

Who owns the state?

Understanding ethnic conflict in post-colonial societies

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ABSTRACT. This article aims to integrate different explanatory approaches to ethnic conflicts: studies on ethnic clientelism and discrimination, on political mobilisation by minority elites, on unequal relations between ethnoregions, and on the effects that different political systems have on the dynamics of ethnic conflicts. For each of these approaches, the relevant research is reviewed and illustrated by selected examples from post-imperial societies. Propositions that seem empirically plausible are integrated into a comparative model which is in turn based on a specific theory of political modernity. The premise holds that the politicisation of ethnicity is to be interpreted as a central aspect of modern state-building. For only when 'people' and state are mutually related within the ideal of a legitimate order does the question arise for which ethnic group the state has to act, who is regarded as its legitimate owner, and who is entitled to have access to its services. Ethnic conflicts can thus be interpreted as struggles for the collective goods of the nation-state. Within this paradigmatical frame, a step-by-step analysis at a medium level of abstraction tries to show under which conditions state-building leads to an ethnicisation of political conflicts and in some cases to an escalation into rebellions and wars.

It is the very process of the formation of a sovereign civil state that . . . stimulates sentiments of parochialism, communalism, racialism, and so on, because it introduces into society a valuable new prize over which to fight and a frightening new force with which to contend. Geertz (1963: 120)

Since the end of the Cold War, ethnonationalist conflicts have outweighed all other forms of political confrontations. The intransigence of ethnonationalist politics in Bosnia has led to catastrophe; at the southern borders of

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the former Soviet Union – in the Caucasus and in Tajikistan – a bushfire of separatist battles has been ignited; Sri Lanka finds no more respite than do Burma's hinterland or Southern Sudan. This list could easily be extended: since the 1950s the number of ethnic conflicts has continued to increase (Gurr 1993a: 101), and in three-quarters of all wars world-wide between 1985 and 1992 ethnonationalist factors predominated (Scherrer 1994a: 74). Gurr lists a total of forty-nine fields of ethnopolitical conflict for the 1993–4 period alone (Gurr 1994: 369–74).

Why, on the one hand, are these conflicts so frequent, and how, on the other, have some multiethnic societies such as Switzerland managed to regulate relationships peacefully among the various groups (see Linder 1994), despite considerable tensions at times?¹ Contrary to a widely held view (e.g. Gellner 1991; Nairn 1993), these differences cannot be explained by the degree of ethnic or cultural heterogeneity, for Switzerland is the former Yugoslavia's equal in every way regarding linguistic and cultural diversity.² Furthermore, cultures among other embattled groups differ even less than in Yugoslavia or Switzerland: Tutsi and Hutu, for example, share the same language, believe in the same deities, have lived side-by-side for centuries, and show only minimal differences in their everyday cultures (Laely 1994).³

How are we to understand the varying role that ethnicity plays in the political life of contemporary societies? Only a comparative analysis can help to answer this question. Yet both the general public and social scientists are at a loss to fully understand the sudden spread of ethnonationalist wars, which arose as if released from Pandora's box.⁴ Our models of rational political actors (cf. Rogowski 1985; Hechter 1995; Wintrobe 1995) or our socio-structural precision arithmetic hardly suffice to fathom the exuberant patriotism and bitter hatred which appear to supply the emotional fuel to these conflicts (Douglass 1988). However, although we might never really understand the 'logic of the infernal machine' (Kuper 1977: 19) working behind the events in Rwanda or in former Yugoslavia, we could nevertheless try to analyse how social and political constellations emerge that make such developments possible.

Thus, I will try to develop a comparative model out of existing individual theses to help understand how ethnic differences become politicised and escalate into ethnic conflicts. For pragmatic reasons the discussion will be limited to non-Western, post-imperial societies. Furthermore, this can be merely an exploratory approach – not a theory already founded in empirical detail. The various examples are not presented as case studies to firmly establish a point but merely as illustrations of arguments. Whenever available, however, I will include the results of systematic comparative studies.

The first section presents the general context of our analysis: the emergence of modern nation-states and the corresponding changes in the principles of political legitimacy. We must then examine the conditions

under which ethnic groups are perceived as communities sharing a common destiny and under which politics become a matter of intercommunal conflict. These conditions will be discussed in two steps. First, the circumstances will be reviewed under which political leaders appeal to ethnonational solidarity in an attempt to gain a following, so that ethnocultural distinctions become laden with conflictive significance. In a second step, we will study the factors that enable such discourse on injustice to fall on fertile ground and thus cause political groups to form along ethnic lines. In a fourth section, we will seek what determines escalation of such conflicts – factors within the political systems in question since, for the sake of simplicity, we will disregard international influences here.⁵

‘Like over like’ – political legitimacy in modern nation-states

Let us first outline the general context within which the politicisation of ethnic diversity has to be analysed. This frame is formed by the institution of the modern state: one built all across the Third World since independence and in the former Soviet empire since its dissolution. In the new states, various groups live together which can in some cases look back upon a century’s history of reciprocal relationships, dependencies and confrontations. We must thus assume that ethnic distinctions already existed – moulded by precolonial history and altered during colonisation – which were in part already politicised (see, e.g. Vail 1989), as an impressive body of comparative literature has shown (see e.g. Armstrong 1982; A. Smith 1996). Therefore, comparative analysis cannot take place in an historical vacuum; there is no zero hour of the politicisation of ethnic differences.

On the other hand, ethnic relations take on completely new dynamics within the sphere of nation-state activity – i.e. of a state aspiring to represent a nation (Young 1976, ch. 3). This is shown by the development of some of the oldest European conflicts that are today classified as being of an ‘ethnic’ character: the fight for the preservation of independence and privileges once granted by the Spanish crown to the local communities of the strategically sensitive Basque region is transformed into the struggle of a ‘Basque people’ for an autonomous state (Heiberg 1989, part 1); similarly, the conflict in Northern Ireland originally developed within the framework of medieval relationships between (indigenous) peasants and (conquering) overlords and their dependants; as soon as control over a modern nation-state was at stake, the dynamics and lines of conflict were realigned and the groups in conflict became ‘ethnoreligious’ (O’Sullivan 1986: 34–48; O’Day 1993).

The politicisation of ethnic differences during the process of modern state formation can also be illustrated by aggregated data. Africa south of the Sahara allows us to examine the relation between state-building and ethnic

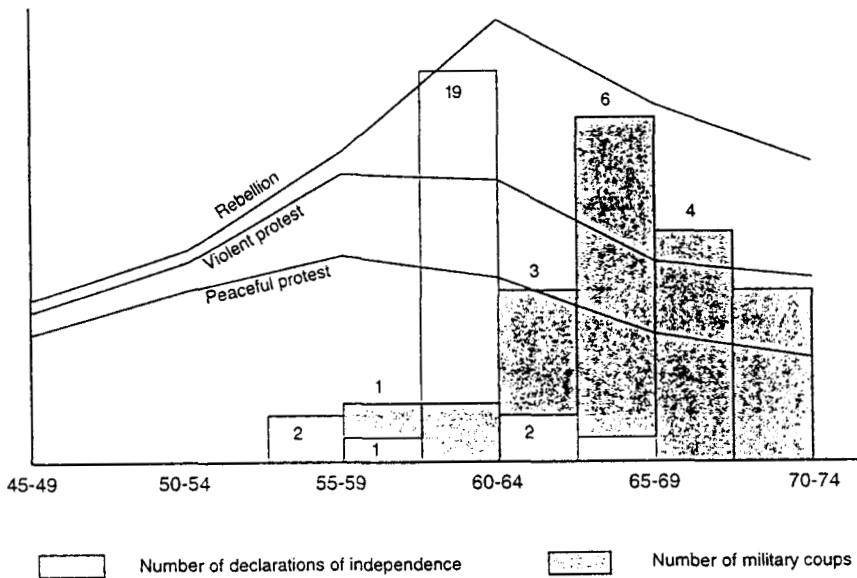


Figure 1. Ethnic conflicts, state-building and military coups in sub-saharan Africa, 1945 to 1975

conflicts, since most of the declarations of independence fell into the time span where reliable data on the development of ethnic tensions are available. Figure 1 (taken from Wimmer 1996c) shows the change in the intensity of ethnic conflicts (based on Gurr 1993a: 106) as well as the number of declarations of independence and military coups (based on Nohlen 1987: 74f.). Without anticipating too many of the findings of the coming sections, the figure can be interpreted as follows: in the decade before independence, incidents of rebellion as well as of violent and peaceful protests based on ethnic claims began to rise sharply in number; during the years immediately before independence, they became radicalised and more violent (peaceful forms being replaced by violent forms), reaching a peak after the establishment of the independent states. Within a further decade, many conflicts were suppressed by authoritarian regimes, indicated by the rising number of military coups and the declining intensity of ethnic strife.

