

II The Study of Ethnic Conflict

1. Introduction

Our approach to the study of ethnic conflict is informed by one fundamental premise: ethnic conflicts, while complex political phenomena, can be understood. Their complexity must not be confused with a difficulty, let alone impossibility, to understand. Rather, what it means is that there are lots of different things to understand. This understanding can be facilitated with the help of an analytical model that allows us to identify, categorise and group a wide range of different factors that are relevant in explaining the origin, duration and intensity of ethnic conflicts. In order to construct such a model, we proceed in several steps. First, we develop the 'shell' of our analytical model, drawing on an existing body of international relations literature where the so-called levels-of-analysis approach has been developed and used since the late 1950s. Second, we argue that there are three sets of theories that can provide useful insights into how it is possible to establish causal relations between the independent variables categorised within the levels-of-analysis model and specific outcomes, namely the occurrence (or lack thereof), intensity and duration of ethnic conflict and the success or failure of policies aimed at its prevention, management and settlement. The three bodies of literature we discuss are theories of international relations, of ethnicity and of inter-ethnic relations.

2. Ethnic Conflict: A definition

Before embarking on this intellectual journey, it is necessary to define as precisely as possible the subject of this inquiry. Ethnic conflict is a term loaded with often legitimate negative associations and entirely unnecessary confusions. The most important confusion is that ethnic conflicts are about ethnicity—'ethnicity is not the ultimate, irreducible source of violent conflict in such cases'.¹ It often forms an important part of the explanation, but we do not know of any conflict that can be solely explained by reference to ethnicity, which is itself a hotly contested term, as we shall see later on.

Generally speaking, the term conflict describes a situation in which two or more actors pursue incompatible, yet from their individual perspectives entirely just goals. Ethnic conflicts are one particular form of such conflict: that in which the goals of at least one conflict party are defined in (exclusively) ethnic terms, and in which the primary fault line of confrontation is one of ethnic distinctions. Whatever the concrete issues over which conflict erupts, at least one of the conflict parties will explain its dissatisfaction in ethnic terms. That is, one party to the conflict will claim that its distinct ethnic identity is the reason why its members can not realise their interests, why they do not have the same rights, or why their claims are not satisfied. Thus, ethnic conflicts are a form of group conflict in which at least one of the parties involved interprets the conflict, its causes, and potential remedies along an actually existing or perceived discriminating ethnic divide. In other words, the term ethnic conflict itself is a misnomer—not the conflict is 'ethnic' but at least one of its participants, or to put it differently, an ethnic conflict involves at least one conflict party that is organised around the ethnic identity of its members.

Empirically, it seems easy to determine which conflict is an ethnic one: one knows them when one sees them. Few would dispute that Northern Ireland, Kosovo, Cyprus, Rwanda, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Kashmir and Sri Lanka, to name but a few, are ethnic conflicts. That is so because in each of these cases organised ethnic groups confront each other and/or the institutions of the

¹ Rogers Brubaker and David D. Laitin, 'Ethnic and Nationalist Violence', *Annual Review of Sociology* vol. 24, 1998, p. 425.

states in which they live. All of these conflicts have been violent, yet violence in each of them was of different degrees of intensity. Leaving aside, for the moment, considerations of relativity (Cyprus is, after all, smaller and has fewer inhabitants than the DRC), in 30 years of violence, some 3,500 people were killed in Northern Ireland, roughly the same number during three months of conflict in Kosovo after the commencement of NATO's air campaign, and a single day during the genocide in Rwanda could have easily seen that many people killed in just one town.

In contrast to these examples, relationships between Estonians and Russians in Estonia and the complex dynamics of interaction between the different linguistic groups in Canada, Belgium and France are also predominantly based on distinct ethnic identities and (incompatible) interest structures, yet their manifestations are less violent. These and similar situations are more correctly described in terms of tension or dispute. Finally, there are cases in which various ethnic groups have different, and more or less frequently conflicting, interest structures, but hardly ever is the term 'tensions', let alone 'conflict', used to describe them, such as in relation to Switzerland, where fairly stable and legitimate political institutions provide a framework in which different interests can be accommodated. Thus, the way in which we use the term 'ethnic conflict' is related to the fact that organised ethnic groups take recourse to the systematic use of violence for strategic purposes.²

3. The Levels-of-Analysis Approach

In 1961, J. David Singer published an article in *World Politics* entitled 'The Level-of-Analysis Problem in International Relations' in which he made a strong case for distinguishing between systemic (global) and subsystem (nation-state) levels for the analysis of various processes in the international system (Singer 1961). In addition, he made some broader general remarks about the use and usefulness of analytical models, requiring them to 'offer a highly accurate *description* of the phenomena under consideration', 'to *explain* relationships among the phenomena under investigation', and to hold the 'promise of reliable *prediction*' (Singer 1961: 78f.). Maintaining this standard is absolutely essential in the development of analytical models, both to gain a better (scholarly) understanding of specific phenomena and to be able to make dependable and effective policy recommendations.

While Singer offers good general guidance on the levels-of-analysis approach, his counsel is primarily geared towards deciding which one of the two levels that he identifies should be chosen, rather than giving scholars and analysts a choice of combining the two levels in their analysis. Two years earlier, Kenneth N. Waltz, had offered a consideration of three images (i.e., levels of analysis) in accounting for the occurrence of war, and had suggested that neither human nature nor the aggressive behaviour of states alone accounted for war, but rather that the nature of the international system and the expectation of violence within it led to war (Waltz 1959). As Jack Levy has pointed out, the levels-of-analysis approach, in the tradition of Singer and Waltz, was subsequently mostly used in IR scholarship to classify 'independent variables that explain state foreign policy behaviour and international outcomes' (Levy 2001: 4). Levy also emphasises that '[i]t is logically possible and in fact usually desirable for explanations to combine causal variables from different levels of analysis, because whether war or peace occurs is usually determined by multiple variables operating at more than one

² This also means that violent riots or protest demonstrations in themselves do not 'qualify' as ethnic conflicts. They may be part of an ongoing ethnic conflict, but they can also occur in situations of ethnic tensions or disputes, i.e., where a situation may occasionally escalate into violence, but where its use is not part of the normal repertoire of interaction among ethnic groups and/or between them and state institutions.

level of analysis' (Levy 2001: 4). Despite the traditional focus on states and their relations with one another, there is nothing inherently prohibitive in the levels-of-analysis approach to extend its application to non-state actors and structures and to a range of 'issues' that fall somewhere outside the actor and structure dichotomy yet remain important independent variables when accounting for the causes of ethnic conflicts and for the success or failure of specific policies adopted to prevent, manage or settle them.

