

An Explanation of Conflict: Ethnicity, Deprivation, and Rationalization

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Introduction

The incidence and scale of ethnic conflict has exploded over the last fifteen years, facilitating a wide range of scholarly inquiry on the issue. Explanations of ethnic conflict range from chaos theory to ancient-hatreds analysis, neither providing a constructive model for determining when and why ethnic conflict occurs. This paper, on the other hand, seeks to explore the complex causes and conditions of violent ethnic strife through an analysis of various conceptions of ethnicity, sources and manifestations of deprivation, ethnicity as a mechanism for mobilization, and the process of rationalization. I argue that the overlapping of ethnic divisions and patterns of relative deprivation creates an environment primed for conflict; however, the transformation from potential strife into actual strife only occurs after a period of rationalization, when the actors involved weigh the costs and benefits of resorting to violent measures. Ultimately, relative deprivation is the root cause of conflict and ethnicity acts to mobilize a group for common political or economic objectives. Moreover, the distinction between these political and economic objectives is quite minimal. Perceived and actual economic incentives impel the quest for or maintenance of political power. This phenomenon of relative deprivation, which is essentially economic, suggests that ethnic violence can be initiated from the bottom-up or from the top-down.

This paper is organized into four primary sections on ethnicity, deprivation, mobilization, and rationalization. Each section seeks to illuminate a specific element of the thesis, providing contextual examples with the cases of Rwanda, Yugoslavia, Sri Lanka, and Mexico. These cases have been selected because the current discourse on ethnic conflict has typically been unable to give a consistent and cohesive analysis for the occurrence of conflict among all of the scenarios; often studies are case specific, giving detailed and descriptive analysis that does not explain conflict as a global phenomenon. For instance, Andy Storey's analysis of conflict in Rwanda implicates the International Monetary Fund's structural adjustment program but does not explain why other countries who initiated SAPs did not resort to violence. Others, such as Neil DeVotta, blame weak institutions for being unable to cope with ethnic diversity; however, this explanation does not provide any insight when violence occurs in strong states. This paper seeks to integrate the variables of four very different cases of ethnic conflict in order to provide a useful model that is more broadly applicable to this increasingly devastating problem.

Indeed, the social, political, and economic environment in these four states vary widely at the time of their respective conflicts. However, each example has experienced ethnic conflict due to relative deprivation along ethnic lines and when the cost-benefit analysis falls in favor of violence. The first section provides a cursory overview of three main approaches to defining ethnicity: primordial, epiphenomenal/instrumental, and ascriptive. I justify my reliance on the ascriptive school of thought, which describes ethnicity as *real, but constructed*. Next, I explain how violent conflict occurs when groups experience relative deprivation as opposed to relative or absolute poverty. There are four primary dimensions of relative deprivation that provide a more nuanced and causal explanation of conflict. Political or economic deprivation can occur relative to oneself over time (longitudinal) or relative to others in a particular time (horizontal). All manifestations of relative deprivation can lead to conflict, which the four case studies demonstrate. The third section describes how ethnicity can be used as a mechanism to mobilize a population. However, the effectiveness of this tool is affected by both the degree of ethnic diversity and prowess of political leaders. A presumption that humans are naturally rational beings underpins the fourth section, which examines the cost-benefit analyses that impel war.

Ethnicity

Defining ethnicity, while extremely difficult, is essential to understanding the nature of ethnic conflict. Most generally, it is described as an association based on common racial or cultural traits.¹ Is ethnicity inherent, automatically placing individuals in one group versus another? Or, is it an entirely socially constructed phenomenon not based on any real commonalities? Analysis of ethnic identity falls into three main categories: the primordialist, epiphenomenalist/instrumental, and ascriptive approaches.² The first question above addresses the primordial explanation of ethnicity while the latter suggests the epiphenomenalist definition. However, the ascriptivist approach, which incorporates concepts from both approaches, offers the most useful analysis of ethnicity.