Why should there be such a direct relationship between state-building and ethnic conflict? It is the institution of the modern democratic state that first raises the question who may belong to its nation, because that state embodies the idea and political practice of *national* sovereignty: the state should, so to speak, be dyed by a nation's colour and designate the 'people' in whose name it rules over its territory. By contrast, the legitimacy of multiethnic empires rested on universalistic, hierarchical concepts of political representation.

The rulers of colonial empires saw themselves standing on top of a ladder that differentiated lesser from more civilised peoples; they were thus obliged to help the backward ones to climb up the steps of evolution by implementing a benevolent policy of colonial integration. Christian kings, Muslim caliphs and sultans were by their noble birth predestined to execute God's will on earth and to guarantee that commoners could live a decent and peaceful life. Communist cadres ruled over vast empires by virtue of their vanguard role in the revolutionary transformation of the world. In a modern nation-state, however, access to state power is to be given to those who represent the collective will of the *national* community (Modelski 1972: 9–108). The rule of French-speaking lords over German-speaking peasants is now seen as a scandal. Ibo peasants should no longer be governed by British administrators. A ruling class of 'ethnic others' like the Mamelukes or the Janissaries becomes illegitimate. Russian party elites should be replaced in Lithuania by a government of Lithuanian background. Like should rule over like (Geertz 1977: 249–53; Bendix 1979; Rothschild 1981: 11–16, 227–35; Kedourie 1988).

The ideal of popular sovereignty and the claim to national self-determination were inter-twined in the political thought of the nationalist movements of nineteenth-century Europe (Hermet 1996); they became the twin principles of modern European nation-states. After Wilson's adoption of the idea of national self-determination (Moynihan 1993, ch. 2), they spread around the globe and now form the ideological, political and juridical backbone of the world order of states (Cassese 1995).

It cannot be the aim of this article to discuss the details of this success story. I shall rather confine myself to analyse the consequences that the hegemony of the nation-state model had for political processes in post colonial societies. For when like has to be governed by like, a wholly new field of tension arises in which political groups form and the state exercises its power. Within this field the meaning of ethnic distinctions changes (Williams 1989). According to the view to be developed here, ethnic conflicts arise during the process of state formation, when a fight erupts over which 'people' the state should belong to. Our task is now to discover the determinants under which state-building leads to such a development and under which it can be avoided.⁶

The politicisation of ethnic difference

First let us determine more precisely how a bureaucracy as the main actor in the process of state-building takes on ethnic tints. Two variants can be distinguished. When a majority population with a tradition of political centralisation, a so-called 'state people' (*Staatsvolk*), takes over the apparatus, ethnicisation of the state and bureaucracy occurs automatically.⁷ In Argentina or Egypt, for instance, it was never debated if Indian

minorities in the pampas or Nubians should be candidates for the states' nation. The new state classes automatically understood themselves to be Argentinians or Arabs and never really questioned in which peoples' name they exercised power. A similar effect can also be brought about by the introduction of federalism. For example, minority policies in the Soviet Union, with a kind of quota system, granted the titular nations preferential access to the bureaucratic-political apparatus of their republics (Roeder 1991; for Nigeria see O'Connell 1967).

But where conditions of majority and power are unclear and where there is no *ethnie* that can be transformed into a state's people – thus the second variant – ethnicisation of the bureaucracy can also occur through formation of client groups, as is shown in the following. Bureaucratic practice opens up chances to legitimise governmental power which did not exist to the same extent in the courts of premodern empires: positions within administration, infrastructure, import and export licenses, public contracts and so on can be distributed selectively, which secures enduring support from the group of favourites. In other words, bureaucracy and economy⁸ can be politicised by clientelism, causing weak Third World states to risk losing their autonomy to interest groups (Migdal 1988).

If clientelist networks form around ethnic solidarities, the latter also gain a new political significance where majority proportions are unclear. But why should the new bureaucrats give members of their own ethnic group preferential treatment⁹ rather than spread their favours over various groups? On the one hand, members of one's own ethnic group are most likely to be given preference in terms of trust (Cohen 1974) because according to their own self-understanding ethnic groups wish to represent a kind of extended kinship group whose members are obligated to mutual aid.¹⁰ On the other hand, the reverse expectation is also placed on new magistrates: that they take care of 'their own' (Sithole 1986; Hyden and Williams 1994), now that the British, the Ottomans, or the Russians are leaving the place and government should be responsive to the demands of 'the people'.¹¹ For these reasons the formation of strategic groups within a bureaucracy¹² is likely to occur along ethnic lines, and one observes a general compartmentalisation of institutions on communal grounds (e.g. in Nigeria, see Young 1976: 467ff.).

This tendency is particularly marked where other non-ethnic criteria for selective awarding of bureaucratic benefits are lacking because a civil society consisting of parties, associations and other interest groups could not be established (Geertz 1963; Gellner 1991). The sequence of historical developments determines whether this is likely to be the case. Where a state bureaucracy develops before democratic institutions can form (van Amersfoort and van der Wusten 1981: 483), ethnicity can be used by political elites in the very process of state-building (Enloe 1978) and therefore becomes quickly politicised. This was not the case, for reasons to be determined, in the Christian parts of the Philippines (Young 1976; ch.

9; Geiger 1994). It happened, however, in most of the ethnically heterogeneous countries in the Third World which inherited colonial bureaucracies, and also in the successor states of the former Soviet Union, explaining why the ethnicisation of bureaucracy there has become practically ubiquitous.

It is interesting to observe that in the course of this process, precolonial clientelist systems which previously had a trans-ethnic structure also become transformed as described above.¹³ For example, the pre-colonial kingdom of Burundi owed its stability to the fact that the clans of various ethnic groups were bound together in a comprehensive network of clientelist relationships balanced out by the king. Laely (1994: 28) shows how this clientelist pyramid was restratified: Tutsi elites, systematically promoted by the Belgian colonial administration, began during the course of state modernisation and bureaucratisation to favour members of their own ethnic group and to discriminate against the Hutu majority. The trans-ethnic clientelism among clans and lineages, which had pervaded the society, was replaced with an intra-ethnic clientelism among persons.

This is thus the first determining factor in politicising ethnic differences: the ethnicisation of state bureaucracy. To lead up to the second condition, let us view this bureaucracy as an arena contested primarily by the educated middle classes. Research in Trinidad, Sri Lanka, Malaysia and the Ivory Coast has shown that at least three-quarters of all secondary school students strive towards positions in the civil service, while only a few envision future jobs as professionals or in the informal sector (Horowitz 1985: 114). This is hardly surprising considering the economic weakness of peripheral countries and the high risk involved in self-employment. According to other studies, ethnic prejudice is most clearly developed among members of these middle classes who have bureaucratic aspirations (Horowitz 1991: 140). Thus in the relevant milieu the formation of strategic groups along ethnic lines also results in corresponding distinctions between 'us' and 'others'.

Private competition becomes a matter of public politics when individual ethnic groups contain educated middle classes which see themselves as systematically disadvantaged in the struggle over access to state power. This represents the second determining factor; here again, I distinguish between the two variants – the ethnically deeply divided societies and societies with majority states peoples.

In many *ethnically very heterogeneous* societies, colonial practices of *divide et impera* gave rise to such a disadvantaged educated elite. For example, members of early Christianised or English-speaking ethnic minorities were often given preference in colonial administrations, such as Ibo in Nigeria, Baganda in Uganda, Bengalis in East India, Ewe in Togo, Tamils in Sri Lanka, Sikhs in the British Indian Army and Tutsi in Burundi. During the post-colonial period, middle-class members of other ethnic groups, as latecomers to the struggle for positions within the state apparatus, were often left empty-handed and under-represented in the bureaucracy. Basing

their claims on the newly established ideal of democratic sovereignty and representation they began to demand a bigger piece of the state pie.

Similar conflicts can also arise in societies divided into *state peoples* with long traditions of political centralisation and several smaller, often tribally organised ethnic groups. Through a government's attempts at cultural integration by granting educational opportunities for all citizens as well as through economic development, an educated elite of previously excluded ethnic groups can emerge. It enters into direct competition with the established bureaucrats who close ranks, particularly during hard times (Smith 1979), and make 'passing' into the dominant group through complete cultural assimilation difficult (cf. Rothschild 1981, ch. 5). The minority elites then begin to protest against discrimination and soon question the ethnic basis of the existing state or demand one of their own. To illustrate this, we can point to the pan-Indian movement in Mexico (Wimmer 1993; 1995c, ch. 3), the Kurdish nationalists in urban Northern Iraq (Wimmer 1995b), the ethnonationalist awakenings of the Oromo in Ethiopia (Scherrer 1994b), minorities in the Soviet Republics (Roeder 1991) and Christian minority groups in southern Sudan (Gray 1971; Wirz 1982, ch. 2).

