CHAPTER ONE

The Dimensions of Ethnic Conflict

Not so long ago, the proposition was advanced that increased political consciousness could be expected to consolidate the unity of states with homogeneous populations and "strain or destroy" the cohesion of states with diverse populations.¹ At the time, the observation seemed even-handed enough, but in the interval it has become clear that few states are homogeneous and many are deeply divided. Ethnic conflict is a worldwide phenomenon.

The evidence is abundant. The recurrent hostilities in Northern Ireland, Chad, and Lebanon; secessionist warfare in Burma, Bangladesh, the Sudan, Nigeria, Iraq, and the Philippines; the Somali invasion of Ethiopia and the Turkish invasion of Cyprus; the army killings in Uganda and Syria and the mass civilian killings in India-Pakistan, Burundi, and Indonesia; Sikh terrorism, Basque terrorism, Corsican terrorism, Palestinian terrorism; the expulsion of Chinese from Vietnam, of Arakanese Muslims from Burma, of Asians from Uganda, of Beninese from the Ivory Coast and Gabon; ethnic riots in India, Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Zaire, Guyana, and a score of other countries—these comprise only the most violent evidence of ethnic hostility. There are many less dramatic manifestations. In country after country, political parties and trade unions are organized ethnically. There are movements to expropriate ethnically differentiated traders and expel long-resident workers of foreign origin. Armed forces are frequently factionalized along ethnic lines. Separatist referenda in Quebec and the Swiss Jura, a painful division of Belgium into zones for Flemings and Walloons, the protests of Berbers in Algeria and of Croats in Yugoslavia all serve to mark the potent political

force of ethnicity in the politics of both developing and industrialized states.

Ethnic conflict is, of course, a recurrent phenomenon. Shifting contexts make ethnicity now more, now less prominent. The international environment plays a part in its emergence and remission. Often overshadowed by international warfare and masked by wartime alliances, ethnic allegiances are usually revived by the wartime experience or emerge again soon afterward, as they did after the First and Second World Wars. In their periodic reemergence, ethnic sentiments have been supported by the widespread diffusion of the doctrine of "national self-determination."2 This doctrine, traceable to eighteenth-century conceptions of popular sovereignty, flowered with the burst of nationalism in nineteenth-century Europe and the building of states like Germany and Italy out of more parochial units. The twentieth-century version, on the other hand, entailed the dismemberment of empires and large states in favor of smaller units, beginning after World War I, when the Wilsonian espousal of self-determination helped remake the map of Eastern Europe.

The process was repeated after World War II, with the termination of colonial control in Asia and Africa. Decolonization set in motion a chain reaction, the ultimate impact of which has yet to be felt. The movements that sought independence from the colonial powers were not always wholly representative of all the ethnic groups in their territories. Some groups that were not so well represented attempted, with varying degrees of success, to slow down the march to independence or to gain special concessions or even a separate state. But, with some exceptions, ethnic differences tended to be muted until independence was achieved.

Following independence, however, the context and the issues changed. No longer was the struggle against external powers paramount. No longer was colonial domination the issue. Self-determination had been implemented only to the level of preexisting colonial boundaries. Within these boundaries, the question was to whom the new states belonged. As some groups moved to succeed to the power of the former colonialists, others were heard to claim that self-determination was still incomplete, for they had not achieved their own independence. “The discontinuance of a sin,” wrote Anthony Trollope in 1860, “is always

the commencement of a struggle." In a large number of ex-colonial states, the independence rally gave way to the ethnic riot.

As these issues began to emerge, the independence of Asia and Africa was being felt in Europe and North America. The grant of sovereignty to the former Belgian territories in Africa (Zaire, Rwanda, and Burundi) helped stimulate ethnic claims among Flemings in Belgium itself. If, they said, tiny Burundi can have an autonomous political life, why should the more numerous Flemish population be deprived of the same privilege? The emancipation of Africa also had an impact on Afro-Americans, and it probably made racial discrimination seem anomalous to many other Americans. In Canada, some French-speaking Quebeckers cited African independence as a precedent for their own, and some identified the position of Afro-Americans as analogous to theirs, calling themselves "Nègres blancs d'Amérique." The latest large-scale exercise in self-determination—decolonization—thus had reverberations across oceans. Although international conditions cannot create a conflict where one does not exist—for contagion is not the source of ethnic conflict—they can create a setting in which ethnic demands seem timely and realistic.