Primordialism asserts that ethnicity is one of the most basic foundations for identity, akin to gender. As a collective identity that distinguishes between ‘us’ and ‘them,’ it is a critical component in the formulation of individual identity. These ethnic “groupings exist *a priori*, meaning that they are natural units that derive their cohesion from some inherent biological, cultural, or racial traits which then become instruments of social differentiation.”³ While this explanation of ethnicity is useful because it recognizes a natural heterogeneity of

humankind, it has significant weaknesses. For example, primordialism fails to recognize ethnicity as a fluid phenomenon; it offers no explanation for why ethnic lines have overtime been blurred and reconstructed to form new identities such as Anglo-Saxon.⁴

The evolution of ethnic identity in Rwanda during the colonial period demonstrates the invalidity of the primordial approach. Prior to German and subsequent Belgian colonial rule, the differentiation between Hutu and Tutsi was not conceived in terms of ethnicity. Hutu and Tutsi identities were an important element of the hierarchy in Rwandan society but not exclusively based on unchanging biological characteristics. Andy Storey notes how there was even “some movement between ethnic categories,”⁵ which would be inconceivable from the primordial perspective. Not until colonization was ethnicity considered a “strict (patrilinear) inherited characteristic.”⁶ This new notion was introduced by the Europeans and then used as an instrument of indirect rule, showing that ethnicity lacks the exclusive primitive quality that the primordial approach describes.

Epiphenomenalists and instrumentalists are on the opposite end of the spectrum from the primordialists. These schools explain ethnicity as a political and social construction without any biological basis. Benedict Anderson describes such constructs as “imagined communities.” In talking about a nation (or ethnic group, for our purposes), he explains how “It is *imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion.”⁷ Although this perspective seems to provide an accurate analysis of ethnicity in Rwanda, its thin account offers little more insight than the primordial approach. At the surface, it may appear that ethnicity was merely a construction by colonial powers for the purpose of political manipulation. However, the Europeans’ system of preference was based on inherent physical traits of the Tutsi: “The Europeans were always attracted to the Tutsi. Unlike the Hutu, who are a dark people, short and squat, with coarse features, the Tutsi are tall and fair, with finer features that reminded Europeans of themselves.”⁸ While the concept of ethnicity changed in Rwandan society, the ethnic distribution and organization of society did not.

The epiphenomenalist perspective uses other variables, such as class, to describe the cause of conflict. It dismisses the role of ethnicity as entirely superficial, which cannot even mobilize a population but is used instead to mask economic or political motivations for conflict. This approach supposes, its primary weakness, that ethnicity is irrelevant and unrelated to the rise of conflict. Although in Sri Lanka, this conclusion is very clearly

implausible. Conflict in Sri Lanka was not based entirely on class. Indeed, youth from both main ethnic groups turned violent because of their economic plight. But, these groups did not fight side by side against a common enemy. Instead, they instigated a period of inter-ethnic rivalry and violence. Ethnicity, regardless of its origins, was certainly used to mobilize members of both the Tamils and the Sinhala.⁹

While ethnicity is not inherently problematic, it can indeed influence the instance and nature of conflict. Neither the primordialist nor the epiphenomenalist approaches effectively deal with the concept of ethnicity. Ascriptivists, such as Max Weber, have much more accurately described ethnicity as “*real, but constructed.*”¹⁰ Real biological differences exist that demonstrate ethnicity, but ethnic identity is based on perceived (or constructed) notions of the group community. Leaders can use ethnicity to effectively mobilize people because of this balance between real ethnic differences and their manifestation in imagined communities. Epiphenomenalism dismisses ethnic conflict as an actual phenomenon, while primordialism overlooks ethnicity as a malleable political tool. Therefore, this paper will analyze ethnic conflict with this ascriptive understanding of ethnicity because it permits a more complex exploration of the instance and cause of ethnic conflict.

Deprivation

The notion that ethnic diversity necessitates conflict is grossly misguided. Plurality certainly has the capacity to exacerbate other more fundamental causes of violence but the correlation between ethnicity and conflict is much more nuanced. For example, Tanzania has a great deal of ethnic diversity yet has remained strife free as a result of a government system that effectively manages and distributes political and economic power. Switzerland and the United States are other examples of diverse nations without widespread outbreaks of violent conflict. Ethnicity only becomes salient when it overlaps with patterns of relative deprivation. Specifically, *deprivation* rather than *poverty* is meaningful indicator of the source of conflict. Using measures of poverty suggests that conflict would erupt in any poor nation, yet many states are significantly impoverished, such as Kenya, and have not succumbed to violent crisis.