In the vast majority of all modern ethnic movements, slighted middle classes such as these play a prominent role, as numerous studies in the tradition of the so-called instrumentalist approach have emphasised (particularly Rabushka and Shepsle 1972; Brass 1985, 1991; Vail 1989).¹⁴ For they can formulate a discourse on injustice which refers to the fundamental principles of the modern state: sovereignty of the people and representational justice. And, thanks to their organisational capabilities, they give a political movement a long wind.¹⁵

The ethnicisation of political conflicts

So well established has it become in the literature of the last decades that the conclusion sounds like a truism: there is no lasting ethnic mobilisation without involvement of an educated elite. Less well known or even systematically overlooked especially by those taking the instrumentalist perspective is the fact that on the other hand successful mobilisation also depends on the grassroots members of an ethnic group. The example of most of Mexico's Indian regions shows that minority elites do not always succeed in winning over their co-ethnics for their goals and in generalising their view of the political world (Wimmer 1993; see also Anon. 1989; Lanoue 1992; Cohen 1978: 396–7; Macmillan 1989). However, as the third determining factor in charging ethnic differences with conflict, ethnic blocs superseding class and other sectoral divisions must form as political groups.

Of course, bloc formation never includes all whose origins label them as belonging to an ethnic group. Sarajevo clearly shows that bloc formation

does not necessarily include all circles even after the escalation of military conflict. For this reason, we must beware of interpreting ethnic conflicts as confrontations between entire ethnic groups. They should rather be defined as conflicts dominated by friend-or-foe semantics of an ethnonationalist type.

On the other hand, it would be just as inappropriate to attribute intensification of ethnic conflicts to manipulations of the political elites alone. For the direct course of violent conflicts also often shows that many ordinary people define themselves as members of an ethnic-national association of solidarity, declaring neighbours of other ethnic groups to be their number one personal enemies (Imhof 1996).¹⁶

We must therefore deal with one of the most difficult issues in the analysis of ethnic conflicts (Kasfir 1979; Newman 1991): under what conditions can people who play no direct role in the struggle for bureaucratic posts and sinecures be mobilised for an ethnonationalist project? Why do they contribute to the spread of conflict or sometimes – for example, through their vote (Horowitz 1985, part 3), even give impetus to ethnicising political life?

Explaining ethnic mobilisation: economic interests, primordial bonds, psychological needs or the power of ideology?

Many answers to this question have been suggested. For example, the desire for self-determination of all peoples has been conjured up as the driving force of world history (Varese 1983). However, this borrows only one of the ideological figures of nationalist movements without explaining how they come to be (see Elwert 1989, ch. 1 and 2; Wimmer 1995a, ch. 7). Conversely, in a position rarely held today, others have referred to the false consciousness shown by the lower classes, who do not recognise their true interests and follow the siren song of ethnic activists instead (Sklar 1967; Díaz-Polanco 1978; see discussion in Kasfir 1979; Wimmer 1995a: 144–9). Yet four explanatory approaches deserve serious consideration.¹⁷

(1) Most social scientists in the 1970s were convinced that mobilisation along ethnic-national lines could be successful where these lines separate socio-economic interest groups. Various forms of this approach can be found, depending on whether regions, fractions of classes or certain professional groups are seen as corresponding to an ethnic interest group. Hechter (Hechter and Levi 1979) developed a much discussed hypothesis which derives from dependency theory. The process of uneven development experienced by dependent nations also leads to political and cultural hierarchisation of regions. Hierarchisation is particularly conflict-laden and high in tension when it places various ethnic groups in opposition to each other. According to the second variant, the world market for labour power has torn ethnic groups from the fabric of their traditional cultural environment and placed them in ethnically segregated labour markets and

slums of the fast growing cities. In this way, class and sectoral interest groups coincide with ethnic communities. Ethnic conflicts are traced to intensified competitive group relations, to a breakdown in older patterns of segregated labour or housing markets¹⁸ (Bonacich 1974; O'Sullivan 1986; Olzak and Nagel 1986; Olzak 1993). Finally, Bonacich (1973) developed a model to explain why trading minorities are so often victims of ethnic violence.¹⁹ Trading minorities are more competitive, due to their ethnic and family relations,²⁰ and therefore suppress the general level of wages, leading to an outbreak of hostility.

Cohen (1974) tried to give a general answer to the question of why these different interest groups do not organise themselves as labour unions, parties or regional associations based on non-cultural criteria. According to Cohen, this is the case when interest groups cannot formally organise (i.e. with official membership, bureaucratic structures, etc.), either because this is not tolerated by the central power or because it runs contrary to basic cultural principles (for example in theocracies). In recent times, this style of argumentation has been formalised and systematised by economists seeking to explain the advantages of ethnic organisations by their low transaction costs (Wintrobe 1995).

The empirical shortcomings of the interest-group approach are clear by now. It is after all rare that all members of a politically mobilised ethnic group find themselves in a similar economic position (for references regarding this point see Bentley 1987: 40). More specifically, each of the variants above has its own empirical weaknesses: contrary to Hechter's theory of 'internal colonialism', most secessionist movements originated in ethno-regions which would hardly be capable of survival or which – like the Slovak part of former Czechoslovakia – even profit economically from the hitherto common state (Horowitz 1981: 194; cf. also Mayall and Simpson 1992; for contemporary Russia, see Graham Smith 1996: 401ff.).²¹ They strive for independence despite the considerable economic cost this would entail. Conversely, it is not, as claimed by Immanuel Wallerstein (1961: 88) and Peter Gourevitch (1979), always the more wealthy regions which tend towards secession.²² And not all economically privileged regions that have a negative balance sheet with respect to the central state develop secessionist desires (Horowitz 1985: 194).²³ The automatism of the 'trading-minorities' model is equally off the mark and fails to fit all examples: many trading minorities have lived for long periods without difficulties in their 'host' countries, and they are not involved at all in many cases of ethnic conflicts (see examples in Horowitz 1985: 113–24). Finally, conflicts over jobs or housing frequently disappear just as rapidly as they arise, and activists normally make no demands for changes in the basic rules of politics.²⁴ They are easily satisfied.²⁵ Without support from the educated elite such movements apparently lack the political resources with which to form a long-term perspective and to mobilise that large part of one's own ethnic group which does not see itself at the mercy of competition with

other ethnic groups in the struggle for individual goods such as workplaces or customers.²⁶

Thus, as several studies have shown (see Bélanger and Pinard 1991; Wimmer 1996a; 1997) and as will be developed later in this article, conflicts which are articulated by ethnonationalist semantics of 'friend or foe' are less concerned with economic and individual goods than with the political and legal goods of the modern nation-state (compare also the criticism by Williams 1989: 405–13).

(2) In a second explanatory approach, social psychological research plays an important role. Sherif's and Tajfel's experiments (cf. summary in Horowitz 1985, ch. 2) demonstrated that even groups formed arbitrarily for experimental purposes begin to act as rivals. Because ethnic status is given at birth and thus cannot be changed, this approach views the struggle for group prestige in ethnically heterogeneous societies as inevitable as soon as processes of uneven development foster rivalry between regions. Horowitz (1985), who has presented the most extensive and detailed comparative study of ethnic conflict to date, follows this line of argument, usually identified as the so-called 'primordialist' approach. The question remains as to why just *ethnic* distinctions gain this political significance (Banton 1994). Moreover, ethnic categories do not always represent static units, and attribution to an ethnic category does not always prohibit passing to another group (see references in Elwert 1989: 13–14; Wimmer 1995c, ch. 3.4; Baumann 1996: 18) or situational redefinition (Mercier 1965; Moerman 1965; Wallerstein 1965; Barth 1969; Nagata 1974; Sharp and Boonzaier 1994). Solidification of ethnic categories and dividing lines is often not the precondition but rather the *result* of their politicisation.

(3) In order to explain why ethnic identities can be mobilised so easily for political ends, psychological theories start from the assumption of a need for ego stabilisation through group identification, which is especially felt in times of rapid social change.²⁷ The problem of these approaches lies herein: although they do work out the motives or unconscious dynamics behind the devaluation of others, they cannot explain how one group becomes classified as foreign and another group as one's own. The boundaries between 'we' and 'they' can be drawn around family, kinship, acquaintance, class, region, ethnic group, nation or even 'race'. In addition, during times of radical social change, threatened identities can be stabilised by means of nativism uncoloured by ethnonationalism or by means of a religious fundamentalism.

(4) In search of an explanation, some writers have found inspiration in the works of Foucault and other post-structuralist philosophers. Connerton (1989), for example, argues that the bodily impressions left by public rituals such as national holidays become stored in the memory of the individual in such a manner that they evade reflective access. For this reason, he states, the discourse on national (or for our matter: ethnic) greatness takes on a natural plausibility, and people find it self-evident that they belong to a nation or ethnic group or even that they should fight for it.²⁸ Kapferer

(1989) also focuses on unconscious processes as he states that nationalist ideologies can relate to culture-specific, fundamental images of the social world and a community's place within it. More recently Smith (1992) also held that the 'power of ideology' plays a central role in explaining ethnonationalist mobilisation: thanks to myths of chosen people and visions of an historical mission, ethnic communities can withstand pressure to assimilate for centuries. According to Smith, this explains the ease with which ethnic groups can be mobilised politically if they perceive the honour of the community or even its cultural survival to be at risk. Ethnonationalists thus reconstruct a coherent new set of ideas from existing myths and histories. They do not invent traditions – as instrumentalists would have it – but revive them through their reinterpretations (Smith 1995).