Certain worldwide ideological and institutional currents have also underpinned the growth of ethnic conflict. The spread of norms of equality has made ethnic subordination illegitimate and spurred ethnic groups everywhere to compare their standing in society against that of groups in close proximity. The simultaneous spread of the value of achievement has cast in doubt (and self-doubt) the worth of groups whose competitive performance seems deficient by such standards. Finally, the state system that first grew out of European feudalism and now, in the post-colonial period, covers virtually the entire earth provides the framework in which ethnic conflict occurs. Control of the state, control of a state, and exemption from control by others are among the main goals of ethnic conflict.

In consequence of all these developments, ethnic conflict possesses elements of universality and uniformity that were not present at earlier times. The ubiquitous character of ethnic conflict opens opportunities

for groups and movements to become part of a broad and respectable current, learning from each other and in so doing becoming similar in their claims and aspirations. The profusion of ethnic claims is in fact expressed in a distinctly parsimonious common rhetoric. Its terminology is the language of competition and equality, a remarkably individualistic idiom for claims that are advanced on a collective basis. The ubiquity of the phenomenon provides the basis for comparative analysis, for ethnic conflict has common features.

THE LONG REACH OF ETHNIC AFFILIATIONS

If few states have been impervious to ethnic divisions, the new states of Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and the Caribbean have been particularly susceptible. The importance of ethnicity in these states is indicated by the results of sample surveys. Open-ended questions that ask “Who are you?” “What is your nationality?” or “What is your country?” overwhelmingly elicit ethnic responses, even when the “set” before the question is fixed on “national” rather than ethnic identity. Children as well as adults respond in these terms; in a Philippine study, children as young as six were aware of their ethnic identity and by the age of ten provided strongly ethnic responses. Questions about appropriate political behavior also elicit responses cast in ethnic terms, responses sometimes startlingly ethnocentric. Thus, in the Philippines, it is “better” to vote for someone “from your own home region.” In Nigeria, a person’s loyalty “should be to his region rather than to his country,” and a child “should


be taught to protect the welfare of his own people and let other tribal
groups look out for themselves." In Ghana, many people expect favor-
able treatment at the hands of bureaucrats belonging to their own ethnic
group and unfavorable treatment at the hands of bureaucrats belonging
to other ethnic groups. In one country after another, other ethnic groups
are described in unflattering or disparaging terms. In general, ethnic
identity is strongly felt, behavior based on ethnicity is normatively san-
tioned, and ethnicity is often accompanied by hostility toward outgroups.

Nowhere, of course, is politics simply reducible to the common de-
nominator of ethnic ties. Even in the most severely divided society, there
are also other issues. Nor do ethnic affiliations govern behavior in all
situations. If they did, the bonds across ethnic lines that make a multieth-
nic society possible could not develop. Everywhere there exist buyers
and sellers, officials and citizens, co-workers, and members of profes-
sions; all of these roles are to some degree independent of the ethnic
origin of their incumbents.

The degree of this independence, however, varies widely. It tends to
be smallest in those societies that are most riven. Although ethnic affili-
ations can be compartmentalized—that is, their relevance can be limited
to some spheres and contexts—there is nonetheless a tendency to seep-
age. In deeply divided societies, strong ethnic allegiances permeate or-
ganizations, activities, and roles to which they are formally unrelated. The
permeative character of ethnic affiliations, by infusing so many sectors

Northern Nigerians, age seventeen, 74 percent of whom agreed with the first quoted
statement and 69 percent of whom agreed with the second.


