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ETHNIC DIVERSITY AND ETHNIC STRIFE AN INTERDISCIPLINARY PERSPECTIVE

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Ethnic Diversity and Ethnic Strife An Interdisciplinary Perspective*

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Abstract

The objective of this paper is to present an overview of ethnicity, ethnic strife and its consequences, as seen from the perspective of the disciplines of economics, political science, social anthropology and sociology. What exactly is ethnicity--how is it to be defined, characterized and measured? What exactly are the causal links from ethnicity so defined to its presumed consequences, including tension and violence? What are the feedback loops from the consequences of ethnic divisions back to these divisions themselves? How can policy, if at all, mitigate ethnic divisions and ethnic conflict? Finally, what role does interdisciplinarity have in helping to understand ethnicity and ethnic strife, and how can interdisciplinary collaboration be enhanced? These are the questions which this paper takes up and deals with in sequence.

Keywords: Ethnicity, Conflict, Interdisciplinary Approaches

* Introduction to *Ethnicity and Ethnic Strife*, forthcoming Special Issue of *World Development*. The papers in the symposium are listed in the Appendix.

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1. Introduction

Ethnicity and ethnic strife continue to dominate the political economy, politics and society of many countries, especially those in the developing world. From extreme manifestations of civil war and genocide, through the periodic “ethnic riots” that disfigure the social and political landscape, to the quotidian politics of ethnic allegiance, ethnicity has come to the forefront of the development discourse. Not surprisingly, academic researchers in economics, sociology, anthropology and political science have over the last decade and half given special attention to this subfield and produced fresh theoretical and empirical insights that have enriched the debate in each of these disciplines.

The connection of conflict to ethnic identity rests on a number of conceptual and methodological issues. A central issue is the force of ethnicity, whether it is a relatively robust marker of individual identity that exists as a more or less uniform force of more or less equal importance across a range of actual or potential social, economic and political situations, or whether its force strengthens when boundary issues – of maintenance and perpetuation under real or perceived threat – are encountered. This latter point generally asserts the idea that ethnicity is an effect of broader social, political and economic processes and the way in which these create particular types of group dynamic. There is also the question of the conditions under which identity is seen as shared and what conditions may lead to that shared identity to be perceived as under threat.

The focus of these questions is on the boundary maintenance of ethnic groups. Sociological and anthropological approaches to ethnicity have, particularly since the work of Frederick Barth (1969), begun with the assumption that ethnic groups exist in relation to other groups. Ethnicity, its existence or degree of force, is not realized in the possession and perpetuation of distinct cultural characteristics by a particular group. Ethnic identity and difference is created and becomes culturally and politically meaningful in terms of how it inter-relates to other groups and to broader social, political and economic processes. Ethnic boundaries, for both sociology and anthropology, tend to be the outcome of social action (Malesevic, 2004).

The objective of this paper is to present an overview of ethnicity, ethnic strife and its consequences, as seen from the perspective of the disciplines of economics, political science, social anthropology and sociology. What exactly is ethnicity--how is it to be defined, characterized and measured? What exactly are the causal links from ethnicity so defined to its presumed consequences, including tension and violence? What are the feedback loops from the consequences of ethnic divisions back to these divisions themselves? How can policy, if at all, mitigate ethnic divisions and ethnic conflict? Finally, what role does interdisciplinarity have in helping to understand ethnicity and ethnic strife, and how can interdisciplinary collaboration be enhanced? These are the questions which this paper takes up and deals with in sequence.

The plan of the paper is as follows. Section 2 begins the analysis by discussing how different disciplines approach the characterization and measurement of ethnicity. Section 3 moves to the causal chain from ethnic diversity through ethnic tension to consequences

such as violence. Section 4 follows the causal chain in the other direction, tracing feedback loops from ethnic conflict to the strengthening of ethnic identity itself. Section 5 addresses the question of what, if anything, public policy can do to address the problem of ethnic division and ethnic tension. Throughout this paper, we draw on the insights and approaches of economics, political science, social anthropology and sociology, noting the similarities, differences and complementarities of the different perspectives. Section 6 draws together the benefits of interdisciplinarity, and considers how it could best be advanced. Section 7 concludes.

2. Ethnicity: Characterization and Measurement

Individuals have many observable characteristics—height, weight, race, language, religion, nationality, residential location, occupation, income, wealth, education, membership of a club, and so on. Individuals with the same characteristics, or set of characteristics, can be thought of in purely descriptive terms as a grouping. Under certain conditions, certain groupings could potentially have social, political and economic salience. Our focus is on groups formed out of commonalities of race, language, religion, or combinations thereof, at different locations. Hindus and Muslims in Ahmedabad are two such groups, as are the Yoruba and Hausa in Nigeria. We refer to such groups as “ethnic groups.”

There is plenty of evidence of close networks within ethnic groups, which take on social and economic dimensions.¹ The presence of different ethnic groups may be associated with ethnic tension, and a failure of collective action detrimental to the wellbeing of both groups and of society at large. But not necessarily. Our task is to examine the conditions under which ethnic grouping translates into ethnic tension, and thence into failure of collective action and possibly violence. Apart from the analytical and intellectual challenge this poses, such an examination is important because it could help in the design of public policy to contain and manage ethnic tension.

In order to begin the analysis of ethnicity and ethnic strife, we need definition, characterization and measurement of ethnicity. How do various disciplines, or scholars, understand the concept of ethnicity? How do they measure it? Indeed, some might ask: can it be measured at all? Two different types of issues are involved here. The first has to do with whether ethnicity should be defined broadly or narrowly. The second is how malleable ethnic identity is, and what malleability might do to its measurement.

The classic text by Horowitz (1985) makes the case that the conventional interpretation of ethnicity as connected only to language or race is much too narrow. Horowitz argues that ascription – connection to birth – is the primary, if not the only, criterion. Seen this way, religion, caste, tribe, race and language are simply different forms of ethnicity, which is viewed by Horowitz, and many others, as an umbrella term. Though in some societies, religion is a matter of choice, in most societies religious identity is given at birth. Similarly, people can in principle move from one linguistic community

¹ See Fafchamps (2000, 2004), Biggs, Raturi and Srivastava, (2002), and La Ferrara (2003a).

to another, but in most societies, the first language – or “mother tongue” – lasts through a lifetime. Race, tribe and caste are generally understood to be quite inflexible. Anthropologists have argued that this inflexibility stems from the repetition of custom and ritual, often backed by the state, that creates an ideology of their inflexibility and salience (Mafeje, 1971; Mamdani, 1996; Dirks, 2001). Horowitz (1985) and others argue that class is different from ethnicity because movements across class boundaries are relatively more common. In contrast, the sociologist Stephen Steinberg argues that those traits commonly recognized as ethnic may be class-based: he argues that many cultural attributes attributed to ethnicity may be rooted in class difference (Steinberg, 2001).