Certainly such cultural elements of *longue durée* should be taken into account, as they are directly relevant to the politics of representation and thus contribute to structuring the political field. However, it is not enough to refer simply to the power of ethnonationalist discourse without answering why it proves very effective only under certain conditions and only for particular groups, while under other social and historical conditions ethnonationalist discourse falls on infertile ground or recedes into the background. Looking at successful movements conceals the fact that many ethnic communities did not experience a nationalist mobilisation, although there would be enough mythical material and prenationalist feelings of belonging available. The Aquitanians of France, who in the meantime have dissolved into the *Grande Nation*, the Vlachs of the Balkans (Winnifrith 1993) or the Valser of Switzerland could be cited as examples. (For non-European cases see Young (1976: 105–10), Wimmer (1995c: 70ff., 219–29)). Study of historically durable categories of community and their nationalist reinterpretations must therefore be combined with analysis of the process of state-building (cf. Zubaida 1989);²⁹ only in this way can we gain an understanding of the non-discursive aspects that determine whether ethnonationalist constructions develop and get accepted (Wimmer 1997).

Struggling over collective goods

According to the view to be developed here, the conflictive charging of ethnic differences is connected with the struggle for the resources of the modern state: territorial sovereignty, protection from arbitrary violence, social and legal security, political representation, financial redistribution, economic infrastructure, the symbols of independence and state power. But the question remains how and why individuals claim entitlement to such state resources *qua* members of a particular ethnic group – and neither as individuals nor as members of a social class. The answer is closely connected to the ethnicisation of bureaucracy, as discussed above, which has direct consequences for persons outside the state apparatus: for farmers and craftsmen, small-scale entrepreneurs and workers, when applying for credit,

gaining permits, legalising ownership of a piece of land, or taking an examination to enter higher education. All involve considerable difficulties when bureaucrats exercise ethnic preference politics and only a few of 'one's own people' sit within the apparatus.

According to some research in countries experiencing severe ethnic tension, the population generally expects government officials to treat members of their own ethnic group preferentially (Horowitz 1985: 194; Hyden and Williams 1994). Prior to the first riots in Sri Lanka, many Sinhalese were convinced that Tamil government employees would specially earmark documents of 'their own people' so that their requests would be handled with higher priority.³⁰ In addition, dealings with a bureaucracy and particularly the legal system are complicated when communication must take place in a foreign language or when use of one's own language is even prohibited – as, for example, until recently the use of Kurdish in Turkey. For this reason, the language issue very frequently joins the interests of the middle classes – whose chances of advancing within the bureaucracy are directly dependent upon the choice of official idioms – to the interests of broader segments of the population.

Thus, resources and services dispensed by an ethnicised bureaucracy do not appear to be *public* benefits available to all, but rather *collective* goods³¹ attainable only by those who belong to the 'proper' ethnic group. Competition for state resources is not seen as a matter concerning individuals or classes but rather whole ethnic groups.³² The boundaries between them harden, and multiple identities become increasingly reduced to a single ethnic dimension.³³ Not until the final stage of this process of 'social closure' (Weber 1922: 23ff.) are political associations of loyalty in fact reduced to ethnic categories.³⁴

That governmentally regulated competition for state resources plays a crucial role in ethnicising politics is also shown by examples in which smaller units began to form ethnic groups according to colonial district or other administrative boundaries – in this way often corresponding to the categories of colonial ethnographers (Geertz 1963).³⁵ Thus many processes of ethnogenesis follow the divisions of ethnicised bureaucracy.³⁶

Formation of ethnic groups is for this reason comparable to establishing national communities in the process of European state building – with the crucial difference that multiple ethnicisation of bureaucracy prevented generalisation of a particular *ethnos* (Wimmer 1996b). Even where majority relations were clear, the Third World state was usually the heir to a colonial bureaucracy that developed *before* democratic institutions and a strong civil society could take roots. This is why the new elites relied heavily on ethnic ties in their efforts of state-building and legitimation (Enloe 1978; 1986). The state apparatus was therefore not sufficiently independent from the surrounding social forces – in contrast to many of their European models – to be able to offer social security, legal protection and welfare for all citizens independently of their ethnic background, which would have allowed them

to transfer their expectations of solidarity to a large national group (Geertz 1963; Ihonvbere 1994).

Thus, the much-discussed nation-building in weak and multiple-ethnicised states had little chance of going beyond the euphoric conjuration of national unity during the struggle for independence and immediately following its achievement (for Zimbabwe, see Sithole 1980; for Guatemala, Smith 1990). Instead, the ethnicisation of bureaucracy quickly resulted in the transformation of many ethnic categories into actual groups of loyalty, instead of one national entity. Once ethnic identity and political interests bind together in this manner, the symbolic sphere becomes a battlefield for competing ethnonationalist demands; bitter struggle takes place over who, in the name of the state, may speak his own language, whose emblems will appear on the national flag, because these are signs indicating 'ownership' of the state (Denich 1994).

However, there is another aspect in the process of state-building that leads to social closure along ethnic lines and thus reinforces the ethnicisation of political conflicts.³⁷ Up to now, we have described the state as a gigantic dairy cow; fighting over its milk becomes the preoccupation of the various elite factions in a bureaucracy and their ethnic clients. But, in a phrase once coined by a Basque nationalist, the cow grazes in one field but has her udder in another. The resources of a state are not only distributed but must also be collected. For the broad masses of a population, unequal distribution of the *costs* of the state frequently plays a more important role than distribution of profit. Costs include taxes paid by a particular region which can be disproportionately high in relation to governmental expenditures profiting that region. In the view of the common people, raw materials which are monopolised and used by the state also count as costs, because they are deprived of their use; the same holds for land that, in the course of governmental resettlement projects, is lost to outsiders.

However, regional distribution of state costs has at least in principle nothing to do with ethnic distinctions. We have already seen that political dynamics cannot be predicted from the structure of the hierarchy of ethnoregions alone. Independently of the objective balance sheet of economic relations to the central state, state costs then become the fuel for *ethnic* conflicts if they appear to profit 'others', because the state 'belongs' to another ethnic group which alone enjoys its advantages (Young 1976: 522–3). For this reason, conflicts over distribution are more apt to be reinterpreted as ethnic conflicts if state classes engage in a nationalist discourse which symbolically excludes one's own group.³⁸ This is all the more probable since the ethnicisation of the state apparatus leads to an asymmetrical symbolic representation of the 'national' cultural heritage (Williams 1989). In some cases, distributional conflicts can even be interpreted within a framework of historically set concepts of the enemy (Smith 1986b: 30–1, 37–41; Denich 1994). The more intense competition over state resources becomes and the more the situation culminates in a

general societal crisis, the more conflict definitions seem to come under the influence of such historical patterns of perception and essentialising semantics of the 'other' (Imhof 1993). It is at this precise point in the process that the long memory of an *ethnie's* history – the favourite subject of an entire research tradition – helps to kindle the fire of ethnonational conflict.

The example of Mindanao illustrates this point. From the beginning of this century, Christian farmers have migrated to this island divided between Moslem sultanates and non-Moslem tribes. In the 1950s and 1960s this migration was promoted and organised on a large scale by the government. The original inhabitants – whether Christians, Moslems, or 'animists' – defended themselves, often in concert, against the intruders. At the beginning of the 1970s, however, perception of the conflict and the corresponding alliances changed. No longer was this a matter of individual land ownership. Rather those involved saw themselves as fighting in a new round of a centuries old religious war – the struggle of small Moslem states against the Spanish and those inheriting the Spanish culture and tradition of state, the Christian Filipinos (Geiger 1994, based on George 1980).

One additional mechanism which contributes to such a polarisation of friend–enemy perception along ethnic lines is the fact that violent acts can be aimed at any member of an ethnic group. *All* members thus become potential victims, and the *actual* victim represents them all. The representativeness of violence makes it possible for even a small group of extremists to stir up conflicts³⁹ along ethnic lines and sustain them for longer periods.⁴⁰

The struggle over the state becomes a struggle *against* the state when the costs of state activities become very high. This is true for groups in whose ancestral territories raw materials are suddenly discovered, dams are built or settlement projects carried out. As in the case of Mindanao, these areas are frequently inhabited by tribal groups.⁴¹ In the eyes of the majority population, peoples of the hinterland stick like a thorn of primitiveness in the body of the nation (compare here on Turkey, Möwe 1994). To strengthen national self-consciousness, it thus seems legitimate and virtually necessary to subdue 'the barbarians', to fill the 'cultural vacuum' (Wai 1979: 73), to declare their lands as state property, and to populate them with one's own peoples. Non-national 'others' become the victims of politics which may be appropriately called 'state terrorism' (Harff and Gurr 1989; van den Berghe 1990). Ethnic groups with warfaring traditions are more apt to defend themselves against such policies than are groups which normally react to conflict by withdrawing to more remote regions (see Geiger 1994). Resistance is in addition more lasting and effective if led by an educational elite capable of carrying the conflict into the national political field and of forming alliances there. Otherwise the only notice taken of genocide and ethnocide is too often that by human rights organisations in the West.

