


Psychosocial Factors in Ethnic Conflict

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Introduction and Rationale

A pervasive development after the Cold War is the upsurge of ethnic conflicts in many parts of the world. This has become a grave concern among policymakers and scholars for the following reasons: a) the causes of ethnic conflicts are not well understood and b) efforts to deal with the problems posed by ethnic conflict are still being studied and assessed (Brown, ed., p. 3). It is also important to point out that the persistence of ethnic conflict is contrary to a major assumption in western social science that ethnic conflict would disappear as nations modernize and to the Marxist view that ethnic conflict is just a diversion of the road to a communist society (Ryan, 1990, p. xx).

As a concept, ethnic conflict may be defined as one in which "groups that defined themselves using ethnic criteria make claims on behalf of their collective interests against the state, or against other political actors" (De Goor *et al*, ed., 1996, p.11). It has three variants: a) simple protest movement by individuals who perceived themselves as belonging to, and representing the aspirations of, a particular group against state policies or conditions they consider as unjust or unacceptable, b) autonomy movement by an ethnic group which involves a demand from the central government for greater control over the governance of their local affairs, and c) secessionist or separatist movement in which an ethnic group seeks complete separation of a portion of a state territory (Muslim, 1994, p. 18).

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There had been a neglect until recently of ethnic conflict in research on international relations. This was due to the system-and state-oriented focus of theories on international relations. The liberalist approach has for a long time looked upon domestic variables as insignificant sources of interstate conflict and has mainly focused on state actors (De Goor *et al*, ed., p.11). The realist tradition on the other hand, has been wedded to a belief in the strength of the sovereign state and its durability as a form of political organization (Ryan, 1990, p. xxi). In either approach, little attention is given to the possibility that a state could break from within due to ethnic conflict.

Even Gurr's *Minorities at Risk* (1993) which provides a comprehensive global view of ethnopolitical conflicts need to be complemented by further research. Gurr recognizes this when he said: "The inherent limitation of broad comparative research is that it does not capture the details and nuances of each particular communal group's traits, grievances, and conflicts" (*ibid.* p..x). In this connection, Brown (1996) says that "the causes and consequences of internal conflict are not well understood" (p.ix) and "one of the keys to advancing knowledge in this area is the production of detailed case studies carefully focused on the proximate causes of internal conflicts" (p.601).

The purpose of this paper is to look into the psychosocial factors that cause ethnic conflict, taking into consideration the aforementioned suggestion of Brown. In particular, this paper seeks answers to the following questions: What are the psychosocial factors that lead to ethnic conflict? And, what lessons if any, can be learned from this paper on how to resolve ethnic conflict? The psychosocial factors are the least explored in ethnic conflict and this paper hopes to contribute to a better understanding of ethnic conflict by exploring them.