But how much does birth determine? Are ethnic categories also to some extent a matter of choice? Here two types of debates have been central. The first was between essentialists and instrumentalists in the 1960s and 1970s. The second debate was launched by constructivists in the 1980s and 1990s.²

By now, constructivist views of ethnic identity have captured the intellectual mainstream.³ Several identity categories are given to each of us at the time our birth: only some are relevant at different points in life. What our identity at any given point is, how its intensity changes, or how it gives way to another identity altogether – these are determined, or “constructed” -- by institutions, historical epochs, economic endowments, demography and politics (Laitin 1998). In other words, identities are indeed malleable, but not infinitely so, calling upon us to analyze in detail the interplay between different forces that shape group identity (Taylor 1994).

Ethnicity is thus at least partly produced by techniques of classification and categorization. The sense of shared traits and communal identity which allows the passage from individual identity to group identity and back again is a second order phenomenon. That is, it is the result of broader organizing techniques that employ tools such as census categories to organize populations (Barth, 1969; Hirschman, 1987; Anderson, 1991). A related concern is the interplay of individual identification and external classification, focusing on institutional and organizational, pedagogical and disciplinary, techniques that structure and orient individual forms of self-classification allowing their aggregation into broader group classifications (Brubaker et al, 2004). The focus then is on the processes of categorization and on the meaning and consequences that this has for political, social and economic governance (Williams, 1989).

The idea that ethnicity is a result of classification leads scholars to the study of practices of classification, particularly those employed by the state. This Foucaultian method has not however always been sensitive to the idea that techniques of rule imposed by the state do not simply overwhelm individuals and groups. Rather, individuals and groups receive, respond and sometimes re-work state power (Li, 1999). Ethnic categorizations formulated at the national scale may play out differently at local scales. Other cultural, political and economic dimensions come into play when people encounter

² For a detailed discussion, see Varshney (2007).

³ But the constructivist views of ethnic *conflict*, as opposed to ethnic *identity*, remain less compelling. See Varshney (1997 and 2007).

the disciplinary and pedagogical power of state institutions. Classificatory practices designed to impart conceptions of ethnicity are not then simply received at the local scale but are reworked in relation to local political, economic and social dimensions. A focus on the way that state classificatory practices are received, and responded to, at the local scale shifts somewhat the analysis away from a focus on governmental practices to local mechanisms. The telling issue becomes the analysis of when and why people interpret social issues in ethnic terms. The focus in sociology and social anthropology on the way in which ethnic identity is formed through boundary maintenance in relation to other groups and processes leads to a series of questions about the relation of bestowed population categories to socio-political dynamics at the local level. The focus here is on how ethnicity arises as an effect or consequence of broader dynamics. Important as this approach is to contextualizing ethnicity and the consequences of ethnic division to a broader spectrum of social processes, a concern is that the approach fails to take into account how ethnicity may serve a cognitive purpose as a means of interpreting, framing and understanding experience (Brubaker et al, 2004).

In sum, the attempt in sociological and social anthropological approaches to render ethnicity relational and dynamic, to understand it as a social process, is important in locating ethnic identity in the broader contexts of its historical and social development. A tendency, though, may be to overly emphasize group dynamics and group ontologies to the extent that the ways in which individuals relate to ethnicity – or other markers of identity – as a means of responding to different processes is sometimes marginalized. This is not to privilege an autonomous individual in a social vacuum. Brubaker, et al (2004) focus not on the individual as self-sufficient source of his or her identity, but on how identity and cognition arise socially, through the “socially shared understanding of social objects” (Brubaker, et al, 2004: 52).

Taking a particular definition of ethnic boundaries, how do we characterize and measure ethnic diversity? The issues that arise in formulating a theoretically satisfying measure can be illustrated with the important case of the index of ethno-linguistic fractionalization (ELF) index, which has been deployed to measure ethnic diversity. In Easterly and Levine (1997), which can be said to have ignited much of the recent economics oriented quantitative literature, the index is simply the probability that two randomly drawn individuals from the country (say) belong to two different groups. This can be written as:

$$ELF = 1 - \sum_i s_i^2$$

where s_i is the share of group i in the total population. This index was applied to a forty year old compendium of the world’s language groups constructed by Soviet linguists and anthropologists, the Atlas Narodov Mira. Easterly and Levine (1997) then sought to discover whether this index was correlated with outcomes such as economic growth. On the whole, they found a negative and statistically significance correlation. The basic strategy was applied by much of the subsequent economics literature (see Alesina and La Ferrara, 2005, for a survey).

Critiques by economists of the ELF approach have focused on issues like missing data for certain countries, or whether the particular index is appropriate.⁴ For example, ELF as defined above implies that fractionalization is greater when there are 100 equally sized groups than when there are two equally sized groups. If fractionalization is taken as tantamount to tension, then these features should give us pause, and alternative ways of combining group population shares, to measure “polarization” have been suggested in the economics literature (for example, see Esteban and Ray, 1994, Bossert, Pattanaik and Xu, 2003; and Montalvo and Reyna-Querol, 2005). But all of these have taken as given the basic classification to which the index is applied.

In political science, a powerful critique of the ELF approach has emerged, influenced in part by constructivist insights (Chandra 2006; Posner, 2004a and 2004b). Three critiques, which focus not so much on the index but on the underlying classification, challenged the relevance of the ELF index for measuring ethnic diversity or fractionalization. First, the most significant ethnic identities in a society are not always based on language. Tribe, race, caste or religion could be the more important basis for ethnic identification. In India, on the whole, religion has been a stronger determinant of group identity than language. In Nigeria’s Yorubaland, tribe has been more salient than religion or language (Laitin, 1986).

Second, the ELF index not only does not capture different dimensions of identity (let us say, linguistic and religious); it also does not say anything about whether the dimensions cumulate or intersect. In Sri Lanka, the Sinhalese and Tamils are not only divided by language, but also greatly, if not entirely, by religion. In Indonesia, the Chinese and *pribumi* (“sons of the soil”) are divided by religion and race, but not language. Muslims and Hindus in many parts of India are divided by religion but united by language. The Sri Lankan case is one of cumulative differences, the Indonesian and Indian of crosscutting differences. Cross-cutting differences might on the whole be more manageable than the cumulative ones.

