflicts, drawing on both psychological and development models, is then proposed at the end of this introduction.

### **The Given, the Natural, and the Learnt**

The core of the main theoretical debate in ethnic-conflict studies focuses on the given or acquired character of ethnic identity and bonds. Positions vary from a so-called hard primordialist view, claiming that cultural identity is a given, to a soft one,

claiming it is socially constructed by manipulative elites. Horowitz is correct to stress that few take the extreme hard or soft views; most positions are, in fact, centrist, but, then, Horowitz himself is labeled a “primordialist” by Htun and Singh (2000). Both Horowitz and Walker Connor have avoided being classified a primordialists, and Daniele Conversi, editing his book on Connor’s heritage, endorses the view that Connor was, in fact, an enemy of all the isms. This is perhaps his most important legacy, but it still remains disputed.

As these opposing views inspired very different sets of policies, each grounded in rather fundamentalist illusions and delusions, a descent into the body of research providing the basis for an in-between approach is necessary. Clifford Geertz, usually quoted with Edward Shils as the standard bearer of primordialism, stressed the importance of one’s bond with one’s culture. Individual thought is shaped by the culture one shares—notably by language, and everything entailed by it. A country’s politics, Geertz stated, “reflect the design of its culture,” which “is not cults and customs, but the structure of meaning through which men give shape to their experience, and politics is not coups and constitutions, but one of the principal arenas in which such structures publicly unfold” (Geertz, 1973: 311–12). Furthermore, beyond acculturation, Geertz sees “an unaccountable” and “absolute import” deriving from the bond itself, which is then regarded as primordial:

By a primordial attachment is meant one that stems from the ‘givens’—or, more precisely, as culture is inevitably involved in such matters, the assumed ‘givens’—of social existence: immediate contiguity and kin connection mainly, but beyond them the givenness that stems from being born into a particular religious community, speaking a particular language, and even a dialect of a language, and following particular social practices. These congruities of blood, speech, custom and so on, are seen to have an ineffable, and at times overpowering, coerciveness in and of themselves. One is bound to one’s kinsman, one’s neighbor, one’s fellow believer, ipso facto; as the result not merely of personal affection, practical necessity, common interest, or incurred obligation, but at least in great part by virtue of some unaccountable absolute import attributed to the very tie itself. The general strength of such primordial bonds, and the types of them that are important, differ from person to person, from society to society, and from time to time. But for virtually every person, in every society, at almost all times, some attachments seem to flow more from a sense of natural—some would say spiritual—affinity than from social interaction (Geertz, 1963: 1089–110).

Does this imply that cultural identity does not have a sociogenesis but is truly primordial, or inborn, as the critics of Geertz allege (Eller and Coughlan, 1993)? Empirical evidence illustrates that a change of identity is, in fact, possible at times. People do switch from one group to another, although this does not happen frequently. More frequent, however, is the situation when individuals brought up in different cultures from that of their parents and socialized to become members of their host culture acquire, through acculturation, a new identity which can, at times, act quite powerfully on their behavior. This seems strongly related to the individual's ability to speak the language of his or her new culture, though evidence is rather mixed (Lanca and Alskins, 1994). The fact that identities are learned through social experience does not diminish their importance for the individual or groups. It also does not mean that, within the normal set of one culture in its own so-called cradle, thus ruling out cases of migration, forced acculturation, or catastrophic events which may uproot a community, the bonds of culture do not tie individuals strongly, though the strength of these bonds may vary. The conclusion is that it is reasonable *to expect people to think, feel, and behave from within a certain cultural framework*. This framework is created through years of history and common experience and is as expressed in the social representations<sup>2</sup> of this history and experience. It is not only ethnic bias which we often encounter in practice, understood as ancient prejudice or hatred, but frequently a genuine cognitive bias arising from being socialized in a particular culture. An individual has to be well educated and well traveled to look on the world from a truly individual and cosmopolitan perspective, emancipated from one's culture. It is better not to expect this from ordinary people.

What remains of the givens, if sociogenesis is thus admitted? The best answer is provided by theories of psychology, which also underpins Horowitz's ethnic-conflict theory. Social-identity theory, as developed by Henri Tajfel and his many followers, derived on the basis of laboratory experiments and considerable fieldwork as well, stipulates that groups have a drive to acquire a positive social identity. This is usually obtained by maximizing differentiation and competition among groups (Tajfel, 1974). Social comparison feeds identity, and, in order to have a high self-esteem, a group tends to compare itself positively against others, thus seeking positive differentiation. Even when assigned randomly to different groups in experiments, members tend to form in-groups, invent some features of their separate identity,

2. The term was coined initially by French social psychologist Serge Moscovici and is widely used in European social psychology. Social representations are widespread individual representations with a social construction, providing a certain interpretation of a fact or event whose experience is shared by a community. See Doise (1990) for more clarifications on this concept.

and favor the in-groups and prejudice the out-groups. This discriminative behavior is little influenced by the presence of a unique reward, so it cannot be explained by a scarcity-of-resources hypothesis. In one of these experiments, for instance, the possible rewards are distributed between groups as follows: (1) in-group and out-group profit combined is maximal; (2) the in-group's profits are maximal; (3) differences between in-group profit and out-group profit is maximal. Subjects tend to choose the third variant, thus preferring that their group have more superiority than what they earn in absolute terms. To illustrate his point, Tajfel quotes a Russian proverb that also circulates in many variants among other peasant cultures, from the Balkans to Mexico. God offers Ivan a wish. However, there is a catch: "Your neighbor will get twice what you get," God tells Ivan. The small catch makes Ivan uneasy, as he cannot settle with the idea that whatever he gets will only be half of what his neighbor will have. What does he choose? He finally asks God to blind him in one eye.

