Approaches to ethnic conflict resolution: paradigms and principles

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Abstract

In the past few decades, the consciousness of the ubiquity of ethnic conflicts and of ethnic diversity has significantly increased. There has been, however, an inability to foresee, adequately explain and resolve ethnic conflicts. This inability is attributed to the preconceived frameworks and paradigms through which the ethnic phenomenon has been understood. Three types of such preconceptions are singled out: the preconception of ethnic groups as pre-modern, the self-conception of the majority group in society as non-ethnic and the often-assumed "command" character of the mandate carried out by appointed administrators dealing with minority ethnic groups. These preconceptions have contributed to ineffectiveness of efforts at interethnic conflict resolution in as much as they have excluded the principle of identity recognition, regarded here as a basic metaprinciple of interethnic relations. Techniques of ethnic conflict resolution, such as that of negotiation, can work effectively only when they are governed by this metaprinciple. In this regard, the effectiveness depends also on participation of the state in interethnic conflict resolution, particularly by means of policies of identity recognition. Application of the metaprinciples, however, requires not only an understanding of the circumstances of each particular situation of conflict, but as well, an understanding of the nature of ethnicity, types of ethnic groups, the nature of ethnic identity, the nature of the process of ethnic identity construction and change. Understanding of the nature of nationalism and types of nationalisms is a case in point. Full understanding of the broader nature of the phenomenon of ethnicity is a prerequisite for development of an attitude that would lead to an effective negotiation process between conflicting ethnic groups. © 1999 Elsevier Science Ltd. All rights reserved.

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Introduction

Why are social scientists and practitioners so often unable to foresee or predict interethnic conflicts and when they occur unable to find effective ways of their resolution? What follows is an attempt to give an answer to this frequently asked question. I locate the problem in several intellectual paradigms of the era of modernity. First, a brief picture of potential interethnic conflicts at the end of this century is presented. This is followed by a discussion of what I consider to have been prevalent intellectual paradigms which have made the persistence of ethnicity and interethnic conflicts difficult to understand. Thirdly, I take up the issue of the most general principles that guide approaches to ethnic conflict resolution and argue in favor of the principle of identity recognition. I suggest that employment of this principle and the attitudes deriving from this principle can make a more thorough conflict resolution possible. Inversely, the failure to regard the principle of identity recognition frustrates or limits the intervention efforts for interethnic conflict resolution. Identity recognition provides integrity to the process of interethnic negotiation and in difficult cases of negotiation even one or a few actions which symbolically detract from identity recognition will have the effect of undermining the entire process.

The process of interethnic negotiation presupposes not only a specific knowledge of each culturally different group involved in interethnic conflict, but also, and especially, a broader understanding of ethnicity as a social phenomenon that changes or develops over time. Finally, I present an analysis of nationalism as an example of this broader approach to understanding ethnicity. The discussion will use a variety of illustrations of interethnic conflicts in the world, but it will particularly draw examples from Canada’s social and historical experience.

Current interethnic conflicts

Interethnic conflicts have existed since the dawn of humanity. Yet, it is only recently that scholars and other writers have become conscious and have come to realize how many societies and nation-states in the world are multiethnic and how extensive interethnic conflicts are around the world. In a recent book on “minorities at risk”, Ted Gurr (1993) has singled out 233 groups that are “at risk”. By this he means groups that in the post-World War II period have become politicized, i.e., have either taken political action on behalf of their collective interests or have experienced economic or political discrimination, or both. Hence they are actually or potentially engaged in interethnic conflict. Each one of these groups is at risk of collective adversity. Of these 233 groups, only 27, or about 12%, have so far no record (in the sources he could find) of political organization, protest, rebellion or other form of intercommunal conflict since 1945. Further, he points out that out of 127 countries in the world that he examined, 75% had at least one, and many had more, highly politicized minorities. Gurr admits that
these are conservative figures and gives references to other researchers. Two such researchers have identified 575 ethnic groups as being actual or potential nation-states, and one has estimated that there are as many as 3000–5000 "nations" in the world (Gurr, 1993; Nielssson, 1985; Nietschmann, 1987).

Another way of gauging interethnic conflict is to look at significant events taking place over a period of time. Thus, out of 295 events taking place around the world as recorded by Hunter (1993) (the Statesman's Yearbook, 1993–94, 127), or 43% of all the events in one year, can be counted as directly relating to interethnic issues. (The criterion in coding the events as involving interethnic issues was to include all those that had relevance to an ethnic group as a whole vis-a-vis another group or a country's government. This included both events taking place among minority ethnic groups and events taking place among majority ethnic groups, e.g., one nation's government acting vis-a-vis another nation's government. In the latter case, only those events were coded which bore on the question of identity, e.g., a nation's decision to join the European Community, excluding purely economic EC agreements.)

There are, of course, conflicts which stand out clearly because the news about them are continuously reported by the media, as for example, the conflicts in ex-Yugoslavia, Rwanda, South Africa, Israel, Northern Ireland and Germany. But many interethnic tensions are either rarely reported on or not reported at all. The French–English conflict in Canada is only occasionally reported upon in the international media, that relating to the Canadian First Nations even less occasionally, and such issues as the Japanese–Canadian, Ukrainian Canadian or similar demands, are rarely reported even in the Canadian media.