West Papua serves as an example of such a region of conflict where tribes attempt to defend themselves against Javanese settlers. In the Chittagong

Hill Tracts, various groups speaking Tibeto-Burman languages led a fight against the superior strength of Bengali settlers and troops (IWGIA 1988). Similar situations can be observed in Assam (Paul 1989) or Tripura (Bhattacharjee 1989). Thus, when the costs of state activity approach a level where the social or even physical survival of a group is at risk, ethnic rebellions can occur independently of the political system of the state, even when no educated middle class formulates an ethnonationalist discourse on injustice. However, this should be regarded as an extreme case.

Three conditions have been mentioned under which ethnic differences become laden with conflict and ethnic groups appear as communities sharing a common political fate: (1) ethnicising of bureaucracy; (2) an educational elite excluded from the state apparatus; and (3) unequal distribution of the goods of the state perceived as ethnic discrimination and thus leading to the solidarisation of broader segments of a population with ethnonationalist demands formulated by the educational elite. Fortunately, however, the politicisation of ethnicity and the ethnicisation of political conflicts does not inevitably lead to a warlike escalation comparable to the cases of state terrorism just mentioned. Neither in Thailand nor the Ivory Coast did the politicisation of ethnic differences result in a civil war such as those experienced in Nigeria, Sri Lanka, Lebanon or Sudan. For this reason, our already long chain of argumentation must be extended with some further considerations.

In order to explain when ethnic tension can rip apart all cross-cutting ties (Kuper 1977), we need to turn our attention to the nature of the political system within which such conflicts are then highlighted (Young 1976; Jalali and Lipset 1992/93: 597ff.). The structure of this system should itself be interpreted as the product of historical struggles, which means that the outcome of past conflicts determines current reactions to political tensions within the ethnic context. Also, these reactions cannot be separated unambiguously from the politicisation of ethnic distinctions, because the ethnicisation of bureaucracy, as discussed above, is of course a political process in itself. But political institutions and social structures vary independently of one another and should thus be considered separately.⁴² I shall distinguish first of all between formally democratic and authoritarian variants and examine both with regard to their capacity to resolve political tensions resulting from ethnonationalist mobilisations.

The dynamics of ethnic conflict in different political systems

According to some of the leading specialists in the field, ethnic conflicts escalate most in a pluralistic, multiparty system with first-past-the-post elections.⁴³ A democratic party system quickly becomes reorganised along ethnic lines as soon as ethnic distinctions, for reasons discussed in the previous sections, gain paramount political importance. Under such condi-

tions it is rewarding for politicians to found parties which appeal exclusively to the solidarity and shared interests of an *ethnic* group and demand their 'fair' representation in the framework of state institutions. Because the criterion for voting decisions is much clearer for ethnic parties than for parties representing a certain political conviction, one gains sure votes with little exertion when interethnic relations are strained (Horowitz 1985: ch. 7). If a successful ethnic mass party appears on the political scene, other parties reorganise themselves, in a type of chain reaction, according to ethnic lines.

This can be seen clearly in the case of Trinidad. Following independence, a first mass party was formed under the banner of a left-wing nationalist programme. The party was chaired by a Creole but also had some Indian representatives of the urban intelligentsia. The party won the first parliamentary elections, as it gained the majority of city votes. An opposition party, also ethnically mixed, won the next elections thanks to rural support. However, this party soon broke apart along ethnic lines, because it became clear that its success was due mainly to the virtually unanimous block of Indian votes. These voters viewed the opposing party as Creole, and they would not have approved concessions to Creole members of their own party's leadership. Thus Indian party leaders decided to cleanse their ranks of Creoles (Horowitz 1985: 312–15). A similar process of the ethnicisation of the party system could be observed in Nigeria before independence (O'Connell 1967; Young 1976: 289–95).

According to Horowitz (1985: ch. 8), in an ethnic party system of this kind, political positions very often become radicalised.⁴⁴ In non-ethnic party systems, simply speaking, politicians must mainly court the floating voters in the middle of the political opinion spectrum and therefore move away from extremes. In clientelist party systems one campaigns with diffuse promises to gain the support of voters who are flexible in their choice of patrons.⁴⁵ An ethnic party, in contrast, seeks its support only *within* a clearly defined segment of the population, because as ethnic tensions increase, group membership of the individual is hardly subject to debate any more. For this reason, it is worthwhile for ethnic party leaders to take radical positions in order to forestall competition over representation of 'true' group interests; moderate votes in an ethnically divided electorate are secure in any case. When the demographic distribution of power is clear and political competition is open, the political subordination of minorities is, after all, permanently fixed. Change can be brought about only through means of force (Horowitz 1985: 342–9). In Nigeria, such ethnicisation of the political scene and, after several coups, an ever clearer polarisation of political positions, resulted in an outbreak of a bloody secessionist war (Diamond 1988). In Burundi as well, elections at the beginning of the 1960s led to rapid ethnicisation of the party system and to the take-over of power by the threatened minority elite (Laely 1994). The introduction of multiparty elections in Estonia resulted in an outbidding to radical nationalists and the denial of citizenship status to people of Russian origin (Metcalf 1996).

But it would be simplistic to say that the institution of public voting alone was responsible for such developments (van Amersfoort and van der Wusten 1981). For under certain conditions, a grand coalition of elites of differing ethnic origins can be formed which negotiates a stable institutional compromise (Nordlinger 1972; Esman 1977; Lijphart 1977; McRae 1974). Thanks to ethnic quotas in government and bureaucracy, reciprocal affording of veto rights and regional autonomy, interethnic tension can be appeased and escalation can be avoided despite the holding of elections. Frequently the most important ethnic groups are represented through their own parties, and any disagreements which develop are dealt with and negotiated upon by party leaders. The common interests of the elite cartel thus prevent escalation of conflicts. This form of conflict resolution corresponds to the much-discussed ideal type of 'consociational democracy' as characterised by Lijphart.⁴⁶

Such regimes may be able to function in relatively small and wealthy countries with long traditions of statehood such as Belgium or Switzerland (MacRae 1983; but see for the Swiss case Steiner and Obler 1977). Yet in most Southern countries state resources are lacking which could satisfy all groups involved in such an arrangement, particularly during frequent crises of modernisation.⁴⁷ Under such preconditions, it is extraordinarily difficult to set up a consociational regime, as shown by Trinidad's experiment with a trans-ethnic, multiparty government after 1986 (Premdas 1993). We are also reminded that a political culture of moderation and compromise is little developed among many elites in the South (Rothchild 1986; cf. Nordlinger 1972; ch. 4). If members of the middle classes of ethnic groups not yet represented in the elite cartel enter into the field of competition (see second section), or if demographic power relations change, the willingness to renegotiate compromise is lacking, and the consociational regime breaks apart (see van den Berghe 1991: 191ff.). In fact, as Simpson (1994: 468) has recently remarked, 'the list of cases where consociational arrangements applied reads [nowadays] like an obituary page'.

The fragility of consociational arrangements can again be related to the sequence of historical developments: when modern bureaucratic institutions are built up before a civil society is established, the state remains weak in relation to powerful social interest groups (e.g. dominant ethnic elites) (Migdal 1988). In such an environment, procedures for transforming fundamental conflicts into gradual, negotiable ones can hardly become part of political routine – which according to Hirschman (1994) is one of the central features of democratic politics.

In Lebanon – if for the moment we ignore international developments – this led to the break-up in the mid-1970s of the 'magic formula' of governmental representation by religion: from the population of Shiites, which for centuries had been made up mainly of illiterate farmers, an urban class of professionals had formed. They soon began to demand a larger piece of the government's pie for their group, which no longer made up one-

fifth, but rather one-third of the population (Picard 1986). At present in Ethiopia an attempt is being made to build a consociational and federalist system. Chances for its success are not very favourable, as Tigre rebels currently dominating the political scene hardly seem interested in the division of power and have formed branch organisations in all regions meant to prevent development of political dynamics independent of the new centre (see Niggli 1992).

Frequently, dictatorial regimes have arisen from broken formally democratic systems. In ethnically divided societies, the authoritarian state is often dominated by a single ethnic group – compare Lustick's (1979) 'control model' or the 'plural society' of Smith (1969) – or most often even by one of its subgroups or clans. For due to precarious legitimacy and the ever-present threat of a coup, the strongman can only rely upon a narrow circle of relatives or ethnic acquaintances. And so, in a round dance of coups and palace revolts, ever smaller and more closely knit groups assert themselves. Finally a small clique holds all the threads of power firmly in its hands, playing one secret service or group of officers off against others and skillfully enacting gestures of paternal care for the people (see Horowitz 1985: 486–501).