Conceptual/Theoretical Framework

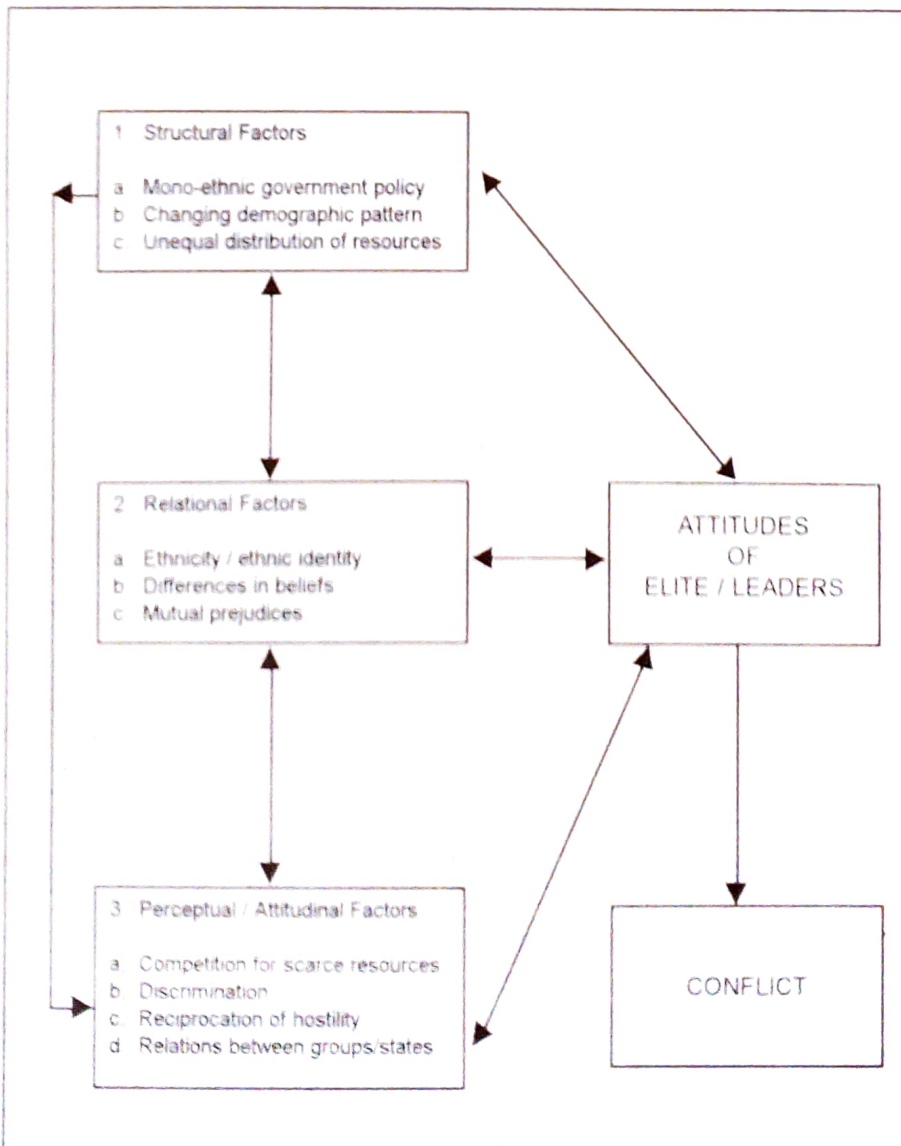
This paper combines the psychological and the sociological perspectives in pursuing its research questions. The psychological perspective views ethnic conflict as a consequence of the individual's attitudes, opinions, aspirations, and behavioural patterns. The kinds of problems dealt with are those of prejudice, hatred, hostility, stereotypes, scapegoating, aggression, fighting and violence. The sociological perspective on the other hand, conceives of ethnic conflict in the context of the components of the social order which include the individual with his beliefs, goals, aspirations, and orientations; the characteristics of the social structure such as groups and institutions and their interactions; and culture, the patterned way of life (Sills, 1965, p. 26). The combination of the psychological and the sociological perspectives is termed in this paper as the psychosocial perspective.

In line with its psychosocial framework, and on the basis of existing theories

and studies on intergroup conflicts, this paper argues that there are perceptual/attitudinal, relational, and structural causes of ethnic conflict (Figure 1). Perceptual/Attitudinal factors include ethnicity/ethnic identity, perceived differences in beliefs, prejudices and attitudes of elites/leaders. Relational factors consists of competition for scarce resource, discrimination, reciprocation of hostility, and relations between groups/states. Structural factors include the mono-ethnic tendency/policy of states, changing demographic patterns, and unequal distribution of resources. These factors are presumed to be interrelated as the individual's attitudes, beliefs, aspirations and behaviors are the products of his group membership, social interactions and relationships, and the organization of his society (*ibid.*).

a. Perceptual/Cultural Factors - Building on anthropological theories, premordialists hold the view that members of the same group have" a com-

Figure 1. Analytical Framework



mon primordial bond" called ethnicity which determines their personal identity and distinctiveness from others (De Goor, *et al*, ed., 1996, p. 12). Based on myth of origin, ritual, language, religion or genealogical descent, ethnicity establishes a strong group boundary in which a member unreflectively takes his own group's culture as objective reality in the context of which he judges other groups. At a complex level of egocentric perception of group origin, a group member regards the culture of others as incorrect, inferior, or immoral and becomes an object of contempt and hostility (LeVine and Campbell, 1972, pp. 1-3). Ethnicity persists for generations, resists change, and are subliminal and subconscious.

Beliefs may be defined as an individual or group's perception of the nature of persons, objects, events and the social order. Belief-system theory assumes that from the point of view of any group, the more similar an outgroup is in beliefs, the more liked it will be. Conversely, the more dissimilar an outgroup is in beliefs, the more disliked it will be. According to this view, belief disparity rather than skin color and other attributes is the target of hostility and hatred (*ibid.* p. 177). Prejudice is a feeling of distrust and a negative or unfavorable perception or attitude toward an outgroup which is resistant to change even against contrary information. According to Sumner's ethnocentric syndrome theory, all ethnic groups have prejudices towards other ethnic groups. This is because of our mental maps of our distinctiveness from others and our distrust of those whom we perceive to be different from us. Prejudice carries with it an unconscious desire to eliminate a hated ethnic group as in the case of ethnic cleansing in Yugoslavia.

According to the elite competition view, elite and inter-elite competition are the critical precipitants in ethnic mobilization and conflict (Muslim, 1994, p. 19). Central to this position is the view that all factors, such as ethnicity, cultural symbols and economic inequities, are but backdrops and resources for elites to draw upon for political mobilisation. Without the entry of elites who can magnify inequities and other issues, injustices may be tolerated, and grievances may be expressed in isolated, anomic, or sporadic forms of disorder.

b. Relational Factors - Realistic-group-conflict theory views group conflicts as rational in the sense that groups have incompatible goals and are in competition for scarce resources (LeVine and Campbell, 1972, p.222). According to this theory, the greater the conflict of interests, the greater the intergroup antagonism. And, if intergroup conflict of interests over scarce resources has been recognized by the group, greater scarcity of resources leads to greater hostilities.