Deprivation, on the other hand, can more accurately explain the causes of conflict. This phenomenon can occur in the economic or the political spheres and between groups or for a particular group across time. Nafziger and Auvinen define relative deprivation as when “people feel deprived of something they had, but subsequently lost, or when others have gained relative to them.”¹¹ Their definition is useful because it addresses the many

dimensions of deprivation: political, economic, horizontal, and longitudinal. In their study, “Economic Causes of Humanitarian Emergencies,” they correctly emphasize the distinction between absolute and relative deprivation, citing “deterioration of living conditions over a prolonged period [as] absolute rather than relative deprivation.”¹² Such extended periods of deprivation are less influential for humans because they become accustomed to their situation, whereas experiences of relative deprivation are more accessible for the individual: a man can look to his rich neighbor and realize his own poverty or remember days when he himself was wealthy. He is more likely to resort to aggression based on these observations than if there was blanket poverty across the nation. As Nafziger and Auvinen note, “aggression is unlikely to result from such an abstract source.”¹³

Although the term deprivation is desirable because it has both economic and political implications, very rarely is deprivation unrelated to economic factors. Political deprivation occurs when a group or individual is excluded from the political process or disadvantaged in some manner, as he/she/they are being deprived of their political rights. However, political elites use this type of deprivation in order to maintain their power to control and administrate economic resources. This blurring of economic and political resources is especially prevalent in the third world, where weak political institutions perpetuate clientelism and corruption.¹⁴ Moreover, public sector employment is extremely vital in developing economies where the private sector is weak and ineffective.

Relative deprivation can manifest itself in a variety of forms. In Sri Lanka, one can observe both horizontal and longitudinal differences in the economic and political spheres. Sri Lanka is a particularly interesting case because it was an exemplar for post-colonial development and then was seemingly suddenly plagued by civil war. Sirimal Abeyratne implicates the overwhelming post-colonial prosperity and success with the ultimate deterioration of conditions throughout the last three decades.¹⁵ The legacy of colonialism in Sri Lanka was a strong and effective welfare system that continued to improve human development. The irony of the system is that it improved overall health, facilitating population growth that the economy was unable to support. As Abeyrantne notes, “the main development challenge at the time was not of raising people’s living standards, but of maintaining them in the face of a rapidly growing population.”¹⁶ A further problem created by the welfare-state was a generation of “people who were brought up within the welfare system [and] had improved human capabilities to be utilized productively and higher social expectations to be satisfied.”¹⁷ This generation could not be absorbed into the economy and was faced with increasing unemployment.¹⁸ The outbreak of violence by both

Sinhalese and Tamil youth demonstrates the potency of this longitudinal deprivation throughout the country. However, the Tamils were also experiencing deprivation relative to the Sinhala majority such as discriminatory employment in the public sector and imposition of a Sinhala official language. These factors of exclusion and economic decline are instrumental in the progression towards war in Sri Lanka. Neil DeVotta provides a slightly different explanation of conflict in Sri Lanka, implicating illiberal institutions for creating an environment prone to “ethnic outbidding.” He says that:

...democracy has been reduced to a hollow shell. Democratic forms and institutions have been preserved for appearance’s sake, while the essentials of true constitutional liberalism—the rule of law; limited government; free trade and fair elections; and the freedoms of assembly, speech, and religion—have been perverted, crippled, or destroyed in an atmosphere of ethnic hatred.¹⁹

However, weak institutions are not an alternative explanation for the subsequent ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka but instead describe *how* relative deprivation was achieved.²⁰

The pattern of deprivation leading to violence is also apparent in Yugoslavia prior to and during its dissolution in 1991. Yugoslavia, like Sri Lanka, is a case study that lacks absolute poverty. In fact, Yugoslavia is an upper-middle income country yet violent conflict occurred because the Serbian majority experienced relative economic decline. Thomas Szayna and Michele Zanini demonstrate this decline in a table comparing per-capita gross social product (GSP, clarified as net material product plus capital consumption) by ethnicity/region. While total GSP for all of Yugoslavia increased from 393.70 to 398.8, Serbian GSP markedly declined from 148.42 to 144.7.²¹ Over an eight-year period the Serbs began to feel a decline in their economic condition and then in 1991 were faced with serious pressures on their political power. Secessionary movements in Slovenia and Croatia threatened to remove the economic resources that Serbians used their political positions to control. Serbian longitudinal relative economic deprivation is a critical component of the crisis that occurred in the former Yugoslavia.