10. See, e.g., Marilynn B. Brewer and Donald T. Campbell, Ethnocentrism and Inter-
group Attitudes: East African Evidence (New York: John Wiley, 1976); Kleneberg and
Zavalloni, Nationalism and Tribalism Among African Students, 140–64; Bulatao, Ethnic
Attitudes in Five Philippine Cities, 56–68; Vaughn F. Bishop, "Language Acquisition and
Value Change in the Kano Urban Area," in John N. Paden, ed., Values, Identities, and
National Integration: Empirical Research in Africa (Evanston: Northwestern Univ. Press,
1980), 188; Brian M. du Toit, "Ethnicity, Neighborliness, and Friendship Among Urban
Africans in South Africa," in du Toit, ed., Ethnicity in Modern Africa (Boulder, Colo.: Westview
Press, 1978), 143–74; A. F. A. Husain and A. Farouk, Social Integration of
Industrial Workers in Khuna (Dacca: Univ. of Dacca, 1963), 46–49; Peter Osei-Kwame
and Paul P. W. Achola, "A New Conceptual Model for the Study of Political Integration in
Studies 6 (Winter 1972): 73–96; George Henry Weighman, "A Study of Prejudice in a
of social life, imparts a pervasive quality to ethnic conflict and raises sharply the stakes of ethnic politics.

The permeative propensities of ethnic affiliations in divided societies are easily demonstrated. In severely divided societies, ethnicity finds its way into a myriad of issues: development plans, educational controversies, trade union affairs, land policy, business policy, tax policy. Characteristically, issues that elsewhere would be relegated to the category of routine administration assume a central place on the political agenda of ethnically divided societies. Hydroelectric power and logging have been bones of violent ethnic contention in the Philippines. The status of private schools has been an ethnic issue in Malaysia and Tanzania. In Guyana, an upsurge of ethnic tension between East Indians and Africans brought demands for segregated field gangs on sugar estates. Malays in Thailand have opposed the settlement of Thai Buddhists in the interior of Southern Thailand. Kurds in Iraq have opposed the settlement of Arabs in their areas. Ceylon Tamils have opposed the settlement of Sinhalese in the East of Sri Lanka, and the Mahaweli irrigation scheme, supported by international aid donors, is controversial because it is supposed that the scheme will attract Sinhalese colonists. In Ethiopia, a major effect of a land reform was to take land away from Amhara and distribute it to Galla, and for a time the revolution was suspected of being a Galla plot.\textsuperscript{11} While Nigeria was under civilian rule in the early 1960s, ethnicity entered into court-martial practice. Army officers accused of misappropriating funds could only be tried if men of other ethnic groups were also standing trial.\textsuperscript{12} These examples lend support to the frequently heard refrain in divided societies that almost any issue, any phenomenon, can suddenly "turn ethnic" or "turn communal."

The salience of ethnicity is reflected, too, in the segmented organizational structure of ethnically divided societies. This applies to the structure of economic organization, as it does to political organization.

Capital and labor are often organized on ethnic lines. Fukienese entrepreneurs in Hong Kong, Malayalee clerks in Bombay, and Ibo plantation laborers in Equatorial Guinea were all mobilized into their economic activity on the basis of ethnic affinity. Consequently, it comes as no surprise that, in Malaysia, for example, there are separate Malay Chambers of Commerce and Chinese Chambers of Commerce or that, in sev-


eral countries, cooperative societies are usually controlled by one or another ethnic group; if they are not, internal tensions may soon make them so.\textsuperscript{13} Trade unions are also commonly monoethnic, especially if an occupation or craft is dominated by a single group. In Fiji, the miners-workers' union is mainly Fijian; the canegrowers' federation, mainly Indian; and there are two teachers' unions, one for each group.\textsuperscript{14} Unions that start out multiethnic are subject to schism along ethnic lines. In Kenya, waterfront workers from Coastal ethnic groups left the Luo-led Dockworkers' Union to form their own union; in Zimbabwe, where a railwaymen's union was led by a Ndebele, branches representing Shona workers assumed their dues were "lining Ndebele pockets in Bulawayo, and they rebelled and broke away."\textsuperscript{15} In Jos, Northern Nigeria, the first miners' unions were Ibo-dominated. Later, Hausa and Birom workers formed separate unions corresponding to the occupations in which each group was clustered and paralleling the political party preferences of each group.\textsuperscript{16}