Vertical ethnic differentiation theory views stratification as synonymous to ethnicity. According to this view, locations and mobility in the social stratification system are determined by race and ethnicity wherein minority group members are confined to the lower strata and structurally prevented from moving upward in the social stratification system. High prestige roles such as positions in the govern-

ment or business sectors are reserved for the members of the majority, while members of the minority are denied access to such roles or confined to lower ones. This type of ethnic differentiation makes members of minority groups feel discriminated against and inferiorized. This feeling generates strong resentments against the system or government.

Realistic-group-conflict theory, frustration-aggression-displacement theory and cognitive balance theory converge on the view that groups have the tendency to "return hostility with hostility in behavior and attitude" (LeVine and Campbell, 1972, p. 222). According to these theories, "ingroups will return the perceived attitudes of outgroups toward themselves so that reciprocal attitudes (positive or negative) will tend to agree," and "if groups reciprocate hostility toward them, then retaliation and escalation is possible" (ibid.).

The diffusion or international influences theory stresses the role of external factors in the mobilization of ethnic groups against their governments or states (Brown, ed. 1996, pp. 590-601). According to this view, movements in some countries influence the development of similar or related movements in other countries. In some cases such influence come from subversion or intervention by foreign powers or certain groups in other countries. For instance, Malaysia used to be linked to the armed Muslim separatist movement in Thailand (Muslim, 1994, p. 18).

C. Structural Factors - The mono-ethnic tendency theory holds that newly independent states have the tendency to bring about cultural homogenization as an essential component of their state-to-nation route (DeGoor, ed., 1996, p.18). According to this view, this process of imposing the values of an ethnic group on other ethnic groups in a multiethnic state will be resisted and will result in conflict based on ethnicity.

The demographic view of ethnic conflict stresses that changes in the demographic composition of an area brought about by birthrate differentials, migration, urbanization, or sudden influx of refugees can lead to ethnic conflict by changing the balance of power in such area (Brown, ed., 1996, p.576; Sills, ed. 1965, p. 27).

Finally, modernization theory views the state as a principal agent of modernization which has to make decisions on what to do, where, when, and by whom (Poole and Vanzi, 1984, pp. 189-207). In this situation, some individuals or groups may be favored over others in terms of access to economic resources such as land and capital, creating vast differences in standards of living, thereby making members of the latter feel discriminated against and become alienated from the state. These feelings of discrimination and alienation become the causes of ethnic mobilization in various forms.

These theoretical formulations do not seem to be contradicted in existing literature, but empirical support for some of them are still doubtful. Thus,

more case studies are needed as a way of reexamining them.

Methodology and Scope

This paper explores the role of psychosocial factors in the emergence of ethnic conflicts by focusing on three on-going ethnic conflicts in Nigeria, Philippines and Sri Lanka. It proceeds on the assumption that objective material conditions remain submerged until psychosocial precipitants appear for ethnic conflict to occur.

Data are derived from both primary and secondary sources. Primary data are derived from individual depth interview and personal observations while secondary data are derived from both published and unpublished works.

Each case is described as briefly as possible using the historical/sociological approach. Then, the cases are compared through the explanatory mode of analysis. It is hoped that through this mode of analysis, the trajectory of objective and psychosocial factors in the emergence of the ethnic conflicts focused upon can be made clear.

Case 1: Ogoni and the Nigerian State

The complexity of ethnic political relations define the confrontation between Ogoni and the Nigerian state. To appreciate the psycho-sociological factors in the shaping of this confrontation, it is necessary to be familiar with the ethonopolitical structure of Nigeria, the structure of economic control and the objective conditions of existence of Ogoni people.

The Structure of Political and Economic Power -

There is no agreement on the ethnic composition of Nigeria nor on the nature of power relations among ethnic groups. Received wisdom does not, for example, distinguish between two historically distinct ethnic groups - Hausa and Fulani which were brought into oligarchic relationship following the conquest of the former by the latter several decades before the advent of British colonial rule, hence they are grouped together, rather erroneously, as one - Hausa/Fulani (Ekeh, 1996). Thus, speculations on the ethnic composition of Nigeria range between fifty-one and a whooping six hundred and ninety ethnic groups (Otite, 1990). Three of these, according to popular classification: Hausa/Fulani (north), Ibo (east), and Yoruba (west) are undisputably demographic majorities with each numbering about ten million of the one hundred and ten million estimated population of Nigeria. A handful of others number far less than ten million while the populations of the remaining others vary from a few thousands to tens of thousands. Ogoni falls within this last group being about five hundred thou-

sand.

