Ethno-territorial conflict and coexistence in the Caucasus, Central Asia and Fereydan

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Chapter Two

Theoretical Framework

What do we mean by ethno-territorial conflict? What are ethnic groups, and what is their relationship with nations and states? Which factors are very likely to contribute to the emergence of ethno-territorial conflicts? This chapter aims to answer these questions. After having defined ethno-territorial conflict, the concepts ethnicity, nation, and state will be discussed.

The concepts ethnicity, politicized ethnicity, nation, and nationalism are essential to understanding ethno-territorial conflicts. Therefore, these concepts will be discussed before discussing factors which may contribute to such conflicts. The concepts territory and territoriality are related to these concepts, notably to nation and nationalism, and will also be discussed here.

After having discussed these concepts, possible factors responsible for the eruption of ethno-territorial conflict will be reviewed on the basis of existing theories. The impact of the newly introduced factor, ethno-geographic configuration, on ethno-territorial conflict will also be assessed. At the end of this chapter, a broad and abstract model is presented, which includes the theoretically relevant factors for the occurrence of ethno-territorial conflict.

Ethno-Territorial Conflict

Ethno-territorial conflict is a type of ethnic conflict with a clear territorial dimension. In such a conflict ethnic groups whose homelands border each other fight over a contested area, or one ethnic group fights against a state for political control over its (perceived) homeland. Speaking of ethno-territorial conflicts, three elements should be discussed: ethnicity (as collectivity), territory, and violence. The first criterion is the ethnic character of the conflict:

Generally speaking the term “conflict” describes a situation in which two or more actors pursue incompatible, yet from their individual perspective entirely just, goals. Ethnic conflicts are one particular form of such conflict: that in which the goals of at least one conflict party are defined in
(exclusively) ethnic terms, and in which the primary fault line of confrontation is one of ethnic distinctions…. Thus, ethnic conflicts are a form of group conflict in which at least one of the parties involved interprets the conflict, its causes, and potential remedies along an actually existing or perceived discriminating ethnic divide. (Cordell & Wolff 2010: 4-5; Wolff 2006: 2)

In an ethnic conflict at least one party is an ethnic group (Brubaker & Laitin 1998: 428; Cordell & Wolff 2010: 5; Wolff 2006: 2). The other party can be either another ethnic group or a state associated with a dominant ethnic group. Being a sub-type of an ethnic conflict, an ethno-territorial conflict also has a clear ethnic character.

In contrast to many prominent studies such as *Minorities at Risk: A Global View of Ethnopolitical Conflict* (Gurr 1993), “Peoples against States: Ethnopolitical Conflict and the Changing World System” (Gurr 1994), *Peoples versus States: Minorities at Risk in the New Century* (Gurr [ed.] 2000), and *Ethnic Conflict in World Politics* (Harff & Gurr 2004), in this current study ethnic and ethno-territorial conflict include both inter-ethnic and ethno-nationalist versus the state conflicts. In other words, this study also includes the (hypothetical) conflicts between two “minorities” and tries to explain them. In this study the political character of ethno-territorial conflict is manifested in the relationships between ethnic groups mutually, and between ethnic groups within a state and the state itself, often dominated by or associated with a certain ethnic group. This latter type is in fact equivalent to a situation in which one minority group fights against a majority ethnic group that controls and dominates the state. This type of ethno-territorial conflict is called a vertical ethno-territorial conflict. Separatist and autonomist wars are examples of the vertical type. Due to its logic, the vertical type of ethno-territorial conflicts are more likely to appear in countries in which the dominant understanding and definition of nation is an ethnic nation (see further in this chapter). A horizontal ethno-territorial conflict is a type of conflict in which two ethnic groups of the same level of hierarchy fight about the ownership of and authority and control over an area. Their attachment to and claim over a territory makes these ethnic groups, in fact, ethno-territorial groups.

The second criterion of an ethno-territorial conflict is its violent character. Not all types of ethnic strife can be regarded as ethnic conflict. An ethnic conflict is a violent conflict (Brubaker & Laitin 1998: 428; Cordell & Wolff 2010: 5; Wolff 2006: 2-3). For the non-violent (and less-violent) conflicts, more appropriately “terms such as ‘tension’, ‘dispute’ and ‘unease’ are used” (Wolff 2006: 3). As Cordell and Wolff (2010: 5) state, ethnic conflict of interest can hardly even be called “tension”, let alone conflict, as ethnic groups should systematically exercise violence for strategic purposes in order to justify speaking of ethnic conflict. Being
a sub-type of ethnic conflict, an ethno-territorial conflict has to be a violent conflict.

Although in this study violence is regarded as an indispensable aspect of any ethno-territorial conflict, the term “violent” should be operationalized. Numbers of deaths can be indicators of violence. Indeed many databases set a minimum number of human casualties in a certain time-span in order to speak of an ethnic conflict.

The third criterion is the territorial character. An ethno-territorial conflict is an ethnic conflict with an explicit territorial character. Territory and territoriality play a central role in any ethno-territorial conflict. Although one can think of (hypothetical) non-territorial forms of an ethnic conflict, territory and territoriality are indispensable aspects of any ethno-territorial conflict. Dispute over territory has been the cause of many wars between or within states. Territorial ethnic conflicts, or ethno-territorial conflicts as we call them in this current study, are those ethnic conflicts in which the dispute is about the ownership of and authority and control over an area. A territorial conflict is always political because it is closely tied with power relations: “who gets what” is dependent on power relations, but the “what” itself—that is, territory and its resources—determine the power relations to a certain degree, because next to resources territory offers the controlling party the possibility to control its human resources and mobilize its population.

Being an ethnic conflict with prominent territorial character, at least one party in an ethno-territorial conflict is an ethno-territorial group. Simply put, ethno-territorial groups are rooted ethnic groups that place a claim on a territory, either based on historical ownership or on large demographic weight in an area. An ethno-territorial conflict is either between two such rooted ethnic groups or between one such rooted ethnic group and a state associated with another such rooted ethnic group. In addition, a state asserts a legal claim on its territory.

In conclusion, an ethno-territorial conflict is a violent conflict between two rooted ethnic groups—or between one such ethnic group and a state dominated by and associated with an ethnic group—who fight for the control and ownership of a disputed area or its political status.

Ethnos and Ethnicity
There are not many concepts in the social sciences which have caused so much cacophony as ethnicity, nation, and nationality. Much ambiguity is

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due to the fact that by an ethnic group, different authors, at different times, have meant different entities. In the (recent) past as well as today, social entities such as tribes, religious communities, linguistic communities, racial minorities, and migrants have been called ethnic groups. In addition, many authors use the terms nation and nationality where they would be better to use the term ethnic group or ethnicity.

The term ethnicity is derived from the Greek ethnos. At times, the term ethnos is also used as “ethnie” in English, as is the case in French. In practice, however, the terms ethnic group or ethnic community are more often used than ethnie. The term ethnic is itself an adjective derived from the rarely used ethnie. Perhaps to fill the gap the term ethnicity was introduced into English, as a noun. Although related, by ethnicity is meant something different from ethnic group, ethnic community, or ethnie: whereas those latter terms refer to collectivities, the term ethnicity refers to a quality which is attributed to those collectivities. The following phrases can be useful in order to understand the complex interrelation: “To which ethnic group do you belong?” is more or less equal to “What is your ethnicity?”, and “What has ethnicity to do with it?” is more or less equal to “What has the membership of an ethnic group to do with it?” These terms refer to a cultural quality to which one is ascribed.

The term ethnos was used by the ancient Greeks as a designation for non-Greeks, while the Greeks themselves were called genos Hellenon (Hutchinson & Smith: 1996: 4). The association between ethnos and the “other(s)” seems to have persisted to modern times. The Ottoman Empire had offered the non-Muslim, minority millets, i.e. religious communities, a certain degree of autonomy in their internal communal affairs. This system was called the millet system. The Greek Orthodox community was a recognized millet in that system. In fact, the word millet was used, in a way, as equal to its ancient Greek equivalent ethnos. It is remarkable that the word millet in modern Turkish and Persian (mellat) and ethnos in modern Greek are used for the English word “nation”.

Although the term “ethnicity” was already in use in the 1940s and 1950s, it was only in the 1970s that this term gained momentum in social sciences. Glazer & Moynihan (1975: 1) began their introduction by writing that “ethnicity [in the sense which we use it] seems to be a new term”. They used the concept ethnicity to indicate the generally conflicting relations between the subgroups and the larger society (see also Banks 1996: 73-75). Many other scholars also regard ethnic groups as subgroups within a larger society. This position is verbalized in the definition of ethnic group by Richard Schermerhorn (1978: 12):

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9 A similar system had already existed in the pre-Islamic times in the predominantly Zoroastrian Iranian Sasanid Empire, in which the Christians enjoyed a certain degree of autonomy.
An ethnic group is ... a collectivity within a larger society having real or putative common ancestry, memories of a shared historical past, and a cultural focus on one or more symbolic elements defined as the epitome of their peoplehood. Examples of such symbolic elements are: kinship patterns, physical contiguity (as in localism or sectionalism), religious affiliation, language or dialect forms, tribal affiliation, nationality, phenotypical features, or any combination of these. A necessary accompaniment is some consciousness of kind among members of the group.

Hutchinson and Smith (1996) have a slightly different definition. They do not place an emphasis on positions as minorities or subgroups within a larger society but also do not reject the existence of such cases. According to them an ethnie (a term that they use instead of ethnic group) is “a named human population with myths of common ancestry, shared historical memories, one or more elements of common culture, a link with a homeland and a sense of solidarity among at least some of its members” (Hutchinson & Smith 1996: 6). This definition is compatible with different views on ethnicity but allows a definition of ethnic groups without their relational position vis-à-vis other groups or the larger society. Ethnic groups, whether subgroups or not, should not be confused with ethnic minorities. Certainly, not only the minorities but also majorities can have ethnic identity (see also Banks 1996: 149-160). If ethnicity is regarded (correctly) as a cultural quality, then the majorities who have a culture also logically have ethnicity and are members of an ethnic group. Certainly, this current study does not limit an ethnic group to a minority group.

The cacophony about ethnicity and ethnic groups results also from the interchangeable usage of the concepts ethnic group and nation. Surely there is a strong relationship between the concepts ethnic group and nation. While many are aware of their difference, many journalists, policy makers, politicians, and even scholars use these concepts as identical. For example, according to the scholar Walker Connor, “[a] nation is a nation, is a state, is an ethnic group, is a…” (1978).10 Indeed, “the dividing line between ethnic unit and nation is a very blurred one” (Saul 1979: 354), but there is a line, or better said a grey transitional area where ethnic group and nation merge and beyond which they are distinguishable. It is not possible to speak about nations and ethnic groups separately (see further in this chapter). It is, therefore, appropriate to differentiate between the two concepts but also to pay attention to their

10 This is the title of one of Walker Connor’s (1978) oft-cited papers: “A Nation is a Nation, is a State, is an Ethnic Group, is a…”.
relationship. Nations consist of one or more ethnic groups, but not all ethnic groups are nations.

Another aspect of this cacophony is the fact that there are so many theoretical views on ethnicity. While there are certain differences in these views, the differences are usually exaggerated. There are not as many factual differences as there are different points of emphasis. Most authors do acknowledge that there are many dimensions and aspects of ethnicity but they pay attention to one or a few more than the others. There is not as much denial of certain aspects as there are stresses on different aspects.

