

# **Ethnic Conflict in IR**

# What is ethnic?

- Ethnic conflict is a phenomenon in the international affairs that is almost equally difficult to understand as it is to define.
- *Who fight in the ethnic conflicts, and why do they do it?*
- *Why do ethnic conflicts cause cruel violence to civilians?*
- *What drives people to inflict such suffering?*
- *What is it that makes many an ethnic conflict so difficult to settle?*

## What is ethnic?

- The origins of the term “ethnicity” go back to the Greek word for nation – “ethnos”. In Ancient Greek this term described a community of common descent, a kinship group linked by ties of blood.
- The term “ethnicus” was also used in order to define “people from elsewhere” and to describe “primitive” or “archaically” non-European non-western societies.

# What is ethnic?

- Yet, because of its increasingly politicized nature, and its implications for the relationships between people and between them and the states in which they live, definitions of ethnicity *vary greatly and are hotly disputed among academics* as well as among politicians. Its political consequences may be intriguing in itself and it is hard to clarify what lies at the heart of ethnicity and if and how its core components relate to ethnic conflicts.
- In order to achieve some clarity on these matters, it is useful to make some basic distinctions between different schools of thought on ethnicity.

# What is ethnic?

- Ethnic group - no universally accepted definition.
- In the United States ethnic is a group, which has its own identity and cultural traditions, but is a part of bigger society – that means that ethnic group is associated with minority. In Eastern Europe this term is used to describe society, which hasn't reached the level of “nation” or doesn't have its own state. In communist states the status of nation was recognized only to the people who had its own states, the others were ethnic groups.

# What is ethnic?

- Anthony D. Smith - as a named population sharing common myths about its origins, historical memories, and cultural features and is associated with a certain territory and has a sense of solidarity.
- According to Richard Jenkins ethnicity is mainly about collective identification which is based on the perception of cultural differences; ethnicity concerns culture but stems from social, especially intergroup interactions; ethnicity is not fixed and static; ethnicity is collective and individualistic at the same time.

# What is ethnic?

- Ethnicity as a neutral term, without any pejorative elements. Ethnicity will be mainly linked to habits, language, origins, collective experiences and group solidarity.
- This means that ethnic within this course will be understood as group who has its own culture and shares perception about their past which have created the sense of solidarity and association to the certain territory.

# What is ethnic conflict?

- Ethnic conflict is a term loaded with negative associations and entirely unnecessary confusions. The most important confusion is that ethnic conflicts are about ethnicity – “ethnicity is not the ultimate, irreducible source of violent conflict in such cases”. Alternatively, ethnicity may provide the mobilization basis for collective action, with violence being used as a tactic. It often forms an important part of the explanation, but we do not know of any conflict that can be explained solely by reference to ethnicity.



## What is ethnic conflict?

- Ethnic conflict is a situation “in which the goals of at least one conflict party are different in (exclusively) ethnic terms, and in which the primary fault line of confrontation is one of the ethnic distinctions.”
- This means that we speak about ethnic conflict “when at least one group defining the causes, fault lines, and potential solutions of the conflict along a real or perceived ethnic divide”.

## What is ethnic conflict?

- Ethnic conflict are a form of group conflict in which at least one of its parties involved interprets the conflict, its causes, and potential remedies along an actually existing or perceived discriminating ethnic divide
- It involves at least one conflict party that is organized around the ethnic identity of its members.

## What is ethnic conflict?

- Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Nagorno-Karabakh – ethnic conflicts?
- The term “ethnic conflict” may be quite misleading. Georgia is not fighting specific ethnic groups but “separatists” – that is, people who are challenging its territorial integrity, whatever their ethnic origin”.
- On the other side for separatists the conflicts are about self-determination and reinforcement of their political rights on their ethnic home.

# What is ethnic conflict?

- Thus we can claim that the conflicts inside Georgia with separatists were not caused by ethnic hostility. They were rather struggles about the national-state, over status of some specific groups and were caused by contradictions between their national projects.
- Conflicts in South Caucasus were about defending territory, ethnic homes and independence. However it should be said that nowadays mutual relation of conflict parties are ethnically hostile. This can lead us to the conclusion that ethnic animosity was not the cause, but the result of the frozen conflicts in South Caucasus.

