

Conflicting theories: a reflection

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During this course I learned a lot. I thought I already knew most of the causes of conflict, and that I knew the Kosovo conflict through and through, since I had been there twice of which the first time in an exchange program focusing on the conflict. I thought the Kosovo conflict, and actually the whole Balkan war, was caused by grievances about the past, which were then (mis)used by political leaders such as Milosevic. Also in conflicts in general I thought these were very important causes. But the literature reminded me of other important factors and that we therefore have to keep looking broad in naming the causes of conflict. We can look from multiple perspectives to one and the same conflict, and that vision is followed throughout this essay. In this final essay I will mention the theories that were most important for me and that are important and applicable to the Kosovo case¹, but from which I think they are also important for conflicts in general. Again I will show the use of the theories on causes of conflicts by referring to Kosovo, for the before mentioned reasons. I will start with discussing the causes that are present on the individual level, followed by the level of a whole conflict, ending with the global causes of conflicts. The second part of this essay focuses on the basis of these causes, namely whether the causes are real, perceived, or manipulated.

Causes on the individual level

I start with the lowest level of scale, the individual, because I tend to forget this level and this course reminded me of the importance of it. As Kalyvas states: *"master cleavages often fail to account for the nature of the conflict and its violence and that violence is either unrelated or incompletely related to the dominant discourse of the war. (...) Civil wars are imperfect and fluid aggregations of multiple, more or less overlapping, smaller, diverse, and localized civil wars"* (Kalyvas 2003, p.479). Several arguments for the use of the local level are included in this statement, which I will discuss now.

The first aspect is that master cleavages do not (completely) explain a conflict. It can be supplemented with studying the motives of individual participation, and why only certain people join and not others. The acts of these individuals accumulated are the components of the conflict. Humphreys and Weinstein (2008) have proven that poverty, education, alienation from the political system, material offers, and improving one's personal security are correlated to participation in the Sierra Leone conflict (H&W 2008, p.447-9). This can to a certain extent predict who will participate in conflict and who doesn't, and I think these characteristics can be seen in Kosovo as well. Although it is difficult to reveal, I think many of the Kosovo Liberation Army members, the active participants of the conflict, were young, especially at the start of the movement. As this statement shows: *"Younger Kosovars increasingly began to ask why they should hold fast to nonviolence"* so it seems like the older generations longer believed in the nonviolent approach of Ibrahim Rugova (Global Security 2010). The other characteristics of participants are even more difficult to reveal, but for the whole Kosovo movement it is sure that the people were alienated from the political system after Yugoslavia (see below for more explanation), and that education was poor since they started their own underground system (Unesco 2004, p.41). As far as I found material offers were not given but status and the feeling of being useful (compared to being unemployed) provided good reasons to join the conflict might have been important enough. One's personal security might have diminished by joining and choosing sides, so this does not fit in the theory. Still, this theory helps in estimating who will join and who wouldn't. Theories like these are important because you can create target groups and consequently aim policy at the groups who need it most, which will hopefully decrease the number and level of conflicts in the world.

The second aspect of Kalyvas' statement is that civil wars are *'aggregations of multiple civil wars'*. Kalyvas has some examples where there are local wars within the big civil war, which have different causes. Another example of this is people handling their personal cleavages because it is war, and it then is more legitimized to commit a crime, especially if the other is the enemy. In general one could say, that people use the major cleavage as a cover for their individual acts. I remember

¹ There is one exception: I will not discuss the democracy/democratization issue since I feel I do not have enough knowledge about it. I have not studied political sciences and will therefore stick to my field.

