FEATURE REVIEW

Against the concept of ethnic conflict

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ABSTRACT *Despite a boom in studies of ethnic conflict, the empirical and conceptual justification for this field remains weak. Not only are claims of surging ethnic conflict unsubstantiated, but the concept itself is problematic. The concept tends to homogenise quite distinct political phenomena. Making valid causal inferences about 'ethnic conflict' is nearly impossible as a result, a shortcoming reflected in the un-robust nature of the literature on the subject. For both practical and normative reasons there is a good argument for abandoning the field of ethnic conflict studies.*

Today, the study of ethnic conflict is a major growth industry. New journals[1] and research centres[2] have been launched to study ethnic conflict, while an increasing number of scholars cast their work in this mould. There have been 43 books published in English with the term 'ethnic conflict' in the title since 1990, compared with just 17 before then.[3] One online database of English-language scholarly journals lists 249 articles with the term 'ethnic conflict' in the title written since the start of 1990, versus just 23 with the term 'class conflict' in the title over the same period.[4] Huntington's 'clash of civilisations', ethnic conflict writ large, has been deemed the greatest political challenge of our time.

Yet the empirical and theoretical justifications for this approach to the study of politics are weak. Not only is there insufficient evidence of surging ethnic conflict globally, but the concept itself is problematic and other approaches are almost always more fruitful.

Several scholars have taken issue with the term 'ethnic conflict' (alternately 'ethnic war' or 'ethnic violence')—loosely defined as political or social conflict involving one or more groups which are identified by some marker of ethnic identity.[5] Yet mostly they have done so on empirical grounds, arguing that often what appears to be ethnic conflict is not actually ethnic conflict. It is time, I think, to tackle the issue on conceptual grounds, that is, via a purposive deductive route.

I am not arguing that we should ignore the ethnic (or identity) dimensions of politics where they are plainly in evidence. Ethnic diversity has clear economic, political and social consequences.[6] I am arguing, however, that rarely if ever is the ethnic conflict framework the best one for the study of politics. The

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conceptualisation, causal claims and significance of the ethnic conflict paradigm are almost always over-emphasised to the exclusion of better defined, more causally efficacious and important frameworks. On close inspection there appear to be only two rare kinds of situation where the concept of ethnic conflict is apposite, and the highly contextual nature of such situations means the reduced concept has little leverage. All things considered, there is a strong case for severely limiting the field of ethnic conflict studies, if not abandoning it altogether.

Empirical problems

It has been said that paradigms in political science reach a peak of popularity just when their empirical justification is at its weakest.[7] This may describe ethnic conflict theory today. At a time when it is the hottest topic in political science, there are questions about whether it deserves all this attention. One is told that ethnic identity, long dormant in the post-World War II era as a result of secular drives in democracies or top-down control in non-democracies, has erupted like a volcano. Ethnic conflict is said to be 'everywhere on the rise'[8] and scholars must respond. Is it?

There are several ways we might measure levels of ethnic conflict—number of incidents, casualties, number of people involved, etc. Any plausible claim of increase would have to take account of increased levels of information as well as increased levels of interaction. To my knowledge there have been few if any attempts to show that ethnic conflict has risen on any of these definitions. Fox shows that ethnic conflict across state borders has *not* increased in the post-cold war era, contra Huntington and others.[9] To be sure, civil wars have become more common than inter-state wars and probably a fair proportion of these involve competing ethnic groups.[10] But most evidence suggests an overall decline in ethnic conflict, as evidenced by indicators like refugees or state failures.[11] Co-operation not conflict remains the norm.[12]

Much of the concern over rising ethnic conflict came from the disputes that accompanied the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe and the USSR. Van Evera predicted in 1994 'a substantial amount of violence' across the region for several decades to come as dozens of additional ethnic groups fought for statehood or irredentism.[13] Snyder said nationalist war had become 'endemic' since the fall of the Berlin Wall.[14] Yet these upheavals had by the early 2000s given rise to mostly settled polities—including in countries such as the Ukraine and Romania long believed to be ripe for ethnic break-up. Elsewhere, predictions of surging ethnic politics have been confounded by normal not ethnic politics everywhere on the rise. The Parti Québécois and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) have both been chased from office over old-fashioned economic disgruntlement. In Africa more people still identify themselves by occupation or class (40%) than ethnicity (25%).[15] Severe political crises in countries like Zimbabwe and Kenya have notably *not* led to a rise in ethnic tensions. And, despite more than a decade of civil strife involving half a dozen ethnic groups, more people in Somalia still feel threatened by armed thugs (81%) and wild animals like hyenas (67%) than by ethnic disputes (60%).[16]