Nevertheless, very recently the consciousness of the ubiquity of interethnic conflict has greatly increased. Indeed, some have been surprised by it. As Robert D. Kaplan (1994), in an article in the Atlantic Monthly (February, 1994), discovered, in the eyes of many, perhaps most, people in the world "the real borders are the most tangible and intractable ones: those of culture and tribe" (p. 60). Quoting another scholar, S. P. Huntington of Harvard University, Kaplan states: "Differences among civilizations are not only real; they are basic, involving, among other things, history, language and religion" (p. 60). Being taken aback by the degree of violence and trying to understand it, he makes this insightful comment: "The savagery of the fighting points to a truth that we like the stomach to contemplate: A large number of people on this planet, to whom the comfort and stability of a middle-class life is utterly unknown, find war and barracks existence a step up rather than a step down" (p. 72).

Yet, there was a period of time, not so long ago — about 20 years ago — in which many scholars as well as many "lay" people believed that ethnicity was something of the past, something left over from a prehistoric or at least pre-modern times and something that was doomed to extinction as the technological civilization and modernism advance. In 1975 a group of distinguished social scientists, mainly from the United States, published a collective book in which they analyze ethnicity in the world as a new phenomenon. The book's editors (Glazer & Moynihan, 1975) reveal something of a surprise that in this period
ethnicity has shown, as it were, a resurgence with a relevance to modernity. They quote a distinguished German sociologist R. Dahrendorf as saying that emergence of ethnicity in modern times is a "refeudalization" of society, that modernity has witnessed a shift to concerns with property or class and ethnicity, even if property has been correlated with it, has been seen as a survival from a previous age.

Most social scientists, political pundits and those in power themselves, have had an inability to foresee ethnic conflicts and, related to it, an inability to explain them, let alone resolve them. Thus, for example, nobody could foresee the violence of ex-Yugoslavia, the collapse of the Soviet Union, the genocide of Rwanda, the resistance to humanitarian help in Bosnia and Somalia, and so on. Likewise, in all of these, and other cases, the other nations of the world with all the resources they could draw upon, including the wisdom of the social scientists, showed a basic inability to do much to help resolve these conflicts.

The question, thus, is why this inability? Why should it not be possible to foresee ahead of time the emergence of at least a number of these conflicts and why until now have the nations of the world not developed effective ways of resolving them? I will argue that the two types of inability, i.e., inability to foresee and inability to resolve, derive from the same roots. I will focus here only on a few of such root-factors, those that I consider to be the most basic.

Pre-normative paradigms and understanding of intergroup relations

I want to single out three such factors that are interrelated and interdependent. They are: the preconception of ethnic groups as pre-modern, the self-conception of the majority group in society as non-ethnic and the often-assumed "command" character of the mandate carried out by appointed administrators dealing with minority ethnic groups. All three of these factors can be depicted as pre-normative paradigms, i.e., preconceived frameworks that are shared by people of knowledge in society and often by the societal leaders and elites. These paradigms usually provide the accepted or "proper" basis for understanding, research and study of the relevant subject matter and anybody who has a claim to be an expert on the respective subject is expected to accept and conduct his/her discourse within the context of the paradigm. Similarly, they provide legitimization and parameters for activities, social policies and programs undertaken by relevant authorities or interest groups. Such paradigms can be called pre-normative in the sense that they are cognitive in character, yet they underly the existing values and attitudes. They are constitutive of what is often called the intellectual climate of any specific historical period.

To explain, let me use an example. In the June 9, 1994 issue of the New York Review of Books, British historian Norman Davies reviews a book on the Second World War written by the American historian Gerhard L. Weinberg. In it, Davies, on the one hand, praises the author for his judicious scrutiny of the research on the topic up to now and for his careful attention to his sources. Yet he goes on to criticize him for not really understanding what World War II was
about for the real people who fought in it or for those who were the victims of it. Davies (1994) says that the problem is that the book was written according to the preconceptions accepted by the victorious Allies in the war and these preconceptions have not changed in the 50 years since the war, but rather have formed the framework for the “mainstream” history until today. Yet, this framework has made it impossible to understand the war from the point of view of those who were not the victorious Allies. For example, the official end of the war given by the mainstream history is May 1945. But this was so for the Allies. For Greeks, Chinese or Ukrainians the end of the war did not come until 1947, 1949 and 1951, and for still others, even later. Or again, the mainstream history holds that in the war Russia and the Russians suffered the greatest damage and losses. Davies points out that although many Russians did suffer horribly from the German invasion, the devastating brunt of the occupation was borne not by Russia, but by the Baltic States, Belarus, Poland and Ukraine. What is interesting to me is how now, with the change of the political structure of Eastern Europe, the history of the area itself is beginning to change.

The existing theoretical literature dealing with intergroup relations does not appear to pay much attention to the paradigmatic factors existing in the broader structure of intergroup relations itself. In the social psychological literature, scholars have grouped the prevalent theories of intergroup relations into at least three categories: contact theories, social identity theories and realistic conflict theories. All these three types of theories have had some empirical testing (Taylor and Moghaddam, 1987; Tzeng and Jackson, 1994). The contact theories focus on the process of interaction between the conflicting parties itself, which under favourable pre-existing conditions tends to reduce negative stereotypes and hostility among the conflicting parties, but under unfavourable pre-existing conditions may do the opposite, i.e., increase negative stereotypes and hostilities (Allport, 1954; Amir, 1976; Pettigrew, 1986). One type of contact theory focuses on the statuses of the conflicting parties and assumes that the conflict interaction can be successfully resolved if the conflicting parties are of equal status and vice versa (Spangerberg & Nel, 1983). The problem with this assumption is that whereas this may be the case in many situations, probably the most hostile conflicts between ethnic groups, religious groups, and other similar groups, occur in situations in which the statuses are perceived by the conflicting parties not to be equal, particularly when one group, for historical reasons, considers itself superior to the other group and the other perceives itself as having been victimized. The historical situations create a system of relationships that establish group preconceptions and, in their broadest intellectual aspects, create relationship paradigms. By focussing on the immediate interaction process itself, the contact theories tend to ignore these broader paradigms as determining factors of conflictual relationships.