The most important politically significant ethnic structure of Nigeria is the north-south dichotomy in which popular wisdom associates the north with the Hausa/Fulani who appear determined to control political power at the centre for as long as they can. This ethnic structure is based on the fact that the country has been ruled by individuals from the north for about thirty-two years of the about thirty-seven years of the country's independence and the real fear of the south about the north's unwillingness to allow transfer of power to the south even through the democratic process. The latter is supremely buttressed by the annulment in 1993 of the Presidential election nationally and internationally acclaimed to be free and fair and won by a southerner and Yoruba billionaire and supposed crony of Babangida, Chief M.K.O. Abiola by the Babngida administration.

In the other more complex ethnic structure, the three demographic ethnic majorities are usually referred to in the sense of equal holdership of power at the centre in scholarly discourse whereas, "the only group that still retains power at the national level is the Fulani aristocracy which was not a demographic majority in the first place" (Ekeh, 1996:39). Such imputation was meaningful in respect of the Yoruba and the Ibo during the decolonization process up to 1966 when they held sway in their respective regions. To take for example. The two civilian administrations in the political history of Nigeria which held effective power were led by Fulani individuals. Of the seven military leaders that have ruled Nigeria, three were Fulani. Even in the other administrations not headed by a Fulani, Fulanis were in prominent positions. As Ekeh puts it, the Fulani retain a *veto power* in Nigerian politics.

Given this devious power structure underlined by ethnic chauvenism, it can be argued that Nigeria is, to use Markakis' concept, an 'ethnocratic state'. Both political and economic resources have over the year been systematically concentrated at the centre under this power structure mainly through military rule and several reviews of the revenue allocation formula. It is in this situation that ethnic minorities (in every sense of the word) including the minorities of the Niger coast from whose land ninety per cent of Nigeria's external revenue is derived through the exploitation of oil, are confined.

Oil and Objective Conditions of Existence -

Living conditions in Nigeria are generally poor. Poor also is the provision of modern amenities in especially rural areas. It therefore, makes no issue for any people to pursue complaint about neglect in the development of infrastructure in their area and poor state of their material well-being at the national level. The difference comes with oil which bestows wealth on the nation-state and leaves in its trail - in the area of source - survival threatening and, indeed, thermal negative

externalities. If the price of a barrel of oil is put at an average price of US \$20 dollars, then an average of US \$2.2 million dollars was made out of Ogoniland per day given that an average of 108,000 barrels of oil was mined there daily by the time Shell was forced to suspend operations in early 1993 by Ogoni resistance. Obvious disastrous effects of oil-exploitation on human survival are land alienation and disruption of the natural terrain; and pollution of the land, water, and air. Degradation of the environment sums up all this as the disruptive consequences of oil exploitation for the environment.

In Ogoniland, land alienation and disruption of the natural terrain occurred through the acquisition of land often without prior consultation with the autochthonous owners for the laying of oil-pipelines, construction of flow-stations and roads and burrow pits from exhausted oil wells. The consequence of all this was demographic stress where in Gokana area of Ogoni, land became scarcer for population expansion and peasant farming purposes. Before oil-exploitation began, population pressures had forced some peasant to migrate to the northern borders of Ogoniland in the early 1950s, where the Tai (Ogoni) have been engaged in occasional fratricidal attacks and court disputes with their neighbor, the Ndoki, one of the several ethnic minorities in the Niger coast.

The main effects of pollution of land and water which results from pipeline leaks, blowouts, drilling fluids, refinery effluent and sabotage were poor farm yield, reduced fishing yield and scarcity of drinking water. Pollution of the air came from gas flaring and endangered the life of the people who variously suffered from such health problem as "respiratory disorders, asthma, cancer, and birth deformity" (The African Guardian, Lagos: 4-10-93).

Despite these inconveniences of oil-exploitation, little effort was made by government and Shell BP - the main oil-company that operated in Ogoniland until early 1993, to compensate the people with the provision of basic amenities. Thus, in most part of Ogoni, and before organized resistance, there was no electricity, functioning health care delivery system, tarred road, or pipe-borne water. Most of the people live in mud house with thatched roof.