Relative deprivation in Rwanda occurred in two phases, the post-colonial transitional period and the liberalization period of the early nineteen-nineties. First, the Tutsi minority who were long favored by the colonial powers lost control of the government to the Hutu majority. The sense of insecurity caused by this sudden loss of political power and access to resources facilitated the formation of a Tutsi rebel movement against the new government.²² The Tutsi insurgency continued throughout the sixties, seventies, and eighties putting huge strains on the Rwandan economy that necessitated the structural adjustment programs of the nineteen-nineties.

While the Tutsis resorted to violence because of a relative loss in political power between the colonial and post-colonial periods, the Hutu turned to violence when they feared a loss of economic security with the onset of the International Monetary Fund's SAP. In Andy Storey's analysis of the economic factors that led to Rwandan genocide, he explains how structural adjustment conditionalities changed the nature of political power. He notes how "[t]he prospect of democratization posed a real threat to the interests of the political and economic elites,"²³ who were no longer free to use their power to perpetuate Hutu preferential treatment. The Hutu deprivation of political power and potential loss of jobs "contributed to the perception of...elites that their future was bleak."²⁴ Recent Hutu deprivation coupled with continued Tutsi violence primed Rwanda for the genocide that followed.

The violent uprising of indigenous people in Chiapas, Mexico demonstrates the effect horizontal inequalities can have. The same day that the North America Free Trade Agreement went into force, 1 January 1994, the Zapatista National Liberation Army instigated a violent clash in several towns and cities in the southern Mexican state of Chiapas, largely populated by indigenous peoples.²⁵ Enduring economic disparities between the indigenous Andean population and the rest of Mexico are foundational to the Zapatista movement. When Mexico experienced marked improvement in the economy and standards of living over twenty years between the 1970s and 1990s, many Indian peoples did not. One study that measures social indicators shows how Mexico's growth was not evenly felt between the largely Indian populated areas like Chiapas and the rest of the country. For example, the percentage of Mexicans with indoor plumbing increased from 41.4 percent in 1970 to 63.6 percent in 1990; however, Chiapas remained under forty percent even by 1990. Also, less than 70 percent of all Chiapas households had electricity in 1990 when the national average was as high as 87.5 percent of households.²⁶ These statistics indicate marked horizontal inequalities that provide an important context for the rebellion of New Year's Day 1994. The existing deprivation of the indigenous population relative to the rest of the country was further compounded by perceived negative effects that NAFTA would bring. Recent promotion of free market principles in Mexico had not proven beneficial for the Indian peoples, only perpetuating their conditions of absolute poverty. The implementation of the North American Free Trade Agreement seemed likely to further exacerbate the inequalities and devastating living conditions of the indigenously populated southern states of Mexico.

Unlike Yugoslavia, Rwanda, Sri Lanka or Mexico, Kenya is an example of a state that has been able to avoid major outbreaks of ethnic conflict despite conditions of deprivation. As noted earlier, the distinction

between absolute deprivation and relative deprivation is important. Kenya, although an extremely poor country by global standards, could resist violent uprisings during the post-colonial period due to sustained and broadly shared economic growth. Kenyans' economic position relative to themselves overtime gradually improved, so their impetus towards conflict is rather weak. Kenyatta, the first president of Kenya, implemented a socialist based economic development program that fostered this period of growth across the entire country.²⁷ However, Jeni Klugman warns that the situation in Kenya is deteriorating and the potential for conflict is increasing. She notes:

Unequal access by groups to land, employment, and state benefits has been exacerbated by rapid population growth and the economic stagnation to which Kenya has become prone since the early 1980s. Kenya is no longer an exceptionally good performer among the economies of Africa.²⁸

It is not that Kenya lacked relative deprivation prior to this recent economic decline rather deprivation was relative horizontally. Horizontal deprivation, although relevant, does not provide as strong foundations for conflict as longitudinal deprivation.. Every society is subject to some degree of inequality; it is when individuals feel that the source or manifestation of inequality is unjust or particularly devastating that the impetus for violence can arise. Recent economic decline in Kenya, causing longitudinal relative deprivation, heightened awareness of preexisting horizontal inequalities. Klugman observes how sporadic outbursts of violence throughout the 1990s demonstrate growing ethno-economic tensions²⁹ and increasing likelihood for a major outbreak of ethnic strife.

The various manifestations of relative deprivation in Sri Lanka, Yugoslavia, Mexico, and Rwanda articulate Ted Gurr's assessment that deprivation provides "the basic condition for civil strife of any kind."³⁰ While the Serbs in Yugoslavia were not faced with excruciating circumstances of absolute poverty, they indeed experienced tangible relative decline in their political power and economic growth. This longitudinal relative deprivation also occurred in Sri Lanka, Rwanda, and arguably in Mexico as well. However, Andean deprivation in Mexico was most potently felt across society. Thus in the four studies of ethnic conflict, and even more recently in Kenya, the necessary preconditions for violence exist.