Syria can serve as an example of this type of political regime. Its state apparatus is dominated by the Numailatiyya clan of the Matawira tribe, a small subgroup of Alawites (Batatu 1981), which, on the one hand, severely suppresses any expressions of dissent (for example, from the Sunnite majority) and, on the other hand, seeks legitimation through pan-Arab nationalism and Syrian patriotism (van Dam 1979). Similar conditions prevail in neighbouring Iraq, where the al-Begat section of the Al-bu Nasir tribe of the Sunni town of Takrit holds all the threads of power in its hands (Batatu 1978: 1088ff.). In Ethiopia, since the spread of the Shoa Amhar kingdom from the middle of the last century, its members have attempted to hide their ethnocracy under the cloak of the concept of an Abyssinian empire. No genuine Amhara nationalism has developed to date for this reason (Lewis 1983). And finally, in Burundi, the Hima, a Tutsi subgroup, gained power following a number of coups and purges. In the official discourse, ethnic distinctions in the Barundi nation are denounced as colonial fantasy and completely denied.

The example of Burundi also shows that minority regimes are often only able to hold onto power thanks to ruthless deployment of military and police forces. Yet this repressive pressure increases the very tensions which it is intended to suppress (Kuper 1977).⁴⁸ In Burundi during 1972, 1988, and probably also in 1993, a great number of the more educated Hutus were massacred in land-sweeping pogroms as they dared to question the supremacy of the Tutsi elite (Lemarchand 1990; Laely 1994). Political dynamite can also be detonated when the central power weakens. Kurdish and Shiite rebellions against the Baghdad regime, which was exhausted and debilitated by the Gulf War, are recent examples of this. Multiplying ethnic

independence movements in the last years of communist Ethiopia represent another (Fukui and Markakis 1994).

However, not all formally undemocratic regimes should be seen as dictatorships. Less totalitarian, for example, are such one-party systems as typified by Kenya under Kenyatta, the Ivory Coast under Houphouët-Boigny (Rothchild 1986) or Indonesia under Suharto (Brown 1994). These lacked both the state power for authoritarian control of the whole territory and the conditions necessary for consociational democracy. Representatives of the ethnic clientele negotiate the price for political support behind the scenes – whether in the lap of the monopoly party or the bureaucracy. Thus ethnic particularism does not manifest itself in public politics, and an aggravation of conflicts caused by agitation of ambitious politicians can be avoided. Rothchild (1986) described this type of political system as the ‘hegemonial exchange model’.

However, if the sources of benefits – which the central elite can pass on via the ethnicised bureaucracy all the way to the heads of individual villages – run dry, rival leaders will enter the political arena and orchestrate the dissatisfaction of their ethnic following. These conflicts can no longer be held in check by the regime (Rothchild 1986: 74). Similar processes can be observed when a political system is forced to ‘democratise’ by external pressure; ethnic divisions turn up in the party system, and positions become more radical. The latest developments in Kenya or in Zaire seem to confirm this thesis (see here also conclusions reached from statistical analysis in Gurr 1993b: 189; for contemporary developments in Africa, see Rothchild 1995).

Conclusion

A violent escalation of ethnic conflicts can occur in all types of political systems discussed, though for different reasons: under conditions of open political competition, ethnicisation of politics and radicalisation of positions seems likely; consociational democracies often fall because of the rigidity of their quota systems; the attempts of dictatorships to suppress ethnic conflicts can backfire; clientelist one-party systems disintegrate during democratisation or when the state budget shrinks too much. Here too a struggle can flare up over the state which may destroy much of it.

But before ethnic conflicts develop this destructive force, ethnic blocs transcending class must form so that in people’s perception the political landscape is made up of different *ethnic* groups each sharing a common destiny. It was not difficult to trace the interests and perceptions that lead disadvantaged educated middle classes to adopt such a view of the political world. Corresponding analyses predominate in the social scientific literature as well. It was more challenging to find answers to the question of why rank-and-file members of an ethnic group begin to see politics as a domain

where ethnicity matters and begin to involve themselves in the struggle over the state. I have argued that this occurs when the benefits and/or costs of state activity are distributed unequally along ethnic lines: on the one hand, when the bureaucratic apparatus has been ethnicised, state resources appear as collective goods accessible only to those belonging to the 'proper' ethnic group. On the other hand, unequal regional distribution of state costs is seen as ethnic discrimination if the state apparatus is controlled by a group which excludes others from the nationalist discourse or is even viewed as an enemy power on the basis of historical experience. Social closure then proceeds on the basis of ethnic membership, and political loyalties become a matter of ethnic affiliations.

These propositions can be summarised in the form of a decision tree (see Figure 2), which, although rather schematic, may help to give an overview over the various hypotheses put forward. It shows the cumulative conditions for escalation of ethnic tensions and represents an attempt at relating the results of various well-established research traditions: analysis of ethnic clientelism and discrimination, of political mobilisation through minority elites, of unequal relations between ethnoregions, and of the effects that different political systems have on the dynamics of ethnic conflicts. Some of the propositions are well established by empirical research, others have the status of hypothetical presumptions to be tested in the future.

In order to integrate these different research approaches, I have built on the perspective outlined by Geertz (1963), Young (1976) and more recently by Williams (1989): the view that politicised ethnicity is not an archaic pattern of identity which modernity has not yet managed to wear away but rather an effect of modern state-formation. For only when rule by the grace of God has been replaced by rule by grace of the people, when like should be governed by like, does the problem arise to determine the identity of this people: who is regarded as the legitimate owner of the state, and who is entitled to have access to its services? Seen from this point of view, ethnic conflicts appear as struggles for the economic, political, legal and symbolical resources of the modern nation-state.

Most popular explanations for the recent wave of ethnic wars are caught by the self-evidence of a world ordered according to nationalist principles – by the ideological 'tyranny of the national', to use Noiriel's (1991) rather drastic terms (see also Bourdieu 1993). They are thus hardly able to analyse the fundamental relationship between modern state-building and the politicisation of ethnicity. Instead, 'human nature' or the 'laws of history' are invoked and (ethno-)nationalism becomes naturalised. Some writers fall back on the very psychology of nationalist thinking. They postulate a universal desire for cultural rootedness, accentuated under current conditions of rapid social change (compensation thesis). Especially if the control of dictatorial Leviathans weakens, the hitherto 'frozen' drive for national self-assertion is liberated (the 'defrost thesis', cf. Simpson 1994: 465). Of the