Third, constructivist accounts of identity formation make it abundantly clear that while identities do not normally change in the short-run, alterations are quite possible in the medium to long run. Two types of changes have often been noted. The relative *salience* of the different dimensions of identity is often transformed in response to serious changes in political institutions, laws or economic conditions. In India, language was a significant basis of ethnic politics in the 1950s. After each major linguistic group was given a state of its own in the Indian federation, language ceased to be a salient and divisive issue in Indian politics. One can also show that in many cases, group identities -- not simply the salience of different dimensions of a group’s identity -- are fundamentally transformed as a result of a public policy, state behavior or transformative “exogenous” shocks. Via public schools and conscription armies, peasants were turned into Frenchmen over several decades after the French Revolution (Weber 1976).⁵

⁴ The literature is by now huge. See for example, Arcand, Guillaumont and Guillaumont (2000), Bates (2000), or Alesina and La Ferrara (2005).

⁵ Also see Colley (1993) for the construction of British national identity.

In short, a linguistically based conceptual division made in the 1950s, even if right for that period, is not necessarily a good predictor of identities in the 1980s and 1990s. That is too long a stretch to assume stability of identities. The stability is to be demonstrated, not assumed. The negative correlation discovered between the ELF index and economic growth rates may, thus, be difficult to interpret.

Have the constructivist insights only led to criticisms? Is constructivism as a theoretical device amenable only to qualitative empirical research *a la* Benedict Anderson (1991) and critique, or can its theoretical potential be also meaningfully deployed in quantitative measurement? A creative shadow of this question looms over some new attempts to marry positivism and constructivism. Especially in relation to assessing its impact on conflict, some new ways of measuring ethnic diversity, consistent with constructivist critiques, are currently under way (Cedereman, Wimmer and Min, 2009).

3. Ethnic Diversity and its Consequences

The daily life of families, neighborhoods, regions and countries is influenced by ethnic divisions. At the national level, politics in many, if not all, parts of the world, is often structured along ethnic lines, with major political parties representing different ethnic groupings. We have already pointed to the finding that there might be a negative association between ethno-linguistic fractionalization and economic growth. At the local level, too, it is quite possible for politics to be influenced by ethnic divisions. It has been shown that local supply of public goods is adversely affected when the population is ethnically heterogeneous (Alesina, Baqr and Easterly, 1999; Gugerty and Miguel, 2005).

Group violence, riots and civil war are the most extreme manifestation of the consequences of ethnic divisions. A large literature shows the positive association between ethno-linguistic fractionalization and the probability of civil war (Collier et al, 2003). There is also a substantial literature on ethnic riots (Brass 1997; Varshney, 2002 and 2008; Wilkinson, 2005; van Klinken, 2007; Davidson, 2008; Berenschott, 2009). But a key point to note is that very often, even perhaps as a rule, ethnic divisions do **not** lead to violent consequences (Fearon and Laitin 1996).⁶ A comparative perspective is thus needed to understand what differentiates those cases with violent outbreaks and those cases where violence does not break out. An important hypothesis is that a thick weave of associational life that knits together ethnic groups is what prevents the outbreak of violence and riots (Varshney, 2002). At the same time, politicians, local and national, who use ethnic divisions to mobilize support can cause divisions to sharpen and make them more prone to violence.

A central point in drawing a causal link from ethnic diversity to outcomes such as violence is that we must be careful not to attribute more to diversity than is warranted. This over-attribution can happen for several reasons. First, if there are feedback effects from outcomes to ethnicity and ethnic diversity (for example as violence sharpens ethnic

⁶ For the highly influential early insights on these matters, see Rudolph and Rudolph (1967) and Weiner (1978).

identification, or changes the character of neighborhoods through migration) then “simultaneity bias” can lead to ascribing a bigger impact of diversity than appropriate. Second, if ethnicity and ethnic diversity are, in and of themselves, the product of factors other than the consequences—for example if it is the result of a long history of colonial attempts to classify the population, the better to control it—then in a fundamental sense ethnic diversity is only the proximate cause of violence. The ultimate cause is the colonial project, and beginning with the ethnic diversity measure may divert from a deeper analysis. Third, if ethnic tensions and violence are caused by some third factor—the lead example being social mobilization by political entrepreneurs who simultaneously raise ethnic awareness and mistrust while at the same time fomenting interethnic violence—then attributing causality to ethnic diversity is misplaced and misleading. The different disciplines are of course aware of these issues, but they are perhaps given different weights, and are addressed differently.

The economics literature, in particular the dominant part of it which uses cross-country econometric analysis to investigate the link between ethnic diversity and consequence such as economic growth, uses well known econometric techniques to address the above issues. A thorough account is provided in Alesina and La Ferrara (2005). Thus, for example, in regressions explaining cross-country variations in economic growth, they use not only the ELF measure (and variants thereof) as an explanatory variable, but also other “standard” economic variables such as schooling, financial depth, regional dummy variables to separate out regional effects, period dummy variables to account for possible historical effects, and variable such as “assassinations” to measure the general political climate. They also use “seemingly unrelated regressions” methods to address common but unobserved factors that might affect the estimated influence of the fractionalization variable.

The literature on this is by now veritably large, and many other variants and corrections have been tried. The bottom line consensus seems to be that fractionalization affects growth negatively. But there are further twists to this story that the economics literature considers. Thus, for example, Collier (2000) shows that the negative effects on growth are present only in non-democracies. One issue is that since democracies are generally richer, is this just capturing a tendency for richer societies cope with diversity better? This high correlation between income and democracy makes specific attribution to each difficult, and of course the mutual causality between these two is another complication.⁷ Alesina and La Ferrara (2005) draw two conclusions from their regressions: “Overall, the effect of income seems more robust and more precisely estimated than the effect of democracy”, and “rich democracies are more capable of ‘handling’ productively ethnic diversity”, but they also add the caveat that “It may be the case that racially fragmented societies that choose democratic institutions are also those in which ethnic cleavages are less deep and/or the power distribution of groups is such that none can impose on-democratic rule.”⁸

⁷ See for example, Tavares and Wacziarg (2001)

⁸ On the general question of institutions and conflict within a cross-country regression framework, see Easterly (2001).

It is in these caveats of the careful econometric work that we begin to see the complementary strengths of other disciplines that focus more directly on the causal mechanisms, and study individual cases in great detail. In political science, for example, particular attention is paid to the nature of the state. The relationship between ethnic diversity and violent conflict -- riots, pogroms, genocides, civil wars -- has been a significant research theme in political science for years. The central claim is not that in and of itself, as indicated above, ethnic diversity promotes violent conflict. Rather, it is normally argued that the link between ethnic diversity and violence is mediated by the state, political and civil institutions.