Tajfel also noticed that social categories come with important affective meanings, and he spoke of the "great heights of intensity that social identification may involve" (Tajfel, 1982). He thought affect operated primarily through self-esteem. Groups need to have a high self-esteem, and members must develop various strategies to cope with its possible scarcity, including group desertion when possible. Social identification is thus desirable because it is seen as a source of self-esteem (Tajfel and Turner, 1979). In every cultural group, one can find strong evidence of in-group favoritism, although less so in groups with a historical experience of being seen as occupying the bottom rung of society (Pratto and Sidanius, 1998). National favoritism may be only one particular case of more general in-group favoritism, and favoritism of one's national group may only be a special case of the general rule of attitude theory, according to which people tend to prefer the familiar to the unfamiliar.

In another widely quoted Tajfel experiment, European children showed marked ethnic favoritism, ranking photographs of representatives of their own national group as the best liked or attributing best liked photographs to their own national group. This national favoritism decreased with age in the Tajfel experiments. The children who showed such preferences were well below the age when they become able to grasp more abstract notions such as country and nation (Tajfel et al., 1970: 245–53).

The tendency to cleavage is therefore well documented by evidence. Ethnicity is just one source of cleavage and bias, but the most frequent one, as it provides automatic and permanent membership, positive bias toward one's group, and often recognizable markers and boundaries. It is, in other words, economically convenient as a source of identity. Religious identity comes next, but even on isolated islands where inhabitants apparently share common traits, various cleavages are invented (Firth, 1957). Individuals categorize people into classes and exaggerate similarities among themselves and differences from others, a phenomenon known in social-

judgment theory as assimilation and contrast effects. They seem to derive value from the groups to which they belong (Brewer, 1997: 205; 1991: 476), not the other way around. Indeed, they derive satisfaction from the group's success, even when their own contribution to that success is palpably absent (Brewer, 1979: 322). A willingness to sacrifice for group interests and participate in collective action is predicted more by a sense of collective deprivation than it is by individual deprivation (Brewer, 1991: 478–79).

What appears then to be given, or natural, is the tendency to cleavage and build a positive social identity by comparison, the act of social classification, not the cultural bond itself, be it religious or ethnic, which emerges out of a specific historical context (see also Comaroff and Comaroff, 1992: 64). But this acknowledgement also renders the debate less relevant for the policy world. If cleavages and discrimination are to be assumed, ethnicity, more than anything else, is likely to provide a basis for them. Shaking discrimination off would not be easy, despite being able to deconstruct its contextual character.

### **Symbols in a World of Bounded Rationality**

Among the false dichotomies in ethnic-conflict theory, the alleged tension between the affective and rational uses of ethnicity is our next concern. Does Walker Connor's formula that "man is a national animal" imply that ethnic allegiance is just a matter of sentiment? Do people lose reason when strongly attaching to an ethnic identity, answering to appeals from nationalist leaders, or endangering one's life when fighting for one's country? Or does evidence support those who see ethnic groups as social-capital groups, providers of goods for members? The best example to illustrate the claim that this dichotomy is exaggerated is language, the main instrument of self-ascription.

Language is the chief vehicle connecting personal and collective identity and the main discriminant between the in-group and the out-group. It acquires significance as the main medium of socialization, articulating the social representations that constitute the tissue of a culture and is also the most salient ethnic marker. "One's behavior, and in particular one's language behavior, is the best reflection of one's ethnic allegiance" (Giles, 1977: 326). Furthermore, there is evidence that exposure to another language strengthens feelings of identity and loyalty toward one's ethnic group or language. Social psychologists have increasingly accepted that it is in the situation of language contact that people most readily become aware of the peculiarities of their language vis à vis others. In addition, the purity of standardized language most easily becomes the symbol of group integrity. Language loyalty breeds in contact just

as nationalism breeds on ethnic borders (Weinrich, 1974). Language is thus an essential provider of national identity.

On the basis of such empirical observations, the state has traditionally forced its linguistic policies on linguistic minorities to create good subjects or good citizens. Knowing the official language becomes a sort of guarantee of good citizenship. In addition, using a language other than the official one may encourage large linguistic groups to lay a claim to self-determination. These linguistic battles are sometimes reduced to minor squabbles, seemingly symbolic and trivial, but, in fact, are not so. Resources tend to be distributed according to linguistic lines. Fighting for an equal status for two languages, for official bilingualism, as the Canadian Parti Québécois did in the 1970s, was not only symbolic, but also had practical value. The stake of such battles is in the reorganization of the state along linguistic lines. This type of policy can be noticed in Belgium and Quebec and implies the demand for the political system's reform and a decisive change of the rules of the game (Melluci, 1989). Language also matters for both public and private employment, and groups assume it matters even more than it does. Linguistic loyalty is guaranteed by the simple fact that most people are unable to become fully proficient in more than one language, so, for example, they feel threatened if job interviews are conducted in a language other than their own. Therefore, the answer to Elie Kedourie's influential question of why groups based on linguistic difference are entitled to states of their own is simply that a state of one's own is the most convenient for groups, so a justification must and will be found. Humans seek convenience and demanding a state for a linguistic group is tended to be viewed as rational behavior. Convenience may not provide *legitimacy*, but one should not disregard the salience of behavior based merely on seeking convenience, which always becomes more important than simply a battle for such. Psychologists often portray humans as cognitive misers (Fiske and Taylor, 1994). But humans are convenience-seekers, which is not the same as profit-maximizers because it suggests that they tend to strike a balance between the effort invested and the profit gained—even if this stops short of the greatest profit. This is the world of bounded rationality.