In Malaysia, a long-time favourite of scholars of ethnic conflict, the Chinese versus Malay split has been transformed since the early 1990s into a democracy versus authoritarianism split. Scholars of Malaysia who, as Case bemoans, 'still dwell on the country's "plural", "divided", or "communal" makeup as its most salient feature',[17] have been caught off guard by the rise of the pro-democracy *Reformasi* movement. Singh notes that 'the continuing utility of [the] ethnic conflict [paradigm]…is in the process of steady decline' in Malaysia.[18]

In India, another centre of ethnic conflict studies, the number of lives lost to communal conflict rose in the period 1976 to 1992, corresponding to the rise of the Hindu revivalist BJP. In the decade since, however, it has resumed its low-level path. The one exception was the Gujarat riots of 2002. But, in per capita terms, the deaths in Gujarat were *far less* than those from previous outbursts because India's population has tripled since independence.[19] While the often blatant ethnic thuggery of the BJP raised the *profile* of ethnicity in the country, evidence suggests that the *incidence* of ethnic violence is falling as India's people become better educated and better off.

If the increased attention to ethnic conflict is the result of a heightened moral revulsion of it, or to a belief that is has graver implications for international peace than other forms of conflict, then this needs to be stated and defended.[20] To my mind, few scholars do so, preferring instead to raise the unproven spectre of ethnic conflict as 'endemic' or 'everywhere on the rise'. Rather, what seems to be everywhere on the rise is the characterisation of diverse conflicts as 'ethnic', and the moral or security concerns of scholars about conflicts that contain ethnic markers.

Battered and bruised as it is, modernisation theory may be more right than wrong in predicting that, as people experience rising incomes and better education, such conflicts will decline. If so, then the attributes of and obstacles to modernisation seem the proper subject of study. Here we are already hinting at the conceptual issues to come.

Conceptual problems

Three decades ago, Philip Schmitter criticised the 'definitional vagueness, lack of potential empirical specificity, and circularity of argument' that surrounded the concept of 'corporatism'.[21] The concept was being used to describe everything from vague social feelings of community to the Soviet-style imposition of totalising functional organisation. As a concept, corporatism needed to be defined so as to be identifiable, measurable and disprovable. At present the concept of ethnic conflict is none of these things. Definitions range from competing 'meta-narratives of meaning' to violent conflagrations where the combatants display different cultural symbols.

Some scholars have celebrated the 'diversity' of the ethnic conflict literature, arguing that through it 'we gain a greater appreciation of the range of variation of such conflicts and a richer sense of their complex roots'.[22] Yet concept diversity makes for bad social science, or at least bad political science. We need well specified concepts in order to make valid inferences across cases that can be the basis of positive policy prescription.

Ethnic conflict has been allowed to drift into poor conceptualisation because of a strange combination of under-conceptualising postmodernism and over-conceptualising quantification. The former has eschewed meaningful comparisons among cases, and has 'taken flight from the hard categories of social science to find refuge in deconstruction, relativism, and meta-narratives'.[23] The latter, often concerned with international security, has gladly lumped together dissimilar cases, often in order to raise the gloomy spectre of civilisational clash or new security challenges.[24] If political science has a unique role to play, it is providing good concepts that enjoy both within-case and cross-case validity. It is high time to engage in what Weber called a 'reconstruction' of concepts. The question is: can it be done? If we wade into the 'messy center'[25] of a proper conceptualisation of ethnic conflict, can we find anything worth salvaging?

The challenge of making ethnic conflict a useful concept begins with finding a useful definition of ethnicity itself. Ethnicity is usually defined as that part of a person's identity which is drawn from one or more 'markers' like race, religion, shared history, region, social symbols or language. It is distinct from that part of a person's identity that comes from, say, personal moral doctrine, economic status, civic affiliations or personal history. For a start, the mere existence of ethnic markers in political conflict cannot be the basis of calling something 'ethnic conflict'. When the six countries that share the Mekong River fight over its use, this is not 'ethnic conflict' merely because all sides are ethnically distinct. If this is the only meaning of ethnic conflict then all we have is a superficial description, not a useful concept. It becomes no more useful than saying that protests were by fishermen or involved looting. If the concept of ethnic conflict is to be useful, it must point to a distinctive causal explanation for given instances of political contention. It must somehow inform us about what is happening beyond superficial appearances. And, as it does this, we must be able to measure whether it is or is not apparent and thus to reject it in some cases, lest it become tautological every time people of distinct ethnicity are on either side of the barricades.