As this also suggests, organizational pluralism is strongly reflected in party systems. In name or in fact, ethnically based parties have grown up, often with perfectly irreconcilable aims. By the time of independence, there were essentially Ibo, Yoruba, and Hausa-dominated parties in Nigeria, East Indian and Creole parties in Guyana and Trinidad, Sinhalese and Tamil parties in Sri Lanka, Malay and Chinese parties in Malaysia. Perhaps more revealing of the pervasive character of ethnic affiliations is the tendency of avowedly nonethnic parties to be captured by one or another ethnic constituency. The tendency affects parties all along the political spectrum. The Communist Party has been dominated by Ansaris in the Sudan, by Sinhalese in Sri Lanka, by Javanese in Indonesia, by Greeks in Cyprus, and by Chinese in Malaysia. In various Indian

\textsuperscript{13} See, e.g., R. S. Milne, "Guyana's Co-Operative Republic" (unpublished paper, Univ. of British Columbia, n.d.), 15, 22–23, pointing out that cooperatives are dominated by Afro-Guyanese. In Tanzania, rural cooperative societies were often torn apart by ethnic factions competing for benefits. The "villagization" policy of the government was adopted, in part, to eliminate this ethnic competition. Interview, Dar es Salaam, Jan. 1980.


states, the Communists have appealed to various ethnic constituencies. In Punjab, the Communists have been a party of Sikhs, especially of the prosperous Jat caste; in Kerala, a party of the poorer Ezhava; in Assam, a party of Bengalis; and in Tripura, alternately a party of indigenous hill people and later of Bengali migrants, but never of both. The Socialists have had the same experience. When there was party competition in Guinea, the Socialists were Fulani; in the Ivory Coast, they were Bété; and in Congo (Brazzaville), they were Mbochi. All of these parties were affiliated with the French Socialists, but the local ethnic context was crucial in determining the limited scope of their support. And so it has been for Muslim political parties. Although Pakistan and Indonesia are overwhelmingly Muslim countries, support for Muslim parties has been ethnically differentiated, strongest among Urdu-speakers in Pakistan and among certain Sumatran groups in Indonesia. Ethnic affinities constitute an obvious organizational link in divided societies. By the same token, ethnic antipathies dictate that a party identified with one ethnic group repels members of antagonistic groups, who are then attracted to other parties.

Revolts and insurgencies, although ostensibly inspired by class ideology, have sometimes derived their impetus from ethnic aspirations and apprehensions instead. The independence movement in Guinea-Bissau was a movement of Balante, with no appreciable support among the Fula. The core of Mozambique’s anti-colonial army was recruited from the Makonde in the North of the country, while the political leadership of the movement came heavily from the Shangana of the South. The Angolan movement was split three ways, among the Kumbundu of the Center, who gained power, and the Bakongo of the North and Ovambo of the South, who continued their guerrilla fighting after independence. In Namibia, SWAPO is also a movement of Ovambo, and in Zimbabwe


the bulk of Robert Mugabe’s support is from the Shona majority, while most of Joshua Nkomo’s is from the Ndebele minority. In Laos, the Pathet Lao relied heavily on the hostility of hill tribes to the Mekong Lao, and the Cham Muslims of Cambodia gave only equivocal support to the Khmer Rouge. The organization and behavior of the rebellious Union des populations du Cameroun in the late 1950s were greatly influenced by the “widely differing tribal cultures and structures” of its main participants, the Bassa and the Bamiléké. In composition, spirit, and leadership, the Communist insurrection in Malaysia was a Chinese movement, just as the Huk rebellion in the Philippines was confined to the Pampangan ethnic group of Central Luzon. The Kwilu revolt in Zaire possessed, in addition to its millenarian social objectives, an element of ethnic deprivation. Close analysis of the 1971 insurgency in Sri Lanka reveals significant ethnic elements. Though fighting was extensive, no major incidents occurred in the Tamil areas of the North and East, for few Tamils participated. Nor did Sinhalese Christians participate in proportion to their numbers, since the revolt was almost entirely conducted by Sinhalese Buddhists. The Karava caste, disproportionately Christian, was likewise underrepresented, but a powerful rebel leader was Karava, and it seems “he made rather subtle attempts to build up a leadership based on loyalty to the Karava caste.” The participants in