Collective Action -

Before 1990 when collective action began, the Ogoni reacted over their situation virtually in individualistic or localised ways. The peasant who were directly affected by oil activities either chose the *exit* response by migrating to other places or *voice* response (cf. Hirshman, 1978) through what have been referred to as everyday forms of resistance (Esman, 1989). Intellectuals engaged in petitioning by writing letters to the editors of dailies, Shell BP, and government departments connected with mining and social affairs. There is further indication that even the ordinary people were aware of economic discrimination from this popular song:

*The flames of Shell are flames of hell
We bask below their light
Nought for use save the blight
Of cursed neglect and cursed Shell
(quoted in Saro-Wiwa 1993:10)*

In these various reponses, there was no systematic linking of economic discrimination of the Nigerian juridical order. This took place when Ogoni elites, aided by Ken Saro-Wiwa's analysis of the Nigerian state as an ethnocratic one, formed the Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP) to press for economic, cultural and political uthoronmy. It was the elites who aided the masses of the Ogoni to perceive their economic condition in terms of the organization of state power. By so doing, they also made Ogoni masses aware of the powerlessness of the Ogoni in the Nigerian power structure. To put the latter differently, they drew the attention of the masses of Ogoni to political discrimination against them. And by political discrimination, they meant inadequate representation in government establishments and paras-tatals and denial of input into the decisions on oil resources and not system-atic denial of their political rights (cf. Gurr, 1993).

The demand for political and economic autonomy by the Ogoni and the determination with which they pursued it was so terribly incompatible with the centralist preference of the minders of the state with regards to the control of political and economic resources that violent conflict was inevitable. Their response was first an attempt to bride MOSOP leaders of abandon their struggle or softpedal. When this failed on the leadership of Saro-Wiwa, they resorted to harassment and finally, violence against the Ogoni. The well known example of this is the execution of Saro-Wiwa and his eight compatriots in November 1995 following what most Nigerian and other nationals saw as a very flawed trial.

Case 2: **The Moro Struggle in Mindanao**

The Moro, as they would like to be called, are the Muslims of the Philip-pines. They constitute 9% of the present predominantly Christian (85%) Philippine population of 70 million and 23% of the 16.9 million present population of Mindanao (Umpa, 1996, p.). They are subdivided into at least 13 ethnolinguistic groups with different customs and traditions. What gives them a feeling of solidar-ity is their common adherence to Islam. As a people, they have a long history of successful resistance against colonial attempts to subjugate them. In fact, they expressed strong objection to be part of the Philippines when the Americans relinquished control of the country in 1946.

Mindanao is the Philippines' second largest island located in the southern portion of the country with a total land area of 10,199,886 hectares, or 34% of the country's total land area of 46,147,700 hectares (Muslim, 1994, p. 27). The Moro are concentrated in four (4) of the 24 provinces of the region, namely: Lanao del Sur (557,003), Maguindanao (484,292), Sulu (457,866) and Tawi-Tawi (210,063). (*Ibid.*)

Since the 1960s, the Muslims have been agitating for independence. Several times they took up arms against the Philippine government to demonstrate their desire for self-determination. At the forefront of such struggle is the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) organized in Cotabato in 1967 to serve as the military arm of the Moro struggle for independence.

Causes of the Moro Struggle -

A Muslim scholar, Dr. Majul (1993), views the problem as "the struggle of the Muslims for survival as a Muslim community." Abulkayr Alonto, former Vice Chairman of the MNLF Central Committee, defines the problem as a "struggle for autonomy where the Muslims can live as Muslims, governing and protecting themselves and being respected as Muslims" (Balacuit, 1994, p.2). Nur Misuari, Chairman of the MNLF and newly-elected Governor of the present limited (four provinces only) Autonomous Region for Muslim Mindanao (ARMM), sees the problem as the "Muslims' struggle for the preservation of freedom, homeland, and Islam" (*ibid.* p.2.).

In their study of the root causes of the Moro struggle, Majul (1976) and Gowing (1973), attribute the problem to the following fears of the Muslims: a) fear of being alienated from Islam and of losing cherished traditional values and customs, b) fear of displacement from ancestral and traditional lands, and c) fear of having no future in the Philippines because of 1) lack of representation in the government, 2) lack of participation in the formulation of national policies, and 3) lack of equitable share in the economic benefits derived from their areas.

The fear of the Muslims of being alienated from Islam and of losing cherished traditional values and customs is related to the integration policy of the Philippine government. Republic Act. No. 1888 passed by the Philippine Congress in 1957 aims "to promote improved moral, social and educational standards" for cultural minorities "in order to effectuate in a more rapid and complete manner their economic, social and moral, and political advancement into the body politic." The Muslims view such policy as a continuation of the colonial policies of the Spaniards and the Americans who sought the perfect assimilation of the Moros with the Christian majority (Gowing, 1973). As Misuari puts it, "the Philippine government seeks to destroy the national consciousness and Islamic identity of the Bangsa Moro people through the promotion of a cultural homoge-

neity" (Balacuit, 1995, p.2). He points out that Philippine schools which are generally run by the Philippine government and the Catholic missions are mainly concerned with the teaching of Christian values, institutions and interests without provisions for the teaching of Muslim values and institutions (*ibid.*). He calls this "cultural genocide" intended to "annihilate the spiritual and cultural identity of the Filipino Muslims."