Theoretical views on ethnicity can be grouped and placed along a continuum of which the two polar opposites are primordialism and instrumentalism. However, as there are too many views, there exist too many names and “ism”s. Instrumentalism itself is usually used as an umbrella term for theoretical views which criticize primordialism and is called by many authors by other names such as constructivism, circumstancialism, situationalism, functionalism, mobilizationism, etc., as a polar opposite to primordialism, or a different label, or a variant thereof (e.g. essentialism, ethnic nepotism, culturalism, etc.).

Moreover, there is no general agreement on who is who and where he stands in this continuum. For example, Barth, a major critic of classical primordialism, is “nearly always described as an instrumentalist” (Eriksen 2002: 54) but is charged with primordialism by Abner Cohen (1974: xii-xv), another critic of primordialism. Horowitz’s view,11 which is often (correctly) regarded as a primordialist12 one, is named as a social psychological one by John Hutchins and Anthony D. Smith (1996: 10). A. D. Smith is an influential theoretician whose theoretical view, more often than not, is regarded as a primordialist one. He, nevertheless, opts to call his theoretical view rather as an “ethno-symbolic” one (Smith 1999: 40; Hutchinson & Smith 1996: 10). Many authors call A. D. Smith’s theoretical view “perennialist”.

Whatever the names may be, two polar opposites are distinguishable, one of which emphasizes subjective emotional aspects, kinship, and cultural elements as essences of ethnicity, while the other polar opposite emphasizes the fact that ethnicity is dynamic and is a product of rational choice or policies, or in any case a response to certain circumstances. The different designations make the subtle differences and nuances clearer. Many alternative designations for primordialism stress the importance of the (often ascriptive) cultural elements or the often

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11 Horowitz’s most-cited book is titled Ethnic Groups in Conflict, in which he emphasized the importance of kinship and the resemblance of ethnicity to families (1985: 55-92).
12 It seems that primordialism has obtained a negative connotation in the social scientific literature. This is, however, not my view. By classifying someone as primordialist, I do not try to reject his or her views.
static, subjective, and emotional aspects of ethnicity. On the other hand, the alternative designations of instrumentalism stress the dynamic and reactive aspects of ethnicity. Simply put, according to the instrumentalist view, an ethnic group cannot exist in separation from other ethnic groups, as it takes two to tango! According to the relational character of the instrumentalist point of view, ethnic groups do not exist on their own merits and are only existent because of their place in a larger society.

The primordialist-instrumentalist debate which began in the 1970s was only the beginning of an incessant debate on the meaning of and approaches to and theoretical views on the concepts of ethnicity and ethnic group, a debate which is still developing. Since then, the theoretical discussion on ethnic groups has been framed in a dichotomous way, or better stated, in the aforementioned bipolar continuum. The primordialist theoretical view is older than the prevalent debate. In fact, instrumentalism can be seen as a reaction to primordialism’s shortcomings, but it does not mean that there is no truth in primordialism as a theoretical view. It is especially hard to deny the truth in its modern and modified versions. The term primordialism, in the sense that is used in the social sciences, was coined by Shils (1957). Primordialists assert that a group’s identity is a given and that within every society particular fundamental, (perhaps irrational) solidarities exist, which are based on blood, race, language, religion, etc. Clifford Geertz (1963) is generally known as the intellectual father of the primordialist view on ethnicity.

According to primordialists, ethnicity is based on pre-existing fundamental cultural aspects such as kinship, language, religion, and folkloric customs. When someone is born into a community, he or she is, according to primordialists, automatically a member of that community. He or she is attached to that community by “blood relationship” and kinship and ideally displays the racial and phenotypical features of that ethnic group. His cultural traits are then mere ascriptions. He or she speaks the language of that community, confesses the religion of that community, and preserves the traditions of that community. In this sense he or she is automatically a member of that community and therefore possesses emotional ties to that community.

This emotional aspect of primordialism regards ethnic groups, in fact, as an extension of familial and clan ties. Van den Berghe’s (1978a; 1978b; 1979; 1986; 1987 [1981]; 1995) socio-biological understanding of ethnicity is a primordialist one heavily based on racial and biological characteristics of human groups. According to this understanding, ethnic nepotism is natural and innate to human nature, because like any other species, humans have an inclination to their kin and rivalry with or aversion to (more) distant or non-kin groups. Although a person’s emotional attachment to the ethnic group cannot be neglected, its
similarity to familial or even clan relations seems to be exaggerated. Members of a family (or even a clan) know each other and often have harmonious interests, while members of an ethnic group are usually anonymous to each other and do not have necessarily harmonious interests. Nonetheless, even though less than is the case in the context of family or clan membership, the members of an ethnic group do indeed share certain interests or perceive some interests as common ethnic interests. This is especially the case in political environments, where ethnicity is politicized and one’s personal well-being is dependent on his or her membership of an ethnic group and the privileges associated with it.

A very narrow understanding of primordialism, in the sense that the ethnic identity is based on the membership of an ethnic community by birth and on fixed cultural content, suggests that cultural changes should be viewed as a process of evaporation of the group’s identity rather than its redefinition. It is, therefore, appropriate to also define ethnic groups on bases other than cultural traits alone.

The polar opposite of primordialism, generally known as instrumentalism, is promoted by many different critics, who all have in common that they regard ethnicity as a dynamic concept rather than as a static one. According to these views ethnicity is a result of mobilization, organization, and interaction. Glazer & Moynihan (1975), two of the most prominent theoreticians associated with instrumentalism, maintain that ethnic groups are constructed entities and function as useful instruments to reach collective advantages, especially in social contexts which are characterized by a high degree of competition. From this point of view, the potential members of an ethnic group are mobilized around certain political goals. Ethnicity is, therefore, politically relevant. As they wrote in their earlier seminal publication, Beyond the Melting Pot (Glazer & Moynihan 1963: 310): “Social and political institutions do not merely respond to ethnic interests; a great number of institutions exist for the specific purpose of serving ethnic interests. This in turn tends to perpetuate them”.

A narrow understanding of instrumentalism suggests that ethnic groups do not exist naturally but are formed in order to pursue a goal and as a response to different situations and circumstances. Such a narrow and rational-choice view on ethnicity is difficult to maintain. Culture is a central aspect of ethnicity. The cultural dimension and aspects of ethnicity could be dispensed with totally, if ethnicity was situational and pursuing a goal was the main rationale behind it. People could better pursue their goals by formations such as labor unions and political parties. Even though instrumentalists tend to place the emphasis elsewhere, they cannot totally dispense with culture. In his seminal book, Ethnicity and
Nationalism, Thomas Hylland Eriksen (2002), who holds a firm instrumentalist position, combines the cultural dimension of ethnicity with instrumentalist logics of situationalism and relationalism. According to Eriksen (2002: 12): “For ethnicity to come about, the groups must have a minimum of contact with each other, and they must entertain ideas of each other as being culturally different from themselves. If these conditions are not fulfilled, there is no ethnicity, for ethnicity is essentially an aspect of a relationship, not a property of a group”. In addition, he maintains that “ethnic relations are fluid and negotiable; that their importance varies situationally; and that, for all their claims to primordiality and cultural roots, ethnic identities can be consciously manipulated” (Eriksen 2002: 21).

A well-known classical theoretical view on ethnicity and ethnic groups is that of Fredrik Barth (1969), who focuses on the “ethnic boundaries and their persistence”. Although recognizing the relative importance of cultural elements, Barth (1969: 10-15) does not regard ethnic groups merely as fixed static carriers of culture, but rather as social organizations formed on the basis of interactions between them, and allegiances between their members. According to him, ethnic groups are separated and distinguishable from each other by social boundaries, and hence these boundaries are indispensable for the study of ethnic groups and understanding of inter-ethnic relations. Ethnic boundaries are kinds of social boundaries which determine the exclusion or inclusion of the (potential) constituent members of an ethnic group, as a social organization (Barth 1969: 15-17). According to this perspective, preservation of ethnic distinctiveness does not depend on the isolation of the groups; on the contrary, it is preserved owing to the processes of contact and social interaction between ethnic groups. Barth’s perspective allows, on the one hand, exploration of ethnic formation from the subjective view of its members, and on the other hand, it allows a goal-oriented rational action analysis of it by recognizing social and political relations inherent to these processes. In this sense, Barth’s perspective reconciles primordialism with its polar opposite.

The usage of many names for the polar opposite(s) of primordialism (e.g. instrumentalism, constructivism, situationalism, circumstantialism, etc.), which subject primordialism to similar but yet slightly different criticisms, indicates that the polar opposite of primordialism is itself multi-faceted and, therefore, there exist much

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13 In one of my earlier writings (Rezvani 2008a: 602-603), I presented indications and evidence for the fact that religious affiliation appeared to be an ethnic boundary in Iran to the extent that Jahangir Khan, a Christian of Georgian origin, could not fit into the Iranian Georgian realm because Iranian Georgians were Shi’ite Muslims. Owing to his faith, he crossed the prevalent social boundary and entered the Christian Armenian realm and in fact became an Armenian.
diversity and to some extent even disagreement among the critics of primordialism, as well. It also indicates the complexity of the concept ethnicity. As a matter of fact, the criticism of primordialism is not as much of primordialism’s logics as it is of its shortcomings in explanation and understanding of many dimensions and aspects of ethnicity which remain underexposed and obscured by classical primordialism. The understanding of ethnic phenomena does not require denying primordial sentiments and cultural elements but rather complementing them with other aspects and elements.

Clifford Geertz, often known as a classical primordialist, has tried, in a way, to reconcile primordialism with instrumentalism. Geertz (2000 [1973]) in a later account discussing the nationalistic movements in post-colonial countries after the Second World War, observes that two tendencies of “essentialism” and “epochalism” are visible in the processes of formation and consolidation of collective identities. Essentialism is based on “the indigenous life style”—that is, on the local fortification of the indigenous institutions and traditions, recovering, re-discovering, and revaluing cultural roots, national character, and even race. Epochalism, on the other hand, is based on “the spirit of the age”—that is, the interpretation of contemporary history by social actors (Geertz 2000: 243-254). Geertz is pleading for comprehensive studies which consider the political realities of the time but do not neglect the cultural and symbolic aspects of identity. Ideologies of identity formation are rarely purely essentialist or purely epochalist, and there often exist dynamic interactions between both tendencies (Geertz 2000: 243). This perspective can be regarded as an effort to reconcile primordialism and instrumentalism with each other. Epochalism does not depart from a static point of view. To be precise, it can be called a circumstantionalist perspective, because it represents in fact a reaction to circumstances. Essentialism in this perspective means that primordial sentiments, cultural aspects, and the generally assumed givens are not neglected by Geertz.