So are the language wars, which play a role in many ethnic conflicts, waged for interest or pride, or for convenience or symbolic use? The answer is for both. Fighting for the use of one's language in the state administration, for instance, explained by Walker Connor (1972) as the need for self-identification and political affirmation, cannot be grounded solely in the affect or the reason. The revival of small languages has become fashionable in our times, just as assimilation was fashionable a century ago. John Stuart Mill and other nineteenth-century thinkers considered assimilation a positive phenomenon. Mill thought that it was to the advantage of the Bretons and the Navarrese to be assimilated into the French culture (Mill, 1977: 549–51). Historically, assimilation is the process by which individuals belonging to culturally



distinct groups come to have complementary habits of communication (for example, a common language) because of contact with each other and the ensuing social learning. When the ability to communicate grows faster than the need to do so, good prospects arise for creating a common identity. However, when assertiveness outruns assimilation, separatist movements and national mobilization are likely to result (Deutsch, 1966). Controlling these processes is, therefore, of crucial practical importance for both states and the international community.

States have often resorted to fighting dissident groups by linguistic means. Communist Albania repressed the Albanian Gëgs, imposing a standardized language based heavily on the Albanian Tosk dialect (Biberaj, 1999: 16). Some successor states of the former Soviet Union, such as those in the Baltics, which are insecure because of the large numbers of Russian-speaking minorities on their territory, pursued aggressive policies of nation building, making use of the local language the *prima facie* condition for citizenship. In states where the majority did not consist of a group that was seen to enjoy a positive social identity, such as in Moldova, the move to use language as a condition for citizenship was resisted, and the Russian speaking minority won the battle. In states where the right incentives existed to prompt assimilation of Russian speakers into the new community, minorities accepted the trade-off and learned the local language, as in the Baltics (Laitin, 1998). Language plays therefore both a symbolic role, indicating the group's status, and an instrumental one, providing access to resources controlled by a group or state. There is no conflict among the two. The former predicts and accompanies the latter.

Explanations, such as the one put forth by Kaufman, that the symbolic-politics approach is useful because it offers "not only a way to take attitudes and myths seriously, but also a way of thinking about the interaction between elites and masses" explain, in fact, nothing at all. The fact that leaders both manipulate and respond to symbols is merely a banal observation" (Kaufman, 2000: 203). Symbols cannot be found in isolation from more practical issues, such as the division of power and resources, and individuals must always look to their history to see where they come from. Do symbols have their own existence, or are they merely tokens of a group's social identity? They are tokens, and more: *the instrumental and the symbolic cannot be separated*. People may be moved by symbols, but symbols always stand for something, be it a group's self esteem or more conspicuous advantages. In one way or another, *symbols are indicators of the group's position in social comparison, which constitutes the main stake in ethnic relations*. Symbols should be seen therefore both as *permanent* indicators of group status, and as indicators of the group's *current* position. Not even the slightest concession can be made over them because it would signal that a group is at disadvantage or on the defensive, thus affecting its positive social identity, with all the ensuing practical consequences.

To conclude, ethnicity is salient “because it can combine an interest with an affective tie,” as Bell has already put it perfectly (Bell, 1975: 169). Neither the views stressing the extreme importance of affect, as Walker Connor’s, nor those of rational-choice theorists that purport an individual always gains from ethnic affiliation, can become explain-all theories. As Horowitz (1998) observed, just as the family is simultaneously an emotional and an economic unit, so the ethnic group takes on instrumental tasks. But an ethnic group cannot be described solely in terms of, or be reduced to, the performance of those tasks. Ethnic violence is a mix of both spontaneous and organized activity, of grassroots frustration and cool-headed organization: “Passion might come first; organization could not succeed without it; but passion would attract organization. Interest can mobilize people along the lines of their passion, but only if there is passion to mobilize around” (Horowitz, 1998: 15). Here, again, social-identity theory chartered useful territory when depicting individual strategies to bolster self-esteem (Tajfel, 1978), including behaviors as varied as altruistic sacrifice (which can provide invaluable rewards in terms of self-esteem; we have the unfortunate example of suicide bombers) and identity switching (Christian renegades in the Balkans, for instance, became part of the Ottoman ruling class). There is a delicate balance to strike between an interest that can be identified as such by an external observer and the interest to remain high on the social-identity scale, even if a sacrifice may be required. More than anything else, ethnic related behavior is a matter of bounded, not pure, rationality.

### Who Leads and Who Follows?

Primordialists are said to promote the idea that the masses are the source of evil. If ethnicity has a thick substance and is a given, perception of threat makes groups aggressive. Groups then seek leaders to mobilize and defend them. On the other hand, instrumentalists and constructivists tend to blame manipulative elites and ethnic entrepreneurs for ethnic conflict, which may arise even when feelings of antipathy among groups are not present. (Fearon and Laitin, 1996; Hardin, 1995: 147–50). The best-known work in this line is Paul Brass on India, who alleged that elites manipulated ethnic identities in their quest for power (Brass, 1997). Breuilly (1982) and even Hobsbawm (1990) go even further, assuming that elites and leaders construct ethnic identities and conflict by manipulating history, myths, and symbols, as well as actual needs. Without such engineering, the argument goes, there would be no conflict. An in-between vision, offered most notably by Connor (1994) and Horowitz (1995), alleges that elites and masses operate under the same intellectual and affective

constraints. Engineering is necessary, but engineers emerge out of a social need for them. Remove one engineer, and another would replace him.