To do so, we need to consider the nature of ethnicity. Most accounts hold that ethnicity is a largely cognitive phenomenon, the salience and depth of which will vary across groups and individuals. Having rejected primordial understandings of ethnicity, scholars have formulated more plausible constructivist (ethnicity to satisfy socio-psychological or political-psychological needs),[26] or structural (ethnicity as a response to economic, rights or security deprivation) approaches.[27] We can loosely call these the 'ends' and 'means' theories of ethnicity.

Parlaying these into a concept of ethnic conflict is tricky. Ethnic conflict as an ends-based concept only makes sense if the motivating purpose of contention is some matter of specific relevance to an ethnic group. Yet the inherent complexity and dynamism of ethnicity itself makes proving this difficult. Constructed ethnicity is a moving and contested target and so explanations of political conflict with reference to such ethnicity are liable to be off the mark.[28] Unlike 'class conflict', which can be proved or disproved by using pretty stable measures of the people involved (income, education, occupation, etc), the same cannot be said of ethnicity. Prejudices against other ethnic groups that appear 'essential' wax and wane as conditions change.[29] The mere existence of conflict

with other ethnic groups may shift the meaning of ethnicity on all sides.[30] Malay identity may have been constructed in terms of a 'sons of the soil' mythology that justified preferences over Chinese in the past, but today it is an identity that has shifted to pan-Islamic and modernist features. How would we know ethnic conflict if we saw it?

The problems of ethnic conflict as a means-based concept are more obvious. Here ethnicity is found by the entrepreneurs to be a handy device with which to mobilise supporters in the face of some form of deprivation or repression.[31] Ethnicity provides the necessary sense of solidarity within the social movement. Yet if ethnicity is structurally derived, or made salient, then the critical, as opposed to proximate, cause are the structural issues themselves. 'Ethnic conflict' in such cases is really 'structural deprivation' conflict, whether economic, political, or social.[32] The reason why most of the USSR and Eastern Europe did not turn to rivers of blood after communism is because in most places the structural cause of ethnic assertiveness was the lack of 'democratically legitimated state structures at the center'.[33] This was solved through independence and democratisation. The cry 'Ukraine for the Ukrainians' fell silent once the country was free and democratic. Tamils rebelled in Sri Lanka but not in India's Tamil Nadu, because they were systematically denied basic political, economic and cultural rights in the former from the mid-1950s onwards—not because they were inherently antagonistic to Sinhalese and certainly not because of democracy *per se*.[34] Chewas and Tumbukas are allies in one country and enemies in another as a result of different political structures.[35] The Muslim insurgency that began in the southern Philippines in the 1970s was an entirely predictable response to state-sponsored land evictions and religious freedom limits, 'an indirect consequence of risk aversion', not a Filipino clash of civilisations.[36]

If ethnicity is merely a mobilisational focal point in the face of structural deprivation, notes King, it raises the question of 'whether a thing called ethnic war even exists'.[37] In such cases there seems little justification for separating cases of contentious politics where ethnic difference is involved from those where it is not. Punjabi demands for regional autonomy from Delhi might be compared with demands for autonomy from Kuala Lumpur from Sabah timber barons. Protests by Ecuadorian jungle tribes over oil and gas exploitation are akin to protests over quotas by Nordic fishing communities. Yet the Punjabi and Ecuadorian cases are lumped together as 'ethnic conflict'. Case homogeneity is violated when ethnic difference is the basis of selection.

In both ends and means cases the concept of ethnic conflict leaves us at sea in explaining what is going on beyond a host of *ad hoc* appeals to ethnicity. Good institutions reduce ethnic conflict because they reduce structural injustices and accommodate shifting identities, ethnic or otherwise, not because ethnicity is a special form of contentious politics.[38] Empirically ethnic civil wars are associated with largely the same factors as non-ethnic civil wars. As Sarkees and colleagues note: 'In the data on "ethnic" wars, it is often difficult to determine whether ethnicity is the dominant motivating factor for the combatants, whether the importance given to ethnicity is a constant or varies over time, and whether "ethnic wars" can be a mutually exclusive category as distinct from' other forms

of pluralism.[39] Yet many scholars cling tenaciously to the belief that 'ethnic civil war' exists. To quote one group summarising five years of collaborative research: 'No one of us has been able to show precisely how ethnic civil wars differ from civil wars that have no ethnic component at all. *We all intuit that such a difference must exist*; we have not been able to demonstrate how and where.'[40]

The concept of ethnic conflict, then, turns out to be merely a holding pen for a herd of disparate descriptive events. It has become, to use Huntington's criticism of another concept, 'a signal for scholarly preferences rather than a tool for analytical purposes'.[41] As such it is falling outside the realm of social science, or at least that part which aspires to some level of generality.