The fact that many authors emphasize the social relations and boundaries (Barth 1969) and the political character of the ethnicity (Glazer & Moynihan 1975) does not mean that they neglect primordial sentiments totally or do not acknowledge the importance of cultural elements at all. Glazer & Moynihan (1975: 18-20) state that ethnicity is not only a mechanism to obtain collective interests, but that culture also plays an important role through the “affective ties” with which the “political interests” are combined. Even authors who legitimately question the primordial, affective, and ineffable character of ethnic ties (e.g. Eller & Coughlan 1993; Eller 1999) do acknowledge the importance of culture and history in the arena of ethnic relations. The reason behind Abner Cohen’s (1974: xii-xv) charging of Barth with primordialism might lie in
the fact that Barth himself recognizes and acknowledges the imperative character of ethnic identity, in the sense that “it cannot be disregarded and temporarily set aside by other definitions of situation” (Barth 1969: 17). Another reason might be the fact that even though Barth’s primary focus lies on ethnic boundaries, he does not neglect culture:

I have argued that boundaries are also maintained between ethnic units and that consequently it is possible to specify the nature of continuity and persistence of such units…. [E]thnic boundaries are conserved in each case by a set of cultural features. The persistence of the unit then depends on the persistence of these cultural differentiae while continuity can also be specified through the changes of the unit brought about by changes in the boundary-defining cultural differentiae. (Barth 1969: 38)

It would be rather stubborn and naïve to state that ethnicity is only a social organization aimed at gaining political, economic, and social advantageous. Cultural content does indeed matter. By cultural content I mean culture and cultural elements, or even—as they are often called—cultural markers in concrete and specific terms. It is not culture in an abstract sense but refers to things such as the language a certain people speaks, the religion they confess, etc. Cultural content is an important aspect of ethnic identity and hence also of inter-ethnic relations, because ethnic groups tend to define themselves on the basis of their perceived differences from other groups. Only by virtue of cultural content is one group distinguishable from “others”. In addition, group membership by virtue of descent or “blood relationship”, as well as feelings of belonging, do matter. It can happen that someone does not practice the cultural traditions, does not confess the religion of his/her ethnicity, or does not speak his/her ethnic language, but still belongs to a group. Why? Because (s)he is attached to that ethnic group by kinship relations. Moreover, one can deny one’s ethnicity and step out of it; but when this does not happen, it means that (s)he does have primordial sentiments to a certain degree. If one does not like his/her ethnic affiliation, (s)he either steps out of it (if possible) or tries to do his/her best in order to be “proud” of his/her background; otherwise, (s)he suffers from “cognitive dissonance”.

Ethnic groups are primarily cultural collectivities. This, however, does not deny that they can, and often do, have political relevance. Not only do members construct an ethnic group in order to gain political advantages, but the reverse can also be true: politics can construct an ethnic group. The political context itself can impose definitions and boundaries on groups and by this means construct ethnic groups. In different political and social contexts, ethnic groups can be defined differently. Often state laws define the boundaries of an ethnic group. This legal enforcement usually has political, social, and economic
consequences. Members of an ethnic group can opt to behave accordingly to claim their privileges but can also opt to resist and try to change this categorization when they see it as unjust and detrimental to their interests. Indeed, in many states such as Lebanon, the former Soviet Union, and Yugoslavia, ethnic categories were more than just cultural categories; they were politicized and hence were also political categories. In many countries, for example in the former Soviet Union, the allocation and distribution of ethnic groups in different administrative units determined to a certain degree their members’ privileges or deprivation (Bremmer 1997; Martin 2001a; Martin 2001b; Slezkine 1994). In many countries, for example in the former Soviet Union, its successor states, and the USA, census could be regarded both as a political instrument and as a political force itself because it plays an important role in defining the ethnic boundaries—it can divide and label population, not necessarily but often in ethnic terms (Bhagat 2001; Bhagat 2003; Hirsch 1997; Hirsch 2005; Kertzer & Arel 2002; Waters 1990; Waters 2002).

Ethnic groups are not always politicized and not always defined in legal terms, but nations—however one might define them—are always defined in legal terms and are always political categories, as they are entitled to a state, either in reality or in their own perception. This is exactly one of the main differences between the concepts of ethnic group and nation.

**State, Nation and Nationalism**

The concept of nation is intimately connected with that of ethnic group and the distinction between these concepts is often blurred. Many people, even many scholars, can be confused about these two concepts. Their distinction, however, is not unclear. A nation is a community whose members subjectively feel that they belong together and who already possess a state or feel entitled to have one. It is often said that a nation is an imagined community (Anderson 1983), because not all its members know each other but, nevertheless, feel that they belong together.

A state is the political organization of a nation. States are territorial entities. A state is not only a collection of institutions and laws, but it is also a territory. State laws and institutions gain their meaning only in combination with territoriality. A state can exert its power and implement its policies only in its defined territory. In simple words, a state is the territorial manifestation of a nation, notably a type of nation which is called a civic nation. (This concept will be discussed further below.)

A nation may be constituted by only one ethnic group, but it may also be constituted by many ethnic groups. There are generally two views on nation: a civic nation and an ethnic nation. The civic nation comprises
all citizens of a state. This view is prevalent in American terminology, in which the concepts of “nation” and “country” are used interchangeably. Therefore, this view on nation is also called a territorial nation. This does not imply, however, that a territorial nation has no ethnic basis. It can be based on either one or more ethnic groups. In many states, especially those in Africa, these ethnic groups do not share a common history or are not intimately connected to each other more than they are to groups in other states. On the other hand, there are many nations which are multi-ethnic and their members share long history and a similar culture with each other. These latter countries, for example Iran, India, and to a certain degree also China, are usually those states which have ancient roots in history and show a certain continuity in the course of time.

In the second view on nation the concepts of “ethnic group” and “nation” are used interchangeably. The ethnic nation comprises only one ethnic group. Ethno-nationalists maintain an ethnic view on nation. The ethno-nationalist ideal is one country for one (dominant) ethnic group. According to the logic of this view, all ethnic groups other than one ethnic group are doomed to take a subordinate position. Ethnic minorities are consequently excluded from the ethnic nationalism prevalent in the polity in whose territory they are living. On the other hand, the civic view of nation does not exclude people’s (potential) membership of a nation on the basis of their ethnicity. According to Bhiku Parekh (1999: 69), who holds a civic view:

National identity...is a matter of moral and emotional identification with a particular community based on a shared loyalty to its constitutive principles and participation in its collective self-understanding. It creates a sense of common belonging, provides a basis for collective identification, fosters common loyalties, and gives the members of the community the confidence to live with and even delight in their disagreements and cultural differences.

Civic nationalism can be embraced by all citizens; indeed, many authors (e.g. Ignatief 1999) conceive civic nationalism as a benign phenomenon. According to Parekh (1999: 69), “the identity of a political community is located in its political structure, and not in the widely shared personal characteristics of its individual members”. At the same time, “members of a multicultural society belong to different ethnic, religious and cultural groups, and these identities deeply matter to them. The prevailing view of national identity should allow for such multiple identities without subjecting those involved to charges of divided loyalties” (Parekh 1999: 69-70).

In Gellner’s (1983; 1997; 1999) view, nations are modern formations which are brought together by modern means of
communication and education. Gellner’s theoretical understanding of nation-building (i.e. the modernization theory) is more in harmony with the creation of a civic nation than with the creation of an ethnic nation. Logically, creation of a civic nation is less dependent on ethnic markers but is rather heavily dependent on the possibilities of extension of the national identity to a larger group of members. In fact, Gellner’s notion of nation-building is more or less the same as the extension of “the high culture” of the elite into larger groups of people, a process which contributes to make a coherent society, called “nation”: “[High] cultures define and make nations: it is not the case, as nationalists believe and proclaim, that independently and previously existing nations seek the affirmation and independent life of ‘their’ culture. Cultures ‘have’ and make nations; nations initially neither exist nor have or do anything” (Gellner 1997: 69). In this view, nation-building is dissemination and standardization of a high culture. Although not stressed by Gellner, whose approach is historical to a high degree, this high culture is not necessarily an elite culture but can be also defined as core values which are often agreed upon in some kind of social contract. Of course, nation-building in this sense implies a certain degree of homogenization. Not only the degree but also the nature of homogenization and homogeneity is determined by conscious or unconscious political planning. As the concept of nation is intimately tied to that of society, and as a nation is thought to be a social construct (see Anderson 1983; Hobsbawm 1990; Hobsbawm & Ranger 1983), the ways in which society is shaped do influence the definition and perception of a nation. Education has the ability to disseminate “high culture” and has always been seen as a means of nation-building. Moreover, it disseminates the ideas and views of how a nation should be constructed. It disseminates the interpretation of national history, describes the “desirable” state of affairs in the society, and gives directions to its future development. Other modern means which contribute to the dissemination of high culture to the masses, and hence homogenization of the society in one way or another, are conscription, radio and TV broadcasting, and the press.

On the other hand, according to the primordialist or, as many might say, perennialist view of A. D. Smith (1981; 1986; 1999; 2003), which he regards as an “ethno-symbolic” approach (Smith 1999: 40), nation-building is based on some pre-modern ethnic and symbolic components which give the members of a nation a sense of identity. According to this view, national identity is more or less the same as a pre-existing ethnic identity, and ethnic nationalism is a mere expression of it.

According to Benedict Anderson (1983), a nation is an imagined community—a community of persons, often anonymous to each other, but who, nevertheless, feel they belong together and to the same community.
An identity based on cultural markers determines to a certain degree the ethnic identity, but for national identity and citizenship more important are the feelings a people have of belonging, attachment, and loyalty to the society as a whole. These feelings of belonging and loyalty can be enhanced by the press, radio and television broadcasting, and other modern means—notably education. Assuming that nations are constructions or imaginations, the functional role of education becomes evident. Education is a method which disseminates ideals about the type of nation—whether civic or ethnic—and standard(ized) (high) culture to citizens. Education, as a mean which reaches the masses, can be very influential in the process of nation-building and national self-definition.

Owing to the aforementioned reasons, the primordialist notion of the nation tends to be an ethnic one, and the modernist notion of the state tends to be a civic one. The modernist view of nation-building, of which Gellner is one of the main theoreticians, is valid in the sense that it explains and describes the process of bringing together people and making them believe that they are a collectivity, and by this making them a politically relevant collectivity. The modernist view explains better civic integration, while the primordialist view holds a predominantly ethnic notion of nations. It is deliberately said above “tends to be”, because modernist theory can go hand in hand with, and explain the building of, an ethnic nation, and primordialism (or perennialism) can go hand in hand with a civic nation, in the sense that one can be proud of one’s multi-ethnic, multi-cultural nation and feel emotional attachment to its culture and values, especially when it is an ancient or old nation.

Accepting the multi-ethnic and multi-cultural character of a national society means the acceptance of a civic nation, a nation in which all ethnic and cultural groups have feelings of belonging and possess equal rights and obligations: all citizens on the territory of a state are the state’s nation.