Implicitly or explicitly, earlier models for the analysis of ethnic conflict have drawn on a levels-of-analysis approach (Brubaker 1996, Smith 2002, Wolff 2001). Most notably among them, Michael Brown, synthesising the state of the discipline some ten years ago, suggested a two stage model accounting for so-called underlying and proximate causes of ethnic conflicts. This was in itself a significant advance in the study of the ethnic conflict, as it brought into focus a shortcoming of much of the literature until then which had done 'a commendable job of surveying the underlying factors or permissive conditions that make some situations particularly prone to violence, but [had remained] weak when it [came] to identifying the catalytic factors—the triggers or proximate causes—of internal conflicts' (Brown 1996: 13). Among the underlying causes he identified structural, political, economic and social, and cultural and perceptual factors, individually or in various combinations, as necessary, but not sufficient conditions for the outbreak of ethnic conflicts. He then used a variation of the levels-of-analysis approach to account for the impact of proximate causes. Presenting a 2-by-2 matrix, Brown (1996: 13-17) distinguishes between internal and external elite and mass-level factors that he argues are responsible for triggering ethnic conflicts.

This two-level approach is consistent with the traditional neo-realist distinction between the system level and the unit level, but it deprives us of a more nuanced analysis. The terminology used by Brown to describe external-level factors ('bad neighbours', 'bad neighbourhoods') emphasises the regional level, which is undoubtedly of great importance, but he does so at the expense of the global level.³ While Brown makes some reference to broader international developments, such as 'sharp reductions in international financial assistance' and 'sharp declines in commodity prices', more recent literature has identified a range of other factors well beyond a (potential) conflict's immediate neighbourhood. These include diaspora communities (e.g., Adamson 2005, Collier and Hoeffler 2001, Sheffer 2003), international human rights norms and their use in the justification of outside intervention into ethnic conflicts (Holzgrefe and Keohane 2003), the moral hazard that intervention precedents create (Crawford and Kuperman 2005), and links between ethnic conflict and organised crime (Goodhand 2003, Kemp 2002 and 2004, Williams 2001). Since September 2001, there is also an emerging body of evidence that local ethnic conflicts, especially those involving Muslim minorities, have been instrumentalised by al-Qaeda and its local off-shoots in their pursuit of global jihad (Abuza 2003, Frost et al. 2003, Smith 2005).

Equally, at the internal level, Brown subsumes national-level and local-level factors into one single category, which is also not unproblematic. For example, it is entirely plausible to attribute a significant share of the blame for the violent escalation of the conflicts in Northern Ireland in the late 1960s and in Kosovo in the second half of the 1990s to bad political leaders (i.e., to internal elite-triggered factors in Brown's terminology). Yet, this glosses over significant, and policy-relevant differences, apart from the fact that the United Kingdom was a democracy in the late 1960s, while the former Yugoslavia was at best in a state

³ Another valuable analysis of the regional dimension of ethnic conflicts is Lake and Rothchild (1997).

of arrested transition between communist regime and liberal democratic market economy. The situation in Northern Ireland was very much a local affair between two communities with very different and incompatible conceptions of national belonging exacerbated by economic decline and, at the time, negligible concern by the central government in London. Kosovo, on the other hand, was a conflict primarily between a local secessionist movement and the increasingly repressive institutions of the central government in Belgrade. Thus, while Northern Ireland in the late 1960s had a realistic chance of effective conflict management and settlement by way of a central government acting as an arbiter,⁴ this was an opportunity that did not at all exist in the Kosovo case.

Therefore, we propose an analytical model that disaggregates the traditional two levels of analysis into four. At each of these levels, analysis should concern itself with the behaviour and impact of both actors and structures on the onset, duration, and termination of ethnic conflicts. The four levels are:

1. The local (or substate) level: existing scholarship⁵ suggests that among state actors and structures, local elites/leaders, authorities and representatives of the central government, established institutional arrangements and socio-economic structures play a decisive role, while among non-state actors and structures it is the locally resident communities/ethnic groups/religious groups and their elites/leaders and locally operating NGOs, rebel forces, private sector interest groups, and criminals whose actions and effects are likely to have an impact. For example, for rebel forces with a clear territorial base in part of the state affected by conflict (e.g., South Sudan, Darfur, eastern Sudan, Lords Resistance Army in northern Uganda, Albanians in Kosovo, South Ossetians, Abkhaz), specific local dynamics would need to be considered alongside those at the national level of analysis, regardless of whether the overall aim of the movement is secession, control of local resources or state capture. The same holds true for conflicts that are relatively locally contained or where the stakes are of a more localised nature (e.g., Northern Ireland, eastern DRC, Niger delta).
2. The state (or national) level: this level of analysis contains essentially the same kinds of actors and structures as they exist at the local level and it is difficult to imagine situations in which there would be no relevant factors at the state level of analysis. The conflict in Kosovo in the late 1990s, for example, had a very clear local dimension, but at the same time could not be fully explained without reference to political, social, economic and cultural dynamics at the state level in Serbia—the balance of power and influence of different political parties, the strength of national sentiment among Serbs in Serbia, the social and economic impact of war over Kosovo and of the potential loss of the territory, etc.
3. The regional level: scholarship on regional security and regional conflict would suggest that relevant neighbouring states and their institutions, regional powers, and regional IOs, as well as their respective elites/leaders, and established structures of political and economic cooperation are the key variables to consider among state structures and institutions, while cross-border/trans-national networks (ethnic, religious, civil society, business, organised crime, rebel groups, etc.) and their elites/leaders are the relevant non-state equivalents.