The social identity theories argue that ethnocentrism, or in-group bias, is a natural outgrowth of a person’s identity formation process and under certain conditions produces feelings of hostility toward out-groups and a consequent discriminatory behaviour favoring the in-group at the expense of the out-group
(Tajfel, 1970; Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Taylor & Moriarty, 1987). In order to ascertain the extent to which in-group identity itself determines outgroup hostility, many investigators of this type of theory focus on the minimal presence of factors from outside the in-group and do not resort to factors built into the structure of the group relationships itself (Brewer & Silver, 1978). Tajfel (1970) himself, however, had tried to ascertain the role of some outside factors and has studied values and norms as determining factors of hostility. He and others concluded that social categorization per se can be a sufficient basis for intergroup discrimination (Allen & Wilder, 1975; Billig & Tajfel, 1973; Tajfel, 1978). Thus more recent research has recognized the importance of the broader factors of preconception in intergroup relations. Still, there has been little specification of these broader factors regarding specific societies or specific periods of time within a society's history. This is what this paper intends, in some degree, to do in relation to the modern period of the Western societies.

The realistic conflict theories maintain that competition for scarce concrete or abstract resources among groups is the source of conflict and hostility among them. The work of M. Sherif (1966, 1979) has particularly fostered this approach. According to him it is the objective fact of this type of competition that creates hostile perceptions and biases of one group against another. While some empirical studies have confirmed this conclusion (Bobo, 1983; Rabbie & Horowitz, 1969), this approach also ignores the preconceptions built into the structure of intergroup relationships.

In sociological literature, much emphasis had been placed on the societal structures. M. Hechter's (1978) work, for example, considers both the presence and absence of interethnic conflict to be the result of the economic and power structure of society in which the dominant groups hold the position of the societal center, consisting of higher status occupations, and the minority groups, particularly immigrants, a position at the society's periphery, consisting of low status occupations, which, nevertheless, are vital for the society's welfare. The boundary between the center and periphery is maintained because it ensures that the minorities remain in a little-competitive position with the majority. This boundary engenders and maintains ethnic cultures and gives rise to stereotypes and biases. Similar theories have been expressed by others (Blumer, 1969; Bonacich, 1972, 1976). While focussing on the societal structure, this approach, however, does not explore the idea that intergroup preconceptions, particularly pre-normative ones, can be constitutive of the structure itself rather than being simply its consequence.

In recent sociology, the social constructionist approach has become popular. Ethnicity is conceived as being constantly subjectively constructed or reconstructed (Anderson, 1983; Herzog, 1984; Isajiw, 1977, 1990; Smith, 1984; Yancey, Erickson, & Juliani, 1976). This allows for extracting and analyzing preconceptions involved in interethnic and other intergroup relations. The approach in this paper can be said to be an extension of this type of analysis. Still, the constructionist approach does not give adequate attention to general paradigmatic analysis. Much of it deals with more specific preconceptions, such as,
for example, androcentricity in intergroup relations (Stasiulis and Yuval-Davis, 1995).

Three paradigmatic factors

Similarly to the case of understanding of World War II above, our knowledge of the ethnic phenomenon, ethnicity, ethnic conflict and ethnic issues has, for a long time, also existed within a broader preconceptual framework that made these phenomena difficult to understand. This framework — including derivative philosophies or ideologies — had been accepted as a fact and taken for granted. I will first briefly look at such taken-for-granted philosophy that formed the basis of the intellectual climate in the 19th century, and then one closer to us in the 20th century. You can see this framework reflected in almost all of the writings in the social thought of the two centuries.

The 19th century may already seem somewhat remote from us, yet we are still indebted to many of its intellectual premises. I have in mind the theory of evolution. In the 19th century evolution was not just a biological theory. On the contrary, the biological theory of evolution was for a long time preceded by a theory of social evolution, according to which history was seen as a process going through certain stages in which each consecutive stage is a higher superior stage to the previous, necessary, but inferior stage. Some thinkers, like Herbert Spencer or Karl Marx, thought these stages to be stages of development of social structures, from primitive to feudal to pre-industrial to industrial and so on. Others, like Jacques Turgot and Auguste Comte, saw the stages to be stages of development of the human mind. By the end of the 19th century there was a preconception that humanity, meaning Europe and America, or more precisely Western Europe and North America, had reached the stage in which reason and science had prevailed over emotion and custom, and that humanity was able to solve all its problems through scientific-rational solutions. Hence emotion was subdued and such things as wars had become unnecessary. Indeed by the end of the 19th century many Western Europeans thought that war was a thing of the past. The First World War, especially its magnitude and violence, came as most European intellectuals as a surprise. It shattered the belief in the present as a superior stage of evolution. Thereafter, the entire paradigm of social evolution fell into disuse and new intellectual paradigms began to emerge.

