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Summary and Keywords

The past four decades have witnessed an explosion of research into ethnic conflict. The overarching question addressed in the voluminous and still growing literature is this: Under what cultural, social, economic, political, and international conditions is ethnic conflict or peace more likely? Limiting my survey to the onset of ethnic war, I divide the literature into four waves and critically examine its theoretical and empirical progress.

I contend that the field has indeed made impressive progress, both theoretically and empirically. Theoretically, the field has moved well beyond the unproductive debate of the three paradigms (i.e., primordialism, instrumentalism, and constructivism), and there is an emerging consensus that we need to draw valid elements from all three paradigms and beyond. In addition, neo-institutionalism has (re-)emerged as a major approach in the field. Empirically, powered by increasingly sophisticated methods and technologies such as the Geography Information System (GIS) and the availability of more and better datasets, inquiries into ethnic conflict have not only ventured into exciting new territories but also gained deeper and fine-grained knowledge into the causes of ethnic war.

I then highlight several recent studies that bring out impressive theoretical and empirical syntheses that may well portend better things to come.

Finally, I identify several venues for further scientific progress, including tighter coupling between theorization and empirical hypotheses, getting the basics of methods right, gathering more fine-grained data that measure the level of ethnic politics, bringing together ethnic politics and other key topics in the wide social sciences, and forecasting the risk of ethnic war based on computational social sciences.

Keywords: ethnicity, ethnic group, ethnic conflict, ethnic war, onset, empirical international relations theory

Introduction

Ethnic conflict has become one of the world's deadliest causes of insecurity, destruction, and loss of life. According to Denny and Walter (2014), 64% of civil wars in recent decades have been fought along ethnic lines. More appallingly, ethnic conflict has incurred unprecedented horrors since the Vietnam War, as the forced displacement and mass killings in the former Yugoslavia and the formerly united Sudan and genocide in Rwanda can testify.

Unsurprisingly, social scientists have embarked on an intensive campaign to understand the causes of ethnic conflict as they have never before, especially since the end of the Cold War. The overarching question addressed in the voluminous and still growing literature is this: Under what cultural, social, economic, political, and international conditions is ethnic conflict or peace more likely? More specific questions include at least the following. Why do some groups choose to resist or even rebel against a state whereas some groups choose to submit? What is the connection between nationalism, nation-building, and state-building on the one hand and ethnic conflict on the other hand? What is the relationship between international changes and ethnic conflict? Do natural resources induce ethnic conflict? Why do ethnic wars tend to last so much longer than non-ethnic civil wars and interstate wars? Why have some groups succeeded in securing autonomy or even secession whereas other groups have failed? Can ethnic groups that were former enemies live peacefully with each other after violent conflict(s)?

Due to the sheer volume of the literature on ethnic conflict, it would be an impossible task to review the whole literature. I thus impose two limits to the scope of my survey.

First, I survey only the literature on the onset of ethnic war, while readily admitting that understanding the duration of ethnic war and the peace after a conflict is also essential for a fuller understanding of ethnic conflict.[1] Second, even within the literature on the onset of ethnic war, I mostly examine the post-1980 literature, based on the conviction that extensive theoretical and empirical advances have been made only after the 1980s. Even with these two limits, however, I have to leave out many outstanding studies due to space constraint.

I also gloss over the well-known debate of the three "big paradigms" regarding ethnicity, nation, and nationalism (i.e., primordialism/essentialism, instrumentalism, and constructivism), for three reasons. First and foremost, the more recent literature has moved far beyond the debate. I strongly concur with Varshney's (2007, p. 291) assessment: "No one seriously argues any more that ethnic identity is primordial, nor that it is devoid of any intrinsic value and used only as a strategic tool. Pure essentialists or pure instrumentalists do not exist any longer. Nor is it likely that they will re-emerge, given the force of empirical evidence." Second, I suggest that there is an emerging consensus that a synthesis of the valid elements from the three paradigms is the only right direction forward. While differences persist, it is fair to say that most today's students of ethnic

conflict are a constructivist first and an instrumentalist second, while admitting that some "primordial" elements still play key roles in driving ethnic conflict. Indeed, several more recent attempts of theoretical synthesis have drawn from all three paradigms and beyond. Finally, it is impossible to deal with the thorny issues within the debate in a short survey, and several well-informed surveys have addressed those issues succinctly (e.g., Brubaker & Laitin, 1998; Fearon & Laitin, 2000; Smith, 1998; Varshney, 2007).