A main difference between nations and ethnic groups is their connection to a territory. Nations, due to their intimate connections with states, are territorial entities. Territoriality in this sense is legally sanctioned and often undisputed ownership of a territory. Territoriality of ethnic groups is less clear. They often do place claims of indigeneity in and hence ownership of a certain area, and after all their living area is one of the main denominators of their ethnic identity. Nations, on the other

14 There are scholars (e.g. Hobsbawm 1983a; 1983b) who state that much national tradition is invented. I am among those who do not deny the truth in this statement but, nevertheless, argue that such statements do not deserve universal acceptance. Further discussion of these issues is not within the scope of this current study. I have discussed this issue concisely along with relevant statements advanced by Hanson (1983) and Friedman (1992a; 1992b) in one of my published papers (Rezvani 2009a: 55-57 and 72, note 6).
hand, are associated with a state that possess sovereignty over a certain territory. The association between a people and a territory is more pronounced in the case of civic nations than ethnic nations and ethnic groups. A civic nation is in fact a territorial nation. Hence, in this case the state territoriality collides with national territoriality; the territory belongs to the state and its nation. Ethnic nations are in fact ethnic groups that posses a territorial state or aspire to have one. Ethnic groups are distinguishable, on the basis of their language, religion, race, and last but not least, habitat or living area. Although most ethnic groups’ ethnonyms are not derived from geographic names, it is, nevertheless, not difficult to find many ethnic groups whose ethnonyms are derived from their habitat or living area. Examples are the Polynesians, the Yemenite and the Iraqi Jews, the Rif Berbers (that is, Berbers from the Rif mountains of northern Morocco), the Afrikaners, Punjabis, (that is, those from the land of five rivers, or in other words, Punjab), West Saharan, Surinamese Hindoostanis. As Hindoostan is a territorial denomination for India, the latter ethnonym is derived from both their present and previous homelands. Even the Gypsy group called Sinti, I argue, may have derived their ethnonym from Sindh, that is, Indus. The association of a nation, even an ethnic nation, with a territory is even clearer. All nations are ideally associated with a state. A state is not only a political organization; it is a political organization in a defined territory. Even ethnic nations, which are defined by ethnicity rather than territory, are associated with one state as their national motherland. For example, Poland is viewed by most Poles as their national motherland, even though many Poles are living in neighboring states. Civic nations, on the other hand, are always identified by their association with a state’s territory: an American or a US citizen is a citizen of the political territory called the United States of America, and a Swiss belongs to the Swiss nation, which is defined by its inhabitation of or origination from the political territory called Switzerland. In more simple words: although a Kenyan is from Kenya, a Massai can be from either Kenya or Tanzania. Moreover, an Iraqi is from Iraq, but a Hungarian is not necessarily from Hungary; he can also be from Romania or Slovakia.

The distinctions between civic and ethnic nations are ideal typical, and both types of nations can exists together. In many countries, many ethnic groups are defined or identify themselves as ethnic nations, while being a constituent part of a territorial civic nation. A few examples are Kurds in Iraq, Basques, Catalans, and Galicians in Spain, and French Canadians or Quebecois in Canada. Moreover, one should realize that the process of state-building and even nation-building are dynamic. State forms change and reform themselves, and nations define themselves otherwise. Most democratic European countries are originally defined as
ethnic nations but are moving towards civic nationhood. In fact, a civic
type of nation is more in harmony with the idealism of democracy, as it
does not exclude segments of society. On the other hand, also non-
democratic countries could define their nationhood as a civic one. The
world’s history offers many examples.

State-building and nation-building are interrelated but not the
same. There is much theoretical debate on whether nations invented
nationalism or nationalism invented nations. Both can be true. As Van der
Wusten and Knippenberg (2001) have pointed out, the effect of
nationalism on state-building is contingent on the time and location of
these states. As Richard Jenkins (1997: 144), somewhat blurring the
concept of nation with ethnic group, states: “Historically, the argument
tends towards tautology: nationalism is what supersedes ethnicity, which
is what precedes nationalism”. Hence, nations can build states, but states
can also build nations. Generally, however, A. D. Smith’s (1981; 1986;
1999; 2003) view is more acceptable than Gellner’s (1983; 1997; 1999),
especially if the nation concerned is an ethnic nation. These are ethnic
groups that make nations, and nations make states. Nationalism refers to
two phenomena. Nationalism can be defined as a process of ethnic groups
becoming nations and, more so, a process of nations building a state.
Nationalism can also be defined as an ideology. Nationalism is an
ideology associating a nation with a state. Nationalism, as an ideology,
can be useful in gluing together the constituent parts of the nation,
regardless of whether they be members of the same ethnic group or of
different ethnic groups. Ethnic groups can be manipulated and redefined
by the state, but they usually exist before the existence of the state. Many
ethnic groups continue to exist when their host state disintegrates or
becomes incorporated into another state. In addition, there have been
ethnic groups in many parts of the world, without being associated with
any political territory or any other form of territorial organization that
would deserve the label of state.

Many states, particularly in Central and Eastern Europe, are the
result of the collapse of empires and ethno-nationalist movements. In
these cases, nations existed prior to their state. In other cases, particularly
those of older states, no such obvious sequence is traceable. One
indication is that in ancient states (for example, the Greek and
Mesopotamian city states) many states had the same ethnic background.
According to certain “modernist” understandings of nation- and state-
building, nationalism would have tended to unite these small states into
one, which did not happen. The only sound conclusion is that nation-
building and state-building are not necessarily modern phenomena and
that different mechanisms may have led to the same outcomes: nation and
state.
The state as a territorial polity has existed since antiquity. David J. Bederman (2001), for instance, maintains that there existed a certain international law in antiquity, which regulated the relations between ancient states. This law, however, differed in many ways in different regions of the world. It is much fairer to say that not “the state as such” but “the modern state” is a modern construct. History, however, cannot be divided easily into pre-modern and modern—and post-modern for that matter—periods. States, like other social constructs, evolve over time and take different forms. There are no general rules for this development. Different states in different parts of the world develop differently and take various forms. It seems, nevertheless, that more and more states tend to move towards a democratic state with a civic nation as its dominant mode of nation. But even this is not totally certain.

Another issue which requires attention is the relationship between state building and territorial autonomy in the preexisting territorial organization of a state prior to its collapse. State formation after the collapse of a former state is more probable if that state was a federation, especially an ethno-territorial federation. The constituent autonomous territories in a federal state often possess wide-ranging capabilities or at least characteristics of a state, such as a local government and council, in addition to attributes such as flags and sometimes also a constitution or “national” anthem. An ethno-territorial federation is a federal state in which the territorial organization is based on ethnicity. The possibility of state-building is greater if these “federal” subjects of the collapsing state possess legislative, judicial, and functioning, strong executive power. Many states are evolved as a result of a collapsing federal state; examples are the successor states of the former Soviet Union, Yugoslavia, and Czechoslovakia.

The Causes of Ethno-Territorial Conflict

Having defined the concepts ethno-territorial conflict, ethnicity, and nation, this chapter goes on to review the relevant theoretical explanations for the emergence of these conflicts. Ethno-territorial conflicts are violent conflicts between two rooted ethnic groups, or between one such group and a state associated with and dominated by a dominant ethnic (majority) group. They either contest an area over which both have claims or fight for its control or political status.

A study by Sambanis (2001) asserts that ethnic and non-ethnic civil wars have different causes. Ethnic conflicts do share many causes with non-ethnic conflicts, but the additional aspect of ethnicity itself suggests that additional factors may play a role in their explanation. As ethnicity has a cultural dimension, it is likely that cultural factors play a
certain role in the emergence of ethnic conflict. Different studies, however, take different positions with regard to the centrality of the role played by such factors. Plausibly, their role is larger in identity wars, while in on-ethnic civil conflicts other factors such as political liberties or economic deprivation may play a central role. As different ethnic groups with different cultural attributes coexist in large parts of the world and throughout long periods of history, primordialism cannot explain the eruption of ethno-territorial conflicts. However, as its name suggests, the explanation of ethno-territorial conflict requires attention to cultural factors, which are related to identity issues as well as territorial factors.

Different aspects and different causes of ethnic conflict will be reviewed in this chapter. These are based on relevant theoretical discussions, which also apply to ethno-territorial conflict as a territorial type of ethnic conflict. Most ethnic conflicts are ethno-territorial conflicts. Therefore, most discussions on ethnic conflict and its theoretical explanations also apply to the ethno-territorial conflicts.

**Power of Culture: Religion, Language and Ethnic Kinship**

The fact that ethnic conflict is all about a conflict between ethnic groups—and hence cultural groups—means that cultural factors are important and should be considered in the understanding and explanation of ethnic conflicts. This has two reasons. First, ethnic groups themselves are defined and distinguished from each other by cultural traits. Second, many cultural issues are very sensitive, issues for the sake of which people will mobilize and even be ready to kill and be killed.

Religious sentiments have often been viewed as major (primordial) sentiments which may cause ethnic conflict. Samuel Huntington can be seen arguably either as a culturalist, primordialist, or even an essentialist theoretician.15 Huntington’s (1993; 1997)16 theory of the “Clash of Civilizations” implies that civilizations based on different religions clash with one another.17 In fact, his theory asserts that religiously based civilizations clash when they encounter each other territorially. This territorial aspect is clearly visible in his schematic figure (Huntington 1997: 245), in which he views conflict between those

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15 Although Huntington maintains that a clash of civilizations occurs in global contexts after the Cold War, it is nevertheless fair to call him an essentialist because he sees, apparently, in this context the eruption of conflict along religious lines as more or less inevitable, unavoidable, self-explanatory, and hence natural.
16 Although published in 1997, the book was copyrighted in 1996.
civilizations that encounter each other territorially more likely in the real world. This implies that neighboring ethnic groups who confess different religions are likely to come into conflict with each other. Indeed, in many cases of ethnic conflict the ethnic groups confess different religions, although elsewhere adherents to different faiths do coexist peacefully.

Modern history contains many examples of conflicts in which the battling ethnic groups are defined on the basis of their religion. Early in 2006 a bloody conflict was underway in Iraq, which has not yet completely subsided. This conflict erupted when a Shi’ite religious iconic sanctuary was bomber by Sunni militants. Moreover, in this conflict, the participants were mobilized along religious fault lines, as the ethnic division in Iraq is partly based on religion and partly on language (see Rezvani 2006; Wimmer 2003). Similarly, the ethnic conflict in Bosnia was not exclusively about the theological differences between Catholic Christianity, Orthodox Christianity, and Sunni Islam, but the participants were mobilized along these fault lines because religion functioned as an ethnic denominator in that context.

Ethnic groups can also be mobilized around other cultural values and ethnic denominators that can create either a sense of belonging and affective attachments among the members of one ethnic group, or a sense of cultural distance and otherness between members of two groups. In a similar way to religion, language can also be an issue around which people can be mobilized, and hence it can be a relevant factor in the explanation of ethnic conflict. The reason is that language is a main denominator of ethnicity, even more so than religion is. In Belgium the Taalstrijd—literally, the “struggle about language”—is a notorious case. It is not so much about the language as it is about the perceived discrimination of each group in the past (the Flemings) and now (the Walloons) in Belgium. Although the struggle about the language between the Dutch-speaking Flemish and the French-speaking Walloons is not violent, it is, nevertheless, very emotional. It is remarkable that peoples who speak, de facto, the same language try to name it differently and exaggerate the differences between their speech when they come into conflict or are separated from each other. The most notable examples are the Serbian, Bosnian, Croatian, and Montenegrin languages, which were all regarded previously as a single Serbo-Croatian language. Although unlike religion, language is not about the essential values in a human belief system and is generally regarded primarily as a means of communication, linguistic difference, nevertheless, may serve as a factor which indirectly can affect the eruption of ethnic conflict.

Speaking different languages makes ethnic groups distinguishable from each other. Differences, and hence also similarities, between the languages spoken by two ethnic groups can also be an indicator of their
ethnic kinship. Since cultural denominators are functional in defining ethnicity and ethnic groups, it is plausible that cultural relatedness affects ethnic relations. Indeed, the power of culture is not only in an absolute sense but it can also be in a relative and relational sense. If cultural denominators define what one ethnic group is and the “others” are, they can also define how close they are to each other. Indeed, ethnic kinship is subjective; ethnic groups feel themselves to be related to each other, basing their feeling on different criteria. Not all linguistically related ethnic groups feel related. As ethnic identity is a subjective matter for a great part, so also is ethnic kinship. Nevertheless, ethnic groups who speak intimately close languages are very often also related in religion and other cultural aspects and feel related to each other. Therefore, linguistic similarity at such an intimate level is very often a good indicator of ethnic kinship.