The most influential and powerful conceptual paradigm of the 20th century had been the paradigm of “modernity”. It defined the intellectual climate of the century from art and architecture to social science, philosophy and natural science. It owed a lot to the evolutionary paradigm of the previous century, except that instead of defining societies and cultures as superior and inferior, it defined them as pre-modern and modern, modern referring to a technologically-based way of doing things and of thinking. An expression of this in social thought was the juxtaposition of the notions of “particularism” and “universalism”. According to this framework, transition to modernity is a transition from particularism to
universalism. Included in this is also a transition from quality to performance, i.e., from an emphasis on who one is to an emphasis on what one can do, from an emphasis on general, diffuse, "jack of all trades" social roles to specific or specialized, "expert" roles, from expression of feelings to control of feelings. Last but not least, from an emphasis on collectivity or community to an emphasis on individuality and individual achievement. The greatest thinker to articulate this meaning of modernity was Talcott Parsons (1951, 1971) of Harvard University.

In this paradigm, ethnicity, ethnic groups and ethnic identity were all matters connected with particularism, with who one is, with diffuse responsibility, emotion, community or collectivity, in short with pre-modernity, not modernity. They were seen as being dysfunctional for modernity, as non-adaptive, as a drawback to equality and social mobility and to full participation in society. The term ethnic came to be identified with minorities only and it came to be assumed that as modernity progresses ethnic groups will change and eventually disappear (Bell, 1975; Porter, 1975). There are still many today who accept this paradigm, even though we have entered into the age of post-modernity.

I am proposing that both of the paradigms described here have made understanding of interethnic conflict difficult, because they made understanding of the nature of ethnicity difficult. Somehow ethnicity was always outside society and society, often referred to as "society at large", came to be defined in non-ethnic terms. The mainstream social thought was one that articulated the paradigm of the "society at large", i.e., the modernity paradigm, and hence ethnic conflict, as ethnic groups themselves, were seen as social problems, as vestiges of the past. On the other hand, wars among states themselves were seen somehow as part of the normal history of societies at large.

The problem with this kind of thinking is that the groups who have power, i.e., whose culture and identity determine the character of major social institutions, tend not to see, nor to define themselves, as ethnic groups. Rather, they tend to see themselves in universal terms. They tend to perceive their own ideologies or policies as universal, i.e., as applicable to all people, or as being in the interest of all people within their society, and even to those outside of their society.

Those in the same society, however, who do not have the same power, i.e., minority groups, may see the same ideologies and policies as fulfilling the needs of the dominant groups rather than theirs. Yet the nature of all ethnicity is precisely possession of a culture and distinct identity which the majority groups possess as do the minority ethnic groups. Hence, the difficulty of the mainstream in understanding and handling ethnicity. This difficulty can be attributed not only to the "Americans" or "Canadians", but to Germans in Germany, French in France and so on. Those in power are often ignorant of those outside of it.

What is salient here is that to understand ethnicity, one has to understand that culture and identity-bearing groups who have power in society, i.e., those who constitute the "mainstream" in the society at large, are also ethnic groups, just as much as those who are not in the mainstream, except that because they possess or have the power they are majority ethnic groups, whereas the others are the
minority ethnic groups. This is the first step toward finding the principles of resolution of interethnic conflict.

Before moving to the question of the principles of ethnic conflict resolution, I want to briefly take up one more factor that historically made it difficult to handle ethnic conflicts. Recently, particularly since the fall of the Soviet Union, it has become popular to talk about the distinction between the "command" economy that characterized the Soviet Union and other socialist countries, and the "market" economy, characteristic of Western, capitalist, societies. Economists have been pointing to the process of shift all around the world to "market" economy (Heilbroner, 1992). I should point out that this distinction is not new. Already in the middle of the nineteenth century, some social thinkers (e.g., Herbert Spencer) were talking about the transition from "military" or command social structure, to industrial social structure based on free competition. The point I want to highlight here is that until today we have often been solving important social issues by principles originally derived from command-type of administrative structures. What I have in mind is such procedures as the administration of the Indian Act in Canada or the establishment and execution of immigration policies or such policies as the Bilingual Education Act in the United States, or the like. The point is that despite coming from democratically established governments, most of these policies, until recently, have been policies established as it were, from above, by legislators or simply by public administrative bodies, and carried out by them into practice as planned with little or no consultation with the groups whom these policies would affect. This, instead of being part of the solution to interethnic tensions, would often become part of the problem, producing dissatisfaction among the people whom, presumably, these policies were meant to serve. Only very recently, and after years of trying, the Native Peoples in Canada have gained some power over the Indian Act and immigrants themselves have become a force, though not a strong one yet, in establishing new immigration policies. It is also only recently that we are coming to realise that all preconceived plans and policies must leave room for negotiation with the groups concerned not only in the beginning before a policy is established, but also during the process of carrying out the policies and even after the policy has been applied, with the idea of modifying it or adding to it at any point in time in order to accommodate concrete reality. Rigid policies are usually not very effective and may be even counterproductive. An example of a relatively flexible policy can be the policy of multiculturalism in Canada. Over the period of time since 1971 when it was established, as new demands were placed on it by various new ethnic groups, it managed to modify itself and accommodate at least some needs of the changing ethnic community, without jettisoning completely the old, originally established goals.

**Metaprinicples of ethnic conflict resolution**

This brings me to the question of techniques and principles of ethnic conflict
resolution. I accept that negotiation with the ethnic groups involved in the conflict is the most important technique. Literature on conflict resolution clearly supports this assumption (Burton, 1987; Kimmel, 1994; Rubin, 1994). However, negotiation can work effectively only in conjunction with other techniques. But the appropriate choice of combination of techniques to be employed in any specific case depends on a deeper understanding of the social-psychological principles behind the technique.