In modern times, the state is, in principle, a neutral institution, to which is assigned the task of maintaining peace and order. The state, however, does not often do what it is supposed to do, favoring instead one ethnic community, especially the majority community, over the others. Such majoritarianism often breeds violence.

There are several ways in which the state can provide security and protection to the minorities. Political science has debated the institutional alternatives for quite a long time. Arend Lijphart was the first to respond concretely to an insight, originally ascribed to John Stuart Mill (1990), that political institutions appropriate for homogenous nations were not easily transferable to multi-ethnic or multi-religious societies. A first-past-the-post and winner-take-all polity may permanently aggrieve minorities, generating rebellions and secessions. On the basis of the historical experience of four smaller European democracies -- the Netherlands, Switzerland, Belgium and Austria - Lijphart (1977) argued that consociational democracies, not Westminster-style majoritarian democracies, were the foundation of social peace and political stability in societies with substantial ethnoreligious tensions. Winners do not take all in consociational systems. The polity is based on proportional representation, not first past the post; minorities are given a pre-assigned share of political power; a minority veto is guaranteed on key cultural matters, including schools, language policy and religious practice.

A great deal of literature critical of the universal ambition of the consociational theory has emerged over the last three decades. The key criticism is that the success of consociational democracy is based on some specific conditions that the four smaller European democracies shared. Consociationalism cannot be successfully transferred to all multiethnic societies. Horowitz (1989) suggests that making acquisition of power dependent some proportion of minority vote, in addition to a majority or plurality vote overall, may be a better way to integrate minorities. Assigning them specific shares in positions of power would only freeze minority and majority identities forever, a situation not always conducive for peace. Horowitz called his proposal "vote pooling".

Other analyses suggest that the mediating institutions do not have to be strictly part of the state. In multi-party systems, political parties, including those in the opposition, can be inclusive, if they build cross-ethnic coalitions. Similarly, it has been argued that integrated business associations, professional associations and trade unions can promote peace at the local level, even when the larger national atmosphere is not conducive to peace

(Varshney 2002). The institutional thinking in political science goes all the way down to the local institutions that can contain tensions and preempt, or reduce, ethnic violence.

The anthropological and sociological literature also takes the state as a key entity that interacts with, and even creates, ethnic divisions and ethnic tension. If boundaries of ethnic groups are a result of the way that state classificatory strategies interact with local structures, and shared local cognitive mechanisms and local institutions, then a study of the connection between ethnic boundaries and strife must involve also the analysis of local dimensions. One important consequence is that macro explanations of ethnic conflict do not always travel well. The causal connection between ethnic identity and ethnic strife should involve some study of the constitutive meanings of ethnicity at particular spaces. What are the economic, political and social dimensions that come into play in the establishment of ethnic identity as a particularly useful or powerful category? Such dimensions, be they political, economic, cultural or cognitive, are themselves multiply constituted across different scales. Religious feeling at a particular local site may be influenced by transnational forces and the institutions that mediate and orient these. The focus on the multiple constitution of identity should not stall analysis or fetishise the local. It should lead to the analysis of a broad spectrum of local, global and regional institutions and processes. The 'local' is influenced and produced by the play of economic, cultural and political forces that connect the local to a variety of scales.

The focus on ethnicity as a cognitive frame for interpreting and understanding broader phenomena involves a study of the ways in which ethnic feeling is framed and transmitted in social spaces. Treating ethnicity as a cognitive frame – a means by which social phenomena are interpreted and understood in ethnic terms - involves thinking through how shared ideas about ethnicity in social space are constituted not simply at the individual or local level. Rather, ideas and frames of understanding that are the basis from which ethnic cognition arises are constituted across different scales.

The way in which violence or the provision of public goods, to take two very different examples, relates to ethnic identity may be analysed by looking at how both are affected by broader forces. State provided public goods such as education are often not neutral, but may be part of strategies of establishing the authority of a state over a population. Alternative means of education, including the provision of private or community religious or ethnic schools funded by transnational networks may arise as a means of countering that assertion of state authority. Such transnational networks themselves provide fodder for cognitive frames. The state is not necessarily the primary actor in the regulation and management of ethnic identity and ethnic division. Counter-authorities exist, and the provision of alternative public goods is a way both of addressing the state's authority to manage and govern groups and to assert an alternative structure of authority over groups.

To summarize, while all disciplines have tried to understand the causal link between ethnic diversity, ethnic tension and consequences such as violence, supply of public goods and economic performance, economists have tended to take a more aggregative, cross-country view, attempting to explain broad variations in outcomes such as economic growth

through broad variations in ethnic fragmentation, while attempting to control for other factors, using data on a large number of countries. The central finding, that fragmentation weakens economic performance, has provided the basis for an extensive debate. Political scientists have also used “large n” methodologies but have focused much more on detailing the causal mechanisms, in particular the precise role of the state or political institutions in translating, or mitigating the link from diversity through tension to violence. Social anthropologists have been the strongest proponents of the argument that the link from diversity to violence or other outcomes is highly contingent on myriad factors, many of which can only be understood in the local and specific context, including how the state has used ethnicity as a classificatory device for control, but also how populations have then reacted, and how state institutions interact with group and individual identity at the localized level.

4. Feedback Loops: Conflict and Construction of Ethnicity

If ethnic division causes conflict, conflict sharpens ethnic division. More generally, a clean one way causal chain from ethnicity to a range of consequences cannot be easily established, because these consequences in turn determine the nature of ethnicity and ethnic divisions. This two way relationship raises questions about econometric regressions where ethnic division is used as an independent variable, to explain outcomes such as public goods provision or economic growth. By and large the econometrics literature does not explore the feedback loop in the other direction, taking ethnicity as a given, a phenomenon that changes only slowly relative to the processes of economic growth. There is, however, an emerging theoretical literature, linked to an earlier literature on club formation, which speaks to ethnic groupings being endogenous.⁹

Political scientists have been more critical of the exogeneity assumption, for example of the use of the ethno-linguistic fractionalization data as discussed in section 2. On how violent conflict shapes identities, while in turn being shaped by ethnic diversities, the literature is now voluminous. Partition of India sharpened divisions between Hindus and Muslims, tearing apart in some cases even villages and towns where Hindus and Muslims were intermingling. Bosnian civil war also appears to have made Muslim identities stronger in Bosnia than they used to be. Civil wars often have this result because they undermine hybridity and impose polarization on societies by pushing people into identity camps. For the sake of safety, people join ethnic groups even if their own prior identities were not sharply ethnic. Arguments of this kind create serious issues for analyses that rely heavily on ethnic diversity as a cause of various outcomes, especially violence. Mutual causation appears to be at work.