To be certain, modern ethnic conflict is often associated with leaders, as it seldom comes in a totally nonpolitical form. Both ethnic parties and rebel armies need politicians and generals. Slobodan Milosevic provides the textbook case of this dilemma. Was Milosevic solely responsible for the Yugoslav conflict? He certainly manipulated it to the best of his ability. His regime organized rock shows to boost national feelings and rally supporters, where the famed singer and wife of his paramilitary deputy, Arkan, featured prominently. But he was an elected politician who fell only when the majority no longer voted for him, and he had to cheat elections to remain in office. On the other extreme, the ethnic rioters who clashed in Brooklyn or Los Angeles at the end of the twentieth century did not have leaders. Osama bin Laden is an idol—more than a leader—for Arab nationalism.

Leaders are very visible, but ethnic groups seem to use them at least to the extent that they are used in turn. Furthermore, leaders are made of the same material as followers, holding the same or more hostile attitudes than their followers (Horowitz, 1997: 439, 457, n. 31). Leaders who try to ignore the politics of ethnicity in ethnically divided societies often find themselves outbid on the extremist flanks by leaders more in tune with mass hostility toward other groups (Rabushka and Shepsle, 1972: 80–86; Milne, 1980). Not surprisingly, the elite-competition view has been criticized for creating an inaccurate image “of evil politicians and innocent masses” (Kakar, 1996: 150–51) and for leaving too little room for individual acts by ordinary people who engage in conflict behavior (Pandey, 1992: 41). Good models should try to “respect the interests and intelligence of elites and masses” both (O’Leary, 1998 in Chirot, 2001: 41).

Horowitz also criticizes constructivists for seeing ethnicity as an altogether opportunistic and infinitely malleable affiliation (Horowitz, 1998). The constraints of the field in which group interactions occur limit what elites can do and what interests they can pursue (Horowitz, 1985: 64–75). By the same token, the freedom of elites to foment conflict and violence is limited by their followers’ definition of the situation and what they are willing to fight over. Hindu nationalists in India often attempt to incite attacks on Muslims, but they rarely succeed in the southern states of Kerala and Tamil Nadu, where caste affiliations have more resonance than the Hindu–Muslim polarity (Wilkinson, 1997). Where there are no charismatic leaders, the blame is put on intellectuals who create mythologies to be used by the masses (Kaufman, 2001). The fact is that, in many conflicts in the post-Soviet world, there were no charismatic leaders, and the Soviet Union was brought down in its peripheral colonies by intellectuals, some of whom later rose to prominence in politics but

none to a profile comparable to leaders in the former Yugoslavia. When analyzing the factors of nationalist mobilization that led to the collapse of the Soviet Union, Mark Beissinger (2002) finds no prominent role for elites. Boris Yeltsin and the intellectuals in the Baltics or Moldova played a role, but they were just part of a broader context favoring the nations against the multinational state, which included both the masses and international actors.

To bridge the endless debate between those who blame the leaders and those who blame the masses, a political communication approach may be useful. Political communication started in the first half of the twentieth century with simplistic, unilateral models of communication, in which the public was often seen as the passive receptacle of manipulative messages. Contemporary models have evolved to form a circular shape, illustrating the way messages are created to appeal to an audience with its own beliefs, and how messages are transformed during the communication process and fed back to communicators as reactions from the public. The communicators then adjust their messages accordingly and resend them, at which point intermediates (media, public opinion leaders) adjust them again and so forth (see, for instance Dennis McQuail for a review of such theories). Forcing a choice between leaders and followers, between elites and masses, is incorrect. The ball circulates too much to be able to identify to whom it actually belongs in the end, or to grant any meaning to the question of who launched it first. Unappealing balls do not circulate at all; they just slip quietly out of public attention. Nationalist messages, obviously, do not belong to this category.

### “West Civic, East Ethnic”

The next—and last—false antinomy we will address is the famous classification of Western European nationalism as civic and of Eastern European nationalism as ethnic. The classification in itself of civic and ethnic nationalisms has come under intense criticism recently, and the idea has gained grounds that any successful nationalism must necessarily draw on principles of both civic and ethnic nationalism, although at different historical moments. The succession wars in the postcommunist world identified Eastern Europe as a perennial area of ethnic conflict, and intellectual archaeologists embarked on rearranging historical facts to promote, once again, the false opposition between the alleged ethnicist Eastern behavior and the alleged ethnically neutral Western one. As the focus was on emancipated postcommunist Europe, the border between East and West was pushed to fit the contemporary, post-1989 border, thus separating Europe in a civic camp, sometimes including Germany, and an ethnic one, comprising the whole of the postcommunist world. This recent

division obliterated the classic distinction of civic versus ethnic, as historians of nationalism have always treated Germany in opposition to France and Britain. As this distinction of East versus West often informs policy, one cannot rule out arguments based on such confusions on the simple grounds that they are not credible. A thorough discussion is needed.

Civic nationalism implies that the people's sovereignty is located in the individual or (the citizen). It requires that people and territory belong together and that the people possess a single political will. Within civic nationalism, citizenship can be elected and determines one's nationality. The starting point for civic nationalism is the state, and its focal point is the nation-state, promoting the belief in a society united by the concept and importance of territoriality, citizenship, civic rights, and legal codes transmitted to all members of the group. Ethnic nationalism refers to nationalism as determined by descent. Attachments are inherited and not chosen, representing the exclusivist element of nationalism. The ethnic concept of nationalism also implies a more collectivistic identity.