By the concept of negotiation I mean to refer not just to any single settlement of a dispute with explicitly defined specific issues. The concept is used here to refer to a broader process, one that includes a series of settlements of specific disputes, but involves also a modification of attitudes, norms, customs and laws. It leads to what J. W. Burton (1987, 1990) has called conflict resolution in the broader sense of the word. Burton emphasized the difference between conflict settlement and conflict resolution. While the former is a rational or legal compromise of specific issues at a specific time, the latter involves a transformation of the relationship between the conflicting parties that removes the problems that have caused the conflict.

This type of negotiation may involve legislation of new policies, enactment of new laws, acts of redress by a government, precedent-setting court judgements and rulings of specific issues, and the like. It may also involve acceptance of new programs by the media or local communities reflecting different ethnic identities, acceptance of culturally different symbolic forms in public monuments, and so on. On the part of minority ethnic groups, this may involve relinquishing some of their customs, attitudes or values and taking over new ones from the dominant society.

In the narrower sense of the word, the process of negotiation involves sets of techniques. M. Deutsch (1994) has tried to identify a number of such techniques, or in his language skills, used constructive solutions to conflicts. He refers to such skills as “active listening”, “taking the perspective of the other”, distinguishing between “needs” and “positions”, “controlling anger”, using “I” rather than “you”, “reframing issues to find common ground”, being alert to misunderstanding deriving from cultural differences, and the like. We can add that these skills are valuable for all parties to any negotiation, but most commonly they are employed by designated mediators or arbitrators. They are particularly important when cultural differences are involved. Deutsch points out that knowledge of the skills by itself is not sufficient for effective conflict resolution. Guided and repeated practice is necessary. But he also states that knowledge of the variety of skills, along with skill practice, can facilitate the generalization of these skills so that they can be applied to a wide range of situations.

Deutsch, however, does not pursue the issue as to the normative grounds which would allow one to generalize the skills to different situations. This is particularly important in the case of conflict between groups of different cultural backgrounds in which one cannot take for granted a pre-consensual sharing of many basic normative principles. Referring to Brewer's (1986) work on ingroup bias, Deutsch concedes that when two interacting groups have each limited their "moral
community”, e.g., “loyalty”, “honesty”, “trustworthiness”, etc., to their own
group, they are apt to develop hostile stereotypes of and attitudes toward each
other.

R. J. Fisher (1994) has pointed out that conflict resolution requires some kind
of humanistic and democratic principles. He, however, does not specify which
ones, particularly those required in situations in which democratic principles
themselves are in dispute between the conflicting parties. Fisher’s emphasis on
such principles is nevertheless important. It indicates that one has to look for the
most general principles that would enable ethnic conflict resolution. These
principles can be called *metaprinicples*.

The most general principle behind a successful negotiation process in
interethnic, intercultural conflicts is that of identity recognition, particularly public
recognition, and the agency that is the most suited to articulate this principle is
the one which is public and possesses legitimate power, i.e., at present, the state,
particularly the democratic state. I will first discuss the role of the state in this
regard and then the principle itself and the prerequisites for its effectiveness.

*The role of legitimate power*

Recent events in South Africa, Israel and Canada have shown that negotiation
can be most successful when it involves a democratic state as a party to
negotiation. Ethnic issues can potentially become, and often do become, political
issues and it is the function of the state to deal with political issues. This function
cannot be performed by economic organizations or businesses no matter how
powerful they are. It is, however, also essential that the state has a commitment to
a code of human rights. Some commentators today insist that the nation-state is a
thing of the past and that the role hitherto performed by the state will be taken
over by the international community. The European Community is given as an
example, as are also the various common market arrangements, NAFTA, Pacific
Rim, etc. The United Nations is pointed to as being more and more involved in
matters that used to be the exclusive domains of specific nation-states.

While all this may be true, the facts do show that in recent interethnic conflicts
in Bosnia-Herzegovina, in Rwanda and in Somalia international intervention
proved to be completely ineffective. It has achieved some humanitarian aims, but
it has shown a complete inability to prevent ethnic genocides and to negotiate any
peaceful solutions. The international bodies, i.e., the European Community and
the United Nations, have repeatedly used negotiation in their attempts to bring
peace, yet to no avail. In fact, they have demonstrated the opposite, that peace,
i.e., all the so-called cease-fires, can be effectively used as an instrument of war.
The problem is that the international community was psychologically, or morally,
unable to use force in support of its negotiations and interestingly enough the few
times that it did use force, the negotiated agreement held.

The point here, is that the international community was unable to act as states
normally do. The main function of the state is to protect its people and in this the
international community failed, perhaps because it did not consider the people in
question to be "its" people. The opposite is also true, that is, that if a government of a state is unable or unwilling to protect those who are supposed to be its people, and especially if it itself engages in either discriminatory practices or in genocide of other ethnic groups within its political domain, then obviously these groups would not see the state as being their own. This precisely has been the long-standing problem in many African countries, particularly Rwanda and Burundi. But Uganda, Angola, Nigeria and Kenya should not be forgotten. This is also one important factor as to why the Soviet Union collapsed so easily: as a result of many historical repressive experiences, most ethnicities subsumed under it, did not see it as their state.