Civil wars are, of course, extreme cases of violence. A great deal of constructivist literature also empirically demonstrates that even in normal times, identities can emerge in response to public policy. The arguments about how census categories in colonial times sharpened, if not created, ethnic identities are now very commonly accepted. The same arguments are also used for some colonial policies. Laitin (1986) shows British colonial

⁹ See for example, Alesina, Baqir and Hoxby, 2004, Demange and Wooders, 2005,

rulers legitimated religious categories in politics in Northern Nigeria, but delegitimized such categories in the Yoruba South, privileging instead tribal categories. Such colonial practices, institutionalized for decades, had long-lasting consequences, even after independence.

However, it is anthropologists who have in the main emphasized strongly the perspective of ethnicity as determined by, as much as determining, the structures and phenomena surrounding it. As Paul Richards notes, “They favor instead a situationalist account. Ethnicity is a product of certain kind of group dynamics...The notion of situational ethnicity amounts to a claim that ethnicity is an epiphenomenon. It is a symptom, not cause, of certain forms of social mobilization.” (Richards, this Symposium). Further, if this social mobilization leads to violence it further strengthens group divisions. In this view, therefore, violence causes ethnic divisions as much as ethnic divisions causing violence. Although couched in a different language, these concerns are not far removed from econometricians concerns on attributing causality to correlation between measures of ethnic division and outcomes such as violence. “Unobserved heterogeneity” can produce a spurious correlation between the two variables, with some underlying factor (“social mobilization”) causing both the division and the violence. Or, indeed, the violence can have feedback effects on division, leading to an overestimate of the importance of division in causing violence (“simultaneity bias”). In other areas of econometric evaluation, for example, the impact of a public program on social outcomes, unobserved heterogeneity and simultaneity bias are taken on board routinely. Not nearly so much with ethnic division and corresponding outcomes, which perhaps reveals the extent to which ethnicity as being “primordial” dominates the economic discourse.

Thus conflict that centres on the maintenance or perpetuation of group boundaries, and the competing imaginations of these, may feed back onto and strengthen group identity. Conflict may arise from contrasting conceptions of the nature of group boundaries. Competing structures of authority, including the state, local networks of patronage and transnational ideological, cultural or religious forces, may have very different conceptions of group boundaries and of threats to those boundaries. Hence conflicts that may ostensibly be about issues of class or inequality may enter into established structures of meaning-making to give them an ethnic tinge.¹⁰

¹⁰ For example, in her studies of Adivasi groups in Kerala, Luisa Steur argues that loss of land, often due to transnational economic issues, is used by a transnational, and multinational, network of adivasi and indigenous peoples groups to mobilise ethnic identity (Steur, 2009). Here adivasi identity is at least partly taken out of its local contexts and related to a broader international movement of indigenous groups. While conflict does appear to contribute to the construction, and indeed regularization, of ethnic identity, it may be important to see how that conflict is read by different and competing structures of authority. The conflict over land documented by Steur was interpreted by the local government in Kerala as an incidence of tribal recalcitrance in the face of modernity. The Kerala government’s response (a mixture of punitive measures and the provision of economic goods) may be read as a means of asserting a particular discourse about ‘tribals’ and it may reflect the tendency and preference of the government to localize the issue and problem of Adivasi whereas transnational networks of Adivasi and indigenous activists sought to locate the issue in terms of a broader incipient worldwide network of indigenous peoples.

5. Public Policy and Ethnic Tensions

If ethnic divisions often lead to bad outcomes, violence, riots, civil war, low supply of public goods and low economic growth, what can public policy do about it?

The first principle is surely one of “do no harm”, since there is evidence that public policy has sometimes exacerbated ethnic divisions. This is certainly the case when administrators of empires introduced divisions where none existed before, to better manage the large and diverse populations under their control. But policy has caused divisions even when it has not intended to do so. Quite benignly, when ethnicity is used to target transfers to poor populations; it can serve to exaggerate ethnic divisions on the ground. And there can be unintended consequences for ethnic division even of policies that ostensibly have nothing to do with ethnicity. This is particularly the case with macroeconomic policy like trade liberalization, which favors broad economic sectors over others. When these sectors align with ethnic groupings, ethnic divisions can sharpen in unintended fashion (Rwanda, Sri Lanka, Ghana). Macroeconomic policy proposals should at the very least be aware of these unintended consequences.

More positively, how can policy help reduce ethnic divisions, or at least their negative consequences? If cross-ethnic associational life is shown to be a mitigating factor in the causation of ethnic violence and riots, then support for such associational life might be suggested. Certainly the economic analysis of free riding in collective action suggests that associational life will be underprovided. A policy recommendation for a public subsidy to organizations promoting cross-ethnic links thus follows. Such conclusions can be drawn, for example, from the economic analysis of La Ferrara (2003b), Dasgupta and Kanbur (2005, 2007) and Miguel and Gugerty (2005), and political science based analysis of Varshney (2002).

If average income gaps between ethnic groups stoke ethnic divisions, then a policy to reduce ethnic income gaps seems to suggest itself. It can be argued that Malaysian policy after the race riots of 1969 embodied this strategy, and that it has on the whole worked well thus far, though some cracks may have opened up of late, as some Malaysians begin to argue that the policy has gone on for too long. Yet a policy for explicit support of Muslim groups in India, to overcome the large income gap between them and Hindus, may not work at all. It is widely believed that such a policy will only stir a counter reaction among many parts of the Hindu community. A policy to reduce income gaps, designed to mitigate ethnic tensions, may in fact exacerbate them in certain contexts.

Political scientists have vigorously debated policy intervention in the field of ethnic conflict. The scholarly dispute is less over whether affirmative action is desirable, if some communities – often minorities (USA, India), but sometimes also majorities (Malaysia, Sri Lanka, South Africa) -- feel a deep sense of historical injury, grievance, discrimination or injustice. The contention is more typically over what form affirmative action should take: Should it be quota-based or incentives-based? Should jobs and educational facilities be the basis of affirmative action, or political representation? Should the public sector be

involved in responding to ethnic grievances, or also the private sector? Should primary education of some groups be subsidized or also higher education?

More ambitiously, going beyond specific policies, structural techniques have been proposed and analyzed.¹¹ Structural techniques do not emphasize specific policy initiatives. Rather, the entire institutional design, aimed at restructuring how political power is organized and acquired, is the focus of structural methods. On structural techniques, a big debate in political science has already been summarized in the previous section: the debate on whether multiethnic societies need consociational systems for social peace? Federalism as a structural technique has also attracted a great deal of attention.