Consistent with the logics of ethnic nepotism and primordialism, it is often asserted that kinfolks—that is, ethnic groups who believe themselves to be related to each other by descent and are ethnically or generally culturally related—are more likely to support each other and are less likely to come into conflict with each other. One of Samuel Huntington’s (1997: 272-290) main theses is that countries and diasporas are likely to rally behind and support their co-ethnics or ethnically close nations and ethnic groups in other countries. Although he speaks of kin-countries, it is obvious from his discussion, and notably his inclusion of diasporas in it, that this kinship also relates to kinship at ethnic or ethno-national level. Huntington’s (1997: 272-290) assertion is in accordance with Stavenhagen’s (1996) assertion that kinfolk and diasporas usually support their relatives owing to affective attachments. Following Horowitz (1991), Kaufman (2001: 31) regards ethnic kinship as a relevant factor in ethnic conflict: “Demographic threats may also motivate ethnic fears, most insidiously in cases involving an ‘ethnic affinity problem’ in which the minority in a country…is the majority in the broader region.”

On the other hand, Stefan Wolff’s (2003) study shows that even the kin-state’s relationship with the external minority—that is, co-ethnics of its own ethno-national group in a neighboring country (host state)—is very complex. Kin-states’ impact on an ethnic conflict is not always encouraging, but it usually plays a role, nevertheless, in the course of the conflict. Wolff’s study, however, deals with territorial dispute and latent ethnic conflict generally and does not deal mainly with present-day, large-scale violent conflicts. It is perceivable that kin-states behave differently when their ethnic kin is involved in a violent conflict.

Samuel Huntington’s (1997: 272-290) assertion is also consistent with Vanhanen’s (1999a, 1999b) view on ethnic nepotism being a mechanism which mitigates the probability of ethnic conflict. Apparently
it can be argued that culturally related ethnic groups are less likely to come into conflict with each other. An anthropological study which supports that assertion is Jon Abbink’s (1993) study dealing with the ethnic conflict in the Kafa region in the southwestern part of Ethiopia. It is remarkable that Dizis have come into conflict with Suris but not with their kinfolk Tishana to their north, to whom they are linguistically and culturally related. Suris speak a language which belongs to another language group and are culturally more distant. This example suggests that cultural distance can play a role in the emergence of conflict.

Not only ethnic kinfolks but also diasporas—that is, the members of the same ethnic or ethno-national group that live in another country—can affect ethnic conflict in many ways. The impact of diaspora is supported by Collier’s and Hoeffler’s (2004: 13-27)\(^{18}\) conclusion that revenues from diaspora contribute positively to the duration of conflict because they can be used for funding a conflict. Although the diaspora can also contribute to peace when different diaspora groups work together in order to broker a peace deal in their homelands, they more likely to contribute to the escalation of conflict and hatred because they themselves are not physically affected by the conflict and often cherish a romantic and old-fashioned view of their or “their ancestral” homeland. Collier and Hoeffler (2004: 27) maintain that time will heal the wounds of a civil war; nevertheless, they hold diaspora responsible for delaying the healing process after a war. It can be argued that diasporas’ remittances have a large impact on the duration of conflict and not on its eruption, because as long as the motive behind the flow of remittances is conflict-related, they are likely to flow after a conflict has begun. In addition, diaspora communities themselves are usually not involved in the decision-making and mobilization process in their (ancestral) homeland. Therefore, the impact of diaspora is mostly on the duration and not on the eruption of ethnic conflicts.

**Power of History: Traumatic Peak Experiences**

History is often used as a justification for ethnic strife and hostility. Traumatic experiences may influence the social and political behavior of an ethnic group for a long time. Traumatic experiences are remembered and memorized and hence affect political behavior and action (see e.g. Edkins 2003). Traumatized ethnic groups such as Chechens and Armenians refer often to their traumatic experiences in order to justify their ethnic strife.

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\(^{18}\) An earlier version of this study (Collier & Hoeffler 2000) is published by the World Bank.
Dijkink (1996) has discussed the influence of historical peak experiences on the national orientation of different peoples regarding their own identity and their place in the outside world. Historical peak experiences are events remembered, largely reproduced overtly (e.g. in the press and media). They give a direction to national action and make a national identity, world view, and hence behavior, emically understandable in any case, if not really predictable (Rezvani 2009a). Dijkink (1996) discusses peak experiences at the national level. Regarding the fact that nations are either based on one or more ethnic groups and in any case incorporate them, peak experiences can also relate to ethnic groups. Therefore, ethnic peak experiences can affect ethnic groups’ political behavior. They are connected to the ethnic and territorial identity of the people who have experienced them. The orientation and direction of action of people are influenced by these historical peak experiences, but at the same time the identification of those events as such and their representation and narration are co-determined by the self-identification and national or ethnic (political-historical) orientation of the national or ethnic groups concerned (Rezvani 2009a: 56).

Peak experiences are powerful tools for mobilizing people for a conflict. Especially the traumatic events which have targeted a people based only on their ethnicity are very powerful for this purpose, because they evoke justice-seeking among the members of that ethnic group as a collectivity. Since “time heals”, these events are more powerful when they have occurred relatively recently rather than being forgotten in the darkness of history and when the effects are still visible or tangible.19

Ethnic entrepreneurs are very selective with regard to history. Only those elements in the ethnic history which are helpful for ethnic mobilization are used and interpreted in such a way as to benefit them (see the case descriptions in Eller 1999). Indeed, relatively recent traumatic ethnic peak experiences, such as deadly large-scale ethnic deportations or genocides, are such events that lend themselves well to ethnic mobilization. A traumatic peak experience functions as an issue around which people can be mobilized for a conflict based mainly on other disputes and grievances. It might even be itself a main motive behind an ethnic conflict. History is full of examples of popular mobilization for the sake of justice.

19 This statement is consistent with those of Lake (1995) and Collier & Hoeffler (2004). According to David Lake (1995), a long period of peace reduces the likelihood of outbreak of ethnic wars. Indeed, time heals: the probability of outbreak of a new war is lower as time passes. This assertion is supported by the quantitative study of Collier & Hoeffler (2004).
Political and Economic Grievances

Traumatic peak experiences are not the only sources of grievances. Other sources of grievances can be in the economic or political sphere. Ethnic entrepreneurs can mobilize an ethnic group by commemorating humiliation, discrimination, and traumatic events of the past, but their real aim may be personal greed, such as the control of natural resources—for example, oil, gas, water, minerals, etc. Apparently greed and grievance, or as Aronson and Zartman (2005) call them, “need, creed and greed”, 20 are not easily distinguished from each other. In other words, whether one calls it greed or grievance, the fact remains that these include issues around which people can be mobilized. It is logical that demands couched as grievances have a stronger mobilizing power for people, as people may act with a sense of justice-seeking.

Collier and Hoeffler (2004: 3) maintain that “greed and misperceived grievance have important similarities as accounts of rebellion”. It appears that they base their conclusion that civil wars are usually driven by greed (and not grievances) on their observation that civil wars occur when the opportunity costs of mobilization are low. This, however, does not seem to be convincing reasoning. The ethnic—or more precisely, ethno-political—entrepreneurs may deceive the population by representing their own greed as grievances of the population. Even if there is no deceit involved, greed and grievance are not easily distinguishable because something which is grievance for one may be interpreted as greed by someone else. Indeed, the distinction between greed and grievance is not a sharp one: greed and grievance can be both sides of the same coin, and the identification of the same issue as either greed or grievance is closely dependent on the definition and perception of the agents themselves. In fact, unlike Collier and Hoeffler’s (2004: 3) statement, it is not so much misperception as simply perception which labels greed and grievance arbitrarily.

The following example may clarify the ambiguous but, nevertheless, strong relationship between greed and grievance. An ethnic group lives in an area which is rich in oil. There is a widespread desire among the members of that ethnic group that their area should be separated from the state of which they are a constituent part now and that it should become an independent state. They, or more precisely, their leaders, maintain that they are treated unfairly by the state because the state spends the oil revenues on the whole country. They advance the fact that their area is the only oil-producing area in the state but is not as

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20 This is part of the title of their book, Rethinking the Economics of War: The Intersection of Need, Creed, and Greed (Aronson & Zartman [ed.] 2005). Many authors have paid attention to the “greed vs. grievance debate” in that book.
prosperous as the state’s capital city. They see their claim to be based on grievances, while people from other areas most probably maintain that it is an issue of wanting more spoils—and hence, an issue of greed. Some analysts might even maintain that the local elites will be better off if the area becomes independent as they are the ones who will become richer than anyone else.

Poverty and relative deprivation have been considered as conflict-generating factors. Based on such an assumption, economic grievances may contribute to ethnic conflict when disparity in the level of wealth and economic discrimination is institutionalized and routinely targets members of certain ethnic groups. In other words, economic discrimination and disparity in the level of wealth are manifestations of power relations between ethnic groups within, and vis-à-vis, a state. Nevertheless, the effect of economic grievances on ethnic conflict remains ambiguous. It is debatable whether the relative deprivation between, and the level of wealth among, different ethnic groups is a cause of ethnic conflict (see Sambanis 2001). Often it is asserted that the poorer countries and regions are more conflict-prone, apparently because there is competition over resources and poor people have nothing to lose and have much more to gain in a conflict. The relative deprivation theory asserts that the deprived ethnic group comes into conflict with the state or their ethnic overlords. Although these theories seems plausible, empirical observations do not always support them. On the one hand, such cases as the conflict in the Basque country, one of the wealthiest regions of Spain, show that the relative economic deprivation theory does not apply. On the other hand, even though there is no sound evidence that conflicts are due to poverty, it does seem that conflicts are more likely in poorer countries. Nevertheless, this does not mean that also ethnic, or ethno-territorial, conflicts are more probable in poorer countries.

As many examples show, economic factors do not play important roles in identity wars. Even though they may serve as additional reasons for a war or issues around which more combatants can be mobilized, they are, nevertheless, often neither sufficient nor necessary factors for eruption of ethnic conflict. Toft (2003) and Kaufman (2001) have discussed (and proven) that materialistic, or what one might call economistic, explanations of ethno-territorial conflicts (in post-)communist states are unconvincing. In addition to the above example of Spain, the successor states of the former Soviet Union and Yugoslavia offer good examples. Although in a situation of economic deterioration, neither Soviet Union nor Yugoslavia were poor countries. Ethnic conflicts erupted in both rich and poor parts of those countries. Slovenia was the wealthiest republic, which along with Croatia—another better-off republic—announced its independence from the former Yugoslavia. Both
the relatively prosperous Croatia and the poor Kosovo and Macedonia were the scenes of bloody ethnic conflicts. Similarly, the most prosperous Baltic republics—Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia—were among the first republics that broke away from the Soviet Union. Irrespective of welfare and prosperity, bloody ethnic conflicts have erupted in different parts of the Soviet Union.