⁴ The reasons why an initially promising initiative to this effect did not succeed are analysed in Wolff (2001).

⁵ Here, and below, we draw on a range of original and synthetic sources, including Adamson (2005), Brown (1996), Buzan and Wæver (2003), Carr and Callan (2003), Collier and Hoeffler (1998 and 2001), Cordell and Wolff (2004), Fowkes (2001), Horowitz (1985 and 2000), Kaufman (2001), Lake and Morgan (1997), Lake and Rothchild (1997), Rotberg (2004), Rubin (2001), Scherrer (2003), Tellis et. al. (1997).

4. The global level of analysis: this level benefits from a large body of existing scholarship, suggesting that powerful states and IOs of global reach and their elites/leaders are the relevant state actors and structures, while INGOs, diaspora groups, international organised crime networks, and TNCs, as well as their respective elites/leaders are those worthy of consideration among non-state actors and structures.

In addition to structures and actors, we consider it worthwhile to examine the impact on ethnic conflicts of a range of issues that cannot easily be classified as either actor- or structure related. These include environmental degradation, resource scarcity, energy security, food security, communicable diseases, etc., all of which by their very nature can not easily be 'assigned' to one particular level of analysis, but rather straddle the boundaries between several levels.

Table 1: The Levels-of-Analysis Approach

	State Structures and Actors	Non-state Structures and Actors	'Issues'
Local	local elites/leaders, authorities and representatives of the central government, established institutional arrangements and socio-economic structures	locally resident communities/ethnic groups/religious groups and their elites/leaders and locally operating NGOs, rebel forces, private sector interest groups, and criminals	environmental degradation, resource scarcity, energy security, food security, communicable diseases, etc.
State	national elites/leaders, central government, established institutional arrangements and socio-economic structures	communities/ethnic groups/religious groups and their elites/leaders and state-wide operating NGOs, rebel forces, private sector interest groups, and criminals	
Regional	neighbouring states and their institutions, regional powers, and regional IOs, as well as their respective elites/leaders; established structures of political and economic cooperation	cross-border/trans-national networks (ethnic, religious, civil society, business, organised crime, rebel groups, etc.) and their elites/leaders	
Global	powerful states and IOs of global reach and their elites/leaders	INGOs, diaspora groups, international organised crime networks, and TNCs, as well as their respective elites/leaders	

To summarise thus far, the levels of analysis approach that we are proposing uses a framework of distinct levels to categorise and classify a range of independent (i.e., potentially causal) and intervening variables to account for the causes of ethnic conflict and the success or failure of specific policies adopted to prevent, manage or settle ethnic conflicts (see Table 1). The identification of these factors, however, is only the first step towards a comprehensive understanding of ethnic conflict. In a second step it is now necessary to draw on various existing theories of ethnic conflict and conflict resolution to establish

causal relationships between these factors (the independent variables) and specific outcomes (dependent variables, i.e., ethnic conflict and its prevention, management and settlement). I will consider three such bodies of literature: theories of international relations, theories of ethnicity, and theories of inter-ethnic relations.

4. Theoretical Foundations for the Study of Ethnic Conflict and Conflict Resolution

4.1. International Relations Theories

Drawing on IR theory makes sense for several reasons. IR theory is prominently concerned with issues of war and peace. While one has to be cautious and avoid a straightforward translation of findings from the realm of inter-state relations to those of inter-ethnic/inter-group relations, it is equally important to bear in mind that some of the units of analysis are of course the same, not least if one subscribes, as I do, to the idea that it is after all individuals—leaders as well as followers—that have choices to make about war and peace or conflict and coexistence. Even though theories of international relations are concerned with the role and behaviour of states in the international arena, they nevertheless start by making fundamental assumptions about human nature. Realism and liberalism both consider human beings as self-interested and rational actors concerned with their own survival. In an anarchical world—the Hobbesian state of nature—this translates readily into a complete reliance on self-help: acquire as much power as you possibly can in order to defeat any threat to your survival. Where proponents of the two traditions and their various sub-schools differ is the extent to which this is not only the natural state of affairs, but one that exists in perpetuity. Realists are generally pessimistic about human nature, while liberalists are optimistic (some would say idealistic) about human beings being capable to learn from experience.⁶

A second reason for drawing on IR theory for a better understanding of ethnic conflict is empirically informed. While it is true that wars between states have dramatically decreased in frequency since 1945, the often-drawn conclusion that wars within states are now one of the predominant challenges to international security is at best an oversimplification of a much more complex matter. So-called internal wars, of which ethnic conflicts are but one form, may not be inter-state wars, but they are often not internal wars either in the sense that they are frequently not confined within the borders of just one state. The conflict in Chechnya involves Georgia, used as a supply base and route for Chechen rebels and has destabilised neighbouring regions in Russia. In turn, Georgia's two ethnic separatist conflicts—South Ossetia and Abkhazia—are marked by significant Russian involvement and support for the separatists. The conflict in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) has, over time, involved regular and irregular forces from almost all of the country's neighbours, earning it the title of Africa's first world war. The unresolved conflicts in the Balkans—Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia, Kosovo, and Serbia and Montenegro—are inseparably linked. The conflict in and over the Nagorno-Karabakh area has involved Azerbaijan and Armenia, and will not be resolved unless the two states find a mutually acceptable solution to their territorial dispute that has the backing

⁶ A third school of IR theory—social constructivism—has emerged since the early 1990s. Constructivists emphasise the inter-subjective aspects of human behaviour and interaction, i.e., the ability and willingness to establish certain norms and values of conduct and allow themselves to be guided by it. However, social constructivism so far has by and large remained at the level of a meta-theory. Social constructivism as a school of thought within the social sciences emerged long before and independently of its application in the field of international relations. One of its most significant early contributions—Berger and Luckmann (1966)—appeared more than a quarter of century before Wendt's groundbreaking article 'Anarchy is what states make of it' (Wendt 1992). More recently, there have been some attempts to develop social constructivist theories of foreign policy analysis, e.g., Boekle, Rittberger and Wagner (2001) and Cordell and Wolff (2005). I will return to social constructivist theories briefly below and in the section on theories of ethnicity.

of three major regional powers as well, Russia, Turkey and Iran. Similarly, the disputed territory of Kashmir has been partitioned between China, India and Pakistan, and the latter two have gone to war with each other four times since 1947. India, in the meantime, has also been dragged, to some extent willingly, into the conflict in Sri Lanka, partly because of its own large Tamil population who are ethnic cousins of the Sri Lankan Tamils, partly because it led an ill-conceived peace-keeping mission to Sri Lanka in an attempt to resolve this long-lasting conflict. The conflict in the Solomon Islands escalated, in part, because of an ongoing conflict in neighbouring Bougainville, itself part of Papua New Guinea.