These are ideal-types, of course, and the reality falls only roughly—at best—within the lines of such classifications. The classifications also do not completely agree with each other. When portraying historical nationalism in five European countries, Liah Greenfeld follows the tradition that emphasizes the dichotomy of the individual and the collective. Collectivism, although of various types, seems to be the mark of continental nationalism, from France's revolution in 1789 to the German and Russian cases. Individualism, the grounds for civic nationalism, underpins only the British experience. Classic liberals, such as John Stuart Mill, expressed skepticism about the existence of a state which is both democratic and multinational. "Free institutions are next to impossible in a country made up of different nationalities" (Mill, 1977: 547), Mill wrote, explaining that people must trust the same leaders and read the same newspapers to form a political community. What he meant was that a unity of culture is necessary to have a democratic polity. Mill viewed the Habsburg Empire with skepticism, and he considered that "it is, in general, a necessary condition of free institutions that the boundaries of government should coincide in the main with those of nationality. . . . Where the sentiment of nationality exists in any force, there is a *prima facie* case for uniting all the members of the nationality under the same government, and a government to themselves apart. This is merely to say that the question of government is to be decided by those governed" (Mill, 1977: 547).

This implies that a government should rest in the boundaries of one culture but also that each culture should have its own state when possible. When this is not possible, assimilation or some form of government providing for minority representation are the next options. This was the case in Habsburg-era multinational Hungary, where nationalities were too intermingled to be separated. In this case, Mill concluded, no

alternative is available but “making virtue out of necessity;” some form of democratic cohabitation must therefore be designed. Mill’s distaste for multicultural polities is as illuminating for contemporary readers as it is sensible, especially because he acknowledges that even the oldest nations in Western Europe were far from homogenous (Mill, 1997: 547–56). In the nineteenth century, democracies needed homogenous or dominant cultures to be born. Both after 1918 and 1989, the new countries that emerged from self-determination processes tried to reproduce these processes.

Hans Kohn coined the “East ethnic, West civic” distinction between Eastern and Western types of nationalism in total disregard of the dichotomy of individualism and collectivism, or any acknowledgement that Western European history presents the nuances described by Mill. Kohn’s main criteria for the different types of nationalism are the relationship between nation and state, and his stress on the type of nation building was accepted by a large number of scholars. According to Kohn, where the nation comes first historically, and the state only follows, nationalism is more likely to be civic. The nation precedes the state in the West, but the state came first in the East. Nationalism in the West was therefore a reality, meaning that states emerged to accommodate already existing nations. In the East, it was based on myths and dreams; the state had to invent the nation, often at the expense of other ethnic groups.

While nationalism in the West arose in an effort to build a nation in the political reality and struggle of the present without too much sentimental regard for the past, nationalists in Central and Eastern Europe created, often out of myths of the past and dreams of the future, ‘an ideal fatherland, closely linked with the past, devoid of any immediate connection with the present and expected to become sometimes a political reality. Then they were at liberty to adorn it with traits for the realization of which they had no immediate responsibility, but which influenced the nascent nation’s wishful image of itself and its mission (Kohn, 1961: 330).

The main focus of Kohn’s distinction is, therefore, on nation building, a process seen as entirely natural and organic in the West, but inorganic and state sponsored in the East. But more recent research—from Eugen Weber to Eric Hobsbawm—illustrates beyond a doubt that Western nations were also achieved with at least a helping hand from governments and intellectuals. (Mill already knew that as well.) Similar to East Europeans peasants, many French peasants did not have a French identity at the end of the nineteenth century. The French peasants thought of themselves as Christians rather than nationals. The difference between East and West may lie then in the percentage of illiterate peasants in the total population, but again this is not a difference in their degree of nationalism.

Nationalism, as both Deutsch and Gellner agreed, needs literates to create citizens. The East-West distinction should therefore be placed closer to its origins, in the realm of a *difference in development*. Catching up with the West, what the small liberated East European countries were trying to achieve after the First World War, led by ambitious, Western educated elites, requires concentrating evolution in a short space of time. Any process rushed and concentrated in such a fashion risks becoming a caricature of itself. Undeveloped states have politicians who are also writers, intellectuals, and nation builders. This does not happen because they are more xenophobic than their counterparts in developed countries, but because they feel they must recuperate all the delay in one generation. Gellner provided the caricature with his depiction of Ruritania, and his own classification is only a step away from Kohn's. For Gellner, Western nationalism remains good and Eastern bad. Gellner wrote:

Roughly speaking and allowing for certain complications Europe falls into four time zones. ...The Westernmost time zone is that of the Atlantic coast of Europe. The point about this zone is that from the late Middle Ages, if not earlier, it was occupied by strong dynastic states, which roughly, even if only very roughly, correlated with cultural areas. If nationalism requires the marriage of state and culture, then in this zone the couple has been cohabiting long before their union was acclaimed by nationalist Manifest Destiny. ...Nationalism did not draw on peasant cultures so as to invent a new literate one: rather it strove to replace peasant idioms by an existing court or urban speech. ...Peasant had to be turned into proper speaking nationals, but no national High Cultures had to be forged from peasant materials. ...