Scholars used to have consensus on the desirability of federalism, if ethnic groups were geographically concentrated. India's linguistic reorganization of polity in the 1950s and 1960s was widely viewed as a great institutional success. By giving each major language group a state in India federation, Indian decision makers removed a great source of ethnic grievance from politics. Religious, caste and tribal disputes continued to rage in India, but linguistic disputes progressively disappeared. It was also often suggested that Sri Lanka's inability to introduce federalism made the Sinhala-Tamil conflict truly explosive.¹²

The break-up of Soviet Union, Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia, mostly along what were previously federal lines, has reignited the debate on whether federalism is a desirable institutional device at all, even when ethnic groups are geographically concentrated. Federal systems tend to give states a great deal of power. Instead of arresting rebellion and secession, some scholars suggest, this might actually make both more likely. A lively debate currently marks the analysis of the conditions under which federalism works, and the circumstances under which it does not (Roeder and Rothchild, 2006). In short, the post-1945 experience of policy and institutional interventions continues to suggest that one size will not fit all. Institutional and policy nuancing according to specific contexts may be necessary for successful intervention.

In the same spirit, while anthropology remains somewhat at the periphery of policy prescription, one of its important functions is as a corrective to policy that may have a tendency to flatten national space. It reminds of the importance of local context, and the complexity and multi-scalar sense of the local. However, it would be useful to try to think how this focus may be translated into concrete policy outcomes.

One approach may be the emphasis on the disjuncture or gap between policy formulation and its implementation. The focus outlined above is on an anthropology that looks at how policies -- of ethnic management for example -- play out in local settings. The idea is that policies formulated at the broad national level are implemented at the complex local level by agents and intermediaries of the state. These agents and intermediaries relay state power to a local population. In this transmission ideas formulated at the broad level may play out differently, they may be subject to corruption and they may be subject to contrasting responses and resistance at the local level. It is

¹¹ The conceptual difference between structural and policy techniques was first drawn by Horowitz (1985).

¹² Stepan, Linz and Yadav (forthcoming) make this point at great length.

important, and this is perhaps what anthropology most fundamentally brings, to think about policy holistically: formulation is to be connected with implementation. Anthropology may usefully provide insights into how policy may travel successfully to different sites.

In a different way, anthropology may contribute to public policy by reframing how policy issues are perceived. The general tendency in anthropology, and sociology, to focus on the complex social lives of particular communities may act as a corrective to state-centred framing of such communities. The tendency in public policy debates to relate issues to broader national goals may obscure the actuality and meaning of issues in individual communities. The contribution by anthropologists here has been to move away from this “methodological nationalism” (Wimmer and Glick Schiller, 2002) by demonstrating how issues thought in relation to the state and its particular goals of security and order may obscure the complexity of a given issue.¹³

Thus, anthropological perspectives warn us against a “one size fits all” application of policy, alerting us to the fact that funds may be ineffective, or may be misused and may end up being channeled to the exact opposite cause. The local context may trump a general policy based on lessons from analysis at a highly aggregated or a highly abstract level.

6. Advancing Interdisciplinarity

We have seen that different disciplines bring different perspectives to the analysis and understanding of ethnicity and ethnic strife.¹⁴ Economists are perhaps the most abstract and most aggregated in their analysis. They use a common model to understand the phenomenon at all levels, from local to national to international, but test the model primarily with data at the national level. They tend to take ethnicity as exogenously given, not itself influenced by context or by feedback from its own consequences. This is somewhat surprising given the attention given in the rest of economics to the difficulties of ascribing causality because of “unobserved heterogeneity” and “simultaneity bias.”

Equally surprisingly, perhaps, it is anthropologists who emphasize the difficulties of establishing clean simple causal claims, and precisely because of these issues. The language may be different, but the cautionary notes are the same. Within anthropology itself there is debate between the approach of a “thick description” case study which provides a lot of detail and context but which cannot be easily generalized, and “thin description” case studies which do not have as much context and detail, but sufficient to

¹³ For example, the anthropologist Ana Bleahu, working with Romanian and Roma undocumented migrants in Italy, note that state discourses that emphasize the illegality of such groups that have legitimized policies of expulsion policy by the Italian authorities on people identified as Roma, presume a somewhat flat national space and the prevailing authority of the Romanian state over that space. Bleahu argues that the policy of expulsion of Roma does not take into account the inconsistencies in a system where a continuing economic need for cheap labor coupled with persistent corruption and restrictive legal migration policies combine to encourage irregular migration. Rather than expulsion, the needs of an economic system would rather suggest a regularization of their status and of their access to labor markets (Bleahu, 2007)

¹⁴ For a previous exchange on the relevance of ethnographic and “rational” approaches in the field of ethnic conflict, see Laitin (2006) and Varshney (2006).

allow more general conclusions to be drawn because of the number and composition of case studies. But there is no question that anthropological investigations of ethnicity and ethnic strife are less abstract and more context specific than those of economists.

Characterizing political science is difficult because it is in flux and is now quite heterogeneous as the result of the growing influence of economics oriented methodologies. Political science seems to occupy the middle level ground between the abstraction and aggregation of economics, and the context specificity and disaggregated perspective of anthropology. This is partly because of the natural focus in political science on processes and outcomes at the level of the nation state—in this they come close to the focus of economists on the determinants of national level economic outcomes. But, even despite the growing influence of deductive model building from economics, political science is unlikely to lose its attention to context specificity and feedback loops in assessing causal claims going from ethnic divisions to ethnic strife or other outcomes.

While a strength of the anthropological perspective is its focus and attention on complex local sites where ethnicity plays out, a related weakness may be a general difficulty in generalizing and comparing from specific sites. Methodologies of political science or economics can act as a spur to anthropology to think beyond the somewhat closed box of “thick description” (Geertz, 1973). Conversely, an anthropological perspective may act as a corrective to the “methodological nationalism” (Wimmer and Glick Schiller, 2002) of some social science.

The focus on processes of categorization of the approach outlined here is one way in which anthropological contributions may move beyond a tendency to overly privilege a somewhat cloistered ethnographic site. The emphasis on the broad economic, social and political and cultural processes and relations at work at the local scale, and at work in delineating ethnic group boundaries, may not only suggest that ethnic boundaries are in flux, but so too are the boundaries of the local. Without a stable site of analysis, anthropology has the opportunity to move beyond thick and localized description towards a broader sense of how the local and its structures of identity are influenced by extra-local forces. The anthropological contribution thus is to study ethnicity as means of highlighting broader economic, social and political issues and queries. The anthropological optic is useful as a corrective to the methodological nationalism of the social sciences generally and as a way of understanding the complexities of the local as constituted by multi-scalar forces.