Relations between states, thus, continue to matter in the understanding of ethnic conflict. Yet, there are important differences, too: rather than being fought exclusively between regular armies of recognised states, ethnic conflicts also involve non-state armed groups, defined on the basis of ethnic identities, that straddle state boundaries and give many of today's ethnic conflicts a distinct regional dimension.⁷

This leads us to a third reason why IR theories are relevant for the study of ethnic conflict: external intervention by states and their regional and international organisations remains the predominant approach to conflict prevention, management and settlement. Its forms vary, and success stories are far and few between. UN peacekeepers were sent to Bosnia and Herzegovina with no peace to keep and a weak mandate, and there were too few of them and they were not well equipped. With close to 40,000 military personnel and at a cost of over \$4.5 billion, the UN Protection Force in the former Yugoslavia only managed to break the siege of Sarajevo in 1994 with the help of NATO. The UN safe area of Srebrenica was overrun by Bosnian Serb forces in 1995, leading to the massacre of several thousand Bosnian Muslim men despite the presence of a Dutch troop contingent in the town. In the end, only massive air strikes by NATO in support of Bosnian and Croat ground forces brought Serbs to the negotiation table in Dayton, Ohio. Spending \$1.6 billion and involving some 22,000 military personnel, the UN Mission to Somalia from March 1993 to March 1995 did not even see a negotiated end to the tribal warfare in the country but left with most of its mission unaccomplished. In another example, \$450 million was the price for failing to prevent the genocide in Rwanda.

To the credit of international organisations, there have also been some successes of late, which means that something can be done, at least about some ethnic conflicts. The Australian-led UN intervention in East Timor in 1999, following the fighting that broke out between pro- and anti-Indonesian forces after a majority of East Timorese voted for independence in a referendum, must be judged as one of the few relatively unambiguous success stories.⁸ Similarly, a UN-authorized and again Australian-led Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands in 2003 has been able to bring peace and stability to this country. The United Nations Office in Burundi, established after a 1993 coup which killed the first democratically elected Hutu president in a country traditionally controlled by its Tutsi minority, succeeded in preventing a civil war of similarly genocidal proportions than the one in neighbouring Rwanda. The UN Mission in Cyprus, created in 1964, may have failed to prevent the partition of the island in 1974, but has at least been able to maintain peace on the island for over three decades

⁷ As a result of this shift from inter-state warfare between regular armed forces to internal and regional conflicts involving, if not exclusively, a large number of irregular and often poorly disciplined and controlled non-state forces there has been a massive increase in civilian casualties in such conflicts. While at the beginning of the 20th century only about 10% of war casualties were civilians, but the end of the century the figure was closer to 95%. On the character of these so-called 'new wars', see Kaldor (1999).

⁸ The subsequent deterioration of the situation in East Timor in 2007/8 can not be directly attributed to the intervention.

since, even if it has so far been unable to achieve a resolution of the conflict. Following the NATO intervention in the Kosovo conflict in 1999, the UN, the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the European Union (EU) and NATO have undertaken the tremendous task of rebuilding the conflict-torn territory—not as unambiguous a success as the mission in East Timor, but so far clearly less of a failure than earlier efforts in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Finally, decisive EU and NATO intervention in Macedonia prevented a significant escalation of the conflict between ethnic Albanians and Macedonians in this other successor state of the former Yugoslavia. The aftermath of the violence in 2001 and the difficult implementation of the EU and NATO-brokered Ohrid Agreement of August in that year have not been free from problems, but Macedonia has embarked on a path to peace and stability, rather than continuing on the brink of civil war. In all these cases, successes and failures alike, core issues of concern to the discipline of International Relations were at stake: the principles of sovereignty, non-intervention and territorial integrity, as well as international standards of human and minority rights and their enforceability.

A fourth reason, closely related to the above, is not without a certain irony. IR theory generally acknowledges that a main difference between the systemic level of analysis and the state or unit level is that the anarchic state of nature is brought under control at the unit level through the institution of government, making it possible for people to rely on government rather than themselves for protection from any threats to their physical security. If such government is missing or fails to perform this function, people will naturally have to revert to their own devices. This realist perspective is primarily concerned with security, whereas (neo-) liberalism puts greater emphasis on the importance of economic factors and the need to regulate economic interaction within and beyond state borders. Especially the advocates of complex interdependence theory, such as Keohane and Nye (1997), argue that complex transnational connections between states and societies, particularly in the economic sphere, have increased and created new dependencies complementing, but not replacing, those based on military power. In order to regulate such systems of economic and social interdependence, avoiding the free-rider and defector problems common in anarchical systems, participating states establish so-called regimes to regulate and facilitate cooperation.⁹ Similarly, collective security approaches to international relations rely on the observation that states, as a result of growing interdependence, have a wider range of options available about how to respond to threats—options that extend beyond military means to diplomatic and economic measures. The more recent social constructivist approach to international relations gains significance in this context, too. Norms and values, emerging from, and consolidating shared knowledge among actors over time, motivate human behaviour in a similar way as purely material interests and can ensure that 'actors follow a logic of appropriateness rather than a logic of consequentiality' (Boekle, Rittberger and Wagner 2001: 105). Translated into the context of inter-ethnic relations, this means that pure rational choice accounts of ethnic conflict will not be able to present a complete picture of the phenomenon, and especially why individuals and groups oftentimes pursue seemingly irrational courses of action—be it in accommodating far weaker opponents, or confronting far superior enemies. In other words, IR theories' concern with institutions (or lack thereof) at the global level leads many IR-informed approaches to conflict resolution to emphasise the paramount importance of institution-building and good governance (e.g., Paris 2004, Rothchild 2002, Walter 1999 and 2002). While there is disagreement on the nature of institutions to be designed to achieve successful conflict settlement,¹⁰ there is virtually no dissent from the

⁹ On regimes, see also Krasner (1983).

