



Ethnicity and nationalism: A theoretical perspectives

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Abstract

Ethnicity and Nationalism are social and Political constructions. They are creation of elites. Who draw upon, distort and sometimes fabricate materials from the cultures of the groups they wish to represent in order to protect their well-being or existence or to gain political and economic advantages for their groups as well as for themselves. Moreover, they are modern phenomenon inseparable connected with the modern centralizing state.

Keywords: ethnicity and nationalism, social and political constructions

Introduction

There is nothing inevitable about the rise of ethnic identity and its transformation into nationalism among the diverse people arises only under specific circumstances which need to be identified clearly. The circumstances constitute two theoretical focus.

The first is the theory of elite competition as the basic dynamic which precipitates ethnic conflict under specific conditions. Which arises from the broader political and economic environments rather than from the cultural values of the ethnic groups in question? Ethnic identity is itself a variable rather than fixed or 'given' disposition some works are point out the ways in which traditions are invented and social realities constructed.

The second theoretical argument emphasizes the critical role of the relationship established between elites and the state, particularly the roles of collaborators with and opponents of state authority and state intrusion into regions inhabited by distinctive ethnic groups Elite refers to influential subgroups within ethnic groups and classes. Lasswell defined elites as those who get the most of what there is to get. It is in relation to difference income and safety.

For example, in the pre modern societies, where land is the most valued resources, the aristocracy is likely to be the most influential group. On the other hand, religious elites in such societies the clerics the learned and holy men- may come from different class backgrounds, similarly in modernizing societies, senior administrative and military officers may come from both the landed and the urban middle classes. They constitute privileged multi class elites within their societies. Through in some cases the bulk of the senior civil servants and military officers may come from one on another dominant class in the broader society. Educated elites often constitute an influential group within the middle classes and very frequently take the lead in ethnic movements demanding recognition for particular languages.

Leaders of most political organizations tend also to constitute elites in relation to the rank and fight and the mass of voters who follow their lead. There are three ways of defining ethnic

groups:

- a. In terms of objective attributes.
- b. With reference to subjective feelings
- c. In relation to behavior.

An objective definition assumes that though no specific attributes is invariably associated with all ethnic categories, there must be some cultural features like language, territory, religion, diet, dress (or any of them) that separates on group of people from another But it is extremely difficult to determine the boundaries of ethnic categories in this way. On the other hand subjective definitions make it impossible to answer the basic questions of how a group of people arrives at subjective self-consciousness in the first place.

Behavioral definitions (are a form of objective definition) assume that ethnic groups are specific, concrete ways in which ethnic groups behave or do not behave particularly in relation to and in interaction with other groups It merely suggest that there are cultural difference between them.

Formation of ethnic category

Any group of people dissimilar from other peoples in terms of objective cultural criteria and containing within its membership, either in principle or in practice, the elements for a complete division of labour and for reproduction forms on ethnic category. The objective cultural markers may be a language or dialect, distinctive dress on diet or customs, religion or a race. The inclusion in the definition of the phrase contains, within its membership, either in principle or in practice, the elements for a complete division of labour and for reproduction is designed to emphasize the cultural basis of ethnicity and to distinguish ethnic categories from other social categories based on class on gender or age/grades.

Ethnicity is a sense of ethnic identity, consisting of the 'subjective, symbolic or emblematic use by a group of people of any aspect of culture, in order to differentiate themselves from other groups (-De Vos) Ethnicity or ethnic identity also involves, in addition to subjective self-consciousness, a claim to status and recognition either as a superior group or a group

at least equal to other groups Ethnicity is to ethnic category what class consciousness is to class.

Ethnicity is an alternative form of social organization and identification to class, but it is a contingent and changeable status that, like class, may or may not be articulated in particular contexts or at particular times Ethnic groups that use ethnicity to make demands in the political arena for alteration in their status, in their economic well-being in their civil rights, or in their educational opportunities are engaged in a form of interest group politics (eg VSA during 1960s & 1970s)

Ethnic group demand a major say for the group in the political system as a whole or control over a piece of territory within the country, or they demand a country of their own with full sovereignty. The ethnic group aspires to national status and recognition.