Finally, I discuss several studies on civil war that do not differentiate ethnic civil war from non-ethnic civil war only because these studies have had enormous impact on the study of ethnic war as well (e.g., Collier & Hoeffler, 1998, 2004; Fearon & Latin, 2003). I, however, insist that there are fundamental differences between ethnic civil war and non-ethnic civil war and that conflating these two types of civil war is unwarranted.

I organize the rest of my survey as follows. The first section is a brief conceptual preparation. The second section reviews the evolution of the literature by dividing the literature into four somewhat overlapping waves. The third section highlights several recent studies that bring out impressive theoretical and empirical syntheses, suggesting that they may well portend better things to come. I conclude by identifying several venues for further scientific progress.

Key Concepts

No scientific discussion is possible without concepts. Unfortunately, many key concepts in the field of ethnic politics do not have definitions that enjoy wide consensus. Because addressing the thorny issues associated with these concepts below is beyond the scope of this survey, below I merely provide working definitions for these concepts without getting into the details.

Ethnicity and Ethnic Group

Although there is no firm consensus on what ethnicity is, most students of ethnic politics today perhaps admit that ethnicity usually entails at least three key elements. First, ethnicity implies "the perception of a common origin based on a set of shared attributes such as language, culture, history, locality, and physical appearance." Second, members of an ethnicity usually attach deeper meaning to the common attributes associated with an ethnicity. Third, "this sense of community or 'groupness' . . . may offer a basis for collective action." (Flesken, 2014, p. 8; see also Chandra & Wilkinson, 2008; Hale, 2004; Wimmer, 2008; Yinger, 1976).

For ethnic group, I adopt Yinger's (1976, p. 200) minimalist definition that transcends the three paradigms. An ethnic group is "a segment of a larger society whose members are

thought, by themselves and/or others, to have a common origin and to share important segments of a common culture and who, in addition, participate in shared activities in which the common origin and culture are significant ingredients."

Because the boundaries of ethnic groups are often vague, there is no agreement on the exact number of ethnic groups in the world. Estimations range from a few hundred to a few thousand. One thing is for sure, most countries in the world are multiethnic, and only a handful of them are close to ethnically homogeneous (e.g., Japan and the two Koreas) or populated by an overwhelming majority group (e.g., China, France, and Germany).

Conflict, Violence, and Ethnic War

Horowitz (1985, p. 95) defined conflict as "a struggle in which the aim is to gain objectives and simultaneously to neutralize, injure, or eliminate rivals." This definition is, however, problematic because it implies that conflict is almost always violent. As Varshney (2007, pp. 278–279) pointed out, however, conflict is almost constant in any society but conflict does not have to be violent. I agree with Varshney and hereby only address violent ethnic conflict.

I further concur with Fearon (2006, p. 857) that "a violent attack can be understood as 'ethnic' if either (a) it is motivated by animosity towards ethnic others; (b) the victims are chosen by ethnic criteria; or (c) the attack is made in the name of an ethnic group."

Ethnic war is a more severe form of ethnic conflict. A violent conflict can be called a war only if both sides have fielded an army or at least a militia (Sambanis, 2001, pp. 261–262). Moreover, the violent conflict must have incurred more than 1,000 battle-related deaths in order to qualify as a war.

Finally, I would like to note that although most ethnic wars have pitted an ethnic group against a state controlled by a different group, ethnic wars can also occur between two ethnic groups that are both out of central power within the state. For instance, the split of SPLA and the resulting war (1991–2002) between the Nuer (under Riek Machar-led SPLA-Nasir) and the Dinka (under John Garang-led SPLA-Torit) during the Second Sudanese Civil War (1983–2005) was certainly a separate ethnic war within another ongoing ethnic war (i.e., the South vs. the North).[2]

Understanding Ethnic Conflict: Four Waves

With the brief conceptual preparation above, I now proceed to survey the literature. I divide the literature into four somewhat overlapping waves, according to key texts and progresses.