Moreover, greed and grievance are not always about money or other quantitatively measurable indicators. People can feel aggrieved owing to the fact that they are considered or treated as second-class citizens. History is rich in examples of rich members of minorities who, nevertheless, held a vulnerable social position and status. Lack of democracy and political freedom, and group-based social and political inequalities, can serve as sources of grievance. As politics is intimately related to power relations within a state, political grievances are thought to be responsible for the outbreak of ethnic civil wars. According to Sambanis (2001: 280), “[i]dentity wars are predominantly caused by political grievance and they are unlikely to occur in politically free (i.e. democratic) societies”. Gurr (2000) views grievances as important causes of ethnic conflict, and he believes that non-violent political action precedes violent ethnic conflict and regards democracy as a moderating mechanism to ethnic conflict. According to Gurr, (2000: 58) democracy “provides the institutional means whereby minorities in most societies secure their rights and pursue their collective interests”. Nevertheless, in an earlier publication, Gurr (1994) maintained that transitional stages to democracy or half-hearted democracies often generate conditions which enhance the chances of ethnic conflicts’ eruption:

Transitions to democracy contribute in complex ways to ethnic and communal conflict. Some ethno-political contenders use democratic openings to justify protest and rebellion as struggles for individual and collective rights. And some ultranationalists who have been elected to power in the Soviet and Yugoslav successor states use similar kinds of rhetoric to justify restrictions on the rights of communal minorities in the name of the “democratic will” of the dominant nationality. The general prediction is that ethno-political conflicts should be more numerous and intense in newly democratic and quasi-democratic states than in institutionalized democracies or autocracies…. Half of the fifty conflicts followed in the wake of power transitions, including nine that began within five years of state establishment and eleven within three years of revolutionary seizures of power (including coups by radical reformers). (Gurr 1994: 361)

Gurr’s (1994) view is consistent with Mansfield’s and Snyder’s (2005) assertion that countries in early stages of transition to democracy are very likely to become involved in wars. All in all, it is not certain that democracies are immune to ethnic conflict. The world is full of examples
of democracies in which ethnic and ethno-religious groups are discriminated against. All these states are at risk of ethnic conflict because the unsatisfied and justice-seeking oppressed ethnic groups may come into conflict with the state and its privileged ethnic group(s). On the other hand, democracies indeed offer an alternative to violence. In democracies, ethnic demands can be channeled through legal, democratic, non-violent routes. Nevertheless, precautions are called for: this mechanism may only work in democracies which have reached a certain level of development. The relationship between ethnic conflict and a combination of democracy and prosperity remains ambiguous. On the one hand, there is not much to demand democratically or by force in poor countries. On the other hand, scarce resources contribute to more (ethnic) competition over the state and its resources (see Dietz & Foecken 2001).

Different types of inequalities are usually interwoven: economic inequality itself is not totally independent of social and political inequality. This is especially true in states with a legacy of planned economies and in which democracy is absent or not functioning perfectly. Due to the interwoven character of politics and economy in these countries, politically privileged groups are often also economically (and culturally) more privileged. Indeed, a state’s laws and policies can treat some ethnic groups as second-class citizens, while they can privilege (the) other ethnic group(s). It is, therefore, important to concentrate on state policies and political structures in general.

**State in Disarray**

History knows many examples of fragile or failed states which were afflicted by bloody conflicts. It is not certain that those conflicts were the cause of state collapse or the state collapse itself was a trigger to the conflicts. Both can be true. Often there is an underlying state of fragility and malfunctioning of the state which may either trigger conflict or offer an opportunity to the opposing or dissatisfied parties to start a conflict. A collapsing or failing state and “emerging anarchy” (Posen 1993a: 27) caused by the loss of a state’s power may evoke fears and bring about a “security dilemma” (Posen 1993a; 1993b) among ethnic groups—and, therefore, cause or trigger conflict. State fragility and collapse facilitates rebellion as there is no well-functioning state to maintain order. Many institutes and organizations invest serious effort in the identification of fragile states as a preventive measure, in order to prevent, contain, or control (emerging) conflict (see Nyheim 2009).

The collapse of an existing political order, particularly state collapse, has been viewed by many authors as a main cause of ethnic conflict. According to Baker and Ausink (1996), in a failing state the
society becomes factionalized and opportunities are created for ethnic leaders to play on groups’ fears and loyalties and mobilize their constituencies, often using (ethno-)nationalism. Similar statements have also been advanced by other authors. In a policy brief written succinctly by Lipschutz and Crawford (1995), the authors advance that the real cause of conflicts is collapse of social contracts. What they call social contracts can be seen as modi operandi—that is, the modes of conduct in relations among citizens, or between citizens, civil society, and the state. These modes of conduct do not need to be just and egalitarian. The only thing they should do is to function properly. This assertion is consistent with the earlier mentioned assertion that a transition towards democracy may cause or trigger—or in any case, facilitate—(ethnic) conflict.

Moreover, the collapse of the social contract—or more precisely, the state’s instability itself—can bring about or awaken grievances. Uncertainty about their (future) status and position may evoke fears among the members of ethnic groups, as they do not want to be the underdog after the collapse of the social contract. No one wants to be worse off. After the collapse of a social contract, ethnic leaders can take their chance to rectify the past injustice. This injustice does not need to be objectively true, as long as it is true in these leaders’ or their supporters’ perceptions. After the collapse of a social contract, the aggrieved ethnic groups may take the opportunity to set the perceived wrongs right. On the other hand, the former overlords and dominant ethnic groups do not like to lose their (relative) privileges.

Referring to Vesna Pesic, David Lake and Donald Rothchild (1996a: 43; 1998: 7) maintain that the “fear of the future, lived through the past” causes ethnic conflict. These fears arise in the context of state weakness:

Collective fears of the future arise when states lose their ability to arbitrate between groups or provide credible guarantees of protection for groups. Under this condition, which Barry Posen refers to as “emerging anarchy”, physical security becomes of paramount concern. When central authority declines, groups become fearful for their survival. They invest in and prepare for violence, and thereby make actual violence possible. State weakness, whether it arises incrementally out of competition between groups or from extremists actively seeking to destroy ethnic peace, is a necessary precondition for violent ethnic conflict to erupt. State weakness helps to explain the explosion of ethnic violence that has followed the collapse of communist regimes in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, and it has also led to violence in Liberia, Somalia, and other African states. (Lake & Rothchild 1996a: 43)

The collapse of social contracts brings about a security dilemma which in turn rests upon information failure and a perception of lack of commitment by the other group (Lake & Rothchild 1998: 17; Wolff 2006: 74). The collapse of a functioning modus operandi within a state disrupts the consolidated power relations. Power relations become the subject of redefinition and reconsolidation. As one ethnic group does not know exactly how another ethnic group may act and how committed they are to previously agreed accords between them, they may begin with defending their position before it is too late. Strategic pre-emptive use of force “is generally thought to be more likely in conditions of emerging anarchy which heighten the uncertainty of identity groups about their future (physical or cultural) survival” (Wolff 2006: 75). In other words, the security dilemma itself is a manifestation of the collapse of the consolidated social and political order.

According to David A. Lake (1995: 2), “the breakup of multinational states, as witnessed in the former Soviet Union and Yugoslavia”, is one example of the breakdown of an existing social order and may cause fear and insecurity among ethnic groups about their future. State collapse and economic change are often inseparable from each other. For example, the demise and collapse of the Soviet Union and the communist economic system, and socio-economic changes, went hand in hand.

Indeed, it is plausible to agree that economically and politically collapsing states are prone to ethnic conflict. The collapse of a social contract can be seen as an underlying background condition which facilitates ethnic conflict. Nevertheless, it is not easy to accept that fear of future evoked by the collapse of the state or social order necessarily causes—always, everywhere, and in all cases—ethnic conflict. There are examples of ethnic groups that did not come into conflict after the weakening or collapse of a state. Only a few ethnic groups came into conflict after the weakening and collapse of the Soviet Union, and the disintegration of Czechoslovakia proceeded peacefully. On the other hand, many countries—for example, India and Turkey—are afflicted by ethnic conflict without being weak or failing states.

Apparently, although state failure and collapse facilitate ethnic conflict, ethnic conflict is unlikely to emerge unless certain conditions are present. The question should be asked why ethnic groups are insecure

23 This refers to a policy brief by David Lake, in which he succinctly discusses his ideas, which are also discussed in his later writings written with Donald Rothchild. These writings include their paper (Lake & Rothchild 1996a) in the academic journal International Security, their IGCC Policy paper (Lake & Rothchild 1996b), and their edited volume (Lake & Rothchild 1998).

24 Elaborate discussions are available in different contributions in Lake & Rothchild (1998).
about their future in the first place. In other words, the question should be asked what conditions make ethnic groups fear for their future and why only a few become involved in conflict in a collapsing state or after the collapse of a state.

It seems that a “state in disarray” is rather a precondition than a condition causing conflict. It serves as a catalyst and facilitates and eases other conflict-generating mechanisms which are primarily dependent on other conditions. In addition, there is a tautology hidden in this. Is it the situation of a state in disarray that causes conflicts, or is it these conflicts themselves that bring the state into disarray? Or is it that there is a dynamic interrelationship between both, and each can cause the other? Although a situation of disarray may facilitate the eruption of conflicts, it is more likely that the hidden conflicts may contribute to bring the state into disarray. Therefore, it is more appropriate to look at the root causes of conflict. As this factor is not of the same nature as most others, it will not be included into the explaining model.

**Ethno-Political Systems and Opportunity Structures**

States are not only arenas of ethnic conflict but they are also major agencies in bringing about ethnic conflict. They are often a party to conflict and, moreover, their laws and modes of ethno-political relationship—and hence ethno-political systems—contribute to ethnic and in particular ethno-territorial conflict. They may either cause grievances or serve as opportunity structures for mobilization of ethnic groups. “Ethnic identity and interest per se do not risk unforeseen ethnic wars; rather, the danger is hegemonic elites who use the state to promote their own people’s interests at the expense of others” (Gurr 2000: 64). It is not multi-ethnicity as such, but the modes of power relation within, and the political structure of, states, which affect the ethno-political relations within the state and hence can contribute to the eruption of ethno-territorial conflicts. Therefore, the role of the state and its prevailing ethno-political system should not be neglected in any understanding and explanation of ethnic conflict.

Ethno-political systems are themselves results of power relations in a state, but on the other hand, they can reinforce and even enforce a latent potential for ethnic conflict. Consociational democracies (see Lijphart 1977) are often thought of as systems which have moderating capability and reduce the probability of conflict in countries, in which the

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25 Similarly, Roessingh (1991: 186; 1996: 268) concludes that the role of the state in generating and molding ethno-national sentiment in Europe is important.
population is diverse and divided along ethnic (or religious) cleavages. Differences in identity and cultural values do not necessarily lead to ethnic conflict, assuming that ethnic elites cooperate. When different ethnic groups share a civic identity, citizenship and civil rights are thought of as being politically more important than cultural differences. Therefore, the probability of ethnic conflict is lower in political systems in which the nation is defined, or de facto perceived, as a civic nation. This political climate is likely to enhance, among different ethnic groups, the feelings of belonging to the state. On the other hand, systems which enable the dominance of majorities over minorities, or those that divide the population along ethnic or religious lines and attach certain rights to the religious or ethnic group’s membership, enhance the likelihood of conflict eruption. This likelihood is higher in political systems which subordinate certain ethnic or religious groups to other groups.

The politicization of ethnicity, or the legitimization of ethnicity as a political category in David Lake’s (1995) terminology, seems to be an important explaining factor for the eruption of ethnic conflict. The examples are obvious: in the former Yugoslavia, the Soviet Union, and Lebanon—three countries which were afflicted by ethnic conflicts—ethnicity was politicized. The politicization of ethnicity has led to similar conflicts in Ethiopia (see Abbink 1993), and the ongoing ethnic conflict in Iraq (see Rezvani 2006; Wimmer 2003) is fought in a context in which ethnicity is politicized.