Mobilization

Deprivation may sow the seeds for ethnic conflict, but it does not independently drive individuals to violent means. As Pranab Bardhan explains, “[f]ailed economic policies often provide the context of despair and desperation which encourage channeling of frustrations on ethnic lines.”³¹ Ethnicity thus provides the mechanism for groups and political leaders to mobilize in pursuit of their common interests when the actual source of turmoil is relative deprivation. Several factors affect the degree to which ethnicity is used for mobilization, defined by Ted Gurr as “the extent to which group members are prepared to commit their energies and resources to collective action on behalf of their common interests.”³² The degree of ethnic diversity and the prowess of political leaders are two especially important elements of the mobilization process.

The uprising by the Zapatista movement on New Years Day of 1994 shows the necessity of utilizing the ascriptive approach to ethnicity. Political leaders relied on the large indigenous population to mobilize in response to disadvantages felt by the entire region. As the data noted above, several southern states of Mexico were particularly backward with respect to the rest of the country. These states also happened to have large indigenous populations. The adept leader of the Zapatista movement, Subcomandante Marcos, was well aware that coordinating a movement regionally was far more difficult than mobilizing a group based on ethnicity. When this realization occurs, political discourse emphasizes the disadvantaged position of the indigenous peoples rather than of southern Mexicans. Tedd Gurr also recognizes how “[g]rievances about differential treatment and the sense of group cultural identity provide the essential bases for mobilization and shape the kinds of claims made by group’s leaders.”³³

As previously noted, ethnic diversity does not necessarily lead to conflict. Collier and Hoeffler, in their project analyzing the economic causes of war, have observed a correlation between the degree of diversity in a state and the incidence of civil war. Extremely diverse states such as the United States or Ghana have avoided conflict because mobilization is very difficult. Collier and Hoeffler describe this phenomenon:

Rebel coordination would be more difficult both in societies in which the entire population was from the same group, so that there was no obvious distinction between government and rebel supporters, and in societies which were so highly fractionalized that rebellion required coordination across multiple distinct groups.³⁴

Optimal conditions of ethnic diversity are usually in the medium range, such as the Tamils and Sinhalese in Sri Lanka or the Hutu and Tutsi in Rwanda. Even Yugoslavia, with six or so main ethnic groups, fell within the scope

of diversity that could be easily coordinated. The ease of coordination is also an issue in the cost-benefit analysis that occurs prior to the outbreak of conflict, as will later be explained.

The former Yugoslavia, amidst economic decline and ethno-religious-linguistic diversity, became victim to one of the most charismatic leaders in modern history. In this respect, the parallel between Germany during the interwar period and Yugoslavia in the late 1980s is fairly obvious. Adolf Hitler and Slobodan Milosevic, armed with control over the state apparatus, were able to manipulate frustrating economic times into an issue of Aryan and Serbian nationalism, respectively.³⁵ In Yugoslavia, Milosevic masked the underlying conditions of declining Serbian political power and economy with a program of extreme nationalist propaganda. He was able to convince even the average individual Serbian, desperate for an explanation of his/her worsening condition, that long-standing ethnic rivalry was at stake. Milosevic conjured up distant memories of the Serbian defeat in the 1389 Battle of Kosovo, claiming that “[d]isunity among Serb officials made Serbia lag behind and their inferiority humiliated Serbia...[and that] unity in Serbia will bring prosperity to the Serbian people...”³⁶ His program of systemized propaganda was critical in rallying Serbians around this common cause. Milosevic’s success demonstrates how:

The combination [of a strong sense of group identity and common interests] animates powerful political movements and sustained conflict whenever it can be organized and focused by group leaders who give plausible expression to minority peoples’ grievances and aspirations.³⁷

The coincidence of relative economic deprivation among the Serbians made it possible for Milosevic to transform an otherwise economic and political issue into a battle in an ancient war of ethnic hatreds. Milosevic became desperate to maintain power and used ethnicity to mobilize the Serbian population.