The First Wave (Pre-1990): Paradigms Without Systematic Evidence

Theoretically, the big debate of the three paradigms (i.e., primordialism, constructivism, and instrumentalism) dominated the first wave. Unsurprisingly, much of the literature in this wave had been unduly abstract. Moreover, although most key theorists built their theories from a handful of cases in a particular region that is most familiar to them, they tended to imply that their theories are applicable across time and space, without bothering to check with specialists of other regions.

The more striking feature of this wave, however, might have been the dearth of systematic empirical evidence. Most empirical work within the first wave consisted of a single case or a few brief cases. Rigorous comparative studies that seek to identify factors and mechanisms driving ethnic conflict were virtually nonexistent. Most prominently, Ted Gurr's (1970) *Why Men Rebel* developed the "relative deprivation" theory of rebellion and provided a long list of hypotheses but offered little empirical evidence to back the theory and hypotheses.

Then Donald Horowitz's (1985) *Ethnic Groups in Conflict* came. A tour de force close to seven hundred pages, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict* is indisputably the foundational text of the field.[3] Theoretically, Horowitz not only transcended the three big paradigms but also drew from the social psychology of group by Henri Tajfel and his colleagues (Tajfel, 1982). Horowitz's numerous theoretical insights foreshadowed many key developments later on (e.g., neo-institutionalism). Methodologically, ahead of many of his peers, Horowitz explicitly stressed the value of comparative studies (Horowitz, 1985, pp. 13–41). Empirically, Horowitz marshaled a massive array of evidence from three (sub-)continents. By any measure, Horowitz thus almost single-handedly moved the field of ethnic conflict out of "a backwater of the social sciences" and laid the ground for making it a distinct and thriving field in the social sciences.[4]

The Second Wave (1990–2000): Middle-Level Theories and Emergence of Statistical Analysis

The collapse of the Soviet Union and the disintegration of the socialist camp in Central and Eastern Europe resulted in a string of ethnic wars. At the same time, atrocities committed during the genocide in Rwanda shocked the world. These developments made it abundantly clear that ethnic conflict may become the new scourge in the post-Cold War era. It is within this background that the second wave of studying ethnic conflict emerged and rapidly expanded.

The second wave of literature markedly distinguished itself from the first wave.[5] Theoretically, the literature decisively moved away from the big debate of paradigms and into middle-level theories. Along the way, theoretical development in the field has drawn

from a wide literature. Empirically, (crude) quantitative studies based on cross-national data emerged and new issues associated with ethnic war came into the purview of the literature.

In terms of theoretical development, the literature welcomed the importation of two key middle-level theoretical traditions. Each of them has opened up new venues for further inquiry and inspired a significant follow-up literature.

Posen (1993) brought the theory of security dilemma into the studies of ethnic conflict. He noted key similarities between the anarchic international system and an emerging de facto anarchical domestic system when a state's central authority begins to collapse or becomes non-neutral when it comes to defending different ethnic groups within the state. Posen stressed that under the emerging anarchy, fear and the indistinguishability of offense and defense action may generate a vicious spiral of action and reaction and propel ethnic groups into conflict.

The second importation has been the rational choice approach. In a widely cited article, Fearon (1995A) asked the seemingly simple question: If conflict is always costly, why do states still fight then? He then identified three "rationalist" causes of war: imperfect information, commitment problems, and issue indivisibilities. Fearon (1995B) went on to argue that ethnic war is best understood as a commitment problem. Collaborating with David Laitin, Fearon then ventured into the field of ethnic conflict and produced a series of influential papers that are not always bound by rational choice (e.g., Fearon & Laitin, 1996, 2000, 2003).[6]

Empirically, three developments stood out.