20. See, e.g., Africa Research Bulletin, May 15, 1976, p. 3999. There are, in addition, pertinent subethnic differences. The Karanga subgroup, a majority of the Shona, is most influential in Mugabe’s party, driving some of the Zezuru subgroup to align with Nkomo’s heavily Ndebele party.


the Azahari revolt in Brunei (the aim of which was to oppose the creation of Malaysia and to create instead a larger Brunei) were predominantly Coastal Kedayans: "In fact the whole area covered by the 1962 rebellion can be placed on the map and exactly fitted in with the distribution of Kedayans." 27 The particularism of all these movements is at once a source of organizational cohesion and an important limitation on their ability to generalize their support.

In societies where ethnicity suffuses organizational life, virtually all political events have ethnic consequences. Where parties break along ethnic lines, elections are divisive. Where armed forces are ethnically fragmented, military coups, ostensibly to quell disorder or to end corruption, may be made to secure the power of some ethnic groups at the expense of others. Whole systems of economic relations can crystallize around opportunities afforded and disabilities imposed by government policy on particular ethnic groups. In Fiji, for example, Indians, about half the population, are not permitted to own land. Consequently, they must lease agricultural land from Fijians. "The growing pressure on the better leases meant that some of these were sub-let at very high rents, or were transferred under the burden of premiums which forced the incoming tenant to over-farm the land in order to get his money back. Hence, the system brought indebtedness and bad agriculture." 28 In such societies, even despotism assumes an unmistakably ethnic form. When Macias Nguema Biyogo of Equatorial Guinea began a reign of terror that resulted in the flight of nearly half the population, the violence, like that of Idi Amin in Uganda and Jean-Bédel Bokassa in the Central African Republic, was directed by a militia drawn from his own ethnic group, and the victims were ethnically defined. 29

In divided societies, ethnic conflict is at the center of politics. Ethnic divisions pose challenges to the cohesion of states and sometimes to peaceful relations among states. Ethnic conflict strains the bonds that sustain civility and is often at the root of violence that results in looting, death, homelessness, and the flight of large numbers of people. In divided societies, ethnic affiliations are powerful, pervasive, passionate, and

27. Tom Harrisson, Background to a Revolt: Brunei and the Surrounding Territory (pamphlet; n.p. [Brunei?], 1963), 21.
THE CASE FOR
COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

The increasing prominence of ethnic loyalties is a development for which neither statesmen nor social scientists were adequately prepared. Here and there, as the colonialists departed the new states, constitution-makers accorded protections to minorities, and in one or two notable cases concluded that the only adequate protection was political separation. But generally such proposals were rejected on the ground that they would foster rather than heal enmities. Rarely was it anticipated that the ethnic cleavage might become a principal line of political division, one that could preempt other cleavages. Especially after the experience of World War II, it was thought that the industrialized countries had outgrown political affiliation based on ethnicity, and anti-colonial movements elsewhere had created an appearance of unity that was slow to dissipate even after independence was won. When the force of ethnic affiliations was acknowledged, ethnic conflict was often treated as if it were a manifestation of something else: the persistence of traditionalism, the stresses of modernization, or class conflict masquerading in the guise of ethnic identity.

Part of the explanation for the many shortcomings in our understanding of ethnicity is the episodic character of ethnic conflict itself. It comes and goes, suddenly shattering periods of apparent tranquility. The suddenness of the phenomenon helps explain the lag in understanding it. As scholarship is reactive, the spilling of ink awaits the spilling of blood.

Yet, some share of the burden must also rest with what Walker Connor has delicately called "the predispositions of the analyst." The study of ethnic conflict has often been a grudging concession to something distasteful, largely because, especially in the West, ethnic affiliations have been in disrepute, for deep ideological reasons I shall elaborate at a later point. Until recently, the field of ethnic relations has been a backwater of the social sciences, and the first response to the rising tide of ethnic conflict was to treat it as an epiphenomenon.

The need for comparative analysis is compelling, not merely because events have overtaken our ability to understand them—though that is reason enough—and not merely because ethnic conflict has been viewed through the lenses of categories that tend to blur the phenomenon by