one example of this in the Kosovo conflict. A Kosovo-Albanian farmer made up a story about Serbs abusing him, while it was actually an embarrassing act of himself (see my fourth weekly essay for more explanation). He used the major cleavage of ethnicity for his own benefit (Kalyvas 2003,p.479). At first sight, the story was embedded in the major cleavages. His neighbors, friends and family must have been mad with the Serbs after hearing the farmers' horrible story. Their stereotypes about Serbs were reinforced, and next time they would meet a Serb they would have hated the person for what 'they' had done to their relative. Based on this story, the friends and family of the farmer could have committed serious crimes against any Serb because the major cleavage already existed, namely that all Serbs were the enemy, and because in conflict there is the tendency to homogenize communities (Hadjipavlou 2006, p.347). If the farmer would have spoken the truth, the anger against the Serbs wouldn't have increased among his relatives, and this would not have contributed to the conflict. This example understates the importance to study the facts and reveal the truth about individual acts: is a story embedded in the major cleavage, or is this not the case? This theory helps me a lot in keeping a critical view on each incident. I think more theories should address this point: that every incident is one incident, and that it is not automatically related to the major cleavage as one would expect. When everything automatically is related to the major cleavage, it might blur the statistics of a conflict, and might create the idea that the conflict has indeed only one cause under which all incidents can be categorized. Different causes of conflict need different approaches to be solved and therefore this theory is important: to really address the cause of that incident.

Causes on the level of one conflict

As stated before, I think we can reveal some 'major cleavages' which should also be taken into account, together with the local level. This is also useful since conflicts are accumulations of individual acts that have the same background, motivations. There can be individual acts that do not relate to the major cleavages as explained above, but in most conflicts there are named a few main causes and these can not be ignored in my opinion. This usually is also what the participants themselves say: 'the Hutu's are bad', 'Kosovo is the heart of Serbia', etcetera. I think there are two broad categories under which these big causes can be categorized, namely grievances and greed, which I will discuss now.

The first major cleavage is grievances, since I think this is a major cause in the Kosovo conflict and is also very important in other conflicts. They are important because grievances are deep-rooted feelings, and most of them can not be compromised. There are several definitions of grievance, but I use Colliers categorization, because it is very complete. Collier states that grievance can be based on ethnic/religious hatreds; economic inequality; lack of political rights; and/or government economic incompetence and I will explain these below (Collier 2000).

Although religion and ethnicity are actually creations of people (Collier 2000), as I will explain in the second part of this essay, during the conflict it is not important whether the distinction is perceived or real. In the case of Kosovo, where ethnicity was very important, there were killings based on one's ethnicity, so at that moment it was the motivation for the murder, apart from the fact whether this idea was created or only perceived. What is important about this theory is that at the time of war, the ethnicity could not be compromised: you couldn't be both Serb and Albanian but it was either/or. Therefore, in order to stop the conflict one needs to take this component seriously, and in this case focus on a government in which both parties are represented, and focus on inter-ethnic dialogue. To achieve inter-ethnic reconciliation, one might use the theory of Collier that ethnicity is created to show that the difference in ethnicity does not have to be a given fact. However, as I experienced myself in a discussion with a young Kosovo-Albanian, that is difficult and extremely sensitive to do. At a later time it might be possible to do, in order to prevent new conflicts based on the same motives.

In Kosovo the lack of political rights and the exclusion of Kosovo-Albanians from the political system were important factors contributing to the conflict. In the Yugoslavia era Kosovo-Albanians had many rights but after that they were under Serbian control again, in which they were excluded from politics. Because of the reasons mentioned in footnote 1, I will only focus on inclusiveness here.

As Reynol-Querol has studied: *"countries with high levels of inclusiveness (...) experience less civil war"* (Reynol-Querol 2005, p.455). In Serbia the result of exclusion was proven by civil war. The Kosovo-Albanians were left out of the political system and could not represent themselves via the legal channels. After the non-violent struggle led by Ibrahim Rugova, the only means left, in their eyes, was war. This theory shows the importance of inclusiveness, on which can be focused in societies in general, but also in post-war situations where the political system is re-established, by including all minority groups. This gives another perspective to the conflict, namely the political. One can notice war-prone societies and then try to prevent a conflict from happening.

I will discuss the economic grievances under greed, since that is also based on economics. The distinction between greed and grievances here lies in the fact that grievances are long-term perceptions of inequality, and greed is about short-term opportunities of gaining a better economic situation.

The influence of greed was bigger in Kosovo than I always thought. While writing my weekly essay about greed I discovered the poor situation Kosovo was in, and that this had a huge influence on the conflict. The theory is important because it reveals another aspect of war, and it helps in explaining why people started fighting in Kosovo, the theory is valuable. In Kosovo three out of four 'greed opportunities' sketched by Collier and Hoeffler were present: means of financing the conflict; the low cost of rebellion; and the military advantage (see my second essay, and Collier and Hoeffler for the opportunities). When studying a conflict one can ask whether these four opportunities were present, and based on that it can be studied where to focus on with the reconstruction of the economy. The theory showed that it is very important to include peripheral regions, and mountainous regions, so this can be used both in conflict prevention (reaching out to these people; politicians that represent their interests) and in post-war transitions (include them in the process; help them too and not only the central region).