A solution?

There seem to be two possible ways to rescue the concept of ethnic conflict, one for each of the ends- and means-based understanding of ethnicity. An ends-based concept might be one that meets a series of strict necessary conditions. Ethnic conflict might be defined as sustained and violent conflict by ethnically distinct actors in which the issue is integral to one ethnicity.[42] It seems at least possible that some long-standing disputes are enduring enough to qualify. The Ayodhya temple, the Temple Mount, the Orange Day parades may suggest this kind of ethnic conflict—purely identificational, often irrational, and deeply impervious to amelioration. Yet such instances are rare. Explanations of Serbian aggression against Kosovars in terms of the 'ancient hatreds' of Yugoslavia—Clinton's words—fell silent when the Serbians voted their tyrant Slobodan Milosevic out of office in 2000 and sent him to stand trial for war crimes. Exclusive political systems have spawned religious-based civil wars not because 'religious identity is fixed and nonnegotiable',[43] but because basic freedoms are fixed and non-negotiable. Religious identity is almost certainly dynamic and elastic. Ancient hatreds are nearly miraculous as social phenomena.

In the means-based case the concept may be useful in those rare instances where structural deprivation has become so profoundly ethnic-specific that ethnicity has come to be defined precisely in terms of this deprivation. That is, it may apply where the mobilisation of ethnicity creates a path dependence which decisively shapes the movement. Loury has made such an argument about African Americans in the USA, and Snyder for some nationalist conflicts.[44] Yet evidence for this is at best mixed. The creation of Dravidian (or Tamil) nationalist parties in India in response to perceived structural deprivations has lessened not increased the ethnic dimension of conflicts there.[45] Without path dependence, ethnic conflict as a means-based concept loses any distinct use, for it is just another tool in the repertoire of a social movement. Ethnic mobilisation caused by a general failure to legitimate inequalities is constantly in danger of being swallowed by a broader social movement. This has long been the case in Latin America.[46]

Alternatively, a structure-based concept might make sense if the structures that give rise to ethnic mobilisation are in some sense 'sticky', that is, not amenable to easy change. If imperfect democracies usually bring nationalist or

ethnic mobilisation—and if those imperfect democracies are here to stay for various reasons, possibly including being reinforced by such mobilisation—it might make sense to settle ourselves on studying how this 'ethnic conflict' plays out. Yet time and again predictions of ongoing ethnic violence based on immutable structural conditions have been disproved. Prominent predictions of ethnic violence or break-up in the Ukraine, for example, were disproved as structures changed.[47]

In all these cases the concept of ethnic conflict has become so conditional and constrained as to be not very useful. We have been forced by the weight of evidence to climb down to the bottom rung of the 'ladder of abstraction', from where it is a short jump to the ground itself—detailed, case-specific descriptions of particular conflicts where ethnicity comes into play. Some have argued that these shortcomings of attempts to develop a 'science' of ethnic conflict merely reflect the shortcomings of attempts to develop a science of *all* social and political phenomena.[48] This seems overstated. We have robust and useful theories of many social and political phenomena, from peasant movements to legislative alliance making. Ethnic conflict simply is not one of them. Its 'messy center' is just too messy.

Political science operates best with its tried and true notions like class, citizenship, freedom, equality, security, order and power. Ethnicity and ethnic conflict do not offer avenues for political scientists to make good causal inferences. No doubt sociologists, historians, and anthropologists will continue to research the meanings of these things, and rightly so. But political science requires a ranking of the truth content of various interpretations and, because ethnic conflict makes it hard to do this, it is almost always going to be less useful than other concepts.

To repeat: ethnicity is important both to identity and to political conflict. Yet the concept of 'ethnic conflict' wrongly conflates the two things—ethnicity in identity and ethnicity in conflict. If the two are not inherently linked—the structural or means-based story—then the relevant issue is the structural factors themselves. Even if they are—the constructivist or ends-based story—making valid within-case and cross-case inferences will be subject to high uncertainty given the dynamic nature of constructed ethnicity. In the end, ethnic conflict becomes not a concept at all but a messy descriptive label for a bunch of unrelated phenomena.