# Theories of Ethnicity

- There is no comprehensive and widely accepted empirical theory to explain ethnic conflict. Rather, each of the explains a particular aspect of ethnic confrontation.
- There is an ongoing scholarly debate **over the study as to whether ethnic diversity breeds armed conflict** (Wimmer, Cederman and Min 2009), **what is the relationship between ethnicity and the duration of armed conflict** (Cederman and Girardin 2007, Collier, Hoeffler, and Soderborn 2004, Fearon and Laitin 2003, Sambanis 2001), and **if ethnic conflicts are more violent in comparison to non-ethnic conflicts** (Eck 2009, Kalyvas 2001, 2007).
- Some scholars argue about the **“banality” of ethnic conflict** (Mueller 2000) and emphasize the role of violence as a central component of both ethnic and non-ethnic conflicts (Kalyvas 2001). The major shortcoming of such approaches lies in their linking ethnicity and armed conflict in a problematic way—as if all ethnic conflict had uniform causes.

# Theories of Ethnicity

- Qualitative research highlights the need to “**scale down**” and trace the ***bellicose*** aspect in the relationship between ethnicity and violent conflict (Beissinger 2007, Evera 1994).
- What marks ethnic conflict as different from other types of conflict is that the interests and claims of ethnic groups are based on ethnic affinities rather than material payoffs (Sambanis 2001).

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Ethnicity “as thought and action stemming from identification with a community of putatively shared ancestry that exceeds the scale of face-to-face *gemeinschaft*” (Kaufmann, Conversi 2012).

Aspects like a common *proper name*, the myth of *common ancestry*, shared *historical memories*, *elements of common culture*, a link to *homeland* and a sense of *solidarity* are used by ethnicities to demarcate their boundaries (Hutchinson, Smith 1996: 6-7).

# Theories of Ethnicity

- An influential piece of conventional wisdom about ethnic conflict is based on the assumption that ethnic composition of a society influences the probability of ethnic conflict due to tensions across ethnic lines.
- Many theories—primordial, instrumental, and constructivist—have proposed the explanation of ethnic conflict.

# Theories of Ethnicity

- **Primordialists** argue that ethnicity is rooted in historical experience and that ethnic identity does not change over time (Weber, Geertz 1996).
- *Primordialist* is an umbrella term, which, according to one of the most prominent scholars, Adam Smith (1994, 1995, 1998), involves three different approaches: (1) “naturalist”, (2) “evolutionary,” and (3) “cultural” determinants.
- 1. The naturalist approach emphasizes that the nation or ethnic group to which one belongs is “naturally fixed” (Smith 1995: 31). Naturalists do not differentiate between nations and ethnic groups. All nations have a distinctive way of life, “natural frontiers,” specific origins, a golden age, “as well as a peculiar character, mission and destiny” (Hutchinson, Smith 1994).



# Theories of Ethnicity

- 2. According to one of the main representatives of the *evolutionary approach*, Van den Berghe, a human society is based on three principles: kin selection, reciprocity, and coercion. (Berghe 1978: 403). This involves more “intergroup than intra-group variance” (Berghe 1978.: 406-407) based on kinship and loyalties of “inclusive fitness” (Smith 1998, Thayer 2009).
- A similar combination of ethnic affiliation with kinship ties is presented in Donald Horowitz’s very influential work *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*: “ethnicity is based on a myth of collective ancestry, which usually carries with it traits believed to be innate. Some notion of ascription, however diluted, and affinity deriving from it are inseparable from the concept of ethnicity” (Horowitz 1985: 52).

# Theories of Ethnicity

- 3. Cultural primordialist, goes beyond pure primordialism and is based on a combination of three major ideas: primordial identities are (1) *a priori* given and static, (2) coercive, and (3) emotional (Eller and Coughlan 1993). The most prominent representatives of cultural primordialism are scholars Edward Shils and Clifford Geertz, who emphasize the power of cultural perception and a belief in “sacredness” by ethnic groups.