Causes on the global level

I will discuss the new wars concept (of which globalization is a big part), and the clash of civilizations here.

The new wars concept does not describe specific causes of conflict. It does however help in revealing a bigger concept of 'modern' wars (after the Cold War). It gives some insights to where attention should be focused on, and that other approaches might be needed today because the type of conflict is different. Aspects of new wars also visible in Kosovo are: erosion of the autonomy of the state/ disintegration of the state; global attention for the conflict; identity politics as a goal; changed mode of warfare; and the financing of the war (Kaldor 2001, p.4-9). With the erosion of the autonomy of the state, the interventions of the international community have changed. Officially the Kosovo conflict was an internal conflict in Serbia so it was the responsibility of Serbia. But since many victims were made the international community decided to intervene, for example with the bombing of Belgrade. Hereby, the international community challenged the territorial integrity of the Serbian state, but it also (tried to) protect the Kosovo Albanian minorities. This discussion is very present today, with the Responsibility to Protect for example. Without delving into that discussion too much here, it is important that the new type of conflict needs different approaches from the international community.

With the new means of financing a war, the process of solving the conflict should also address these new means: external resources. An important aspect of this is diaspora. As Demmers says: *"The sudden upsurge in strength of the KLA during the summer of 1998 may have been at least partially due to fundraising efforts by the Albanian diaspora in the West"* (Demmers 2002, p.86). In solving the conflict it is important to not only solve the conflict in Kosovo itself, but also involve the Albanian diaspora in the West. Or at least, one should be aware of this and of the risk involved in it, for example that the war can restart easily when the diaspora still supports the conflict.

Global attention for the conflict is important as well, since it can change the conflict (Kaldor 2001,p.6). Conflicts are no longer only local, but the whole world is watching and having an opinion on it.

Also the new wars theory mentions the identity politics, on which I elaborated before. All these insights are useful in taking the global impact of conflicts into account. It helps me in looking at the international context of the conflict more, and asking explicit questions about its role.

The clash of civilizations has, either it be true or not, gained a lot of attention and influence. Therefore, the question is less about whether it is true or not, but how to anticipate on the influence of the idea, and whether that idea was present in a certain conflict. The theory is used and sometimes seen as the truth and this results in reactions following this idea, for example the 'war on terror'. In Kosovo the concept was also present: the Slavic-Orthodox civilization fought against the Islamic minority of Kosovo-Albanians (Fox 2005, p.429). The clash was between two civilizations and this was seen as not being able to compromise, as well as is the case with ethnicity. Therefore the same approach is needed here: first focus on inter-civilizational dialogue, and eventually maybe try to dismantle the idea of civilizations, using for example the arguments of Fox and Rubenstein and Crocker (1994).

Real, perceived, and manipulated causes

After having discussed the multiple levels of causes of conflicts I will treat the basis of these causes, the philosophical assumptions that have been made in naming these causes. I think that beside the 'real' causes discussed above there are perceived and manipulated (or created) causes. I will explain this here.

I value the theory of relative deprivation very high in explaining conflict, because it distinguishes between perceived and real causes. This theory shows that poor (not merely in economic sense) people, groups or countries will not definitely go to war, but that it is about the position compared to others or to someone's history, and how this position is perceived. This gives more perspective to the causes of conflict, it gives a basis on which these causes occur. Relative deprivation is: "*actors' perception of discrepancy between their value expectations and their value capabilities*" (Gurr 1970, p.24). Both the Serbs and Kosovo-Albanians felt that they should have received more. The value expectations of both groups were that they would achieve the right to govern over Kosovo alone for example. The capabilities, the things they think were able to get, were not much promising: in the 1990s it looked like the Serbians and Albanians had to live in Kosovo together, and that this would not change. Therefore the only way out was a full-blown conflict. I think this theory can be found in many conflicts, because it is very fundamental: you think you deserve something but you don't get it. This is a strong motivation for conflict, beside the more specific causes discussed above.