First, Collier and Hoeffler (1998) sought to uncover the "economic causes of civil war."[7] Based on a cross-sectional dataset from 1960 to 1992 that contains 27 civil wars in 98 countries, they found that GDP per capita powerfully reduces the probability (and duration) of civil war. Another interesting result is that natural resources may have a non-monotonic effect on the onset of civil war: "the possession of natural resources initially increases the duration and the risk of civil war but then reduces it."[8] As the first systematic though crude quantitative study on the onset and duration of civil war, the Collier-Hoeffler paper became an instant hit. Unfortunately, their analysis was based on questionable data and methods, and many of their results and interpretations are subjected to criticism and revision later on.

Second, much inspired by Collier and Hoeffler's (1998) finding and a series of high-profile conflicts associated with a significant amount of natural resources (e.g., drugs and oil in Colombia, diamond in the Democratic Republic of Congo and Sierra Leone, and oil in South Sudan, natural gas in Aceh in Indonesia, etc.), the relationship between natural resources and civil war, known as the "resource wars" and "resource curse" became a key subliterature. This subliterature, often juxtaposed with the "greed vs. grievance"

debate, stresses that civil wars, both ethnic and non-ethnic, become more likely when a significant amount of lootable natural resources are present (e.g., Berdal & Malone, 2000; Klare, 2001).

Third, noting the fact that ethnic wars tend to engulf neighboring states and groups, scholars began to look into how ethnic kinship and power consideration tend to propel ethnic conflicts in one country into diffusing into neighboring states/groups as a secondary cause of ethnic war (e.g., Lake & Rothchild, 1998).

The Third Wave (2000–2005): Explosion of Quantitative Studies With Marginal Theoretical Progress

The third wave is relative short. The literature in this wave made rapid empirical progress but only marginal theoretical progress.

Empirically, the most critical development in this wave has been the introduction of three key datasets: the Minorities at Risk (MAR) dataset first released by Gurr (1993) and then updated in 2003; a dataset on ethnic groups in 190 countries published by Alesina, Devleschawuer, Easterly, Kurlat, and Wacziarg (2003); and a comparable count of ethnic groups in 160 countries published by Fearon (2003). The availability of these datasets and other data (e.g., Penn World Table) laid the foundation for rapid expansion of cross-country quantitative analyses later on.

The second key development has been the rapid coming and passing of the whole "greed vs. grievance" debate. Based on a new model and an improved dataset of 79 civil wars over the period 1960–1999, Collier and Hoeffler (2004) found that a higher share of primary commodity exports in GDP substantially increases the risk of civil war and they interpreted this finding as evidence that opportunity (or greed?) is a more critical driver of civil war. In contrast, they interpreted that indicators for grievance measured as hatred, political repression, political exclusion, and economic inequality had little explanatory power.[9] This started the whole debate on "greed vs. grievance" (e.g., Berdal & Malone, 2000), and Collier and Hoeffler came strongly down on the "opportunity (or greed?)" side. However, by 2005, better understanding of some prominent "resource wars" has rendered the simple dichotomy of "greed vs. grievance" untenable (e.g. Ballentine & Sherman, 2003).[10] Indeed, eventually Collier, Hoeffler, and Rohner (2009) themselves moved "beyond greed and grievance" and began to emphasize "feasibility."[11]

Third, much influenced by the fact that civil wars as insurgency mostly occurred in poor or weakened states, Fearon and Laitin (2003) advanced a "weak state" or "opportunity-based" thesis of ethnic war. They found that poverty, political instability, rough terrain, and large population are positively associated with civil war. They interpreted their findings as indicating that stronger states deter whereas weaker states invite insurgency. Like Collier and Hoeffler (2004), Fearon and Latin (2003) also casted doubt on the possibility

that grievance (measured as ethnic/religious differences, democracy, and income inequality) has been a key driver of civil war.

Perhaps the most critical empirical development in this wave has been the recognition that quantitative analyses, no matter how rigorous, mostly reveal correlations but not the exact mechanisms that drive ethnic war. As a result, like other fields in political science and sociology, there emerges a consensus that combination of in-depth case studies with process tracing with quantitative analyses should advance our understanding than either approach alone (Sambanis, 2004). This has results in two edited volumes with in-depth single case studies that provide more fine-grained understanding into ethnic war (Collier & Sambanis, 2005). Structured comparative case studies based on process tracing also emerged (e.g., Kaufman, 2001; Petersen, 2002).