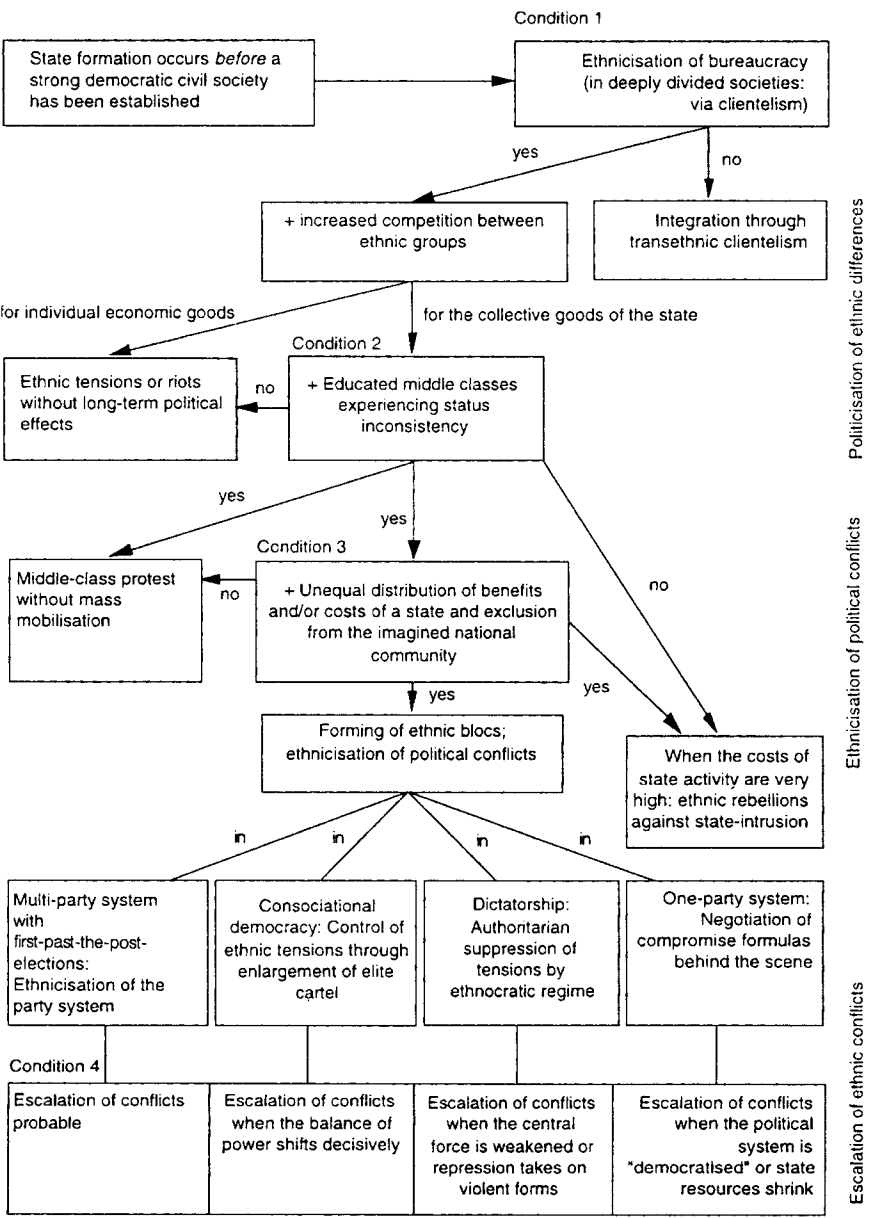


Figure 2. Cumulative conditions for escalation of ethnic conflicts

same order are explanations pointing to the violent 'basic character' of those peoples that have experienced extreme forms of nationalist mobilisations (the culture of violence thesis) (Staub 1989; cf. Bowman 1994). Functionalist evolutionism is less misanthropic and more Hegelian in style of argumentation but equally a cousin of nation-state ideology. Ethnonationalist wars are seen as an inevitable step on the path leading to the ethnically homogeneous nation-state, which is in turn necessary for the proper functioning of developed industrial societies (Gellner 1991).

Instead of interpreting ethnic conflicts as an expression of uncontrolled 'human nature' or as a necessary stage in universal history, they have to be related to a specific form of state-building: political conflicts take on ethnic forms when the resources of a modern state are unequally distributed along ethnic lines because the process of state formation took place before a strong civil society could be established. Under these conditions, communities of political loyalty form around the belief in a common ethnic heritage and politics thus become a matter of power relations between ethnic groups. Taking this perspective, we understand why it is precisely in recent years that we can observe a world-wide increase in ethnic conflicts: during the political thaw that the end of the Cold War and the new hegemony of democratic state ideals have brought, the last multicultural empires, which were based on universalistic state ideologies, dissolve. In most cases they are being transformed into modern nation-states before strong civil societies can take root. In the newly 'nationalising states' (Brubaker 1996), politics is therefore quickly transformed into an arena of ethnonationalist competition.⁴⁹

Notes

1 For the Jura conflict in Switzerland see Henecka (1972).

2 This is also supported by the fact that only 12 of 132 states (in the 1970s) could be seen as homogeneous, but by no means all remaining states have experienced ethnic conflict (Connor 1994: 29). Morrison and Stevenson, as well as Barrows, looked at the relations between cultural pluralism and political instability in a sample of 33 African countries. The two studies yielded diametrically opposed results. Both are cited in Nelson Kasfir (1979: 386). McRae (1983: 23–4) combined measures of civil strife with indexes of the relative religious, racial and linguistic heterogeneity of 90 countries. He found no clear pattern of correlation.

3 Ted Gurr's statistical analysis of 227 politically mobilised ethnic groups found that the degree of cultural difference clearly does not correlate significantly with the intensity of political conflicts (Gurr 1993b: 179).

4 Many suggestions have been made as to how ethnic conflicts may be resolved by means of constitutional law, electoral systems, preference politics and negotiation procedures (see Horowitz 1985: chs. 14–16; and the recent review by Young 1994). The implementation of such policies is often defeated, as the course of negotiations among the Bosnian parties in conflict clearly illustrated, by the real power structure and the political ambitions of those involved (cf. Nordlinger 1972: ch. 3).

5 See Shiels 1984; Boucher *et al.* 1987; Heraclides 1991; Moynihan 1993; Ryan 1990. Carment (1994) gives an overview.

6 Placing my focus on this aspect, I thus follow *one* of the mainstreams of current debates on the political significance of ethnicity; others remain untouched. See overviews by Williams (1989), Foster (1991) and Alonso (1994).

7 These cases resemble three closely related types in Young's (1976: ch. 3) much more sophisticated typology: the colonial states with historical personality, historical states affected by a colonial phase, and traditional states. They are further characterised by having a single clearly dominant group, with minorities, or a core culture, linked to central institutions, with differentiated groups in the periphery.

8 On the politicisation of economic life through bureaucratic measures, see Anne O. Krueger's (1974) well-known thesis of rent seeking.

9 Unfortunately, I am not familiar with any study that yields direct evidence of this, with the exception of observations made in the minority republics of the former Soviet Union (Roeder 1991: 208), in Indonesia (Brown 1989: 54–5), in Nigeria's first republic (Young 1976: 467–8), and in Iraq (Batatu 1978: 1088ff.). We know more, for example, about discriminating hiring practices in ethnically heterogeneous industrial countries (Banton 1983: 384–5). We can assume that ethnic discrimination in societies with large networks of ethnic patron-client relationships is much more marked than in the anonymous industrial workplaces in Western Europe, where comparable obligations of loyalty towards applicants do not exist (Hyden and Williams 1994).

10 Compare here Keyes (1976), Brown (1994: 5–25), or Horowitz (1985: ch. 2) who, however, takes the family analogy rather too literally.

11 In addition, common language and culture, a frequent feature of ethnic groups, eases communication between the partners in a clientelist dyad. The significance of ethnic differences in styles of communication in formal, interethnic contact situations (particularly in the bureaucratic field) is the subject of study of a special branch of ethnolinguistics (see John Gumperz 1982). It has been shown that among members of different ethnic groups, there are great variations in the type of unconscious inferences which are made due to differing conventions of discourse and social presuppositions. In this way, ethnic boundaries frequently become prominent in the communication process.

12 On the concept of the strategic group, see Evers and Schiel (1988).

13 This is not automatic, however, as is again shown by the example of Philippine political parties: they are structured as powerful, clientelist pyramids, whose building blocks originate from the most varied ethnic groups. On the integrative power of trans-ethnic clientelism in Africa, see René Lemarchand (1972).

14 Modernisation theory approaches, which focus upon middle-class competition, are found in Bates (1974), Milne (1981), Rothschild (1981). Other more complex models that include middle-class competition as a central element are presented by Waldmann (1989) and especially by Smith (1979, 1984). Esman (1977) discusses the role of political entrepreneurs from the perspective of the theory of relative deprivation.

15 See the so-called resource mobilisation theory of social movements by John McCarthy and Mayer D. Zald (1977).

16 See examples of massacres reported in the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* (Nr. 170, 23./24. July 1994), based upon information from the Bosnian Documentation Centre for War Crimes in Zenica; for the escalation of violence in Burundi in 1988, see René Lemarchand (1994: ch. 7).

17 My classification of approaches differs from the ones most often found in the specific literature (e.g. Cohen 1978; MacKay 1982; Bentley 1983, 1987; Young 1983; Horowitz 1985: part 2; Smith 1986a; Richmond 1987; Scott 1990). Usually a 'primordialist' is distinguished from an 'instrumentalist' and an 'internal colonialist' approach. The distinction is somewhat arbitrary, since the person usually credited as having founded the 'primordialist' school, Clifford Geertz, is in his original text of 1963 not a 'primordialist' at all, as Young (1983: note 27) remarks. Anyhow, my 'interest group approach' includes the 'instrumentalist' and the 'internal colonialist' theses; the social psychologist approach adopted by Horowitz and Anthony D. Smith's theory are usually classified as 'primordialist' (although Smith himself criticised the primordialist school frequently (e.g. Smith 1986a)). Most of the literature on ethnic elites discussed in the first section would belong to the instrumentalist approach.

18 The formerly common ethnic segregation of workplaces was frequently broken down by resettlement schemes of colonial powers. After the abolition of slavery, Indian contract labourers were meant to replace the now more costly black workers in Guyanese cities, which led to severe riots in 1905. Similar conflicts disrupted Rangoon in 1930 when British employers attempted to hire Burmese workers in place of Indian dock workers then on strike. In the case of Burma, protesting workers later joined the nationalist movement which was organised by the student elite.

19 See recently also Zenner (1987).

20 The usefulness of ethnic relations in trading and business is widely acknowledged today. See Janet T. Landa (1981); Ward and Jenkins (1984); Boissevain *et al.* (1990); Wintrobe (1995).

21 For critiques of Hechter's model see also Birch (1978); Page (1978); Brand (1985).

22 Furthermore, in multiethnic states, secessionist movements trigger a kind of domino reaction completely independent of economic cost-balance sheets of the individual group's relation to the central state: the minorities within those regions fighting for independence attempt either to split from these regions in order to form their own state or to join that region in which their own ethnic group represents the majority. For statistical evidence of the 'contagious effect' of ethnic conflicts, see Gurr (1993b: 181). On the reasons for the choice made between secessionism and irredentism facing many ethnic groups, see Donald Horowitz (1992; 1985: 281–8).

23 Neither among the Ashanti in Ghana, the Buganda in Uganda, the Yoruba in western Nigeria, nor among the German-speaking Swiss was this the case.