¹⁰ The various debates are captured, among others, in Horowitz (1991), Noel (2005), McGarry and O'Leary (2004), O'Flynn and Russell (2005), and Reynolds (2002).

general assumption that functioning institutions are essential for successful conflict settlement and that they are best established with outside assistance.

Our final point about the relevance of IR theory for the understanding of ethnic conflict relates back to the levels-of-analysis approach outlined earlier in this chapter. The local, state, regional, and global levels of analysis postulated as relevant in this approach are at the same time governance levels, that is, levels within a vertical system of layered authority at which decisions are being made on a range of different issues, varying from case to case. Vertically (i.e., between these levels) and horizontally (i.e., at these levels) power is a coveted resource in such a system of multi-level governance. This is important for the understanding of ethnic conflict in two ways. First, ethnic conflict occurring at one particular level in this system cannot be seen in isolation from its consequences for other levels; ethnic conflicts are partly shaped by the responses that actors at all levels adopt. These actors, in turn, are constrained by structural factors that determine their behaviour. Second, the levels-of-analysis approach emphasises again the crucial role that institutions play in ethnic conflicts by guiding the conduct of relevant actors at each level of analysis. Well-functioning institutions can generally provide mechanisms within which the interests of different actors can be accommodated. If these institutions break down at the local and/or state level and peaceful accommodation is no longer guaranteed, violent conflict is more likely to ensue. At the same time, poorly functioning institutions at a regional and/or global level may create uncertainties as to the responses that actors at these levels will adopt in a specific case of ethnic conflict. Inability or unwillingness to mandate and resource an effective intervention may encourage stronger parties in ethnic conflicts to pursue their objectives by violent means and with fewer inhibitions (the cases of Rwanda and Chechnya serve as a powerful reminder), while the promise and precedent of intervention on behalf of weaker parties may well create incentives for them to provoke stronger opponents, such as in Kosovo and Darfur (cf. Crawford and Kuperman 2005).

In conclusion so far then, theories of international relations offer useful tools and insights in the study of ethnic conflict and conflict resolution. Yet, for a comprehensive analytical model to emerge we need to integrate them with theories of ethnicity and inter-ethnic relations. After all, as we have argued above, ethnic conflicts are distinct forms of conflict in which organised *ethnic groups* take recourse to the systematic use of violence for strategic purposes. Understanding the implications of this requires a more detailed engagement with the nature and characteristics of ethnic groups.

4.2. Theories of Ethnicity

Theories of ethnicity provide an obvious starting point when thinking about the nature of ethnic groups. There is general agreement among most scholars that there are two ideal types of theories of ethnicity—primordialism and constructivism.¹¹ It is also generally agreed that constructivism has developed into the more prominent discourse on ethnicity (Chandra 2001) and that there is not much debate anymore questioning which of the two schools offers the more credible approach to the study of ethnicity (Posner 1998). Yet, in the same way as there are virtually no 'pure' primordialists left, there are also only very few 'pure' instrumentalists around.¹² The reason for this degree of convergence—albeit a convergence with strong constructivist tendencies—is easy to see if one

¹¹ Occasionally, the following terms are used synonymously: essentialism for primordialism, and instrumentalism or modernism for constructivism. For more nuanced conceptualisations, see Eriksen (1996).

¹² Rogers Brubaker (e.g., 1996) and Russell Hardin (e.g., 1995) may be the two most prominent exceptions here. Arguably, Collier and Hoeffler (1998, 2001) and Fearon and Laitin (2000) also subscribe to a very strong constructivist tradition.

considers the core assumptions of the ideal-typical versions of primordialism and constructivism. The former holds that 'ethnicity is so deeply rooted in historical experience that it should properly be treated as a given in human relations', while constructivists argue that 'ethnicity is not a historical given at all, but in fact a highly adaptive and malleable phenomenon' and that it 'is primarily a practical resource that individuals and groups deploy opportunistically to promote their more fundamental security and economic interests and that they may even discard when alternative affiliations promise a better return' (Esman 1994: 10-11). In other words, both individual and collective identities are seen as fluid; individuals are said to be able to choose them more or less at will and to instrumentalise them opportunistically for themselves, as well as manipulate the identities of others because they either feel a heightened need of cultural identification or seek to pursue specific political mobilisation agendas.¹³

Ethnosymbolism is one form of achieving a synthesis between primordialism and constructivism. Initially developed by Crawford Young (1976), it then became associated primarily with Anthony D. Smith (1991) and Walker Connor (1994), as well as more recently, in the form of symbolic politics theory, with Stuart Kaufman (2001).¹⁴ The essence of the ethnosymbolist synthesis is well captured in Smith's (1991: 20) description of an ethnic group as 'a type of cultural collectivity, one that emphasizes the role of myths of descent and historical memories, and that is recognized by one or more cultural differences like religion, customs, language, or institutions.' As a self-defined community, ethnic groups are distinguishable by a collective proper name, a myth of common ancestry, shared historical memories, one or more differentiating elements of common culture, the association with a specific homeland, and a sense of solidarity for significant sectors of the population (Smith 1991: 21). This link between tangible and intangible aspects is key to understanding the political implications of ethnic identity and of the formation of conflict groups based on ethnicity. Connor has noted that tangible characteristics are only important inasmuch as they 'contribute to this notion or sense of a group's self-identity and uniqueness' (Connor 1994: 104). In turn, a threat to, or opportunity for, these tangibles, real or perceived, is considered as a threat to, or opportunity for, self-identity and uniqueness. Confronting this threat or taking this opportunity leads to the ethnic group becoming a political actor by virtue of its shared ethnic identity. As such, ethnic identity 'can be located on a spectrum between primordial historic continuities and instrumental opportunistic adaptations' (Esman 1994: 15).