Their fear of displacement from ancestral lands is the result of the resettlement policies of the national government in the 1930s to the 1960s and the increasing influx of Christian migrants from other parts of the country over the years. Traditionally, the Muslims comprised the majority in Mindanao. However, in the 1930s the Philippine government established several resettlement projects in the region for large-scale migration of landless Christians from Luzon. Agencies created for the resettlement projects were the National Resettlement Administration in 1939, the National Resettlement and Rehabilitation Administration in 1955, and the Land Authority in 1963. The Muslims resented the large-scale migration of Christian settlers. In fact, in their March 18, 1935 Manifesto they wrote: "Our public lands must not be given to other peoples than the Moros. Where shall we obtain the support of our families if our lands are taken from us?" (Balacuit, 1995, p. 11) In the 1970s, fighting erupted in Cotabato over land issues.

Concerning lack of representation and lack of participation, the Muslims complain that they are seldom represented in the Cabinet, in the high courts, and in the Philippine Senate. In the foreign service, they claim that it is rare for a Muslim to be appointed to the rank of Ambassador, and in the military, Muslims rarely reach the rank of general (Gowing, 1973; Muslim, 1994; Balacuit, 1995)

The Muslims also lament the fact that even at present they continue to be deprived of the opportunity to set their house in order. As Muslim (1994) puts it, the Moros are excluded from the governance of their region, and "offices purportedly designed for their affairs are run by outsiders" (pp. 162-163). Thus they feel discriminated against and deprived.

Other grievances of the Muslims include the plunder of their land's resources which involved government officials as beneficiaries, government neglect as indicated by the underdevelopment of Muslim communities despite the fact that about 49% of the Philippines' export come from Mindanao, and the failure of the Philippine government to address their basic problems and needs (*ibid.* p. 167). Charges of discrimination, neglect, unequal distribution of resources, dispossession of traditional landholdings, and plunder against officials and agencies of the Philippine government have many articulators among the Muslim elite starting in the 1970s (*Ibid.* 162) The emphasis of the Philippine government until recently to use military force to suppress the Muslims' grievances strengthened the Moro struggle as more of the alienated Muslims were forced to join the movement for independence.

The Tripoli Agreement -

Upon the intercession of the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) who expressed concern of the plight of the Muslims in Mindanao, the Philippine government and the MNLF with the participation of the OIC signed an agreement in Tripoli, Libya, on December 23, 1976 to resolve the conflict. The agreement provides for the establishment of full autonomy, that is, with locally elected executives, locally elected legislature, independent judiciary, and power-sharing arrangement with the central government, for the Muslims in Mindanao. The area of the autonomous region includes 14 of the 24 provinces of Mindanao, 10 of which are Christian-dominated politically and economically.

The 1987 Philippine Constitution contains provisions for the establishment of the Autonomous Region for Muslim Mindanao (ARMM). In 1987, the Philippine government established the ARMM after a plebiscite held for the purpose. The plebiscite showed that only four of the 14 provinces included in the Tripoli Agreement wanted to be part of the ARMM. The MNLF rejected the result of the plebiscite claiming that they had no participation in the Philippine government's implementation actions.

In September 1996, the Philippine government and the MNLF signed a Peace Agreement for a two-year 2-phased implementation of the Tripoli Agreement. Phase 1 consists of cessation of hostilities and the establishment of zones of peace in the aforementioned 14 provinces as part of confidence building for both parties. Phase 2 involves the establishment of the Autonomous Government in two years based on implementing guidelines to be enacted into law by the Philippine Congress. The area of autonomy will be determined through a plebiscite.

Case 3: The Sinhalese - Tami Conflict in Sri Lanka

The Sinhalese and the Tamils are the ethnic groups in Sri Lanka, a multiethnic island state off the south coast of India. As of 1991, the Sinhalese comprised 74% of Sri Lanka's 18 million population, the Sri Lankan Tamils about 13%. The Sinhalese are mainly Buddhists and speak Sinhala, North Indian Aryan language based on Sanskrit and Pali. The Tamils are Hindus and speak Tamil, a Dravidian language. They are concentrated in the northern and eastern provinces of Sri Lanka and are culturally oriented toward the Tamil population in Tamilnadu, India.

Since the 1950's these two groups have been engaged in ethnic strife characterized by "spiraling hostilities, mutual distrust, and growing violence" which traditional approaches of conflict resolutions failed to bring to an end. (Zartman, ed. 1995, p. 36)

Root Causes of the Conflict -

The root cause of the Sinhalese-Tamil conflict is complex. At the cultural and perceptual levels, myth of cultural origin has created a well-defined psychological barrier between the two groups. In particular, the Sinhalese perceived themselves as the “people of Sinha or lion”. They also believe that they belong to the North Indian “Aryan” group, the “first settlers” on the island, and the chosen people by Buddha to protect Teravada Buddhism. While the Sinhalese view themselves as peaceful, kind, honest, heroic, genuine, generous and fairer skinned, they view the Tamils as cruel, darker skinned, cunning, aggressive, stingy, dominative, barbaric, and communal. On the other hand, while the Tamils view themselves as clean, industrious, intelligent, disciplined and heroic, they perceive the Sinhalese as foolish, easy going, lazy and dominative. Thus both groups view themselves or possessing negative and superior qualities mainly based on myth of origin, language and “race.”