One of the great strengths of the anthropological work on ethnicity is that it is subject-driven. Theory emerges from immersion in the field and the behavior of the subjects is probed through participant observation. Standard survey research, used both by economists and political scientists, is rarely subject-driven. Preexisting theory in a given subfield often determines the questions asked. Surveys may cover a wider range of subjects, but that is typically at the cost of depth. While it remains unclear what the appropriate mixture of breadth and depth in social science research is, the anthropological mode of inquiry remains uniquely suited to questions that require in-depth analysis.

From the perspective of economists and political scientists the strength of anthropological research lies in theory building, not theory testing. Anthropologists' in-depth focus on a case, or a few cases, is a legitimate way to build theories, but that is not an accepted mode of theory testing in economics, and increasingly in political science, unless the theory to be tested is deterministic and does not allow any exceptions. Testing probabilistic theories, which most social science theories tend to be, requires a large sample (or a large-n). That is what econometrics as a mode of theory testing does.

The anthropologist Andre Gingrich argues that anthropology is necessarily comparative in nature: it is never an isolated study of networks and relations in a particular society – it is never thus simply inductive - but involves comparison, even if only with the anthropologist's own networks and relations. Gingrich argues that fundamental questions of anthropology – what do humans have in common and how do they differ? – require, today, a macro-anthropological approach because connections of a globalized world call for far-ranging comparative study (Gingrich, 2002). The testing of macro-anthropological theory involves a study of how broad global connections play out differently in different spaces. The macro-anthropological approach does not do away with micro-anthropological studies of specific areas but extends micro-anthropological study where questions about human conditions in specific spaces are connected to broader networks. Cases are extended, what they denote and where geographically they are located are points of contention. At the same time, macro-anthropology requires input from micro-anthropology for the testing and expansion of its theory (Tsing, 2004).

Of course, theory building does not have to be case based, or inductive. It can also take a purely deductive form, as in a formal model. Most economists build their theories mathematically, which are then tested econometrically (or experimentally). In contrast, anthropologists build theories inductively ---- by empirically studying one case in depth, or a few well-chosen cases in substantial depth (thinning thereby description of each case in search of generalization). Political science stands somewhere in the middle. Some political scientists work the way the economists do – building theories formally and testing them with a large number of observations. For theory testing, political scientists are increasingly relying on econometrics or experimental methods.

No single discipline, we believe, has the monopoly of excellence in analyzing ethnicity and ethnic strife. Each discipline has its strengths, and its weaknesses. Indeed, quite often the weakness is simply the other side of the coin from strength. In other words, we should be looking for complementarities between disciplines and deploy them all to understand a vitally important phenomenon.

How can interdisciplinarity in the analysis of ethnicity and ethnic strife be advanced? Several strands of actions suggest themselves. First, there should be more venues where different disciplinary papers are presented and discussed, so that each group becomes familiar with, if not necessarily expert in, the languages of the other groups, as well as with the epistemology that underpins each discipline. But we need to go beyond this general familiarization. Second, we would suggest that interdisciplinary teams should tackle the explanation of, say, a particular episode of ethnic violence to see if they can

arrive at a common understanding. Third, another task for interdisciplinary teams could be to focus on the question of what policies might help to mitigate ethnic tension and ethnic violence. The problem is important enough to warrant resources to be devoted to it, and intellectually relevant, puzzling and demanding enough to warrant the excitement and the commitment of scholars from across the social sciences.

7. Outline of Symposium

This Symposium brings together a selection of peer reviewed papers, by leading established scholars and young researchers, on ethnicity and ethnic strife.¹⁵ The papers between them cover the issues raised in this overview, and highlight the complementary strengths of different approaches.

“Inequalities Between Groups: Theory and Empirics” by Arjun Jayadev and Sanjay Reddy is part of a vibrant economic literature devoted to expanding and extending the measurement of group based diversity beyond the simple ethno-linguistic fractionalization measure discussed in earlier sections. Among other dimensions, they incorporate the extent to which differences in average group incomes (for example) account for overall income inequality. The proposed measures are illustrated with data for five societies. The next paper, “Revisiting Between-Group Inequality Measurement: An Application to the Dynamics of Caste Inequality in Two Indian Villages”, by Peter Lanjouw and Vijayendra Rao, is also in the same spirit. It proposes a modification of inequality-decomposition based measures of group inequality, and applies it to the case of caste in India. Both of these papers, and this strand of the economic literature generally, try to integrate different conceptualizations of the salience of ethnicity into the measurement of ethnic diversity.

The next three papers all focus on the most extreme consequence of ethnic tension—civil war. We have discussed the aggregative economic literature on ethnic diversity and its consequences for economic growth and for civil war. We have also discussed critiques of this literature, from within the econometric fold and without. The paper by Graham Brown and Arnim Langer, “Riding the Ever Rolling Stream: Time and the Ontology of Violent Conflict” is a critique from within the econometric frame, and it focuses in particular on the treatment of time in the regression analysis that is at the foundation of the literature. Their overall conclusion, that “we must be much more careful in deriving universalist conclusions about the ‘causes’ of conflict from econometric studies” is one that makes a case for combining econometric studies with careful case studies of the type that conducted by the next two papers in the Symposium.

In their paper, “Sons of the Soil, Migrants, and Civil War,” political scientists James Fearon and David Laitin start with the observation that ethnic civil wars are heterogenous, but that in 31% of the cases in their data set “the spark for the war is violence between members of a regional ethnic group that considers itself to be the indigenous “sons-of-the-soil” and recent migrants from other parts of the country.” Their

¹⁵ The papers were selected after peer review from among the papers presented at conference on Ethnicity and Ethnic Strife, held at the Central European University in September 25-27, 2008.

analysis and argument, which includes a case study of Sri Lanka, highlights the conditioning variables that turn diversity into tension and tension into violence. Fearon and Laitin emphasize policies and state intervention, as well as the basic structural features of migration into indigenous land, as determinants of outbreak of insurgency and civil war.