# Theories of Ethnicity

- The second approach, which is in contradiction with primordialism, is **instrumentalism**.
- The instrumentalist approach explains ethnic conflict as rooted in (1) modernization, (2) economic indicators, and (3) the role of political leaders (Laitin, Fearon 1996; Brass 1996; Laitin 1998).

# Theories of Ethnicity

- Through the *process of modernization*, which involves better education, urbanization, the creation of better communication channels and mass media, ethnic groups become more aware about their disadvantages, distinctions between them and others, and a need to compete with other ethnic groups (Connor 1972).

# Theories of Ethnicity

- Political leaders manipulate ethnic identities for their own interests, for example to stay in power. Accordingly, political leaders may occur as supporters of conflict across ethnic lines “in order to protect their well-being or existence or to gain political and economic advantages for their groups as well as for themselves” (Brass 1991: 111).

# Theories of Ethnicity

- “Third way” in the study of the causes of ethnic conflict represented by such outstanding scholars as Anthony D. Smith, John Hutchinson, John Armstrong, Stuart Kaufman, Daniele Conversi, and Andreas Wimmer.
- **Ethno-symbolism** is a more homogeneous category, involving the elements of both previous approaches. It allows us to capture the complex nature of ethnic identity formation, which “can be located on a spectrum between primordial historic continuities and instrumental opportunistic adaptations” (Connor 1993).

# Theories of Ethnicity

- According to this approach, the causes of ethnic conflict are rooted in (1) myths and symbols, (2) fears, and (3) opportunity for mobilization.
- Myths and symbols are significant in an ethnic group's construction process. Memories, myths, symbol values, common feelings and opinions may justify a collective behavior. It may take different forms, such as, for example, flags, language, rituals, hymns, special food and costumes, banners, coins, and representations of ethnic heroes and the glorious past (Smith 1999: 16). The core meaning of these symbols represents "inclusive fitness" (Smith 1998: 146-150) to one group, its legitimacy for existence and fear of other groups.

# Theories of Ethnicity

- The next necessary condition for ethnic conflict is fear for the existence, security, and status of the ethnic group. As is very rightly stated by David Lake and Donald Rothchild, “ethnicity is not a cause of violent conflict ... But when ethnicity is linked with acute social uncertainty, a history of conflict and, indeed, fear of what the future might bring, it emerges as one of the major fault lines along which societies fracture (Lake, Rothchild 1998: 7).



# Theories of Ethnicity

- The causes of ethnic conflict stem from “emerging anarchy” when a weakening state is unable to provide security guarantees for ethnic groups within the state (Posen 1993). Barry Posen’s neorealist assumption is based on the ethnic security dilemma explanation. According to this logic, the incentives to use preemptive offensive strategies are high, and factors like emotions, historical memories, and myths exacerbate the escalation of tension to armed conflict.

# Theories of Ethnicity

- To sum up, ethnic conflict is a conflict in which the key causes of confrontation run along ethnic lines, which involve some elements of ethnic identity, the status of ethnic groups, and the opportunity to mobilize violent confrontation. At the outset of a conflict, ethnic conflict could be identified by the observable pattern of rebel recruitment, while ethnicity by itself could be a motivation to mobilize forces.

# The Security Dilemma and Ethnic Conflict

## – Barry R. Posen

- End of the Cold War – nationalist, ethnic and religious conflicts in Eurasia.
  - Collapse of imperial regime – problem of „emerging anarchy.“
  - Security dilemma:
    - 1. when offensive and defensive military forces are indistinguishable, any force on hand are suitable for offensive campaigns.
    - 2. effectiveness of the offense versus the defense.
- Preemptive action in the event of political crisis.

# Offense and Defense Strategies

- Groups have to determine whether neighboring groups are a threat.
- Nature of military technology and organization
- Strong national identity – key ingredient of the combat power of armies – groupness.
- Military capabilities – often unsophisticated, infantry-based armies.
- What methods are available to a newly independent group to assess the offensive implication of another's sense of identity?

# Offense and defense strategies

- What methods are available to a newly independent group to assess the offensive implication of another's sense of identity?
- History
- 1. multiethnic empire suppressed or manipulated the facts of previous rivalries to reinforce their own rule. (Soviet Union and Yugoslavia lacked any systemic commitment to truth in historical scholarship.)