Normative debates

Abandoning the ethnic conflict framework by no means implies abandoning our deeply held normative convictions as scholars about 'what matters' in politics. We can retain our differences while jettisoning a concept that only muddles the debate. In this sense, I see the rejection of the ethnic conflict framework as a way to increase clarity in fundamental empirical and moral debates.[49]

The initial reluctance to accept the concept of ethnic conflict came from Marxist scholars in the 1960s and 1970s who, Horowitz charged, 'have a distinctly rationalistic and materialistic bias'.[50] Today, a 'neo-Marxist' world-view has emerged. Crawford and Lipshutz, for example, argue that 'neoliberal

economic reforms', among other things, have broken existing social contracts, leading to power shifts that 'are experienced as ethnic and religious discrimination'.[51] The same thesis has been advanced by Yashar with reference to Latin America and Chua with regard to new democracies.[52]

An alternative world-view is the 'liberal' one. In contrast to the focus on economic deprivation of the neo-Marxists, the liberal view places emphasis on the failure to provide basic political and civic freedoms as the most important cause of ethnic (and other emancipatory) movements. In this view imperfect or failed democracy, which deprives people of the status they require, is at issue.[53] 'The great evils of human history', said Rawls, 'follow from political injustice'.[54] If, as Horowitz wrote, 'the rise of ethnic conflict has gone hand in hand with the decline of democracy in Asia and Africa',[55] then its amelioration is properly an issue of democratic rights.

Somewhere between these two world-views stands modernisation theory, with its emphasis on breaking traditional economic relationships *and* achieving substantial freedom. From all these viewpoints—Marxist, liberal, and modernisation—conflict involving ethnic groups may be a good or bad thing depending on the motivations and outcomes. Such conflict is not problematic *per se* merely because ethnic difference is involved, any more than are other forms of political struggle or even violence.

Another perspective is the 'realist' worldview, one that is found most commonly in the field of international relations. Here, the main concern is with political order, at home and abroad, which takes normative precedence over 'mushy' concepts of domestic justice. A wave of current writing about democratisation and international peace falls into this category.[56]

It is not the purpose to evaluate the relative merits of these world-views here, merely to state that they are the proper frameworks for the age-old debate about how best to ensure the equal treatment of individuals in a political community. To isolate ethnicity from its context in the hard categories of material, political and security deprivation, or to essentialise it into immutable doctrines that actually have a short shelf-life, makes little sense. If the standard categories of social science are too 'bloodless'[57] for the passion and exotica of ethnicity, then so be it. As frameworks for valid inference they have proven their worth. Ethnic conflict, despite its tempting descriptive richness, has not.

Does it matter?

Is it utopian and unnecessary to try to disabuse the academy of the concept of ethnic conflict? After all, we may want to retain it for those rare cases mentioned above where the concept applies. More importantly, there is a big industry of ethnic conflict studies now and it may be that this industry does more good than harm. Perhaps there is a danger of falling into Hirschman's 'mindless theorizing',[58] demanding that the formulation of elegant theories take precedence over the performance of useful work.

There are some reasons for thinking the contrary. The proper conceptualisation of social conflicts is crucial to understanding what policy measures are appropriate. If economic or political deprivation is at stake in ethnically salient

conflicts (the structural story), a colonial-style 'police the minorities' approach will fail. Dangerous policies may be proposed to roll back democratisation or gag the free press based on assumptions that ethnic mobilisation is a result of path-dependent elite manipulation rather than structural deprivations. If ideas are at stake (the constructivist story), policy makers had better be sure which ones: Fox warns that a belief in rising 'civilizational conflict' has made many in the West fear the Islamic world, which in fact has remained more at war with itself since the end of World War II.

Moreover, it matters that so much of the world's scholarly energies are devoted to studying places where ethnic mobilisation is evident. The globalisation of politics requires us to think more and more about the bread-and-butter issues of class, rights, freedom and basic security for billions of new global citizens. Once we decide to devote ourselves to the concerns of ethnicity, we may ignore the gross deprivations faced by the wretched peasant who either has no minority neighbours or who (as is mostly the case) lives peaceably with them. Is the one fifth of humanity in China doomed to obscurity for its ethnic homogeneity? Was it any surprise that hundreds of millions of poor Hindus in India briefly turned to a nationalist party in the BJP after being ignored for so long by a world, and a Congress Party, seemingly more concerned with the Punjab, Kashmir and Nagaland?

My hope then is to inject some hesitation into the use of the concept of ethnic conflict. If we are more careful in using it, or avoid it altogether, we are more likely to arrive at robust and useful advice for policy makers. And we are less likely to overlook those who suffer equally but who happen not to have ethnic difference on their side.

Notes

[1] Examples include *Nations and Nationalism* (founded 1995), *Ethnicities* (2001), *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics* (1995) and *Ethnic Conflict Research Digest* (1995). One older journal on the subject is *Ethnic and Racial Studies* (1978).