The next zone to the East was different. Far from possessing ready-made dynastic states, it was an area of quite exceptional political fragmentation, endowed with effective political units much smaller than the geographical extension of the two locally dominant High Cultures. The major meta-political unit of the area, the Holy Roman Empire, had long ago lost any effective reality, and by the time of the coming of the age of nationalism had ceased to exist even in name. But if the region lacked pre-existing political units ready for the nationalist requirements, it was exceedingly well equipped with pre-existing, codified, normative High Cultures. ...So here was indeed a need for polity-building, though not for culture-building. It was the next time zone to the East which presented the greatest problems from the viewpoint of the implementation of the nationalist principle of one culture, one state. ...Many of the peasant cultures were not clearly endowed with a normative High Culture at all. Some even had no name. High Cultures

had to become co-extensive with entire societies, instead of defining a restricted minority. Here both cultures and politics had to be created, an arduous task indeed. Nationalism began with ethnography, half descriptive, half normative, a kind of salvage operation and cultural engineering combined. If the eventual units were to be compact and reasonably homogenous, more had to be done: many, many people had to be either assimilated, or expelled, or killed (Gellner, 1994: 115–117).

The model correctly stresses the difference between the widespread so-called high culture in the West and its confinement to a much smaller, elitist group in the East. It also correctly points out that both polity and culture had to be created in the East, polity only in Central Europe proper, and only minor adjustments needed to be made to the two in the West. However, there are important points which Gellner's model fails to address.

- Gellner does not foresee, and consequently does not account for, the strong recurrence of ethnic revival movements in the West. He sees Ireland as an exception and notes with some satisfaction the *failure* of the new Irish state to create a new culture. He was far from anticipating the spread of the new Celtic identity and its growing appeal. His model does not account for the Welsh, the Scots, the Basques, the Catalans, and the Corsicans, all following Ireland in their effort to find a suitable political form to express their—perhaps minor—cultural difference from their fellow citizens within their mother countries.
- The model fails to explain the nationalistic behavior of British and French beyond the limits of Western Europe, such as in Algeria or Northern Ireland.
- The model does not explain why a particularly virulent strain of European nationalism developed in Germany, Spain, or Italy.
- Gellner claims that Eastern Europe lacked political models of states, unlike the West. This strong statement should also be considered with some reservation. In Eastern Europe, the Byzantine model persisted throughout the Middle Ages, as the rulers of Russia, Bulgaria, Serbia, and Romanian principalities tried to reproduce it in their own polities and even to expand it to the neighboring areas under their political domination. There is no notable difference between this Byzantine tradition and the one of the state of Charlemagne that Gellner depicts for Western Europe. Only the Ottoman occupation ended this development. Poland and Hungary also had a long state tradition before being incorporated into larger supranational political units. In short, while conjectural factors clearly prevented the state model from being followed in borderland Eastern Europe, there is no evidence of a structural difference. A model did exist.



Peter Sugar (1969) does more justice to Eastern European nationalism by stressing the importance of development. Eastern European elites pitted against reactionary empires—Russia, Ottoman, and Habsburg—viewed nationalism as inseparable from modernization but also as a strategy for it. Sugar identifies important similarities between the Eastern European nationalism and the Western one in its anticlerical, egalitarian, and constitutional approach. But the degree to which the model was pursued in Eastern Europe was dependent on the development of Eastern European societies. Sugar states that the Czechs came closer to a Western version of nationalism, labeling it “bourgeois nationalism.” Poland and Hungary lacked a middle-class as developed as the Czech one, so their nationalism could only be aristocratic, as it remained until the end of World War Two. In Romania, nationalism was a state project, in fact a government one. Indeed, Sugar sees it as “the project” of the government, subordinating all others. Romanian, Greek, and Turkish nationalism are therefore seen as bureaucratic, since the state, using its bureaucracy, including educators, played the major role in nation building. Finally, Serbia and Bulgaria, which lacked an aristocracy, a bourgeoisie, and a state, developed a populist, mass nationalism, animated by the low peasant clergy and small traders.

By and large, historical evidence points out that the Eastern European elites copied the West, and the moment when the Western model simply exploded in the East was the 1848 revolution. This pragmatic desire of bringing independence and prosperity by means of a model already tried in the West was the driving factor in the East. Ideology was secondary, and accounts blaming East European nationalism on German romanticism are greatly exaggerated. Ideology was built to mobilize the masses. The elites’ development plans were otherwise too abstract to have found any followers. The abstract doctrine of collective self-determination, as derived from Rousseau and the French revolutionaries, was the main inspiration for the modernizing elites in Eastern Europe. Thus it was a self-conscious act of building an ideology for instrumental purposes, but those who initiated it in the East—such as Hungary’s Lajos Kossuth and Romania’s Ion Bratianu—were pragmatic men. They were liberals guided by a liberal idea, which was certainly imported from the West. Poised against both imperial minded aristocrats and populists, these modernizers of Eastern Europe were not ethnicists. This also accounts for their severe defeat in some of these countries.

Little is left of the distinction of West as civic and East as ethnic in the more refined classifications of either Greenfeld or Sugar. There is also little empirical evidence is to support this theory. More proof is emerging daily that even civic states, such as the United States, could hardly be seen as such until the 1970s. Even the most civic of nationalisms had strong ethnic elements, which have gradually diminished (Kaufman, 1999). The end of the British Empire brought about an ethnic revival, not

ethnic tolerance, even in the core of so-called old Europe, although at least some of the varieties of ethnic nationalism (such as in Scotland) have evolved to become more civic (Keating, 2001). In postcommunist Europe as well, new states have become increasingly civic-oriented once one culture establishes itself as the dominant one, and the process of state and nation building is brought to completion (Kuzio, 2002). There is also empirical evidence illustrating that Eastern Europeans are more eager to embrace a European identity than those in Western Europe and tend to support less, not more, the state's assimilationist cultural policies.<sup>3</sup> (Shulman, 2000). In fact, as Shulman points out, Eastern Europe bought the Western model of civic nationalism, even if it was based more on rhetoric than fact, the same way it bought the model of liberal capitalism after 1989.