In addition to this theory I think that in this course we should have learned more about the creation of these perceptions, which is mainly done by bad leaders and the media, and the difference between these manipulated causes and real causes. A small part of the theory of Mansfield and Snyder (1995) and Oberschall (2000) elaborate on this. I support the 'instrumentalist view' that Oberschall distinguishes, in which *'ethnic sentiments and loyalties are manipulated by political leaders and intellectuals for political ends'* (Oberschall 2000, p.983). I think that Milosevic and other leaders have manipulated certain sentiments, so that they could stay in power over a big territory. They profited from the polarization of the society and eventually from the war, because the people then really supported them and hated the other party so that their position would not change in the near future.

The theory of Mansfield and Snyder also supports my vision about the importance of leaders. They state for example that *"threatened elites (...) use nationalist appeals to compete for mass allies (...). In these circumstances, the likelihood of war increases due to the interests of some of the elite groups, the effectiveness of their propaganda, and the incentive for weak leaders to resort to prestige strategies in foreign affairs in an attempt to enhance their authority over diverse constituencies"* (Mansfield and Snyder 1995, p. 19-20). This quote can be applied on the Balkans

since leaders such as Milosevic used 'nationalist appeals' in order to become and stay in power (Oberschall 2000, p.987). Before the war there were indeed two ethnic groups in Kosovo: the Serbs and the Kosovo-Albanians. However, the political leaders and their 'effective propaganda' made the difference between the groups important, which caused war. Milosevic indeed had 'prestige strategies in foreign affairs' with his greater Serbia policy.

These theories help in revealing the real causes of conflict: is something really going on, should we look at the causes that I discussed above, or is it all created? It shows that we should look beyond the short period prior to a conflict, but to take the whole history into account as well. If in the long history the cause that is claimed to be the cause of conflict (in the Kosovo case: ethnicity) was not present yet, that cause was probably created or misused. This could show that before a conflict erupted, that cause was no problem yet, so that people might be reminded to the situation of then. If the conflict lasted for a long while, the former situation of the society can be reminded. To make this concrete, one could look at the Kosovo conflict as follows: Kosovo has been a province of Serbia for centuries, and the people had been living together since ages. In the 1990s however, Serbia and its leaders wanted more control of this territory and started the conflict based on ethnicity. After the war people could be reminded to the peaceful periods in Kosovo, when both ethnic groups lived together. This gives a totally different view on the conflict and opens chances for reconciliation, so therefore these theories are important. In Kosovo however I think the causes were also real since the relations between the ethnic groups were not bad nor good before the war: there were for example almost no inter-ethnic marriages (,p.80). Therefore in the Kosovo case post-war interventions should be focused on reminding to the better periods (to address the *created* causes), and on removing the stereotypes of the other group (to resolve the *perceived* causes), and on indeed improving the position of both ethnic groups (to resolve the *real* causes).

So after the war the difference between "real", perceived and created causes is important to know. During the war however it is not necessary to know, because at that moment the cleavage is real and in name of that, victims are made. Therefore post-war interventions should first be focused on solving these real issues. When this is solved the other two types can be addressed.

Conclusion

I have discussed many theories that explain conflicts. I think all of them have their strengths and weaknesses and that we should look at the strengths of all of them and use many of them when analyzing conflicts. First of all, we need to realize that causes can be perceived, manipulated, or real. During the war the causes are real, and therefore they are important and useful in resolving the conflict. In conflict prevention and after a long period after wars we can discuss the manipulation and perceiving of these causes, in order to prevent new conflicts. I think the causes can be looked for very broadly; from economics to ethnicity, from grievances to globalization. I think in every conflict there are many causes present. However this image was not sketched in the articles. They all presented their cause to be the most important one, but I think it is an interaction and combination of many. Also the theories reinforce each other: when there are ethnic differences, and the economy decreases, and there evolve 'bad leaders' who trigger certain individuals, this might cause a conflict. Therefore the scientific approach is very important to keep in mind: there is not one truth, and you can not judge over it. This I missed in the articles since they all think they invented "THE" cause of conflict. The theories do help in understanding that single aspect, indeed very precisely, but we should see them in perspective.

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