Recently, in South Africa, Canada and, to an extent, Israel there has been an effective use of the negotiation technique. The change achieved in Africa in such a short period of time by use of this technique is astounding. In Canada, once the negotiation between the government and the Native Peoples began in earnest, the results achieved were something that some of the Native People have worked hard to achieve for close to a century, but whose demands were never taken seriously until very recently (Berger, 1982). Similarly in Israel, the first steps in negotiations, when the government took the Arab demands seriously, produced a change and a real promise of a solution that was unthinkable before. In each of these three cases the action by strong governments, but governments acting within the context of democratic principles and human rights considerations and giving full recognition to the contending party as somebody to be taken seriously, was a determining factor.

Threat is a contingency that often impedes negotiation. Yet, many, if not most, cases of negotiation between ethnic groups, take place in the context of threat. Threat, of course comes from both sides of the negotiating table. But the threat coming from the group that has little power is of particular interest. Many governments refuse to negotiate with groups because they consider them to be terrorist. It should be understood that terrorism, at least in the early stages, is a way of both bringing attention of those in power to the group's issues and a way of placing the group on a power level that would force the other side, usually a state, to take the group seriously. The effect, of course, often is the opposite, i.e., refusal of the group in power to negotiate under threat. But it should be remembered that the longer this refusal lasts and the more terrorism groups engage in, the more terrorism becomes a way of life and the more difficult it becomes to have lasting effects of any negotiated settlement. Hence in any interethnic conflict it is advisable to use the negotiation technique as early in the process as possible. This will not guarantee a satisfactory solution, but it increases the chance of reaching it.

Thus, in addition to its role as protector of "its" people, the state is also a powerful agency of legitimation, particularly legitimation of group identities. The fact of the state being a serious party to negotiation of intergroup conflicts is indirectly and symbolically an acceptance of the identity of the larger group on whose behalf the negotiation takes place as being legitimate. This bestows on the group a degree of public recognition, which in itself can contribute to the conflict
resolution. To achieve this it is important that negotiations proceed in a context of understanding that there are some real gains to be made by both sides. Both sides must be prepared for some real give for a real take. Negotiations can be easily frustrated when one party comes to define the other party as negotiating in bad faith. This sends the message that the negotiating group is not really taken seriously, its identity is not accepted, and even if some disputes do come to be settled, no progress is made toward conflict resolution in the sense mentioned above.

It should be mentioned here that, indirectly, the state is a party to any minority group interaction if it establishes policies regarding minorities. Such policies as that of Multiculturalism in Canada, Affirmative Action, Bilingual Education Act in the United States, etc., give implicit public recognition to the identities of the groups to whom the policies relate. This in itself is an important step toward minority conflict resolution, provided the policies do not alienate other minority or majority groups in society.

Identity recognition

To effectively use the negotiation technique to achieve interethnic conflict resolution, it is essential to understand the principle of identity recognition behind the technique and cultivate an attitude that follows from this understanding. Recognition of the identities of others implies that one can conduct a discourse with them on equal footing. It implies respect for them not on account of any of their acquired attributes, such as wealth, position, expertise, but simply on account of them being human. It assumes the idea that two human beings can settle any of their problems through a human discourse. The idea of according recognition to other identities is the contrary of any racist-type ideology that holds that some people are superior, others inferior. It is also at the basis of the democratic ideology. The only problem here is that whereas in the past the idea of giving recognition to individuals has been more easily acceptable in democratic societies, the according of equal recognition to groups of people, particularly ethnic groups, has not been so widespread. In the West, human rights have tended to be defined as individual rather than group rights and, as I have pointed out before, the social thought of modernity has tended to see ethnicity as pre-modern. Yet, today, it is becoming clear that refusal to accord recognition can have damaging effects on all concerned. As Charles Taylor (1992) put it:

Equal recognition is not just the appropriate mode for a healthy democratic society. Its refusal can inflict damage on those who are denied it ... The projection of an inferior or demeaning image on another can actually distort and oppress, to the extent that the image is internalized. Not only contemporary feminism but also race relations and discussions of multiculturalism are undergirded by the premise that withholding of recognition can be a form of oppression (p. 36).
Indeed, to be a good citizen in a democratic society one must have a confidence in one's own identity and to have that confidence, recognition of one's identity by others is necessary. Individual identities, however, derive from group identities. To have a strong individual identity one must feel that the group of which one de facto is a member, enjoys acceptance and is not seen as inferior by others, especially by the societal mainstream. Hence, if we are to help solve interethnic conflicts, acceptance of the principle of recognition is a sine qua non. In any negotiation an attitude based on this principle is a prerequisite.

Acceptance of this principle and attitude, however, requires a further knowledge and appreciation of other groups. It requires two types of knowledge as prerequisite for positive solution of ethnic conflicts. First, it requires a specific knowledge of the ethnic group or groups in question: knowledge of their history, culture and customs, religion, issues that concern the group and the methods the group uses in approaching these issues. Secondly, it requires a deeper understanding of the nature of ethnicity and the processes of ethnic development and change. It is this deeper knowledge that will make it possible for us to understand the issues behind issues, the often inexplicit motives or causes that lie behind the explicit, specific, often changing, day-to-day issues.