# Offense and defense strategies

- 2. the members of ethnic groups did not forget the record of their old rivalries.
- 3. Because, their history is mostly oral, there is no other view of the past.
- 4. The central authority begins to collapse and local politicians begin to struggle for power, they will begin to write down their version of history in political speeches.
- **Result: one group is likely to assume that another group's sense of identity, and the cohesion that it produces, is a danger.**

# Offensive over defensive action

- Two factors: technology and geography.
- Technology – military capabilities with exception of nuclear weapons.
- “islands” of settlement across the nominal territory of another group – irredenta.
- Economically autonomous, military defensible, nearby brethren.
  - preemptive war more attractive.

# International relations of ethnic conflict

- Vulnerability vs. ethnic ties argument

Vulnerability argument:

- States vulnerable to secession do not support separatists in other states – ethnic conflict: sufficient condition for not support.
- On systemic-level – high level of international cooperation
- Common vulnerability of states and the insecurity of statesmen creates a common interests to build international institution.
- International system protects stability of boundaries and territorial integrity – any violation of the boundary regime may undermine the entire system.



# Spread of Ethnic conflict

Stephen M. Saideman

Ethnic-ties counter-argument:

- Domestic level more important: such variable as 1. motivation of political leaders, 2. the supporter's preferences and 3. ethnic identities influence on foreign policy.
- States support those actors internationally that share ethnic ties with decision-makers' supporters.
- States oppose those actors that share a history of enmity with the political leaders' supporters.
- States will be neutral or ambivalent toward those conflict where decision-makers' supporters have ties to both sides.

# Spread of ethnic conflict

- Military interventions against another state are acts of aggression and multiethnic states that have problems with minority issues must typically think twice before supporting rebellions in neighboring states. “Even where ethnic affinities relate, not to peripheral minorities in the external state, but to centrally influential groups, support is by no means automatic.”
- Cross-border assistance may likewise lead to unwanted turmoil spreading across state borders into the territory of the intervening state. While these are strong arguments for supporting nonintervention, there is empirical evidence pointing in the opposite direction.

# Spread of ethnic conflict

- Most of the internal armed conflict has notable implications for regional stability and have “spill-over” effect. Some neighboring states can trigger the conflict by supporting different groups. This strategy is based on interests of particular state. Conditions under which the spillover effect can transmit the violence to different places occur then internal tension and instability in one country gives the opportunity to external power to intervene in order to maximize its interests and gain power.

# Spread of ethnic conflict

- The greater the level of instability in one country the more significant the risk of a spill over effect into the neighboring state.
- The probability of conflict increases with the external group support.
- The risk of conflict increases if the kin group is governmental rather than another peripheral group.

# Spread of ethnic conflict

- Steven E. Lobell and Philip Mauceri

Diffusion – spillover effect

Escalation – other ethnic groups, other states or non-state actors participating in the ethnic conflict.

- Weakening state – escalation- when outside ethnic groups have opportunities in order to capture the spoils.
- Diffusion – Barry Posen security dilemma logic.

# Spread of Ethnic conflict

- Non-state actors role – escalation – when ethnic group is struggling for its status – support of neighboring kin.
- Diffusion- Ethnic kin appeal through IGOs and NGOs to destabilize the majority ethnic group.
- Escalation and diffusion when there is some change in the ethnic balance of power and in the competition for the distribution of social, economic and political resources.
- Degree of economic, social and cultural integration within regional and global system.

- 2 schools:
- Affective school: existence of ethnic kin in neighboring state – outside intervention.
- Instrumental school – political leaders to obtain scarce resources.
- Ethnic domination vs. diversity – the extent to which political institutions are in hand of a single ethnic group
- High vs. low institutional constraints – the extent to which leaders possess power over state policies.

# Domestic determinants of ethnic intervention

Institutional constraints	Low (I)	Dominant-low (I <sub>a</sub> ): belligerence	Diverse-low (I <sub>b</sub> ): passive lobbying
	High (II)	Dominant-high (II <sub>a</sub> ): sporadic interventionism	Diverse-high (II <sub>b</sub> ): realpolitik policies