Overall, like the second wave before it, the third wave of literature did not make much theoretical progress, either. Two important innovations, however, should be mentioned.

Noting the critical role of psychological factors, both Kaufman (2001) and Petersen (2002) explored the different weight of hatred, honor/grievance, interest, and fear in driving ethnic groups into conflict.[12] After identifying four "stories" of ethnic war (i.e., ancient hatred, manipulative leaders, economic rivalry, and insecurity spirals), Kaufman eventually singled out ethnic myths and fears (or "modern hatred") manufactured by chauvinist elites as the key immediate drivers of ethnic war. Meanwhile, correctly grasping that emotions are perfectly compatible with instrumental calculation, Petersen attempted to synthesize several key emotional drivers (i.e., honor, hatred, rage, and fear) into a more coherent theory of ethnic conflict. Petersen stressed that resentment against institutional domination is a powerful and deeper driver of ethnic conflict while rage may serve as the immediate trigger of spontaneous pogroms against an outside group. Notably, both Kaufman and Petersen deployed structured comparative case studies to support their theoretical arguments.

The Fourth Wave (2005–2012): Ethnic Power Relations, GIS System, and the Coming of Subnational Studies

The third wave did not last long and was rapidly superseded by the fourth wave, perhaps reflecting the increasingly rapid pace of technological change and theoretical innovation.

Theoretically, dissatisfaction with the rather blunt indicator of fractionalization and the lack of ethnic power relationship in much of the second and third wave literature has propelled scholars into searching for more fine-grained measurement of ethnic makeup and bringing ethnic power relationship back into the picture. On this front, the Ethnic Power Relations (EPR) dataset compiled by Cederman, Wimmer, and their collaborators has been the most critical contribution.

Empirically, the most exciting advancement in this wave must have been the importation of geography information system (GIS). Almost by definition, ethnic conflict is a sub-state phenomenon. Yet, previous quantitative studies have exclusively relied on aggregate data at the state level (e.g., Collier & Hoeffler, 1998, 2004; Fearon & Laitin, 2003).

Buhaug and Gates (2002) first introduced GIS-informed subnational data to the field. Since then, several GIS-informed global datasets have been created, and many of them have something to do with the Peace Research Institute of Olso (PRIO), Uppsala University of Sweden, and ETH Zurich of Switzerland. These GIS-informed datasets include the Armed Conflict Location and Events Data (ACLED, Raleigh et al., 2010), the geo-coded petroleum and diamond dataset (PETRODATA, Lujala et al., 2007), the Geo-Referencing of Ethnic Groups dataset (GREG, Weidmann et al., 2010), and the Geo-Ethnic Power Relations dataset (Geo-EPR, Wucherpfennig et al., 2011).[13] Today, most quantitative studies of ethnic conflict deploy some kind of GIS-informed data. As a result, our understanding of ethnic war has become far more fine-grained, literally. The introduction of GIS to the field has transformed the field.

With the availability of disaggregated data, researchers have started to (re)-evaluate earlier empirical findings. Most prominently, the fourth wave of research challenged the alleged irrelevance of ethnicity and grievance for driving ethnic conflict and established a robust relationship between grievance underpinned by political domination and the onset of ethnic war (e.g., Cederman, Wimmer, & Min, 2010). Ethnic power relationship is now firmly back.

Within the fourth wave, a key theoretical development has been the coming of a new approach, and I shall call it "neo-institutionalism" because it has mostly stayed away from the old institutionalism debate on consociational arrangements as the best institutional arrangement for managing ethnic divisions (i.e., Lijphart, 1977 vs. Horowitz, 1985, ch. 14). Instead, this neo-institutionalism approach resurrects, extends, and integrates some central theoretical insights from Rothschild (1981), Horowitz (1985), and Brass (1991). In a nutshell, the neo-institutionalism approach argues that understanding the struggle to control and shape the modern (nation) state is a key for understanding ethnic conflict. As Horowitz (1985, p. 5) put it forcefully, "*Control of the state, control of a state, and exemption from control by others are among the main goals of ethnic conflict.*"