Due both to their traumatic experiences with nationalism and communism and the strong will to pursue a Western model until their countries are fully integrated into Europe, Eastern Europeans have shown considerable resistance toward assimilationist nationalism in some recent surveys. In 2000, even the Serbs, for example, scored lower values on every nationalism survey compared to their neighbors who had not been through ethnic wars (see Mungiu-Pippidi in this volume). If the risk of nationalism remains high in some parts of the former Yugoslavia or Soviet Union, this is because of unsettled problems of borders or armed ethnic entrepreneurs, but the difference between these focal points and the ones in the West (such as the Basque country, or Northern Ireland) gradually becomes obscured. A *conjectural* difference in the legacies of independent states in the West and of multinational empires in the East is responsible for the most striking differences in the recent history of the two parts of Europe. Leaving aside states such as Spain or Germany, Kohn's false dichotomy between a *structural* ethnic character of Eastern European nationalism opposed to a civic Western character is surely flawed. "The dichotomy is fallacious and misleading for it does not represent the true nature of nationalism as both political expression and cultural declaration, it perpetuates notions of Western and Eastern nationalism and 'good' and 'bad' nationalism" (Nikolas, 2000: 5).

How, then, can we explain the enduring popularity of this dichotomy (Ignatieff, 1994; Brubaker, 1996)? It is mainly on the grounds of convenience. Clear-cut classifications have always been simpler to understand, especially when they flatter the audience. The Kohn model also seemed extremely convenient for policy making. It is enough, common wisdom has claimed, to transplant the model of civic nationalism from West to East, solving the problem of ethnic clashes in the East.

3. Both findings are based on the International Social Science Program Survey on Nationalism (1995).

Such illusions still persist, despite the fact that, as Will Kymlicka observed, there is no such common Western model, and the practice is extremely different in various Western countries (Kymlicka, 2000: 184).

In addition, attempts to transplant the so-called Western variety of nationalism ended badly. The international community strongly discouraged any attempts at nation building, which was clearly needed to strengthen the new successor states of the former Soviet Union. Where policies of nation building were nevertheless pursued, such as in the Baltics, where locals knew better than to take bad advice from foreign experts, strong states did ultimately emerge that were able to secure individual rights. Just a decade later, the new states entered a more inclusive, civic phase of state building. Where nation-building policies were pursued incessantly and incoherently, due to the weakness of governments which were caught between Russian imperialism and the double standards of Western Europe, the new states remained weak, bordering state failure. This was the case, for example, in Moldova or Georgia, both of which were plagued by separatism promoted by predatory elites (see the chapter by Charles King in this volume) and often treated as legitimate claims for *cultural* self-determination, despite the proof that self-appointed Russian-speaking agents were acting on behalf of the ethnic minorities who had lost their language and were now culturally Russian. Wherever states were strong and the national problem was addressed as a *minority* problem, so not touching the essentials of state organization, it was solved, and former Warsaw Pact countries have all emerged closer to civic nationalism after the first decade of transition (Shulman, 2000; Kuzio, 2002).

Theories of development are far from explaining everything when ethnic conflict is concerned, but they come close to providing an essential clue of both the difference and similarity between the East and West. Most of the East European nationalism was an answer to underdevelopment and the need to catch up with Western Europe. Nationalism was both the gate to modernization and one of its key vehicles. Struggling still today with unfinished modernization, states of the East embark on nation-building processes, which look ethnic from contemporary Western Europe. Moreover, state- and nation-building processes in Eastern Europe at the end of nineteenth century and in the first decades of the twentieth century are also criticized in retrospect. The core question here is if some nation building is not unavoidable for the creation for a viable state, and whether another type of development can unfold than the succession of phases with a more ethnic-oriented one first and a civic one later—similar to the Western European sequence, although more concentrated. It is highly unusual that success is met in state building without one culture playing a dominant role, unfair as this may be. The one grand exception, Switzerland, has arisen out of a very special context. While the most successful part of its story is widely known, the wars among its ethnic and religious groups—the last no older

than 1848—are now largely forgotten. This may explain why the quest to recreate new Switzerlands has failed so far.

Eastern Europe's political development was also determined by another factor, more and more underevaluated today: the external pressures (German, Russian, Byzantine, Ottoman) that "never ceased" (Sugar, 1969: 35). This external factor, decisive in many cases, has somehow been obliterated from the Western discourse on the Balkans lately, despite vigorous reminders (Todorova, 1997). If one looks at the roots of conflicts between nationalities in the Balkans, for instance, one will always discover the Ottoman Empire's manipulation of elites. It is a grave delusion to indulge the idea that these empires were tolerant political entities struggling to keep peace among small savage tribes. They were autocratic underdeveloped states themselves playing *divide et impera*, encouraging conflict and political corruption to dominate (Glenny, 1999).

Those who see East European nationalism as a vicious psychological drive tend to forget how poorly these nations were governed when part of the empires. Seeking a state of one's own was almost always an answer to a problem of bad governance, as well as the need for cultural assertiveness. Merging the latest ethnic conflicts in the former Yugoslavia in a sort of permanent trend toward the ethnicism of the broader region is mistaken. Eastern Europe, due to its long foreign domination, presents simply far less favorable grounds for state building than the West. Abrupt democratization in conditions of differing and often diverging cultures entailed a need to share common resources, such as the state. This need prompted the succession wars in the former Yugoslavia. Apart from that, tensions in the broader region do not even qualify as conflict. Ethnic conflict is a fight among ethnic groups to attain objectives and simultaneously to neutralize, affect, or eliminate rivals (Horowitz, 1984). Political conflicts should not be misread as ethnic ones. Ethnic conflicts are so ubiquitous, anyway, that there is no need to add pseudo ones to the tally.