Paul Richards brings the perspective of anthropology in his paper, “Tracing Causal Processes in Two West African Villages: A Systematic Approach to the Cultural Explanations of War.” But he also addresses fellow anthropologists, challenging what he calls (following Mary Douglas), “bongo-bongoism”, and “subjective regression” meaning by this the stringing together of “an attractive necklace of an argument, pleasing to the owner but of no objective robustness.” Of course “regression” here means something different from the “regression” of econometrics (or perhaps not!). Richards’s challenge relates directly to the “thick description”/ “thin description” divide we discussed earlier in this paper, and he advances the exercise of “causal process tracing” as an antidote to overly thick description that then stops there. The specific cases he considers, of insurgencies in West Africa, are illustrations of the method. We have here, therefore, an anthropologist reaching for generalization from case studies, towards the econometricians Brown and Langer reaching for more specificity from cross-national correlations.

Below the scale of all out ethnic civil war is the violent conflict that is seen in ethnic riots. Two papers in the Symposium focus on this phenomenon. The detailed analysis confirms again the importance of contingent factors in converting diversity and tension into conflict. In his paper, “The Spatial Distribution of Riots: Patronage and the Instigation of Communal Violence in Gujarat, India”, Ward Berenschott looks at two localities in Ahmedabad during the horrific riots of 2002. One of these communities remained by and large peaceful despite the mayhem surrounding it, while the other succumbed to Hindu-Muslim violence. What explains the difference, according to Berenschott, is the presence in the latter case of “political patronage networks that derive electoral gains from political violence.” Of course this in turn raises the question of why one community has such networks and the other does not, but the general point about the lessons to be learnt from disaggregating and comparing across localities is well made.

Samsul Rizal Panggabean and Benjamin Smith, in their paper, “Explaining Anti-Chinese Riots in Late 20th Century Indonesia” find a similar phenomenon to be explained—namely the absence of riots in some places and at certain times, but not in others. Applying process tracing to paired city comparisons of Medan-Solo, which experienced violence in May 1998, and Surabaya-Yogyakarta, which experienced none, they argue that where the security forces could not control anti-state student demonstrations, they provoked “anti-Chinese violence to distract from a) their inability to control protests and b) their own targeting in protesters’ rhetoric.” Panggabean and Smith use the term “frame shifting strategy” to describe this phenomenon, and show how a seemingly unrelated event (protests against the government by students) can be channeled into ethnic conflict by political actors and entrepreneurs.

Since a significant amount of ethnic violence is perpetrated against and by Islamic groups, the issue of Islamic identity and its interactions with surrounding politics and

culture are a prominent feature of the literature on ethnicity and ethnic strife. The next two papers in the Symposium take up this issue. Jean-Philippe Platteau's paper, "Political Instrumentalization of Islam and the Risk of Obscurantist Deadlock" deals with the question of whether there is something inherent in Islam that is incompatible with democracy, as suggested by Bernard Lewis and Samuel Huntington. Platteau argues the contrary, starting from "a systematic misconception about the true nature of the relationship between Islam and politics: far from being fused into the religious realm, politics tends to dominate religion." With this background, and given the decentralized nature of religious authority in Islam, Platteau concludes that the greater risk is one of "obscurantist deadlock" where political competition uses religion in increasingly vicious ways.

A different perspective on Islam, and indeed on religion, is provided by Patrick Eisenlohr in "Religious Media, Devotional Islam, and the Morality of Ethnic Pluralism in Mauritius." We have discussed ethnic markers, and religion as one such marker, earlier in this paper. The focus there was on "boundary maintenance." But Eisenlohr argues that this misses the moral dimensions of religious teaching, and the effect that this can have on inter-ethnic relations—helping co-existence rather than hindering it. He argues that this is the case in Mauritius, where religion is very much in the public sphere, and religious traditions contribute to the successful ethnic pluralism that is the hallmark of that polity.

The final two papers continue the theme of interactions at the boundary, and the management of collective action in the presence of ethnic divisions. Daniel Monterescu, in his paper, "Estranged Natives and Indigenized Migrants: An Anthropological Perspective on Ethnically Mixed Towns in Israel", argues that contrary to an "ethnocracy" perspective of spatial segregation, "it is precisely the indeterminate "contact zone" between and betwixt communities and spaces that constitutes the political and cultural realities in the city." Monterescu in effect offers a counter to "methodological nationalism," which was considered as a key feature of social scientific study of ethnicity in an earlier section in this overview. It allows us to see the mechanism of "productive negotiation of cultural identities and social worlds," which the aggregative perspective of economics or even political science might miss.

The last paper in the Symposium is at the other end of the spectrum from ethnic strife and violence. It considers a case where there has been progress and social development despite high fragmentation along ethnic and religious lines. In essence the paper offers yet another challenge to studies based on "the size and distribution of ethnic groups as a proxy for the nature of ethnic relations." In her case study of the Indian state of Kerala, "We-ness and Welfare: A Longitudinal Analysis of Social Development in Kerala, India," Singh argues that "cohesiveness of the political community, a subjective feeling of belonging to a common polity," can transcend demographics of ethnic fragmentation. This of course raises the question what in turn gives rise to these subjective feelings of integration, and how these cases differ from cases where ethnic divisions do indeed translate into ethnic tension and then into ethnic violence.

8. Conclusion

Until the early 1980s, very few scholars were interested in ethnicity. Indeed, if one were to hazard a guess, only the discipline of anthropology was paying sustained intellectual attention to ethnic groups. By the late 1980s, the number of political scientists studying ethnicity began to increase substantially. And by the late 1990s, economists also started paying attention.

Both political science and economics came to ethnicity indirectly. The study of conflict has traditionally been a major domain of inquiry within political science. By the 1980s, so much of the conflict raging in the world appeared to be framed in ethnic terms that the conceptual category of ethnicity had to be taken seriously, if not accepted uncritically. And for many development economists, the economic decline of Sub-Saharan Africa by the 1990s was a matter of grave concern. Could African economic stagnation, they asked, have something to do with Africa's ethnic divides? Ethnicity became relevant to political science and economics because some of the great substantive questions of the disciplines spurred an intellectual move in that direction.

By now the number of scholars studying ethnicity and ethnic strife is truly large. What is surprising, however, is how little systematic communication, let alone interaction, there is between researchers across these disciplines. Part of the reason, of course, has to do with the disciplinary languages and boundaries that make interdisciplinary communication difficult. But part of the reason is also quite simply the lack of venues for interaction between researchers from different disciplines. The scholarship is located in various academic disciplines, but there is virtually no interdisciplinary site where insights, methods and conclusions are jointly shared or collectively interrogated. Collaborative research endeavors are also quite rare. Will interdisciplinarity bring greater intellectual rewards? We have argued in this paper that each discipline has complementary strengths (not to mention weaknesses) and, given the nature of the problem at hand, the case for interdisciplinarity is strong indeed.

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