[2] Examples in the USA and UK include those at the University of Notre Dame (www.nd.edu/∼krocinst/re-search/rirec.html), Queens University Belfast (www.qub.ac.uk/csec), the University of Washington (http://depts.washington.edu/ethpeace), the University of Pennsylvania (www.psych.upenn.edu/sacsec/about) and the multi-university Laboratory in Comparative Ethnic Processes (LICEP) (www.duke.edu/web/licep)

[3] Library of Congress online catalogue, accessed 8 April 2004. This of course does not come close to covering the full range of books on the subject.

[4] EBSCO Host Research Database, accessed 8 April 2004.

[5] B Crawford & R Lipschutz, *The Myth of 'Ethnic Conflict': Politics, Economics, and 'Cultural' Violence*, University of California International and Area Studies Digital Collection, Research Series, Vol 98, 1998; J Mueller, 'The banality of "ethnic war"', *International Security*, 25 (1), 2000, pp 43–72; N Sambanis, 'Do ethnic and nonethnic civil wars have the same causes? A theoretical and empirical inquiry', *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 45 (3), 2001, pp 259–283; VT LeVine, 'Conceptualizing "ethnicity" and "ethnic conflict": a controversy revisited', *Studies in Comparative International Development*, 32 (2), 1997, pp 45–76; and C King, 'The myth of ethnic warfare', *Foreign Affairs*, 80 (6), 2001, pp 165–171.

[6] Easterly provides a useful survey of the literature on this point. See 'Can institutions resolve ethnic conflict?', *Economic Development and Cultural Change*, 49 (4), 2001, pp 687–706.

[7] After World War II modernisation theory, dependency theory and then state-centred theory came into vogue, even as contemporary conditions of the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, and then the 1980s and 1990s were at odds with their foundational assumptions. On this see A Kohli & V Shue, 'State power and social forces: on political contention and accomodation in the Third World', in J Migdal, A Kohli & V Shue

(eds), *State Power and Social Forces: Domination and Transformation in the Third World*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994, pp 293–326.

[8] Crawford & Lipschutz, *The Myth of 'Ethnic Conflict'*, p 8.

[9] J Fox, 'Ethnic minorities and the clash of civilizations: a quantitative analysis of Huntington's thesis', *British Journal of Political Science*, 32 (3), 2002, pp 415–435; and J Fox, *Ethnoreligious Conflict in the Late Twentieth Century*, Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2002.

[10] MR Sarkees, F Wayman & JD Singer, 'Inter-state, intra-state, and extra-state wars: a comprehensive look at their distribution over time, 1816–1997', *International Studies Quarterly*, 47, 2003, pp 49–70.

[11] TR Gurr, 'Ethnic warfare on the wane', *Foreign Affairs*, 79 (3), 2000, pp 52–65; TR Gurr, MG Marshall & D Khosla, *Peace and Conflict 2001: A Global Survey of Armed Conflicts, Self-Determination Movements, and Democracy*, Center for International Development and Conflict Management, University of Maryland, 2001; and J Fox, 'State failure and the clash of civilisations: an examination of the magnitude and extent of domestic civilisational conflict from 1950 to 1996', *Australian Journal of Political Science*, 38 (2), 2003, pp 195–214.

[12] D Laitin & J Fearon, 'Explaining interethnic cooperation', *American Political Science Review*, 90 (4), 1996, pp 715–735. Fearon shows that across 160 countries there is a 48% probability that two randomly selected people in a given country will be ethnically different and a 29% probability that they will be culturally different. J Fearon, 'Ethnic structure and cultural diversity around the world: a cross-national data set on ethnic groups', paper presented to the American Political Science Association Annual Conference, 2002.

[13] S VanEvera, 'Hypotheses on nationalism and war', *International Security*, 18 (4), 1994, pp 5–39.

[14] J Snyder, *From Voting to Violence: Democratization and Nationalist Conflict*, New York: WW Norton, 2000, p 17.

[15] Afrobarometer, Briefing Paper #1, April 2002, available at www.afrobarometer.org/papers/Afro-briefNo1.pdf.

[16] United Nations Development Programme, *Socio-Economic Survey of Somalia 2002*, Table 7.12, at www.so.undp.org/SoconRpt.htm. This is no surprise: before the outbreak of conflict in 1991, most Somalis saw ethnic diversity as a source of national unity. See A Hashim, 'Conflicting identities in Somalia', *Peace Review*, 9 (4), 1997, pp 527–532.

[17] W Case, 'Malaysia: aspects and audiences of legitimacy', in M Alagappa (ed), *Political Legitimacy in Southeast Asia: The Quest for Moral Authority*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995, p 91.

[18] H Singh, 'Ethnic conflict in Malaysia revisited', *Commonwealth and Comparative Politics*, 39 (1), 2001, pp 42–43.