Thus, much inspired by the institutionalization of republics for some minority groups but not others in the former Soviet Union and the outcome of this institutional arrangement, Roeder (2007) contended that (new) nation-states only originated from existing "segmented states" within a "common-state" because only "segmented states" can provide the political platform for secession/autonomy-seeking nationalism movements to form, strengthen, and eventually succeed in challenging the "common state," with war if necessary. Brubaker's (2011) inquiry into how new states after the breakup of the former

Soviet Union, Yugoslavia, and Czechoslovakia have been trying to "nationalize" the state also falls into this line of research, although he did not focus on violent ethnic conflict.

Beyond the Fourth Wave: Toward Theoretical and Empirical Integration

Ever since the second wave, theoretical synthesis has never been a central concern in the field of ethnic conflict. Instead, the rush was to identify new factors and mechanisms that drive ethnic conflict. Unsurprisingly, powered by the mushrooming of both quantitative and qualitative studies, the field has become extremely fragmented. Tang (2015) lamented: "From quantitative studies, we have many correlations that seem to link some factors with ethnic war or peace, often without causal mechanisms.[14] From qualitative studies (i.e., comparative case studies), we have many specific theories of ethnic war that bank on some factors and causal mechanisms. Not only are syntheses lacking, students of ethnic war actually tend to pit some factors and mechanisms against some other factors and mechanisms, as if the factors and mechanisms they favored alone can adequately explain the complex phenomenon called ethnic war and these different factors and mechanisms do not interact with each other."[15]

This trend of increasing fragmentation might have ended in 2013 with the publication of two integrated studies from an extremely fruitful collaborative project: *Inequality, Grievances and Civil War* by Cederman, Gleditsch, and Buhaug (2013) and *Waves of War* by Wimmer (2013). Extending Stewart's (2008) neo-institutionalism arguments on horizontal inequality and Roeder's (2007) thesis of "segmented states" and identifying grievance underpinned by political exclusion and domination as a critical driver of ethnic war, these two volumes advance an integrative neo-institutionalism theory of state formation, struggle for state power, political domination, and ethnic conflict. In addition, Wimmer's theory also brings the systemic changes of international systems, especially the collapse of empire, into the theoretical framework. Deploying original global data spanning almost two centuries (with GIS, of course), these authors conducted rigorous quantitative analyses and found strong support for their theoretical insights. They show that political and economic inequalities following group lines generate powerful grievances that in turn motivated ethnic war. They further showed that ethnic war becomes more likely during periods of dramatic institutional change such as being absorbed into an empire and creating a nation-state based on ethnic domination and exclusion (see also Mylonas, 2012; Petersen, 2002). Along the way, these two volumes also cast serious doubt over several key theories regarding nationalism, nation formation, state formation, modernization, and ethnic war, such as those by Gellner (1983) and Anderson (1983[1991]), to name just two of the most prominent.

A more recent contribution has been Tang's (2015) general theory of the onset of ethnic war. Building on earlier attempts of theoretical synthesis (e.g., Cederman, Gleditsch, & Buhaug, 2013; Fearon & Latin, 2000; Horowitz, 1985; Kaufman, 2001; Petersen, 2002), Tang first identifies emotional drivers such as fear, hatred, rage, and resentment/grievance as immediate drivers of violent action whereas factors such as political institution, inequality, domination, and exclusion as deeper drivers of conflict that have to go through the immediate drivers. He then deploys two meta-mechanisms, namely, the security dilemma and intergroup-intragroup interaction, as the synthesizers to bring together the numerous factors and mechanisms scattered in the existing literature into a more integrative and dynamic theory of ethnic conflict. Tang's general theory and his theorizing approach can serve as a useful starting point for theorizing more specific dynamics leading to the onset of specific ethnic wars.

Another more recent innovative study comes from Roessler (2016). Noting that many African states since independence seem to be trapped between coup and ethnic war, Roessler argued that attempts by an ethnic group to dominate and capture a state and other groups' attempt to resist such power grabbing can largely explain why many post-independence African states have been trapped in the vicious cycles of coup, coup proofing, and ethnic war. Combining in-depth case studies and quantitative analyses, Roessler significantly advanced our understanding about the interplay between ethnic politics and the struggle for state power.