Ethnicity often becomes such an instrument of mobilization because “ethnic groups are often easier to organize and consolidate than interest groups since the norms restricting entry and exit are more powerful (and the boundaries are less fluid and the defining characteristics more easily identifiable) in the former.”³⁸ As the ascriptive explanation of ethnicity notes, ethnic identity does have inherent qualities that charismatic political leaders can utilize for mobilizing a population. The transition to strife is neither solely based on ancient-hatreds between ethnic groups nor on relative economic or political deprivation. Rather, the two conditions (common ethnicity and relative deprivation) are complementary variables that under certain specifications can lead to violence.

The Rationalization Process

Deprivation along ethnic lines merely creates an environment with the potential for conflict. Violence is not at all inevitable. Humans are indeed rational beings and will only resort to violence if the perceived benefits outweigh the costs. The rationalization process provides individuals with the opportunity to assess their current, past, and future situations. Humans naturally engage in this process to rationalize their behavior. They use reason to determine the best solution to their problems. The end result, regardless of whether or not it is the best action, is based on each person's vision of reality. The average human employs violent tactics because he/she understands it to be the best or only option.

Collier and Hoeffler in "On Economic Causes of Civil War," express this utilitarian mentality as they describe a number of factors that affect whether or not a state will lapse into war.³⁹ The specific benefits of war depend on the state in crisis but can include an array of common long-term and short-term economic advantages. Short-term advantages are almost exclusively economic, such as providing rebels, civilians, and even state-military soldiers with opportunities for pillaging and looting. Civil wars can also alter normal trade, facilitate labor exploitation, help redistribute or accumulate land, attract foreign aid, and provide jobs or higher wages for the military.⁴⁰ Long-term advantages are both political and economic, involving acquisition of the state or secession in order to gain control of and access to resources.

Although there are substantial incentives to resort to violent conflict, waging war has many notable costs. First, death is an underlying possibility that must be seriously considered by each individual. Furthermore, the potential economic destruction that war can have on a nation can be devastating. These two factors may seem worthy of deterring war, but they are not weighed independently. Fear of death decreases in importance as one foresees a likelihood of success. Economic destruction will certainly take on different meaning in a highly developed country with high per capita income versus a poverty stricken developing nation; a disenfranchised minority in Switzerland has far more to lose than the Tamils in Sri Lanka.

While many factors influence the decision to resort to violence, the purely political or demographic position of an ethnic group is not exclusively relevant. The cases of Sri Lanka, Mexico, Rwanda and Yugoslavia demonstrate how violence can be initiated from the 'bottom-up' or the 'top-down' and by minority and majority groups. However, the dominant positions of the Hutu and Serbs certainly affected their cost-benefit analysis of

the utility of war, both because of the demographic reality of their majority as well as their possession of state power. Similarly, the marginalized position of the Mexican Andean population and Sri Lankan Tamils could also become a pertinent issue in their rationalization of the use of violence.

For groups who maintain control of the state, such as the Hutu and Serbs, the foreseeable reality of a loss in political and military power is persuasive. Essentially, they have everything to lose and all the resources available to instigate violence with a relatively high probability for success. These two conditions alone can make the decision to use violence fairly easy. However, charismatic political leaders can also play a critical role in the rationalization process, as can be seen in Yugoslavia; Milosevic shaped the discourse of inter-ethnic and economic conditions to persuade individuals that violence was necessary. His systemic propaganda not only served to mobilize the Serbian population, as noted earlier, but provided the basic information that guided each person's rational analysis of the costs and benefits of succumbing to violence. A very similar phenomenon occurred in Rwanda where insidious radio broadcasts pushed average Hutus to engage in violent destruction of the Tutsi minority.

The critical decision to engage in violent conflict is quite different for minority and marginalized groups, as can be observed with the Zapatista movement in Mexico as well as the Tamil youth insurgency in Sri Lanka. Minority groups tend to utilize violence when they perceive they have nothing to lose or that there are no other channels for addressing their grievances. The Andean population in Southern Mexico, as alluded to earlier, was in a condition of such absolute poverty that the potential costs of violence were essentially negligible. Furthermore, the imminent threat posed by the North American Free Trade agreement made the necessity to use violence immediate, whereas until 1 January 1994 the Zapatista movement resisted violence as a tool for exercising their political will. Thus, the utilization of violence by minorities is often of necessity in contrast to dominating groups use based on utility. Violence occurred in Sri Lanka also as a result of this necessity:

Tamil nationalism has emerged and been radicalized as an inevitable outcome of internal colonialism: "the escalating dialectic of oppression and resistance was leading to a level of national oppression which could only be met by armed revolutionary struggle."⁴¹

Stokke and Rytveit articulate eight specific conditions that gave the Tamils no other option except violence as an expression of their nationalist movement: the denial of citizenship to Indian Tamils; Sinhalese land colonization in Tamil areas; Sinhala as the only official language; discrimination of Tamils in public sector employment;

'standardization of university admission which favors Sinhalese; lack of public investments for regional development in the Tamil areas; a series of broken Sinhalese-Tamil pacts; and sporadic and systematic anti-Tamil violence.⁴² The level of disenfranchisement within the Tamils is not surprising given the above noted environment. Oppressive state policy coupled with Tamil relative longitudinal deprivation was easily rationalized as necessary conditions for violent rebellion.

Violence was rationalized by the Tutsi minority in Rwanda differently than the Sri Lankan Tamils or Mexican indigenous population. The Tutsis, after experiencing a huge decline in political power with decolonization had everything to *gain* from resorting to violence. The rebel movement that emerged used violence in an attempt to regain control of the extremely powerful state machinery. The Tutsi, partly due to their former dominant position, were well aware of the economic benefits that the state could provide with public sector jobs, control of natural resources, etc. State resources are especially significant in many less developed countries, like Rwanda, where the market and private sector prove insufficient to maintain a healthy economic environment and the democratic institutions are not strong enough to prevent clientelism and corruption.

Violence is a dangerous means for political action in any context; therefore its incidence must be assessed under assumptions of the rationality of human beings. While relative deprivation (longitudinal, horizontal, or both) that falls along ethnic lines makes conflict likely, the resolution to utilize violent measures occurs when individuals and groups accept that it is their best, and perhaps only, option. When violence is initiated from the top-down, evidenced in Rwanda and Yugoslavia, the powerful group does so in fear that it has potentially everything to lose yet the resources to assure success. Conversely, bottom-up violence occurs when a group feels they have nothing to lose because of conditions of such absolute deprivation (the indigenous population in southern Mexico) or everything to gain because of the role of state in administering resources (Tutsis in Rwanda). This direction of violence also occurs when the relevant group sees no other avenues for political action such as the case for the Tamils in Sri Lanka.

Conclusion

Violence, ethnicity, deprivation and rationalization are each integral components of the complex phenomenon of ethnic strife. A more thoughtful analysis of violence in Rwanda, Sri Lanka, Yugoslavia, and Mexico reveals a very specific relationship between relative deprivation and ethnic diversity that leads to conflict.

When a particular group is deprived of political or economic resources, the possibility for conflict is palpable. This deprivation can develop across time or between ethnic groups. In some instances, relative deprivation can occur in both the horizontal and longitudinal dimensions, making it even more tangible. The Tamils in Sri Lanka were victim to this unfortunate fate. Not only were they disenfranchised from the political system by the Sinhalese majority, they were faced with an economy unable to absorb the employment needs created by the post-colonial welfare state. In contrast to the dual deprivation manifest in Sri Lanka, the Serbs in Yugoslavia and Hutu in Rwanda primarily experienced longitudinal relative deprivation from positions of state-controlled power. Their deprivation was relative to themselves, as each majority group was gradually losing its grip on power. And finally, the indigenous population of southern Mexico was continually confronted with horizontal patterns of deprivation. Each of these four cases poignantly demonstrates the consequences that deprivation along ethnic lines can inflict on a society. However, as the fourth and final section describes, the drive to violence only occurs after a process of cost/benefit analysis.

While this paper seeks to provide a model for the occurrence of ethnic conflict, it also has implications for the prevention of this sort of violence. Societies that are subject to ethnic diversity, especially within the moderate range, must be especially careful to effectively distribute political and economic power. Moreover, general economic development can help to mitigate the benefits of using violence by increasing the costs of such action. This policy objective is not exclusively relevant for the less developed countries such as Sri Lanka and Rwanda, but could be an effective strategy for the Mexican government to prevent future violent outbursts in the poorest regions of the country. Ultimately, when the underlying conditions of relative deprivation are eliminated, the motive to use violence as a political instrument is also eliminated so that ethnicity is not even an issue.