Beyond such negative reciprocal perception, an important issue is the nature of the Sri Lankan state (Zartman, 1995, p. 37). The Sinhalese favoured a centralized, unitary state following the British model. On the other hand, the Tamils wanted a decentralized state that would allow them to manage their own affairs particularly in places where they are concentrated.

Another issue was language. During the British colonial regime, (1796-1948), many English schools were established in Tamil populated areas. This made the Tamils “middle man” for the British colonial regime and enabled them to dominate civil service positions and professional jobs. This imbalance alarmed the Sinhalese and demanded that the government take “corrective actions”. Initially, the post-independent governments did not act on the issue on the ground that it did not want to involve itself in what it thought then was sectarian politics. However, during the time of Mr. Bandaranaike or Prime Minister who won the election in 1956 under the Sinhalese Buddhist party, the Sinhalese-dominated government made Sinhala the official language of Sri Lanka place of English. The Sinhala language policy angered the Tamils who viewed the enactment as disadvantages to them, and demanded a federal government structure. Their fear and suspicion of Sinhalese effort to dominate them pushed Tamils toward ethnic violence in 1956. The demand of the Tamils for a federal form of government intensified former want to join the over 50 million Tamils in South India.

Government recognition of Tamil as a minority national language in 1958 eased the tension. However, the government’s rejection of the Tamils’ demand for autonomy within a federal structure left the problem unresolved. In 1960 the Sri Lankan government tried to give political autonomy to the Tamils.

But the Sinhalese staged massive demonstrations and the Bandaranaike-Chelvanayakam pact in 1959 and the Senanayake - Chelvanayakam pact in 1966 granting such autonomy were not implemented.

Other factors which complicated the strained Sinhalese-Tamil relations include the following: a) competition for job and political power, b) the university admission policy based on quota system and standardization in 1977, c) exaggerated fear of the evil intentions of the other group and d) intervention of India by way of arming and training Tamil militants (Bercovitch, 1996: 159).

Status of the Conflict -

Several attempts have been made to resolve the Sinhalese-Tamil conflict. So far, traditional approaches have consistently failed, and the killing, displacement, trauma, and material destruction continue.

Discussion

Common factors in the ethnic conflicts described above are unequal access to political and economic resources, demographic stress, cultural nationalism and the rise of ethnic revivalists. The comparison of the three cases on the psychosocial factors affecting ethnic conflict is shown in Table 1.

Although some Ogoni individuals had at various time held prominent positions at local, state and federal levels of government, they felt that such representation was inadequate quantitatively and qualitatively speaking. In quantitative terms, the Ogoni argued that they have "no representation whatsoever in ALL institutions of the Federal Government of Nigeria" (Ogoni Bill of Rights, 1992:10). On the other hand, they pointed to their lack of input into the decisions on the distribution of 'national' wealth to which their land had contributed so much since 1958 to illustrate their lack of effective power. To correct this imbalance, they demanded as a minimum, a state where they can, to a large extent, decide their political and economic destinies within the Nigerian state. The Moro also complained about their inadequate representation in public institutions non-participation in the formulation of national policies. They therefore, demanded political autonomy which has been granted to some extent by the Christian dominated Phillipino state. The Tamil political grievance is historically different from the Ogoni and Moro in the sense that the former were in the beginning a highly privileged demographic minority. Their representation in administration and the professions was about 35 per cent in the 1960's. It is now about 15 per cent as consequence of the application of quota principle in recruitment into public institutions and university admissions since 1956. Their demand then, is for increased political representation.

Table 1. Comparison of Cases on Psychosocial Factors in Ethnic Conflict

Psychological Factors	Conflict Cases		
	Ogoni vs State	Moro vs State	Sinhalese vs Tamil
1. Structure Factors	-	x	x
a. Mono-ethnic govt. policy	-	x	-
b. Changing demongraphic patterns	-	x	-
c. Unequal distribution of resources	x	x	x
2. Relational Factors			
a. Competition for scarce resources	x	x	x
b. Discrimination	x	x	x
c. Reciprocation of hostilities	-	x	x
d. Relations between groups/states	-	x	x
3. Perceptnal / Attitudinal Factors			
a. Ethnic identity / ethnicity	x	x	x
b. Differences in beliefs	-	x	x
c. Ethnic prejudice	-	x	x
d. Attitudes of elites / leaders	x	x	x