Such a definition that draws both on tangible and intangible aspects of ethnic identity and emphasises both their objective and subjective elements is particularly useful for the study of ethnic conflict. This synthetic definition, therefore, allows meaningful comparative research on ethnic conflicts. It sees ethnicity as a quasi-universal phenomenon, despite certain contextual differences in terms of which criteria may be more relevant in specific cases precisely because it leaves room for subjective interpretation on the part of those who ascribe a certain ethnic identity to themselves (and often also to others with whom they feel to be in competition). Including both the tangible (e.g., customs, traditions, language or religion) and intangible (e.g., sense of solidarity among group members, feeling of uniqueness) aspects of ethnicity, as well as their social and political implications, makes it possible to explain the intense emotions that

¹³ On the role of ethnic activists and political entrepreneurs, see Lake and Rothchild (1997) and below. More general examples of this kind of constructivist approach are Aronoff (1998), Brass (1980), and Laitin (1998).

¹⁴ Among some US-based political scientists, Connor and Smith are not considered mainstream constructivists, but rather find themselves at the "[e]xtremes within this general perspective" of constructivism. See Lustick (2001: paragraph 1.1).

'ethnic issues' generate and to account for the often-excessive violence and wilful humiliation that can be observed in many of today's ethnic conflicts.

It is important at this stage to pause and not jump to hasty conclusions about the inevitability of ethnic conflict between different ethnic groups. It is neither theoretically logical nor empirically correct to assume that merely the existence of two or more different ethnic groups, i.e., two or more groups of people who respectively share an ethnic identity with one another, automatically leads to the onset of ethnic conflict (as defined here) between them. For that to happen, certain patterns of interaction are required, which themselves only occur under specific circumstances. This is the reason why theories of interethnic relations need to be considered on the way towards developing a comprehensive analytical model of the study of ethnic conflict and conflict resolution.¹⁵

3.3. Theories of Interethnic Relations

Theories of interethnic relations are inevitably informed by theories of ethnicity—it is only possible to think about the nature and dynamics of interethnic relations based on a sound understanding of the characteristics of one's units of observation. A proper understanding of the sources and processes of identity formation is essential to develop and test hypotheses about their impact on interethnic relations, and thus ultimately about the occurrence, duration and intensity of ethnic conflict and the likelihood of its successful resolution with specific policies. While we will return to these theories in greater depth in Part II of this book, we present here only a brief outline of two prominent sets of theories—rational choice accounts and social-psychological approaches—in order to illustrate how they can be utilised in our analytical model.

Rational choice theories assume that the individual actors involved in ethnic conflicts choose to do so on the basis of rational cost-benefit calculations. In one sub-set of theories, focused on security, the primary explanation for the occurrence of ethnic conflict is that the choice of violence is predicated on the fear of an imminent violent attack by an opponent who threatens the very survival of the group and its members thus coming under attack. In other words, offense is considered to be the best defence of the group's vital interests. If the focus, however, is on individual economic gain, rather than security, the rational for violence is found in the opportunity to profit from conflict. Social-psychological approaches to ethnic conflict take inequality between groups as their main explanatory variable. Where groups feel entitled to goods that they are objectively denied, or where their continued enjoyment of these goods is coming under threat, they will be prepared to use violence to attain or retain the status that they claim to be rightfully theirs. Both sets of theories, thus, provide distinct, but valuable insights into the dynamics of ethnic conflict, into how and why ethnic identity is a useful and usable resource to mobilise groups for conflict and hold them together during conflict. While we do not question that these theories individually account for important dimensions of the occurrence, intensity and duration of specific ethnic conflicts, we challenge their claim to universality. First of all, ethnic conflicts involve individuals—leaders and followers alike—and these individuals make personal choices. While some may be motivated by personal concern for their and their families' security, others may be motivated by desires to obtain more social justice for their group, and yet others again may seek to

¹⁵ In contrast to this distinction between theories of ethnicity and theories of interethnic relations, Horowitz (1998) includes both sets of theories into 'ten explanations' of ethnic conflict. The two are inherently linked, but there is reasonable doubt about the extent to which theories of ethnicity can be used to explain the occurrence of ethnic conflict other than by assuming that the mere existence of different ethnic groups inevitably leads to conflict between them. This is a point that Horowitz makes in relation to primordialism (Horowitz 1998: 5).

satisfy rather more personal interests of enrichment or the gratification of other needs they have.

Moreover, it is important, in the context of our analytical model, to bear in mind that motive alone is not enough to explain ethnic conflict. Equally important, including from the perspective of rational choice and social-psychological theories, are the presence of means and opportunity. For example, ethnic Albanians in Kosovo had very long-standing grievances about their situation. Yet, only with the changing regional and international situation in the 1990s, the proliferation of small arms in the wake of the collapse of Albania in 1997, did they have the means and opportunity for engaging Serbia in an armed conflict with a realistic prospect of 'victory'.

5. Theories of Ethnic Conflict Resolution

Each theory of interethnic relations not only offers different accounts of the causes of conflict but also different prescriptions for how to respond to it. Again, we examine different theories of ethnic conflict resolution in greater detail later on in this book, but want to demonstrate here primarily how they fit into our analytical model. We use the term *conflict resolution* largely synonymously with *conflict settlement*. In this sense, it aims at establishing an institutional framework in which the conflicting interests of the different principal conflict parties—ethnic groups and/or the state with which they are in dispute—can be accommodated to such an extent that incentives for co-operation and the non-violent pursuit of conflicts of interest through compromise outweigh any benefits that might be expected from violent confrontation. As such, using the term conflict resolution is in fact not always completely accurate: in many cases, the conflict itself may continue to exist for a shorter or longer period of time after a peace agreement has been reached, or at least some of its underlying aspects will, but the conflict parties have found non-violent, sometimes even democratic ways in which they can address their differences. To achieve this is obviously difficult as so many different ethnic conflicts around the world—from the Middle East to Kashmir and from Sri Lanka to the Darfur region in western Sudan—prove. Other cases, like Northern Ireland, Bosnia and Herzegovina or Bougainville, however, show that resolving ethnic conflicts is not impossible either, but rather that it depends on the timing of initiatives and the skill and determination with which they are pursued.