Table 1-Summary

	Yugoslavia	Mexico	Sri Lanka	Rwanda
Explanation	Serbian decline in economic position coupled with threat of losing political control of important economic resources.	Indigenous peoples absolute economic deprivation but also in relation to rest of country; political exclusion of indigenous population.	Tamil and Sinhalese relative economic decline over time due to growing population that economy was unable to absorb.	Tutsi loss of political power and control of economic resources; declining Hutu control and manipulation of public sector for economic gains as a result of SAP

Table 2- Primary Types of Deprivation

	Horizontal	Longitudinal
Political	Sri Lankan Tamils; Rwandan Tutsi	Yugoslavian Serbs; Rwandan Tutsi
Economic	Indigenous Population of Mexico	Yugoslavian Serbs; Sri Lanka; Rwandan Hutu

Notes

¹ "Ethnicity," dictionary.com

² Thomas Szayna (editor), *Identifying Potential Ethnic Conflict: Application of a Process Model* (Santa Monica: Rand, 2000). See Chapter 2 for a more detailed description of the three schools.

³ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 20

⁵ Andy Storey, "Economics and Ethnic Conflict: Structural Adjustment in Rwanda," *Development Policy Review* 17, no.1 (March 99): 3.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso Publications, 1983), 6.

⁸ Leo J. DeSouza, "Assigning Blame in Rwanda," *Washington Monthly* 29, no. 9 (September 1997).

⁹ Sirimal Abeyratne, "Economic Roots of Political Conflict: The Case of Sri Lanka," *World Economy* 27, no. 8 (Aug 2004): 1295-1314.

¹⁰ Szayna, *Identifying Potential Ethnic Conflict*, 24.

¹¹ Nafziger, Stewart, and Vayrynen, *War, Hunger and Displacement*, Vol. 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) 96.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ For a more extensive discussion of this topic see Paul D. Hutchcroft, "The Politics of Privilege: Assessing the Impact of Rents, Corruption, and Clientelism on Third World Development," *Political Studies* XLV, (1997).

¹⁵ Abeyratne, "Economic Roots of Political Conflict."

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 1297.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 1301.

¹⁸ *Ibid.* See chart on page 1308 that shows increase in unemployment, especially among those age 19-25.

¹⁹ Neil DeVotta, "Illiberalism and Ethnic Conflict in Sri Lanka," *Journal of Democracy* 13, no.1 (Jan 2002): 84.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ Szayna, *Identifying Potential Ethnic Conflict*, 91.

²² For a more extensive explanation of the major events in Rwanda since decolonization, see "Rwanda," *Africa South of the Sahara*, 33rd edition. (London: Europa Publications, 2004.): 868.

²³ Storey, "Economics and Ethnic Conflict," 6.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ David Adams, "Doomed uprising rips veil from Mexican 'miracle,'" *The Times*, January 7, 1994, sec. Overseas News.

²⁶ Mexico Country Study & Country Guide- Social Indicators. <http://reference.allrefer.com/country-guide-study/mexico/mexico46.htm>, 2-3.

²⁷ "Independent Kenya." <http://www.kenyaweb.com/history/independent-k/>

²⁸ Klugman, *War, Hunger and Displacement*, 296.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ Szayna, *Identifying Potential Ethnic Conflict*, 41.

³¹ Pranab Bardhan, "Method in the Madness? A Political-Economy Analysis of Ethnic Conflicts in Less Developed Countries," *Center for International and Development Economics Research*, Working Paper No. C96-070, (June 1996), 9.

³² Tedd Gurr, *Minorities at Risk*, (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1993), 127

³³ *Ibid.*, 124

³⁴ P. Collier and A. Hoeffler, "On Economic Causes of War," *Oxford Economic Papers* 50 (October 1998): 567.

³⁵ Many analyses of the interwar period recognize that deteriorating economic conditions in Germany helped fuel Hitler's Nazi movement against the Jews.

³⁶ Milosevic, Slobodan. "St. Vitus Day Speech." June 28, 1989. <http://slobodan-milosevic.org/spch-kosovo1989.htm>

³⁷ Gurr, *Minorities at Risk*, 124.

³⁸ Bardhan, "Method in the Madness?" 15.

³⁹ Collier and Hoeffler, "On Economic Causes of War."

⁴⁰ David Keen, "The Economic Functions of Violence in Civil Wars," *Adelphi Paper* 320 (1998).

⁴¹ Kristian Stockke and Anne Kristi Ryntveit, "The Struggle for Tamil Eelam in Sri Lanka," *Growth & Change* 31, no.2 (Spring 2000): 6

⁴² *Ibid.*

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