In so far as it succeeds by its own efforts in achieving any one of these goals either within an existing state or in a state of its own, it has become a nationality or a nation.

A nation therefore may be seen as a particular type of ethnic community or rather, as an ethnic community politicized, with recognized group rights in the political system.

Nations may be created by the transformation of an ethnic groups in a multiethnic state into a self-conscious political entity or by the amalgamation of diverse groups and the formation of an inter- ethnic, composite or homogeneous national culture through the agency of the modern state. In different process of nation formation, the effort is made to give subjective and symbolic meanings to merely objective distinctions between peoples and to increase the number of attributes and symbolic referents that they have in common with each other and that distinguish them from other groups.

Ethnic nationalism and state centered nationalism may be seen therefore, as subtypes of a more general process of identity formation defined as the process of intensifying the subjective meaning of a multiplicity of symbols and of striving to achieve multi symbol congruence among a group of people.

However, it creates its own problems because the selection of additional symbols inevitably involves either the loss of potential adherents or the need to persuade or coerce group members to change their language, religion, behaviors or doses. It may lead nationalist leaders into expansionist military adventures and conflicts with other states.

The process of nation building by state authorities may be may not succeed in creating relatively homogeneous national groups congruent with the territorial boundaries of the state. State authorities also usually find that it is politically wiser to recognise and tolerate some forms of cultural diversity rather than impose a total uniformity by forcible means. Tolerance of diversity may take the form of recognition of the corporate rights of ethnic groups within the state or the removal of specific symbols from the concept of the nation and their relegation to the private sphere eg that what happened with religion.

Stages of development of nationality

There are two stages in the development of a nationality

a. Movement from ethnic category to community this stage may involve such change as the creation of a self-conscious language, community out of a group of related

speakers, the formation of a caste category, or a community of believers from the followers of a particular believers from the followers of a particular religious leader.

The subjective meanings of symbols of identity are intensified and become more rational (interpersonal) than personal or instrumental.

Language becomes not merely a means of communication, but a priceless heritage of group culture, religion becomes not only a matter of personal belief and of a relationship between a person and a deity but a collective experience that unites believers to each other, familiar places and historical sites become sacred shrines and freedom trails At this state also the effort to bring multiple symbols in congruence begins. The leaders of the movement to create a language community may, at the same time, stake a claim to the dominance of the language in a particular territory; the supporters of the demands for a religious community may also seek protection for the language or script in which their religious text are written and may promote the identification of the language with the religion and encourage its increasing use by all believers.

b. The second stage in the transformation of ethnic groups involves the articulation and acquisition of social, economic, and political rights for the member of the group or for the group as a whole. Depending upon the perceived needs and demands of the groups, its size and distribution, its relations with other groups and the political context, demands may aim at relatively modest civil, educational, and political rights and opportunities for the individual members of the group or for recognition of the group's corporate existence as a political body or nationality. In so far as an ethnic group succeeds by its own efforts in achieving and maintaining group rights through political action and political mobilization, it has gone beyond ethnicity to still as a nationality.

The movement from ethnic group to community is a transition that some groups never make, that others make initially in modern times and that still others undergo repeatedly at different points in time. In the first category are the various 'lost' peoples and speakers of diverse dialects who have merged into or are merging into other peoples the Cornish in the United Kingdom, the Frisians in Holland, the curbs and wends of eastern and central Europe, the Maithili speaking people and numerous other dialect speakers in north India.

In the second category are the newly formed ethnic groups and nationalities of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries - the Welsh and the Irish, the nationalities in Austria Hungary, the IBOs in Nigeria, the Naga Tribes in northeastern India and most of the language communities of contemporary India, the Malays in Malaysia. In the last category are the ancient peoples of the world, Jews, Han Chinese, Egyptians and the major nationalities of western Europe In south Asia, Sikhism as a distinctive religion has its origins in the early sixteenth centuries that a militant body of believers began the process that continues up to the present day i.e. of shaping and defining the boundaries of the Sikh community to conform to a particular view of Sikh orthodoxy and instilling in large

segments of the Sikh Population a sense of communal solidarity and separateness from Hindus.

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