To explain the first prerequisite, the example cited earlier, about the end of World War II, can be used again. To understand the collapse of the Soviet Union and the interethnic conflicts that have taken place there and those that are still taking place in Russia and Eurasia, it is essential to know, for one thing, why the War ended later for many of the groups in that area, what were the official and the actual policies of the Soviet regime toward cultural minorities, the differences in the history of these minorities preceding the emergence of the Soviet Union, the legacy of these different histories, the differences in values, cultural perspectives, customs, etc., of these minorities, and so on. To understand the French English conflict in Canada, it is essential to know the legacy of the Conquest of 1759, differences between the two peoples in economic status and economic traditions, language, religious traditions, the past federal policies of the Canadian government, the past policies of the Québec provincial government and so on. Kimmel (1994) calls this process of learning about the cultural assumptions of different groups in conflict the process of "intercultural exploration". This also indicates the need to employ persons knowledgeable of these specifics in any intercultural negotiations.

Specific knowledge, however, by itself, is not sufficient for conflict resolution in the broader sense of the expression explained above. A broader knowledge of ethnicity and culture as a social phenomenon is necessary to appreciate the importance of identity recognition. Kimmel (1994) has singled out five ascending levels of cultural awareness that lead to tolerance and understanding of cultural differences. I argue that without the broader knowledge of the nature of ethnicity and ethnicity-related phenomena, the highest levels of cultural awareness cannot be achieved. Kimmel's levels proceed from a narcissistic, egocentric stage of cultural chauvinism, to an ethnocentric stage, to a stage of sympathetic, but condescending tolerance, to a stage of minimization of differences for the sake of
universal similarities, to a stage of understanding, in which one’s own givens come to be questioned. Kimmel argues that few students or practitioners of intercultural negotiations reach or operate consistently at the fifth level because of human inclination to define self and the reality around it in a more or less permanent way. I argue that this fifth level cannot be systematically reached unless one acquires a broader, deeper, knowledge of the phenomenon at hand. This type of knowledge will make it possible to establish criteria by which one is able not just to question one’s givens, but rather is able to place them relative to and alongside the givens of other groups, cultures and perspectives.

Kimmel also did not go far enough in his levels of cultural awareness. The broader knowledge of ethnicity and culture as a social phenomenon can make it possible to reach a sixth level of cultural awareness. Kimmel quite rightly points out that tolerance alone is a condescending attitude and that minimization of differences and attitude that considers all humans to be the same often leads to surprises and disappointments when unexpected differences come up. The sixth level that I would add to Kimmel’s theory is one in which one comes to accept human differences as outcomes of human “universal nature”, an attitude that “to be human is also to be different”. Rather than just tolerate cultural differences, or minimize them as if they were not there, this attitude allows one to accept them as positive contributions to one’s own society or to the network of international relations. This level, however, is possible only with some broader knowledge of the phenomena connected with ethnicity. I will attempt to explain what is meant by this broader knowledge by resorting to an analysis of nationalism.

Case illustration: understanding of nationalism as a social phenomenon

Nationalism is a good example to discuss here. The term evokes strong feelings and many interethnic conflicts are attributed to it. Yet, the term nationalism is understood differently by different scholars and commentators and often it is not clear whether the word is used as an analytical term or as a judgemental label. Nationalism is an ideology propounded by a social movement. Like all ideologies, it is a set of principles and a program of group action related to political and social change, with the aim of either accomplishing it, or forestalling it. Its basic principle and goal is national self-determination or national self-assertion.

Some scholars have tried to distinguish between “ethnic nationalism” and “civic nationalism”, the former, roughly, referring to the nationalism of minority ethnic groups, and the latter, to that of the majority groups, i.e., the existing nation-states (Calhoun, 1993, p. 220–21). The problem with this distinction is that it is tied to both a value judgement and to a faulty analytical assumption. The implicit message of the distinction is that “ethnic nationalism” is bad, because it emphasizes pre-modern tribal identities, etc., but “civic nationalism” is all right because it is part of a modern, “universalistic” state. It erroneously assumes that existing independent nations are ethnicity-free, i.e., it ignores the fact that all
modern independent nations have majority ethnic groups (usually one) which exert their cultural and political hegemony over other ethnic, minority, groups. In other words, the scholars who see the phenomenon of nationalism in these terms, themselves succumb to the tendency observable among the members of majority groups, i.e., a tendency to perceive those commanding power as pursuing universalistic goals and behaviour.

This is not the place to discuss in detail any theory of ethnicity and nationalism, but in order to appreciate the importance of understanding the nature of ethnicity as a way to understanding the principles of ethnic conflict resolution, I would like to place nationalism into the broader context of the process of ethnicity change. Nationalism is one, perhaps the most common, expression of an ethnic group's assertion or re-assertion of its claim for political recognition.

Historically, all ethnicities originally developed from folk communities, i.e., from village-type groups, whose social base was overwhelmingly peasant. With increasing differentiation of social roles, especially with the development of cultural intelligentsia, they would become more and more self-aware and become what has been termed nationality-communities (Isajiw, 1993; Smith, 1989; Zieky, 1975). This means, their members would come to share an image of themselves as a collectivity united by a distinct culture rather than simply by their king, kin, clan or village. An essential part of this image is a conception of the history of the group as legacy. The organizational life of the community would articulate this image in its normative systems. As Max Weber has pointed out, the significance of nationality is anchored in the conception of uniqueness and irreplaceability of some cultural values. These are seen as possible to preserve or develop only through the efforts of the group itself. This conception includes a certain sense of collective mission.

Once an ethnic community has become self aware of being unique, it will sooner or later seek a political expression and recognition of this uniqueness. The process may take several forms. If legitimation for the territory where the group lives can be argued, it will claim this territory for itself and thus become a nation. If the group obtains sovereignty over this territory, it develops into a nation-state. These stages are usually accompanied by some types of nationalist movements and nationalist ideologies. In the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries, this has been the most common progression of stages, and can explain many interethnic conflicts. In the same period, the idea of self-determination has come to be accepted, first in Europe and later all around the world as a people's right, on par with other human rights.

