

March 10, 2005

## 11 ETHNIC CONFLICT II

Read: Stephen, 2000. The construction of indigenous “suspects”: militarization and the gendered and ethnic dimensions of human rights abuses in Southern Mexico.

Levi, 1999. Hidden transcripts among the Rarámuri: culture, resistance, and interethnic relations in northern Mexico.

### I. Introduction

A. Last session we constructed two typologies of ethnic conflict

1. First was based on the nature of the actors and the structure of the conflict
2. Second was based on history

B. We focused on armed conflict

C. Today we’ll look at both violent and other kinds of conflict

### II. What happens to armed ethnic conflict over time?

A. Stalemate

1. Neither side can eliminate the other
2. Discuss: examples of state vs. ethnic group?
  - a. Mapuche of Chile vs. Spain...a centuries-long stalemate
  - b. Seminoles in Florida and USA
  - c. Stalemate is comparatively rare—history contains a huge number of examples of states persecuting, exiling, killing ethnic groups to the point of extermination
    - 1) When they resist:
      - a) Colonial administration
      - b) Forced religious conversion

c) Economic policies (trade, labor, extractive industries like mining)

3. Inter-ethnic examples of stalemate?

B. The violent conflict ends

1. Either enough of the combatants get killed, or go away

C. Or the armed conflict gets routinized, channeled into non-violent forms

1. Pressure from international organizations like the UN, or other states is often brought to bear

a. To sign conventions, peace accords, treaties, etc.

1) Rwanda

b. Lead to political structures being set up

c. Examples?

1) Palestinian-Israeli conflict: Oslo, Dayton, "Road Map" discussions

d. In some cases violence is employed during "routinization"—UN bombing during the conflict in former Yugoslavia

1) Responding to the huge problem of "ethnic cleansing" in Bosnia, Serbia, Croatia

2. Mexico: the San Andrés Peace Accords

a. Important

1) For example, how the state defines ethnic groups might be negotiated during these discussions

2) Nagel's point as well as Stephen's

d. Note that the Mexican indigenous people didn't want to secede

1) They wanted to be included

- 2) “Jamás un México sin nosotros”—“Never again a Mexico without us”
  - 3) They were accused by Zedillo of being secessionist, of “balkanizing” Mexico
3. Discuss: why is outside pressure so often needed?
- a. Forging temporary unity out of diversity is difficult
  - b. How to deal with the historical power differentials between the various ethnic groups?
  - c. Save face: can claim being forced to come to the table, or “offer we couldn’t refuse”—very attractive inducements are offered
- D. There is no guarantee that “equality” or “parity” will prevail
1. Violent conflict can end by becoming routinized in the form of a police state
  2. Repression, jails, intimidation are ways of routinizing violence
  3. Sheer force can be quite successful at quelling inter-ethnic violence
    - a. A point often made about relatively tranquil socialist Central Europe and what happened after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of Soviet-dominated socialist governments like Marshall Tito’s of Yugoslavia
    - b. Or Spain under Franco after Spanish Civil War
- E. Frequently articulated goals:
1. Getting the parties to negotiate
    - a. “Getting to ‘yes’”
    - b. There’s a whole industry that studies and facilitates mediation, negotiation
    - c. Sometimes these professionals are called in to decrease ethnic conflict

2. Educating the warring parties
  - a. To understanding the history, logic and structure of a conflict
  - b. Have a clearer, more objective understanding of what's at stake
  - c. Assumption is that correct information about the other will lead to less prejudice
3. Change mentalities, sentiments
  - a. Tolerance, etc.
  - b. Embarrassment in front of the modern world<sup>1</sup>

### III. Ethnic conflict more generally:

- A. Goals behind those engaging in ethnic conflict that involves the state in some way tend to be:
  1. More effective control of a population by the state (and the state is run by one ethnic group)
    - a. Ethiopia
  2. Control of a state by a group
    - b. Sudan's woes
  3. End to control by others
- B. Ethnic conflict not involving the state—more local
  1. Rarámuri case
  2. Immigration conflicts:
    - a. The resentment of Turks in Germany (which periodically flares up into violence)

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<sup>1</sup> An example of international embarrassment producing change inside a country: an anti-lynching campaign during the 1890s by African-American journalist Ida B. Wells in Europe, where she lectured has been argued to have contributed to a gradual decline of frequency of lynchings (Joane Nagel, 2003. *Race, Ethnicity, and Sexuality: Intimate Intersections, Forbidden Frontiers*. New York: Oxford: 114).

- b. Increasingly throughout Europe
        - 1) As nations join European Union and restrictions on travel are lifted
        - 2) Illegal immigration increases, as well
      - 3. Discuss: other types?
  - C. Ideological factors helping to produce high frequency of ethnic conflict
    - 1. Complicated relationship between individual and collective rights
    - 2. Rights are usually cast in an individualistic idiom, or discourse
      - a. E.g., competition, even equality itself
      - b. Western liberal theory values self-determination and equality of the individual
      - c. But the struggles over claims are advanced on a collective basis
- IV. Summing up: Why so much ethnic conflict in present-day world?
- A. Clearly not due to atavistic, “tribal” affiliations, allegiances—“age-old” feuds between groups that keep them from joining modern society
  - B. Colonialism, empire-building are major factors
    - 1. Spain and Portugal, later other European nations; Russia expansion as well
    - 2. Eller’s discussion of Rwanda
  - C. Also notions about “national self-determination” that developed during the 19<sup>th</sup> century
  - D. Post-colonial factors
    - 1. From WW I on, empires and large states have been dismembered in favor of smaller units

2. President Woodrow Wilson established the doctrine of self-determination<sup>2</sup>
    - a. The League of Nations was established
  3. The end of WW II brought about the end of colonial control in Asia and Africa
  4. The increasing development of notion of equality makes ethnic subordination increasingly illegitimate
  5. The trajectory is one of an increasing number of, at times, very small states
  6. Certainly fueled by ethnic conflict
    - a. Not all of it is violent
- E. It's clear than when powerful empires no longer:
1. Subordinate ethnic, religious, etc. communities
  2. Nor repress ethnic conflict (e.g., central Europe under the Soviets)
  3. And where there are resources, benefits to be claimed
  4. There will be competition and conflict
    - a. Ethnogenesis likely to occur (strengthening, reviving, re-defining ethnic identity)
    - b. And ideologies that justify the struggle will develop
      - 1) Some of them extremely pernicious
- F. In the modern world, ethnicity is one of those forces that is community-building in moderation, community-destroying in excess
1. And cases of "excess" derive from forces outside, not inside the group
  2. Such as the present system of modern states
  3. This system provides the framework within which conflict occurs

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<sup>2</sup> This discussion follows Jason Clay, 1990. What's a Nation? Latest Thinking. *Mother Jones*, 15, 7: 28-30.

- a. Most states that were never colonies are diverse
- b. And when many of the former colonies became independent
- c. It was not at all clear which population within these countries could claim ownership and “nation-build”
- d. The model of “nation,” “a people” was well established
- e. How to fashion a unified “imagined community” out of these ingredients?