### **From Nationalisms to Ethnic Conflict. In Lieu of a Conclusion**

If nationalism is neither good nor bad, but can simply have good or bad consequences depending on the context, context becomes essential. Empirical evidence provides good grounds for a theory making justice equal to some anthropological truths on identity, as well as to some sociological facts on social mobilization. It also provides enough grounds to consider that violent ethnic conflict is not the inevitable station at the end of a road Eastern European countries cannot change. Can we, however, predict when an ethnic conflict would be mild and when violent, and can

we emerge with a value free classification of nationalism to fit both majorities and minorities, both historical and contemporary events?

So far, the contemporary literature on violent ethnic conflict has produced a few solid conclusions. Among the facts commonly accepted are that conflict is more likely when minorities are spatially concentrated, there is a previous history of conflict, and the country is transiting from authoritarian rule. Evidence on the role of ethnic heterogeneity is mixed, with one group of scholars arguing that it has a significant relation to conflict, while another argues that it does not and the only variable that matters is the size of the dominant group.<sup>4</sup> There is some agreement that neighborhood and regional context matters importantly, as does international intervention. On internal democratic conditions, there is less agreement, with Collier claiming that political rights, democracy, and dictatorship make no difference in triggering ethnic war, while Sambanis argues that a democratic neighborhood decreases the likelihood of civil identity war. Clearly, political instability matters, and transition regimes are more at risk than stable regimes, be they democracies or dictatorships. On development, views are again rather divergent, with Collier arguing that ethnic wars are a phenomenon of low income countries, and what matters is the overall level of development and the dependency on natural resources as the main export commodity, not income inequality. Others see development as a factor second in importance to ethnic structure and political conditions. The Balkans emerge as fairly atypical in any of these multicountry classifications, which renders the value of the entire exercise rather doubtful. According to Sambanis, Cyprus should not have experienced an ethnic conflict, while Yugoslavia clearly falls outside Collier's cluster of criteria, being among the most economically developed and liberal in the former communist bloc, although there was great inequality among the constituent republics of the Yugoslav Federation.

Combining these empirical findings with our sketchy theoretical review, two essential variables emerge. One is a favorite instrumentalist variable—development. By development, we must, however, understand more than just economic development, as a society's entire development, including the civil and political society, is needed to explain why the institutions of consociative democracy have functioned in the Netherlands better than in Lebanon or elsewhere. More than just overall political and economic development, the degree to which development differs among groups was

4. For evidence along the two lines, see Nicholas Sambanis (2001) "Do Ethnic and Non-Ethnic Civil Wars Have the Same Causes? A Theoretical and Empirical Inquiry." World Bank and, respectively, Paul Collier (2001) "Economic Causes of Civil Conflict and Their Implications for Policy." World Bank.

often invoked to explain conflict. When reviewing all the evidence in favor of development, Horowitz (1995) concludes that economic inequality seems to matter more for elites than the rank-and-file ethnic group members. If elites, however, are then instrumental in mobilizing constituencies around this issue, its importance should not be overestimated, despite failing to show up in the World Bank models.

The second variable, the type of contact among groups, is closer to the primordialist approach, being at the core of psychological explanations of ethnic conflict. The more two ethnic groups have to share poorly separated resources (such as the state), or the more resources of two spatially concentrated groups are uneven, the higher the chances of conflict. Contact works inversely with groups, simply because when groups are in contact, some form of sharing is necessary, and sharing is the source of troubles. Groups with no contact do better regardless of the levels of prejudice, simply because they have nothing to share and are separated by a safe distance

*Table 1*  
Likelihood of Ethnic Conflict  
by Development and Type of Contact Among Groups

Development		Contact			
		Groups share a territory within a state	Groups in neighboring states	Foreign rulers	Immigrant groups, diasporas, other
Low	Uneven	e.g. Macedonia, Kosovo	e.g. India and Pakistan, Kuwait and Iraq	e.g. Rwanda	e.g. 19 <sup>th</sup> century US (gangs of New York)
	Even	e.g. Georgia	e.g. Ethiopia and Eritrea	—	—
High	Uneven	e.g. Serbia and Croatia, Baltics	e.g. Germany and France prior to WWII	—	e.g. Brooklyn, L.A. riots
	Even	e.g. Belgium, Transylvania	e.g. Western Europe	—	—

A matrix resulting from crosstabulating the two essential variables—contact and development—would look as in table 1. The likelihood of conflict increases the more

two groups have to share common resources and the more development is low and uneven. The degree of violence in a conflict also depends on other variables, of which international context becomes a more and more crucial factor. Soviet intervention in the Baltics could have ended up as violent as the one in Chechnya had not the West given clear signs that the Baltics were protected territory. The matrix explains historical conflicts, as well as contemporary ones, can accommodate liberation revolutions, and invasions of neighboring countries or diaspora conflicts. It predicts that sharing will always produce conflict, and that, although development eases the consequences of conflict and developed societies are better equipped to control it, development cannot eliminate conflict.

As it takes many years as well as ethnic peace to foster development, a sound policy of ethnic-conflict prevention and management would then have to manage contact intelligently, through case by case institutions adjusted to the specific conditions on the ground. The lessons learned from the experience of the past decade and the consequences for the people and states of the institutional experiments in nation and state building in the postcommunist world make the substance of the rest of this book.

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