[19] By my own calculations, the number killed in communal strife (mostly Hindu–Muslim) per 10 million people for the worst years of 1964, 1969, 1983 and 1992, respectively are 41, 13, 16 and 12. The figure for 2002 is just eight. This is based on official figures compiled by the Bureau of Police Research and Development (BPRD) of the Ministry of Home Affairs. Although considered conservative, the BPRD data would not affect the comparison if the bias has remained constant over the period. Varshney notes that the trends in his own data, compiled from reports in the *Times of India*, closely match the BPRD figures. A Varshney, *Ethnic Conflict and Civil Life: Hindus and Muslims in India*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002 pp 94–95.

[20] White, however, has argued that emotive moral revulsion is a poor substitute for sober structural analysis, if one aims to avoid a repeat of catastrophic political events. See LT White, *Policies of Chaos: The Organizational Causes of Violence in China's Cultural Revolution*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989.

[21] PC Schmitter, 'Still the century of corporatism?', in FB Pike & T Stritch (eds), *The New Corporatism*, Notre Dame IN: University of Notre Dame, 1974, p 91.

[22] TD Hall & C Bartalos, 'Varieties of ethnic conflict in global perspective: a review essay', *Social Science Quarterly*, 77 (2), 1996, p 445.

[23] G Singh, *Ethnic Conflict in India*, New York: St Martin's Press, 2000, p 22.

[24] SM Saideman *et al*, 'Democratization, political institutions, and ethnic conflict: a pooled, cross-sectional time series analysis from 1985–1998', *Comparative Political Studies*, 35 (1), 2002, pp 103–129; PF Trumbore, 'Victims or aggressors? Ethno-political rebellion and use of force in militarized interstate disputes', *International Studies Quarterly*, 47 (2), 2003, pp 183–202; S Lobell & P Mauceri, *Ethnic Conflict and International Politics: Explaining Diffusion and Escalation*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004; D Carment, 'The international dimensions of ethnic conflict: concepts, indicators and theory', *Journal of Peace Research*, 30 (2), 1993, pp 137–151; D Byman, 'Forever enemies? The manipulation of ethnic identities to end ethnic wars', *Security Studies*, 9 (3) 2000, pp 149–190; and DL Byman, *Keeping the Peace: Lasting Solutions to Ethnic Conflicts*, Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002.

[25] P Evans, '*The role of theory in comparative politics: a symposium*', *World Politics*, 48 (1), 1995, pp 1–9.

[26] B Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, London: Verso, 1983; and K Chandra & D Laitin, *A Constructivist Model of Identity Change*, LICEP, 2002.

[27] W Connor, *Ethnonationalism: A Quest for Understanding*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press .

[28] There is a close parallel here to the constructed nature of moral doctrines and the conclusion by Rawls, most famously, that the result of this is that theories of justice cannot rely on fixed assumptions about the nature of those doctrines. See J Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971, Sec 68.

[29] DP Green & RL Seher, 'What role does prejudice play in ethnic conflict?' , *Annual Review of Political Science*, 6, 2003, pp 509–531.

[30] Byman, 'Forever enemies?'.

[31] R Bates, 'Modernization, ethnic competition, and the rationality of politics in contemporary Africa', in D Rothchild & VA Olorunsola (eds), *The State Versus Ethnic Claims*, Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1983; SJ Kaufman, *Modern Hatreds: The Symbolic Politics of Ethnic War*, New York: Cornell University Press, 2001; and Mueller, 'The banality of "ethnic war" '.

[32] For example, poverty and political instability are the main culprits cited in Laitin & Fearon, 'Explaining interethnic cooperation'. Of course, by rejecting the idea that conflicts that use ethnicity as a tool are 'ethnic conflicts', we need not fall into the trap of calling them 'criminal', even if they appear to the contemporary observer as anarchic and individualistic. In rightly questioning ethnicity, Mueller wrongly does this in 'The banality of "ethnic war" ' and 'Policing the remnants of war', *Journal of Peace Research*, 40 (5), 2003, pp 507–518. This point has been made by S Kalyvas, '"New" and "old" civil wars: a valid distinction?', *World Politics*, 54 (3), 2001, pp 99–118, and of course earlier by E Hobsbawn, *Primitive Rebels*, New York: WW Norton, 1959 and J Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985.

[33] JJ Linz & A Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation: Southern Europe, South America, and Post-Communist Europe*, Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996; and E Giuliano, *Democratization from the Bottom-Up: Secessionism, Nationalism and Local Accountability in the Russian Transition*, LICEP, 2003 .