24 A critical reformulation of the competition model is presented by Bélanger and Pinard (1991). I will endorse this critique on two points: first, ethnic conflicts have more to do with *collective* than individual goods. Second, the perception of *illegitimate* competition plays a crucial role; we cannot derive the degree of conflict in group relations from objective conditions of competition, as a thorough reading of Olzak's (1993) most recent study shows (see Wimmer 1997).

25 Taylor (1987: 197ff.); see also examples in Olzak and Nagel (1986: part 1); Moodie (1992).

26 Compare also the results of a cross-national statistical analysis by Majstorovic (1995). According to Majstorovic, the degree of inequality of the overall income distribution clearly does not relate to the degree of politicisation of ethnic differences. This finding stands in contrast to the thesis that ethnic conflicts are the outcome of a struggle over the distribution of individual goods. Gurr's statistical analysis of 233 ethnic groups in conflict shows that material inequalities between ethnic groups and economic discrimination had only negligible correlations with ethnonationalist grievances and rebellions (Gurr 1993b).

27 See summary of older approaches in Le Vine and Campbell (1972; part 3) or more recently Rothschild (1981); Scheff (1994); and Brown (1994); the crisis management theorem appears also in Bentley (1987: 43–8), who presents it in Bourdieu's terminology. Rothschild (1981: ch. 2) refers to a 'Greshamite flow-gradient of stereotypes from social-role to ethnic image pattern', that gives ethnic identities a superior attractiveness. He fails, however, to explain the reasons for this hierarchy of appeal and to give empirical evidence for his proposition.

28 Compare also Stack (1986) and Black (1988), who presents a socialisation-theory view; Alonso (1994: 382–90) reviews recent literature from the perspective of cultural constructivism.

29 See the strategy of analysis pursued by Smith in his earlier books (1984).

30 Horowitz (1985: 194), also including references to relevant literature on Malaysia and Nigeria.

31 In strict economic terminology it would probably be more correct to speak of club goods (Buchanan 1965; Sandler and Tschirkart 1980), i.e. goods that are only attainable by those who have contributed to their production. In the case of the collective goods of the state, the 'contribution' of dominant ethnic groups consists in their sufferings during the struggle for independence and in their efforts at state-building in general; they are thus not exclusively of an economic character, as in Congleton's (1995) analysis (cf. Williams 1989).

32 It is precisely this effect that active preferential politics of a state bureaucracy can have as well (compare, for example, Nevitte and Kennedy 1986). Very often these policies initially lead to the mobilisation of the excluded or preferred groups, as for example, the Ladino movement

in Chicago has shown (Padilla 1986). Compare also Nagel (1986) who seeks to derive ethnic mobilisation generally from the bureaucratically administrated structure of political opportunities – a conception which in this form is too simplistic, as we will see in the following.

33 The hypothesis that group competition reinforces dividing lines while individual competition weakens them is taken from Michael Banton (1983: 104). This can be expanded as follows: as soon as competition can be regulated politically, politically expedient group membership becomes relevant, and ethnic divisions become reinforced. In another paper I attempted to demonstrate this proposition, taking the example of inter-ethnic relations in Guatemala and Mexico (Wimmer 1994).

34 This thesis is again corroborated by Gurr's statistical research: violent political conflict (rebellion) is correlated with the political-bureaucratic subordination of an ethnic group, although the direct connection is only weakly significant. Yet active political discrimination against an ethnic group is detrimental to a rebellion (Gurr 1993a: 28); this is probably due to the costs of repression which would incur in such a situation.

35 See for instance Rajah (1990); Young (1965: 242–52); Peel (1989); Harries (1989); Kasfir (1976: 98ff.); Melson and Wolpe (1971: 22–4); Vail (1989); Padilla (1986); Wimmer (1994). For other examples of ethnogenesis see Roosens (1989); Hannan (1979); Horowitz (1985: 64ff.); La Fontaine (1969). For a failed attempt at creating ethnic solidarity on the basis of administrative districts, see the example of the Ciskei (Anonymous 1989).

36 Here we note that usually several ethnic identities are structured, as relational concepts of descent, in a segmentary hierarchy (see Keyes 1976). The question as to which of these simultaneously given levels of ethnic divisions will gain political significance also depends upon the structure of administrative-bureaucratic processes. For example, at the time ethnic divisions first became charged with conflict in Uganda, most ethnic groups of the north joined together as 'Northerners' in opposition to the Baganda, who controlled the state apparatus left behind by the British (Kasfir 1976). Later, when this coalition of northern groups had succeeded in grasping power, the ethnic differences among them became politically salient.

37 Perhaps it should be mentioned that for reasons of simplicity, I have restricted myself here to those aspects of the mobilisation of ethnic groups which stand in direct relation to ethnic categories. In many conflicts led in the name of ethnic or national sovereignty, political loyalties of another order do indeed play a significant role: tribal obligations of support are an important factor in the Kurdish movement of northern Iraq (Wimmer 1995b); Shan princes can use the allegiance dependent farmers owe them as political and military capital in the war against Burmese central authority (Brown 1994: ch. 2).

38 See my analysis of the Indian movements in Mexico (Wimmer 1993).

39 The concept of representativeness of violence is taken from Wright (1987), who developed it with reference to the conflict in Northern Ireland. Kuper (1977) analyses the mechanisms whereby the harmful and dangerous elements drive out those which would keep the conflict within bounds. Smith (1981) explores on a more general level the effects that wars have on ethnic solidarity.

40 Both the self-evidence of dyed-in-the-wool concepts of the enemy as well as the representativeness of violence explain the extraordinary persistence and durability of inter-ethnic conflicts and are formidable obstacles to their resolution. In Gurr's analysis of 227 politically mobilised ethnic groups, the strongest statistical correlation shows that groups already mobilised and involved in conflict in the 1970s were still in a similar situation in the 1980s (Gurr 1993b: 182 and 186).

41 According to Gurr's analysis often cited above, expanding state apparatuses correlate positively with the frequency of violent uprisings of indigenous groups and ethnonationalists, and correlate negatively with peaceful forms of protest (Gurr 1993b: 183–5).

42 For instance, we find authoritarian dictatorships in societies with majority groups (Northern Korea) as well as in those showing great ethnic diversity (Syria).

43 For example, see Rabushka and Shepsle (1972) and Horowitz (1985: ch. 7). This contention appears to contradict the results of Gurr's statistical analysis, according to which a high degree of democratisation correlates with peaceful forms of resolving ethnic conflicts (Gurr 1993b:

183–4). Furthermore, in stable, democratic systems, peaceful protest seems to be more intensive. However, Gurr's sample also contains many Western democracies, which due to reasons to be discussed below, are better able to resolve conflict by means of redistribution and decentralisation. Furthermore, Gurr shows that *democratisation* in the South between the years 1975 and 1986 had the effect – when case examples are studied one-by-one – of intensifying conflicts and frequently ended in reauthoritarianisation of the political system (1993b: 184–5, 187). The same holds true for ethno-political conflicts in the 1990s, as Gurr's (1994: 362) new data and analysis show.

44 Brass (1991: ch. 9) believes however – in contrast to Rabushka and Shepsle (1972) and Horowitz – that pluralistic party systems with maximum party competition do not necessarily heighten tensions, as sooner or later even majority ethnic groups split into several competing parties, which makes coalitions necessary, so that finally non-ethnic party alliances arise. While this may be valid in the case of India, where there is an impressive diversity of groups and subgroups and where a strong national non-ethnic party can therefore act as political glue (Young 1976: 308–26), experiences in other countries such as Sri Lanka, Rwanda, Zanzibar or Nigeria speak a different language. However, there certainly are cases of small countries like Trinidad and Tobago, where a pluralistic and largely ethnicised party system does not lead to radicalisation of positions, despite the absence of a consociational regime (compare also van Amersfoort and van der Wusten 1981). Much further research is needed to understand the precise relationships between democratic institutions and ethnic tensions.

45 See, among many others, the presentation of an Indian example by Mayer (1966).

46 Arend Lijphart (1977) uses the concept both descriptively and normatively – as a model for resolution of conflicts in ethnically divided societies. Extensive controversy has developed over the two usages; see recent critiques by Paul Brass (1991: ch. 9) and Lemarchand (1994: ch. 9). Older discussions are summarised in Lustick (1979).

47 Ethno-political conflicts are therefore most frequent and most intense in countries with low GNPs, as Gurr has demonstrated (1994: 359). Furthermore, Grove's (1978) cross-national study shows that in countries with high GNPs the income differences between ethnic groups are comparatively small – independent of the policies pursued by governments (affirmative action vs. welfare state measures, etc.).

48 This can lead to the most severe forms of escalation of violence, namely genocides and 'politicides': Helen Fein (1993) has shown that most genocides and 'politicides' after 1960 were responses to communal rebellions against state policies of discrimination and political exclusion.

49 Empirical evidence for this proposition is given by Gurr (1994: 347–77).

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