To be sure, there are many other ways in which conflicts can be managed and resolved. They include acceptable 'solutions', such as federalisation, integration and arbitration, as well as unacceptable ones, such as genocide, ethnic cleansing and control regimes.¹⁶ How can we best systematise this wide variety of conflict resolution approaches? John McGarry and Brendan O'Leary (1993: 4) suggest a very simple and useful distinction between methods that aim at eliminating differences between conflict parties and methods that try to manage them. Elimination of differences can be achieved through genocide, ethnic cleansing, partition and/or secession and integration and/or assimilation. Differences are managed through control regimes, third-party arbitration, federalism and other forms of territorial organisation giving conflict parties greater autonomy over their

¹⁶ I am excluding control regimes from the following discussion as these are inherently unstable, hardly permanent approaches to manage conflict rather than to settle it. According to Schneckener (2004) control regimes include: coercive domination (e.g., Israeli policy in the occupied territories, the Apartheid system in South Africa and Serb policy vis-à-vis Kosovo throughout most of the 1990s are examples of this kind of control regime, as was Indonesian policy in Aceh and still is Sri Lankan policy vis-à-vis the Tamil minority), co-opted rule (e.g., the Russian, Habsburg and Ottoman empires of past centuries and the colonial empires of the British and French in Africa and Asia), and limited self-rule (e.g., the Ottoman millet-system, the ghettos established by the Nazis for Jews, the so-called homelands created by white South Africans for the country's black majority, the reservations to which Native Americans were sent in the United States).

own affairs, and through various forms of power-sharing. Ulrich Schneckener (2004) presents a slightly more refined classification, distinguishing between methods of elimination, of control and of recognition. While operating with a similar set of conflict resolution methods, Schneckener's approach is more clearly driven by normative judgements, that is, by a distinction between acceptable and unacceptable policies aimed at resolving ethnic conflicts. Similar to McGarry and O'Leary, elimination strategies comprise genocide, ethnic cleansing and forced assimilation, while control regimes include coercive domination, co-opted rule and limited self-rule. In contrast to these two categories of unacceptable approaches to conflict management and resolution, Schneckener endorses so-called policies of recognition, such as minority rights, power-sharing, territorial solutions and bi- and multilateral regimes.

Different ways of classifying the wide range of existing approaches to conflict management and resolution approaches to one side, between them, McGarry & O'Leary and Schneckener cover all known and applied policies. Rather than debating the merits of the one or other classification, we intend to show how certain proposals for conflict resolution are directly related to underlying assumptions about the nature of ethnic groups and the causes of ethnic conflict, and thus how a more complementary approach to theories of inter-ethnic relations can help devise more comprehensive and balanced settlements of ethnic conflicts.

Take, for example, elimination strategies. The perceived need to eliminate ethnic differences rests on two assumptions—that ethnic identities are basically fixed and that peaceful coexistence between different groups is virtually impossible. In other words, a security dilemma will inevitably emerge between groups living in the same state. There are, of course, different gradations of this view, but the essential policy recommendation of this discourse is to find ways and means to eliminate the threat allegedly posed by ethnic differences, including ethnic cleansing and genocide, forced assimilation, and secession and partition. The fact that these 'solutions' have a poor track record of success does not mean that they do no longer have any attraction. Partition and population exchanges (i.e., ethnic cleansing) continue to enjoy a certain degree of support among some scholars (e.g., Mearsheimer and Pape 1993; Kaufman 1996 a and b, 1998), despite evidence to the contrary (Joireman 2004, Sambanis 2000, Wolff 2004).¹⁷ Genocidal policies, too, remain in the repertoire of ethnic extremists, as tragically shown in Rwanda and in Bosnia in the mid-1990s and in Darfur ten years later. Secession is what many so-called self-determination movements aspire to—from Sri Lanka to the post-Soviet periphery of Chechnya, South Ossetia, Abkhazia, the Nagorno-Karabakh area, and Transdniestria, from Kosovo to the Basque Country. While states are generally determined to prevent secessions (Weller 2005), they nevertheless support it often on a selective basis according to their interests. Thus, Kosovo enjoys a degree of direct or indirect support for its drive toward independence from various western countries (the US, UK, and Switzerland among them), while Russia, opposed to independence for Chechnya, now argues that Kosovo could be considered a 'model' for other cases in its neighbourhood.¹⁸

¹⁷ Interestingly, O'Leary originally suggested (re-) partition as an option for Northern Ireland in 1989 in the light of the failure of consociationalist solutions by then, but recognised later that this was not a viable solution either (O'Leary 2004: 43f., for a reprint of the original article O'Leary 2004: 97-131).

¹⁸ In a speech on 30 January 2006, Russian President Vladimir Putin said that the future status of Kosovo must not become a potentially dangerous precedent for conflicts in the post-Soviet periphery, telling a meeting of the Russian cabinet that a 'universally applicable' solution must be found for Serbia's UN-administered predominantly ethnic Albanian province, which he considered to be in the interest of international law, as well as in 'the practical interests in the post-Soviet space' (Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty 2006). This has been variously interpreted as support for Serbia's anti-independence position and as a threat to the territorial integrity of Georgia, Moldova, Azerbaijan and potentially even Ukraine (Socor 2006 a and b).