The materialist basis of the conflicts varies from lost of economic advantage to lack of it at any time. As with political representation, the Tamil were initially the economically advantaged. This changed when the Sinhalese controlled government of Sri Lanka vigorously pursued "corrective measures" between 1956 and 1972. While about 49% of Philippine exports are derived from Mindanao which the Moro claim as their homeland, the areas inhabited by the Moro are the least developed physically and industrially in the Philippines. Beside, the policy of re-settlement of non-Moro peasant in Mindanao, pursued in the 1930s and in the 1960s by the Philippine government, turned the Moro into a minority in the land known to them as their homeland. The Moro, in this respect, charge that they are being disposed, neglected and discriminated against economically. The Ogoni's economic grievance is that the wealth derived from their homeland is used by other groups to develop their areas and improve their quality of life while they (Ogonis) suffer the negative effects of oil exploitation.

Cultural nationalism is a salient factor in the ethnic conflicts in Sri Lanka and in the Philippines because of the various mono cultural policies of governments controlled by the majorities. Since 1946, the Christian-dominated Philippine government has pursued cultural homogeneity mainly through educational curricula based

on Christian values and principles. For the Moro, this is a deliberate policy aimed at undermining their religion, and to exterminate their culture. The imposition of Sinhalese on Sri Lanka as national language in 1956 has been resisted by the Tamil (de Silva, 1996). Culture is not salient in Ogoni conflict because the civil society has managed to get the state comply with its insistence on the secularity of the state. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that the Ogoni demanded cultural autonomy within Ogoni political autonomy where, perhaps, they thought, Ogoni language and culture can be more fully developed.

The conflict involving the three minority groups has also been fed by demographic stress. In Ogoni's case, the problem of scarce land was also been fed by demographic stress. In Ogoni's case, the problem of scarce land was compounded by the demand for land for oil exploitation activities. The Moro feared dispossession through the resettlement policies of the government. A similar fear was also felt by the Tamil in the Eastern province of Sri Lanka. Before the Sri Lanka government began the resettlement of Sinhalese and Muslim landless peasant in this region, the Tamil and Sinhalese had almost equal access to the land. After many years of implementation of the resettlement policy, Tamil access to land has dropped to about 27 percent.

The trigger of conflict in all the three cases was the emergence of an articulate elite. This stratum of each group helped to decide other precipitant and organized them into a coherent body of grievances. The Moro elites formed MNLF in 1967 as a framework for their struggle for political independence. It was also Ogoni elites who formed MOSOP in 1990 after two decades of oil exploitation and its attendant effects especially on peasants, as a vehicle for pursuing Ogoni autonomy. The Tamil first reacted to the Sinhalese domination of the Sri Lankan state in an organized fashion by riots and demand for political autonomy in 1956 when Sinhalese was adopted as state language. Later, the elites formed a terrorist movement in 1972 in continuation of their struggle for independence.

Conclusion

The ethnic conflicts analyzed here suggest that conflict is likely to erupt between an ethnic group with another which may or may not be associated with the state if the latter is seen by the former to have used the state to pursue its interests without regard for equity in the distribution of political and economic resources, cultural autonomy for it as well as demographic pressures on it when an articulate elite emerges within its fold. The aspirations entailed in these issues as the cases show, cannot be eliminated by repression or violence.

The case of the Moro shows that even if an aggrieved ethnic group had declared political independence as its goal, it may be agreeable to some form

of meaningful autonomy if the minders of the state yield to the mediation of a transnational organization which intervenes before violence is introduced into the conflict. The OIC, an organization mainly composed of oil-exporting states, used its influences to pressure the Phillipino state to come to the negotiating table to dialogue with the Moro. This suggests that transnational organizations with some leverage can positively intervene in behalf of oppressed minorities by acting promptly and thereby preventing ethnic conflict from degenerating into violence. It is even bandied in some quarters that Shell BP could have successfully intervened in behalf of the nine Ogoni environment activists executed in 1995, and contribute to a peaceful resolution of the Ogoni conflict if it wanted.

The data show that the proposed psychosocial factors in ethnic conflict are not all applicable to the three cases studied. This is attributable to the differences in the nature and settings of such cases. But there are common factors applicable to all the three cases. These are unequal distribution of resources, competition for scarce resources, perceived discrimination, ethnicity/ethnic identity and the attitudes of the elites/leaders. The immediate trigger of conflict is the emergence of articulate elites/leaders who mobilize the masses toward the pursuit of a common cause.

This study supports the view that the elites constitute the critical factor in the study of ethnic conflict. Given the limited number of cases included in this study, there is a need for more studies on the role of the elites in various phases of ethnic conflict, taking into consideration different world regions, variation in basic conflict issues and differences in conflict outcome. Such studies can provide more insights into conflict prevention, conflict management and conflict resolution.

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