[34] This repression was of course a fundamental violation of democratic principles, so it is hard to endorse the claim by Snyder that the Tamil uprising resulted from democracy. J Snyder, *From Voting to Violence*, p 5. For a comparison of Tamils in the two places, see L Diamond, *Developing Democracy: Toward Consolidation*, 1999, p 156.

[35] D Posner, *The Political Salience of Cultural Difference: Why Chewas and Tumbukas are Allies in Zambia and Adversaries in Malawi*, LICEP, 2003.

[36] H Meadwell, 'Transitions to independence and ethnic nationalist mobilization', in WJ Booth, P James & H Meadwell (eds), *Politics and Rationality*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993, p 196.

[37] C King, 'The myth of ethnic warfare', *Foreign Affairs*, 80 (6), 2001, p 167.

[38] N Bermeo, 'The import of institutions', *Journal of Democracy*, 13 (2), 2002, pp 96–110; and Easterly, 'Can institutions resolve ethnic conflict?'.

[39] Sarkees *et al*, *Inter-State, Intra-State, and Extra-State Wars*, p 55. Sambanis, N., *Do Ethnic and Nonethnic Civil Wars Have the Same Causes? A Theoretical and Empirical Inquiry*. Journal of Conflict Resolution, 2001. 45 (3): p. 259-283; Tilly, C., *The Politics of Collective Violence*. 2003, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Henderson, E.A. and J.D. Singer, *Civil War in the Post-Colonial World, 1946-92*. Journal of Peace Research, 2000. 37 (3): p. 275-299.

[40] Taken from the LICEP group's website, at www.duke.edu/web/licep/aboutLiCEP.pdf, p 5, emphasis added.

[41] S Huntington, 'The change to change: modernization, development, and politics', *Comparative Politics*, 3 (3), 1971, p 304.

[42] This is something like the definition of 'ethnic violence' given by Brubaker and Laitin: 'Violence perpetrated across ethnic lines, in which at least one party is not a state (or representative of a state), and in which the putative ethnic difference is integral rather than incidental to that violence, that is in which the violence is meaningfully oriented in some way to the different ethnicity of the target'. R Brubaker & D Laitin, 'Ethnic and nationalist violence', *Annual Review of Sociology*, 24, 1998, p 428.

[43] M Reynal-Querol, 'Ethnicity, political systems and civil wars', *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 46 (1), 2002, p 29.

[44] G Loury, *The Anatomy of Racial Inequality*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002. Snyder writes: 'One does not have to hold primordialist theories of ancient hatreds to believe that, once popular identities are mobilized to fight along lines defined by cultural differences, it will be difficult to erase fears and hatreds rooted in the memory of those conflicts'. Snyder, *From Voting to Violence*, p 325.

[45] N Subramanian, *Ethnicity and Populist Mobilization*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999.

[46] C Young, *The Politics of Cultural Pluralism*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1976; and D Yashar, *Contesting Citizenship: Indigenous Movements, the State, and the Postliberal Challenge in Latin America*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.

[47] S Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996, pp 165–168.

[48] HD Forbes, 'Toward a Science of Ethnic Conflict', *Journal of Democracy*, 14 (4), 2003, p 172.

[49] There are obvious parallels here with the well known argument of Elkins and Simeon in favour of structural factors over the resort to 'political culture' in explanations. D Elkins & R Simeon, 'A cause in search of its effect, or what does political culture explain?', *Comparative Politics*, 11 (2), 1979, pp 127–145.

[50] D Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000, p 14.

[51] Crawford & Lipschutz, *The Myth of 'Ethnic Conflict'*, pp 4–5.

[52] Yashar, *Contesting Citizenship*; and A Chua, *World on Fire: How Exporting Free Market Democracy Breeds Ethnic Hatred and Global Instability*, New York: Doubleday, 2003.

[53] M Ignatieff, *The Warrior's Honor: Ethnic War and the Modern Conscience*, New York: Henry Holt, 1998; E Mansfield & J Snyder, 'Incomplete democratization and the outbreak of military disputes', *International Studies Quarterly*, 46 (4), 2002, pp 529–550; and A Varshney, *Ethnic Conflict and Civil Life*.

[54] J Rawls, *The Law of Peoples*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999, pp 6–7.

[55] Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*, p xvii.

[56] Snyder, *From Voting to Violence*; Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations*; and B Russett, JR O'Neal & M Cox, 'Clash of civilizations, or realism and liberalism déjà vu? Some evidence', *Journal of Peace Research*, 37 (5), 2000, pp 583–608.

[57] 'A bloody phenomenon cannot be explained by a bloodless theory.' Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*, p140.

[58] A Hirschmann, 'The search for paradigms as a hindrance to understanding', *World Politics*, 22 (3), 1970, pp 329–343.