

Introduction

Ethnicity is a term which has been globally present for centuries. However, the collapse of Communism generated a large number of new nation-states, who were finally autonomous but at the same time had difficulties with finding their new identity. At that point a lot of attention within academic circles was brought to terms like *nation*, *ethnicity*, *state*, *identity*, *etc.* In that environment some ethnic groups recognized themselves as different from their FALI MI RIJEČ and powerful enough to seek for their own country. That is what happened with Chechnya – a Russian province. The aim of this paper is to explain whether Russian-Chechnya conflict is an ethnic one. Before that, I will give a brief insight in terminology and theory of ethnic conflicts in general.

Term “ethnicity”, as well as many nation-regarded terms, has a lot of definitions and is a subject of variety of theories. After the collapse of Communism and the emergence of new nation-states, ethnicity had become fairly discussed term. That is why there are a lot of interpretations of “ethnicity”, “nation”, “nation-state”, etc. However, a lot of literature agrees on few basic and inevitable notions of the very term. According to Phillip Q. Young, and may I say common sense, one can talk about ethnicity from a subjective perspective, where belonging to an ethnic group is a matter of feeling because it is “a product of the human mind and human sentiments.”¹ On the other hand “ethnicity” has more objective dimension because “it must be based on some objective characteristics such as physical attributes, presumed ancestry, culture or national origin.”² T. H. Eriksen simplifies it and refers to a group that shares some common features and feels culturally distinctive.³ N. Meer defines ethnicity as “concept that describes the real or imagined features of group membership, typically in terms of one or other combination of language, collective memory culture ritual, dress and religion, among other features.”⁴ As noted, there are few more ideas that cannot be neglected in defining “ethnicity” and those are race, religion. It is very hard to define the line that separates these notions one from another, because they are thought to be mutually constitutive. Every ethnic conflict has either cultural and/or religious and/or racial background and scholars usually disagree about where ethnicity comes from. At the point of that disagreement three school of thoughts about ethnicity have emerged: primordialism,

¹ Young, 2000: 40

² Ibid. 40

³ Eriksen, 2010: 17

⁴ Meer, 2014: 37

constructionism and instrumentalism. They can be distinguished according to their central ideas about the very nature of ethnicity and its basis.⁵

The Primordialist school

According to the primordialist school, ethnicity is “something inherited from one’s ancestor”.⁶ That means that we belong to a certain ethnic group because we inherit and share physical and cultural characteristics from ancestors. In this case ethnicity is deeply rooted in one’s blood and one cannot change membership to another group. All the members of that group share common biological and cultural origins – *primordial factors*. Young says that there is a culturalist perspective within primordialism which emphasizes the importance of common culture in defining an ethnic group and its members. Moreover, this perspective does not demand a common ancestor to form such a group identity; its role can be undertaken by shared language e.g.⁷ Either way, groups tend to stick to their identity primarily because it is something that its members learned from their parents. S. J. Kaufman says that some groups go that far that its members even tattoo symbols of their identity.⁸ In fact, “this view of ethnicity implies that ethnic conflict is based on “ancient hatreds” which are impossible to eradicate and nearly impossible to manage.”⁹ However, Large number of people have multiple identities, which can even overlap. Certain historical, political or geopolitical tendencies, especially crisis, may cause emergence of new identities and disappearance of old ones. The problem with primordial school is that it does not provide answers why do those identities change. At that point one talks about constructivism.

The Constructionist school

In the eyes of constructionists, identity is something created by society. That implies that ethnic boundaries are changeable and permeable – dynamical. “Ethnicity emerges as a response to structural forces of society (...) Ethnicity is a reaction to changing social environment(...) and is embedded in tradition, which is created, sustained, and refashioned by people.”¹⁰ For example, people will form certain groups according to place of living, type of work they do, church they go to, etc. However, placement of individuals to particular ethnic

⁵ Young, 2000: 42

⁶ Ibid. 42

⁷ Young, 2000: 43

⁸ Kaufman, 2010: 92

⁹ Ibid. 93

¹⁰ Young, 2010: 44, 45)

groups can be made by external actors such as governments, churches, schools, other immigrants, etc. and the exact same actors can discriminate, act hostile and violent. The downside of this school, as well as the primordialist one, is that it pays too little attention to the role of political and economical actors and institutions.

The instrumentalist school

The name itself implies that ethnicity is used as an instrument, meaning that it is useful. According to Young, ethnicity can be used as means of political mobilization for advancing group interest, which makes interests the only notion of ethnic identity.¹¹ Moreover, Kaufman says that ‘‘leaders, when it is in their interest to do so, try to create ethnic solidarity when it works for them (...) and clashes are motivated by economic or criminal disputes, but are later reinterpreted as having been ethnically motivated for political purposes.’’¹² However, there are scholars who believe that cultural homogeneity of people produces the most effective organization for them thus increases ethnic solidarity and identity. Rational choice theoreticians interpret ethnicity as a choice. Group members choose to affiliate in order to make the best of their life in a certain society, so that they prosper from it more than they would lose from it. In reality, it is hard to find ideal examples of all three schools thus experts combine all three models in explaining ethnicity and causes of ethnical conflicts, which is called Integrated approach. As the name itself implies, this approach sees identity, and ethnicity, as something we are born with but can undergo certain changes caused by society and societal, economical and political environment.

Ethnic conflicts

Conflict is a situation of disagreement between at least two parties. Conflict is usually a mean of gaining certain goals, which are different from the other party. The disagreement most often appears as political one (although it can arrive from economic, social or even territorial issues) but it can also turn into violence. For a conflict to be an ethnic one, at least one party has to be defined in ethnic terms. M. Koinova explains the difference between ethnic conflict and violence: ‘‘ethnic conflict is a struggle in which the aim of the opposing agents is to gain objectives and simultaneously to neutralize, injure, or eliminate rivals’’¹³, where ‘‘objectives’’ can represent leadership of minorities and majorities. Violence on the other hand, is the

¹¹ Ibid. 46

¹² Kaufmann, 2010: 93

¹³ Koinova, 2013: 9

“deliberate infliction of harm on people and can be inflicted on physical infrastructure, as many instances of this study demonstrate. (...) It can vary from genocide and ethnic expulsion through rape and various corporal mutilations.”¹⁴ Ethnic conflicts can be managed peacefully but in this case, I will focus on violent ethnic conflicts.

Ethnicity as a generator in Russian-Chechnya war

The Chechen Republic is a federal subject of Russian Federation. It is located on southwest of Russia, and therefore on the north of Kavkas. Most of the population is Islamic-oriented and numbers more 1,2 million people. Since second half of twentieth century Chechnya and Ingushetia were forming Chechen-Ingush Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic. By the end of 90s it was perceiving

¹⁴ Ibid.: 9