Solutions aimed at integration are the only elimination strategy that subscribes to a version of constructivism in terms of the nature of ethnic identity. It, therefore does not seek to eliminate differences as such, but rather to mitigate the political consequences of these differences. Prominent scholars (and practitioners) in this tradition include Donald Horowitz (1985) and Benjamin Reilly (2001) who emphasise the value of electoral systems design to achieve moderation among group-based elites and a gradual transformation of identity-based politics. Seeking to encourage pre-election cross-community coalition-building, such a model implicitly advocates a form of majoritarian democracy, even though it is one in which majority-minority relations are no longer defined in ethnic terms.

Another, albeit more extreme version of constructivism underlies claims that ethnic identities are all but accidental vehicles of convenience to mobilise people where economic opportunity beckons. Findings of Collier and Hoeffler (1998, 2001) and Fearon and Laitin (2000) that civil wars, including ethnic conflicts, are far more prevalent in low-income countries thus lead these scholars to advocate policies of economic development as fail-safe mechanisms to deal with conflict. In other words, the argument here is that ethnic identities will become politically less salient once economic development takes away the need to mobilise groups for economic gain.

Solutions proposed for ethnic conflicts that are aimed at managing ethnic differences are distinct in their assumptions from solutions proposing the elimination of differences in that they are generally more optimistic about the prospects of ethnic groups being able to live together peacefully—provided appropriate institutional mechanisms exist that allow for conflicts of interest and identity to be accommodated. Apart from that, there is wide disagreement about possible solutions, rooted partly in different conceptions of ethnicity and the nature of interethnic relations. Advocates of consociational powersharing in the tradition of Arend Lijphart, most prominently John McGarry and Brendan O’Leary (McGarry and O’Leary 2004, O’Leary 2005), base their model of conflict settlement on the assumption that ‘collective identities ... based on nationality, ethnicity, language and religion are generally fairly durable once formed’ (O’Leary 2005: 8). They do not claim consociationalism as a universally applicable solution ‘in every country or every possible policy sector where identity politics may manifest itself’ (O’Leary 2005: 8), but one that can be usefully applied in many cases where insecurities and inequalities need to be addressed. Other scholars embrace consociationalist designs for powersharing as well, albeit to different degrees. Philip Roeder and Donald Rothchild (2005, see also Rothchild 2005) see powersharing as a short-term transitional mechanism that can address concerns about security and equality, especially of weaker groups, and entice them to participate in, rather than fight against state institutions. In this view, power-sharing can provide the basis for parties to end violence, but is unlikely to offer stable institutions of governance in the long term. Weller and Wolff (2006) offer another view on consociational powersharing that considers the transformative capacity of such settlements—they are less pessimistic than Roeder and Rothchild about the potential for long-term stability generated by consociational democracy, but more optimistic than McGarry and O’Leary about the possibility that over time ethnic identities will become politically less salient and allow for more traditional forms of democratic governance to emerge.¹⁹

¹⁹ Evidence for this transformative capacity is so far admittedly sketchy—Weller and Wolff (2006) base their analysis on the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina, two earlier analyses of South Tyrol arriving at similar conclusions are Wolff (2001 and 2003). NB that McGarry and O’Leary share some of this optimism in relation to Northern Ireland (McGarry and O’Leary 2004: 36).

The second type of difference-managing solutions are proposals for autonomy and/or federalism (e.g., Coakley 2003, Lapidoth 1997, McGarry and O'Leary 1993 and 2005, Weller and Wolff 2005). These are also meant to address concerns over security and equality and recognise, similarly to consociational arrangements, the specific identity needs of territorially-based ethnic groups, such as the desire to exercise a level of self-governance in what they consider their homeland. Their critics allege that autonomy and federalism are but the first step toward the eventual break-up of existing states, and there is considerable, albeit superficial evidence that this indeed the case (e.g., Snyder 2000). Yet, at the same time there is also a remarkable trend in the practice of ethnic conflict resolution that sees the granting of territorial autonomy as an integral part of many recent peace settlements facilitated with international assistance (van Houten and Wolff 2005).

The feasibility and sustainability of any solution adopted on the basis of any one or more of the theories briefly discussed above depends on a variety of factors. Without discussing 'success conditions' in any great detail in the context of this chapter, it is important to point out that these factors exist at different levels of analysis. Local commitment to sustainable peace is obviously the most important, but very often not sufficient: international security guarantees may be as necessary as economic aid to create conditions in which people feel safe and can begin to appreciate that 'peace pays', and often better than war. Regionalised conflicts, such as in the Western Balkans, the South Caucasus or the African Great Lakes Region are unlikely to enjoy sustainable solutions without a clear commitment of regional actors to any peace process. Thus, similar to understanding the causes of ethnic conflict as located in the complex interplay of different factors at local, state, regional and global levels of analysis, we must contextualise the success or failure of conflict resolution in the same way in order to explain why some policies work and others fail, and, crucially, to be able to make credible recommendations about how to respond to very specific conflicts.

6. Conclusion

We have introduced in this chapter a levels-of-analysis model that will enable us to classify and categorise a range of factors identified in various academic and policy debates as contributing to, or inhibiting, ethnic conflict and its successful prevention, management and settlement. Such factors figure in different ways in existing theories of ethnic conflict and conflict resolution, which in turn are informed by assumptions about the nature of ethnic identity and interethnic relations. These theories are normally presented in relatively exclusive ways. Using a levels-of-analysis model enables us to employ simultaneously different existing theories of ethnic conflict in a non-exclusive manner in order to develop more comprehensive accounts of ethnic conflicts. This, however, is not a new theory of ethnic conflict itself; rather, it is a specific approach to the study of ethnic conflict, one that also offers important insights into conflict resolution theory and practice.

From a policy perspective, this levels-of-analysis approach to ethnic conflict also enables us to identify the causes why people *keep fighting* each other at a given point in time, i.e., what issues need to be addressed in order to enable conflict parties to stop the fighting. These are not necessarily the issues over which fighting *starts*, but this is beside the point. More importantly, it allows us to reassess our dependence on the linear logic that is often involved in advocating particular solutions for specific conflicts based on the (over-)reliance on a single theory of ethnic conflict and rather embrace explanations that rely on multiple factors significant at different levels of our analysis.