The combination of ethnic kinship and ethno-political subordination may cause the internationalization or trans-nationalization of conflict. Although a conflict may erupt only in one state, its dynamism and causes can be based on and extend to the ethno-political situation in two (or many) neighboring countries. According to Kaufman (2001: 31), demographic threats may cause ethnic fears in cases in which the minority in a country is the majority in the broader region. Similarly, according to Lake (1995: 3), “[p]articularly dangerous are pairs in which an ethnic group is a dominant majority in one state but a repressed minority in a second”. Majority and minority in this sense are more than demographical entities. The word “repressed” obviously suggests that Lake’s (1995: 3) argument is not simply about demographical majorities and minorities. Apparently, the combination of demography with ethno-political status is important for the explanation of ethnic conflict. Although it may matter, in general the role of demography is ambiguous in the explanation of ethnic conflict. Ethnic demographic dominance is not very likely to contribute to ethnic conflict when a nation is defined as a civic nation and

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26 As we have seen, religion and ethnicity are not totally separate from each other. Religion itself can serve as an ethnic marker.
when ethnic groups are not institutionally politicized, but such dominance is important when ethnic groups are politicized and the nation is defined as an ethnic nation.

The first step is taken for the politicization of ethnicity when a nation is defined as an ethnic nation. Ethnicity acquires importance when nations are formally, and even in many cases legally, recognized on the basis of ethnicity. In these contexts, ethnicity becomes politicized easily. When certain rights, facilities, and resources are distributed on the basis of ethnicity, or when there is a party system which is based on ethnicity and in which ethnic parties represent ethnic interests, ethnicity ceases to be a cultural quality only and transforms into a politically relevant quality.

Very often and in many states, the politicization of ethnicity is accompanied by autonomy arrangements. One should distinguish between territorial and non-territorial autonomies. The second form is often called “cultural autonomy” and was proposed by the Austrian Marxists, Renner and Bauer, for the multi-ethnic situation in the Habsburg Empire.²⁷ It showed a certain similarity with the Ottoman millet system, in which members of religious communities were given autonomy in their religious affairs. Renner’s and Bauer’s proposal, however, was primarily designed for ethnic groups and not religious communities as such. Both systems are also similar in certain ways to the Dutch system of verzolling (pillarization). A non-territorial autonomy may also politicize ethnicity, when cultural autonomy is combined with a range of other communal institutions and, notably, when privileges and rights of each ethnic group are attached to quotas. Nevertheless, unlike territorial autonomy in an ethno-territorial federal system, non-territorial autonomy has no significant territorial consequences.

Federalism and ethno-territorial arrangements maintain an ambiguous relationship with the politicization of ethnicity and hence articulation of ethnic grievances. On the one hand, they sanction and legitimize the politicization of ethnicity and offer opportunity structures to ethnic entrepreneurs, and on the other hand, they can have a moderating effect on the articulation of ethnic grievances and ethnic demands.

According to Gurr (1994: 366; 2000), autonomy arrangements and federalism serve as moderating mechanisms by reducing ethnic grievances or at least channeling them. Gurr (2000: 56-57) maintains that there is no evidence that negotiated autonomy will lead to secession (which alsopresumes that it does not contribute to escalation or protraction of ethnic conflict). According to him, “the ethnic statelets that won de facto independence in the 1990s—Somaliland, Abkhazia, the

²⁷ See in this regard the classical work of Karl Renner (1918), Das Selbstbestimmungsrecht der Nationen- In besonderer anwendung auf Österreich. Erster Teil: Nation und Staat.
Trans-Dniester Republic, and Iraqi Kurdistan—did so in the absence of negotiations, not because of them” (Gurr 2000: 56). However, it is important to note that negotiations usually take place after initial fighting as autonomy itself is often an issue which is fought for:

Modern [ethno-nationalist] political movements are directed toward achieving greater autonomy or independent statehood. Most have historical traditions of autonomy or independence that are used to justify these contemporary demands. In some instances autonomy was lost centuries ago,…but it still motivates political movements. (Harff & Gurr 2004: 23)

Although at times ethno-nationalist movements get enough satisfaction with autonomy arrangements and stop their fight, more often they only agree with them knowing the difficulty of achieving full independence. In this sense the negotiated autonomy arrangements can be (perceived as) the first step towards a war of liberation and full independence, despite “freezing” the conflict for the time being.

On the other hand, the cases of Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union are evidence of the contrary. One thing, however, is noteworthy: in Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union, federalism preceded regime change—or more exactly, the rupture of social contracts—and hence served as opportunity structures for the warring parties. In the cases in which federalism has proven to be moderating, it succeeded the actual conflicts and, unlike those cases mentioned above, it was a negotiated arrangement.

Hypothetically, two mechanisms can be distinguished, in one of which territorial arrangements for autonomy serve as opportunity structures and trigger ethno-territorial conflict after regime change or instability, and in the other of which territorial arrangements serve as moderating and pacifying mechanisms, assuming that the state is stable (see Figure 2.1).

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<tr>
<th>Opportunity Structure for Ethno-territorial Conflict:</th>
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<td>Ethno-territorial Autonomy Arrangements + State in Disarray → Ethno-territorial Conflict → State in Disarray</td>
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<th>Modemating effect:</th>
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<td>Ethno-territorial Conflict → Ethno-territorial Autonomy Arrangements → Pacification</td>
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*Figure 2.1. Tempering or facilitating effect of Territorial Arrangements of Autonomy on Ethnic Conflict*
This double character of territorial autonomy is consistent with Van der Wusten’s and Knippenberg’s (2001) observation that a state system in disarray offers opportunities for ethnic politics. According to these authors, ethnic politics—or as I would rather term it, ethnic strife—occurs in a recursive way: the achievements in one phase serve as a facilitating structure for the next round of ethno-political activism. Hence, although moderating and mitigating and even resolving ethnic conflict in a state at an early stage, territorial autonomy may lead to the disintegration of that state in the long term.

It is important, however, to note that “territorial autonomy”, as such, does not necessarily cause devolution, state disintegration, and ethnic conflict. Indeed, as Yash Ghai (2000: 11-14) discusses, ethnicity-based autonomies are very different from those which are not (primarily) based on ethnicity and have different effects regarding their stability and functioning. In fact, the first ones are either a result of devolution of a centralized state or may themselves cause such a devolution. Many states are only partially or imperfectly ethnicity-based federations. For example, Canada has nine provinces, of which one (Quebec) is French-speaking and the others are predominantly English-speaking. According to McGarry (2005: 96-97; 2007: 135), such a system may mean that conflict of interests between provinces may crosscut ethnic lines and brings about alliances between Quebec and some English-speaking provinces. Such a mechanism decreases the probability of state collapse and, in fact, also of potential ethno-territorial conflict. The situation in the former Soviet Union, however, was such that its territorial autonomies were based on ethnicity and showed a high “correlation” with ethnic heterogeneity. Not all ethnic groups possessed autonomy, and rarely did one ethnic group possess two autonomous territories; in any case, no ethnic group possessed two higher-ranked autonomous territories (union republics) at the same time. According to Coakley (2003a: 16-18; 2003b; 313-314), territorial autonomy, especially when it is congruent with the spatial distribution of ethnic groups, tends to strengthen ethnic commitment and territorial demand by ethnic groups. The emergence of ethno-territorial conflict has a high chance of occurring in such ethno-political systems (e.g. the former Soviet Union and former Yugoslavia).

Roessingh (1996; 2001) divides the states in Europe along two dimensions and into four categories: liberal democratic unitary states, liberal democratic federal states, communist unitary states, and communist federal states. Accordingly, ethno-territorial conflict and disintegration of a state is most probable in a communist federal type. Communist federal countries were ethnicity-based federal systems. Indeed, many successor states of the USSR and Yugoslavia, two states which had well-developed ethnic territorial federal systems, have experienced ethnic violence. This
is certainly consistent with Roessingh’s (1996; 2001) observation of the collapse of federal communist states in Europe.

According to Van der Wusten and Knippenberg (2001: 288-289), following Roessingh (1996) one should distinguish between the short-term and long-term effects of autonomy and federal arrangements:

[I]t seems clear that liberal-democratic political systems provide a better chance for mitigating or preventing ethnic conflict than (post-)communist systems, especially when unitary states are involved. Federalist systems based on ethnic characteristics may prevent ethnic conflicts in the short term; while the long-term result may very well be the (peaceful or not) dissolution of the system itself. In the long run non-territorial consociational options may provide the best chances for overcoming ethnic tensions and strengthening an overarching loyalty to the state involved, notwithstanding the overwhelming dominance of territorial arrangements for national minorities in present-day.

In conclusion, the modes of ethno-political relations in a state, and between the state and its citizens, affect ethnic, and particularly ethno-territorial, conflict or co-existence in that state. Politicization of ethnicity and particularly ethno-territorial autonomy in a federal state serve as opportunity structures which contribute to ethno-territorial conflict or even the disintegration of a state after regime change and rupture in the social and political order.

**Ethno-Geographic Configuration**

There have been many theories which connect the human valorization of territory and the control of its resources, or territoriality in general, to social and political behavior. A number of these theories maintain that territoriality is conditioned and caused by human genes or human instinct. According to the anthropologist Robert Ardrey (1967), a territorial imperative governs human and animal spatial behavior. According to Ardrey, (1967) they have an instinct to possess and defend their territory. A more recent biological deterministic theoretician of territoriality is the geographer Malmberg (1980), according to whom an instinctive aggression is at the basis of territorial defense.

More theorists regard human spatial behavior and territoriality as social behavior. Robert Sack (1983; 1986), a geographer, regards territoriality as a reflection of social power. In such a view, delimiting and asserting control over a geographical area enables social actors, whether individuals or collectivities, to affect or control people and their relationships within that area. A similar view is held by Jean Gottman (1973), another geographer, who regards territoriality as a reflection of
political power among politically organized peoples. Rationales behind territoriality are both physical and material security: territory can be organized for economic needs and for security because defending an area confers security.

I argue that such a distinction between the biological and social nature of territoriality, however, should not be taken as clear-cut. Social behavior may be driven by biological instinct or needs. For example, humans need food to survive. Agriculture and hunting as well as more modern versions of human professions are examples of social behavior that serve the basic human need for food. The basic point is that humans do have a relationship with territory and that human territoriality is socially, and hence also politically, relevant.

The relationship between territory and human social behavior is threefold. First, territory can be used instrumentally in order to control and mobilize people for certain goals. Second, it can be used instrumentally in another way also: to extract its resources. If one (collectivity) possesses and controls a territory, it (most usually) also possesses and controls all its natural and human resources. These two ways refer only to (political) actors who possess jurisdiction over a territory. The third relationship, however, is more general: territory is also affective and emotional. It has meaning for people, individuals, and collectivities, and for their identity, as they feel emotionally attached to their living areas or even to places where their ancestors have come from, or to any other place with significant meaning for them.

Territory is a reflection, and at the same time a container, of social power. It is also a container of meaning and resources. Consequently, territory itself can be viewed as a resource. It is a product of human power, but it also contributes to human power in many ways. In other words, territory is a product that produces. It is capital and commodity. It is valuable to humans. Indeed, territory is often viewed as a commodity over which much competition exists. Such competition between collectivities over territory brings about territorial conflict.