Three further aspects of nationalism must be understood if we are to proceed to a fuller understanding of the nature of interethnic conflicts. First, is the fact that nationalism as an ideology has articulated various degrees of commitment, ranging from a moderate degree to an extreme degree. In the case of minority ethnic groups, the moderate degree can be called liberal nationalism and the extreme degree, radical nationalism. Analogously, in the case of majority ethnic groups, we can distinguish between conservative nationalism and reactionary nationalism (Isajiw, 1985).
Liberal nationalism, also known as cultural or linguistic nationalism, argues for recognition of the ethnic minority's cultural or linguistic rights, recognition of its identity or for self-determination via a legal-democratic process. It does not argue for a full central control of all social institutions and their subordination to the political centre. Radical nationalism, sometimes called integral nationalism, contends the latter. It is a holistic ideology, frequently reflected in the totalitarian character of the movement's organization. It is not only a vision of a politically independent state. It is also a view of society in which all areas of life, activity and thought are subordinated to one goal and one principle, that of the supremacy of the nation-state. Racism is an ideology different from nationalism. However, quite often it unites with the ideology of radical or reactionary, but not necessarily, liberal or conservative, nationalism.

The practical implication of these distinctions is that one must not lump all nationalisms into one category, especially one that is often value-judged as dangerous or bad. Legitimate feelings for self-determination of peoples must be understood and appreciated if we are to resolve interethnic conflicts.

The second issue that must be understood is a fact that is obvious in the history of emerging nation-states, yet, is often ignored. All nation-states are to a smaller or larger degree multiethnic. Even such states as Japan or Austria which are often given as examples of uniheter states, include small percentages of other ethnic groups. However, historically, even highly multiethnic states, have been established and/or run by one dominant ethnic group. In other words, multiethnic states have developed systems of ethnic stratification, in which one ethnic group (sometimes two) would be perceived to be superior to others. The significant fact is that the group on top, i.e., the majority or dominant group, imparts its own cultural characteristics to all major national institutions. This fact is often the source of interethnic tensions and may produce serious conflicts or major splits.

This implies the third important factor that I want to emphasize. While in the process of ethnic group development all ethnic groups will sooner or later develop a political dimension, it does not necessarily follow that all will develop claims for independent territory. Territorial autonomy is one important technique of resolving ethnic conflicts, but it does not apply to many interethnic situations, particularly those which involve immigrant groups. As a rule, immigrant groups have no legitimate claim to independent territory, but they do develop significant political demands. Among these are demands for some kind of political recognition, be it a national recognition of the issues important to the specific group, recognition of a group's language as an official language or a group's language and culture as legitimate subjects to be taught in schools, recognition of some ethnic institutions as part of the national culture and social fabric, recognition given by redress of discrimination through human rights or equity legislation, or even recognition given by redress of historical injustices done to a group. This type of political recognition, and especially the recognition accorded by building into the mainstream culture and structure some minority ethnic institutions or some selected aspects of ethnic institutions, will become even more
important in the future, as the economic structures of many countries become more intermeshed or unified. Besides immigrant groups, there are ethnic groups that have a legitimate territorial claim but do not want to separate from the existing nation states or are ambiguous about separation because of the economic or other social advantages accrued through being part of an established state. The obvious examples are the Flemings, the Scottish, the Quebeckers, many Native Peoples of North America, and others. Yet, these states are not conflict-free and if interethnic conflicts are to be reduced or avoided in these states, negotiation of differences and political recognition of the legitimacy of these differences is necessary on a continuous basis.

Conclusion

In this paper I have tried to address the issue that while both scholars and practitioners in the past 20 years or so have become more aware of interethnic conflicts, the approaches to their resolution or their prediction have still remained not very effective. I have tried to locate the difficulty of approaching ethnic conflict resolution in the basic paradigms of the intellectual climate of the era of modernity. I call these pre-normative paradigms in the sense that they have been implicit in the way scholars and practitioners have looked at and understood important social and cultural issues, particularly ethnic issues, and in the principles and techniques they used to approach them. I have argued that among the principles of conflict resolution that have been identified by scholars (Fisher, 1994), the principle of identity recognition is paramount, but its role has not been adequately studied and assessed. I have also turned attention to the role of public recognition, particularly as provided by the participation of the state in the process of ethnic conflict resolution. Finally, I discussed a theory of nationalism as an example of the necessity to understand ethnic processes in a general way, as historical-social phenomena.

The threshold to post-modernity was crossed when both the intellectuals and the politicians have come to realise that ethnicity not only has not disappeared as modernity advanced, but rather that it has remained and often reappeared and asserted itself in societies in which it was thought to be unimportant or was thought to be already gone. More than ever, the West has become aware that ethnic conflicts are ubiquitous and that the West as much as the rest of the world must now find ways of resolving and at least foreseeing the worst of these conflicts. To do so, it is necessary to have not only a knowledge of the most appropriate techniques and skills of conflict resolution, but also an understanding of the deeper principles behind these techniques, an attitude based on this understanding, a thorough knowledge of the ethnicities in question, particularly their histories, as well as a deeper knowledge of the nature and types of ethnic groups and identities and the processes in which “they” and “us” are enwrapped.
References