No ethno-territorial conflict can occur without territory. Territory, *sui generis*, is a subject of conflict and can be used instrumentally in the course of a conflict. Consequently, ethno-geographic configurations, as an assemblage of many territories (in the broad sense) over a space, contribute to conflict. Nevertheless, not all ethno-geographic configurations are equally likely to do this. Below, it is reasoned why a certain type of ethno-geographic configuration, the mosaic type to be exact (see Figure 2.2), is likely to contribute to ethno-territorial conflict.

Looking at ethnic maps of different regions, certain patterns immediately strike the eye. One configuration does not resemble another. In some
regions, ethnic groups live more compactly than in others. Some regions are ethnically more heterogeneous than others. In some regions, different ethnic groups may inhabit the same area, while in other regions ethnic groups tend to live more in separation from each other.

Ethnic heterogeneity has been viewed as a major factor responsible for the eruption of ethnic conflict. Too often, based on an implicit primordialist understanding of ethnic conflict, it is advanced that different ethnic groups will come into conflict in heterogeneous societies. Basing his argument on the earlier mentioned mechanism of ethnic nepotism, Vanhanen (1999a; 1999b) maintains that ethnic heterogeneity is the main factor in the explanation of ethnic conflict. He bases his argument on the social mechanism which he, following Van den Berghe (1987 [1981]), calls *ethnic nepotism*. However, it is clear that his regression equation explains no more than half of the variance in ethnic conflicts and that his equation predicts a higher degree of ethnic conflict in certain regions and a lower degree in other regions. What he does not point to, but what can be seen from his regression, is regional differentiation. The cases which show a higher degree of conflict than could be predicted by the regression equation are located in regions where the ethnic groups are concentrated in rather small ethnic territories (e.g. the former Yugoslavia and Iraq), while the cases which show a lower degree of conflict than predicted by the regression equation are located in regions where different ethnic groups are less concentrated and tend to live in ethnically heterogeneous areas (e.g. the Caribbean).

It is fair to say that ethnic heterogeneity plays a role in bringing about ethnic conflicts, because there can be no ethnic conflicts without “ethnicity”. The problem is, however, that most regions of the world are ethnically heterogeneous, without always being afflicted by ethnic conflict. Many studies have already pointed to a regional effect on conflicts. Gurr and Moore (1997) maintain that ethnic conflicts in a region may trigger new ones, and Sambanis (2001) speaks of “bad neighborhoods”—that is, regions which display a higher incidence of ethnic conflict. There are apparently regional differentiations. Despite all being ethnically heterogeneous, ethnic conflicts are more prevalent in certain (types of) regions.

The regional effect on conflicts is due not only to variation in geographic location on the world globe, but also to variation in the type of ethno-geographic configuration. By ethno-geographic configuration I mean the patterns of ethnic distribution and settlement in a region. Actually, ethno-geographic configurations are manifested simply by colored patterns on a map of ethnic distribution.
I distinguish four ideal types of ethno-geographic configuration: “perfect heterogeneous”, “perfect homogeneous”, “common heterogeneous”, and “mosaic”. The first two types are mere (hypothetical) ideal types. In the “mosaic” type, ethnic groups live compactly, in relative separation from each other, and in relatively small homogeneous areas. The “common heterogeneous” type is the most common type of ethno-geographic configuration. In this type of ethno-geographical configuration the ethnic

28 Very seldom, if at all, does any area (at meso-scale) in the world fulfill their criteria.
groups are less compactly distributed over space than in the mosaic type. In the common heterogeneous type, ethnic groups inhabit larger areas, and there are transitional areas which are inhabited by many different ethnic groups with sizable numbers of members. (For a schematic view, see Figure 2.2.)

My hypothesis is that apart from all factors derived from existing theory, also the ethno-geographical configuration contributes to the emergence of ethno-territorial conflict. Regions with an ethno-geographic configuration of the mosaic type display relatively highly homogeneous pockets of ethnic concentration. These are regions with a high density of religious and ethnic concentrations, in which relatively small ethnic groups live in their own ethnically homogenous territory, segregated but in close proximity to each other’s ethnic territory.

There are several reasons why the chances of ethno-territorial conflict are greater in a mosaic type of ethno-geographic configuration than in other types. The first reason is very simple: there are, relatively, many territorial encounters between ethnic groups in a relatively small area. (In most cases, the number of these encounters is even larger than the number of ethnic groups). Due to the relative abundance of territorial encounters between ethnic groups, the potential for ethno-territorial conflict is higher in such an ethno-territorial configuration than in any other. In addition, when ethnic groups are highly concentrated in a small and highly ethnically homogenous region, they can be mobilized more easily, while due to ethnic segregation and concentration, the target—that is, the ethnic opponent—is relatively easily identifiable. Moreover, the relative homogeneity of the inhabited area may contribute to ethnic cohesion and feelings of belonging to, and ownership of, an area. In addition, the multitude of ethno-territorial groups in a region and their proximity to each other may lead to certain dynamics and hence affect ethnic relations in the region in a pressing way.

One such dynamic is the epidemic dynamic. In regions in which there are many ethnic groups living in their own relatively homogeneous ethnic homelands, the incidence of conflict is higher because of the epidemic nature of the mosaic type of ethno-geographic configuration. The conflicts can be diffused within a region in a mosaic type of ethno-geographic configuration. Without naming it as such, Abbink (1993) attributes the ethnic conflict in the multi-ethnic region of Kafa in southwestern Ethiopia to the domino effect of the mosaic type of ethno-geographic configuration. According to him, Suris came into conflict with Dizis to their north because Suris’ homeland was itself pressured from the south by other groups. This case shows that territorial pressures from one direction can be transmitted to other directions. More often, however, it is
not so much a case of dominos as it is a case of “there is something in the air”. It is not necessary that the areas afflicted by conflict border each other. Relative proximity or the location of many ethnic homelands in a relative small area makes it possible that one case infects the others. Sambanis (2001: 275) concludes that conflicts are more likely in certain geographic regions than in others. The epidemic dynamic is most likely the reason behind this prevalence of conflict in such regions. The political unrest and revolutions in many Arab countries (2011), the earlier ones in the post-communist countries (Ukraine, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, and Serbia), and the collapse of communists regimes in Central and East Europe (more than) two decades earlier (1989–1990) were examples of the same mechanism. In all these cases, political developments diffused from one country to another without the countries even being contiguous to each other.

Ethnic groups consist of human beings who perceive themselves as a cohesive group. Ethnic groups in general, and particularly those with an ethno-nationalist orientation, claim territory as their ethnic homeland. Not only the (official) nationalist ideologies but also popular folklore compare ethnic groups and nations to families and homes. It is important to note that ethnic groups and nations themselves approach the situation as families and homes. They use terms like “motherland”, “fatherland”, vaterland, vaderland, mamuli (which in Georgian roughly means something which you inherit in the paternal line), or simply refer to homelands, such as heimat (from the Germanic heim, which roughly means “native home”) or mam-e mihan (a Persian combined word in which the homeland is called a “mother”). Families and households live in homes, and hence ethnic groups are territorial creatures. They demand a habitat, a Lebensraum. Moreover, they have emotional ties to their homelands. Following the terminology of humanistic geography (see e.g. Storey 17-19), their homelands are not spaces but places to them. Their homelands are not simply pieces of land; they are ethnic territories and are imbued with meaning. These belong to them, and if claimed exclusively, “others” are ideally excluded from living in them or associating with them.

Ethnic groups, which are human groups and therefore of human nature, have a preference for larger territory above smaller territory, ceteris paribus. Even though it is not excluded that in some situations they may give away a piece of land, strictly taken, it is not very probable that they do so by free will or without any coercion. It is, nonetheless, more likely that one who possesses a large territory makes concessions and gives away territory than one who possesses smaller territory.

Are the contours or shape of a territory relevant for conflict? Yes, they are. Certain shapes of territory are more difficult to defend, while
certain others are easier to defend and more likely to facilitate ethnic mobilization. According to Barry Smith (1997), the desire to reach geometrical circularity of territory contributes to conflict. The ideal of geometrical circularity appears in a mosaic type of ethno-geographic configuration. Although his logic does indeed apply, I argue that the process usually occurs in a reverse direction. According to Smith, the ideal of geometrical circularity and connectedness will cause war because the leaders of the groups want to create such boundaries (configurations) as they offer them certain advantages in terms of defense and strategy and in control of the territory. In his opinion, this is the ideal: a national territory should be, more or less, a circular, contiguous area. In order to reach this ideal, wars have been fought.

In reality, however, many wars are fought by states which have already reached the geometric, contiguous, circular ideal. According to Smith’s lines of logic, these states should not have gone to war, but it is clearly observable in history that the satisfaction of the ideal of geometrical circularity has not stopped states from engaging in war. On the contrary, it has even made wars and military enterprise easier, because the compactness of territories has many advantages for mobilization and defense. Whether or not Smith’s assertion may find support in certain cases is a subject for more investigation. I argue, nevertheless, that the opposite is true: when the ideal of geometrical circularity is present, the possibility of war increases.

Because of their compact nature, ethnic homelands in a mosaic type of configuration very often display the ideal of geometrical circularity. Hence my argument is exactly the reverse of Barry Smith’s (1997) line of thinking. It is easier to control the area more effectively and exercise (full) control over the territory and mobilize its inhabitants for a war in a mosaic type of ethno-geographic configuration than in a common heterogeneous type of ethno-geographic configuration, which in reality appears when the mosaic type is absent. Moreover, the fact that in mosaic types of ethno-geographic configurations these areas of “geometrical circularity” are small, the territorial pressure and ease of mobilization add to the chances of an ethno-territorial conflict. Hence, the existence of geometrical circularity itself facilitates conflict.

In conclusion, because of the reasons mentioned and the mechanisms discussed, a mosaic type of ethno-geographic configuration contributes to the emergence of, or at least facilitates, ethno-territorial conflict. Due to the relatively large number of ethnic groups in an area and their proximity to each other, the probability of ethno-territorial conflict is higher in such a type of ethno-geographic configuration. In particular, due to the compactness of ethnic habitats (living areas) and their proximity to each
other, mobilization of ethnic groups is easier, and conflict can diffuse from one case to others in the region. The relative ethnic homogeneity of the inhabited area strengthens ethnic cohesion and makes ethnic mobilization relatively easier, while it also makes the location of ethnic opponents better identifiable. It also enhances feelings of belonging to, and ownership of, an area by an ethnic group.

**Explaining Ethno-Territorial Conflict: A Theoretical Model**

Having reviewed the available theoretical explanations, a model is presented in which many factors contribute to an explanation of the emergence of ethno-territorial conflict (Figure 2.3). In all likelihood, no factor can explain ethno-territorial conflict completely; however, certain factors, in combination with each other, probably contribute to its eruption. (Empty gray lines in the model [Figure 2.3] indicate ambiguous relationships.)

The factors presented in the model are all structural factors—that is, they relate rather to cultural, spatial, social, and political structures than to agencies.

Ethno-political systems as a factor can further be differentiated into many other relevant conditions which may contribute to the emergence of ethno-territorial conflict. Ethno-political systems and policies in the Soviet Union and Iran are the subjects of the next chapter, at the end of which a more detailed model will be presented.
Figure 2.3. Factors explaining ethno-territorial conflict: An abstract model. (Empty gray lines indicate an ambiguous relationship.)