Conclusion

By way of conclusion, I identify several basic venues and new directions for future research.

The first is basic but fundamental: There must be a tighter coupling between theorization and empirical testing. Empirical hypotheses merely capture empirical regularities, and theories are to explain those empirical regularities (Bunge, 1997). Ideally, therefore, theories should underpin empirical hypotheses and hypotheses should be derived from a theoretical core. Many (quantitative) studies, however, merely list hypothesis after hypothesis, without ever bothering to derive their hypotheses from a theoretical core. These studies have thus implicitly equated deriving empirical hypotheses with theorizing. As a result, these studies have been only marginally theoretical, if not atheoretical: Most of their results are no more than correlations (Tang, 2015, pp. 258–259). This practice has certainly hindered knowledge accumulation in the field (Hegre & Sambanis, 2006; Dixon, 2009), and correcting it will surely bring great benefits.

The second remedy is also basic: We have to get the basics of methods correct, especially for quantitative exercises. Above all, we must avoid "garbage can" regressions and think harder before putting factors into the right side of the regression equations. We need to differentiate intervening and confounding variables and grapple with the potentially complex interactions among those "independent" variables (Achen, 2005; Dixon, 2009; Ray, 2003). In addition, combining quantitative analysis, qualitative analysis, and other methods are almost always superior to merely quantitative analysis alone (Lyall, 2015), because most of the time, quantitative exercises reveal only correlations but not causation, as Roessler (2016) and Tang, Xiong, and Li (2017) both noted. In particular, by comparing quantitative results with evidences from process tracing, Tang et al. (2017) show that oil has rarely been a deep cause but rather merely an immediate trigger of ethnic war, despite the robust statistical relationship between the ethnogeography of oil and the onset of ethnic war obtained in several related studies. In light of their result, it may be desirable to check some of the most prominent quantitative results with in-depth case studies.

Third, we need to compile data that measures the levels of ethnic politics. Ethnic war rarely erupts all of a sudden: Years of low-level ethnopolitics tend to precede and stir up the eventual violent conflict (Sambanis, 2004, p. 265). Understanding when and how a lower level of ethnic tension short of ethnic war eventually escalates (into ethnic war) or de-escalates is thus imperative, theoretically and policy-wise.

Fourth, it will be extremely fruitful, empirically, theoretically, and policy-wise, to examine the interplay between ethnic politics and the sociopolitical power dynamics within different regimes. For instance, both Harkness (2016) and Roessler (2016) examine how power play by states and its elites within multiethnic states may impact ethnic politics,

including ethnic coups and ethnic wars. This line of research will bring together ethnic conflict and other key topics in comparative politics, and it is likely to be a very fruitful cross-fertilization.

Fifth, I shall advance a more hopeful note. Our inquiry into the onset of ethnic conflict has always had forecasting it so that we can take preventive measures as a key goal in our mind. Until recently, however, endeavors have only met with very limited progress. With the rapid advancement of computational social sciences, aided by our accumulated theoretical and empirical knowledge about ethnic war, we may be finally moving to achieve such a goal in the not too distant future (see the special issue of *Journal of Peace Research*, 2017).

Finally and again on a hopeful note, there may have been a steady decline on ethnic war, as Gurr (2000) first noted. More recently, based on more systematic data and analysis, Cederman, Gleditsch, and Wucherpfennig (2017) found strong support for Gurr's earlier assessment. If both Gurr (2000) and Cederman et al. (2017) are right, then this trend may well continue. Regardless whether ethnic conflict has been declining and will continue to decline, however, rebuilding peace between former opposing groups via ethnic reconciliation, a topic that has received little attention in the field of comparative politics and international relations so far, should become a key area for research (Tang, 2011). After all, ethnic violence and war tend to be recurring phenomena in many multiethnic countries. If this is the case, then only deep reconciliation between former ethnic foes can lay the foundation of deep ethnic peace.

Acknowledgments

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Notes:

(1.) Thus, I leave out the literature on the dynamics during a war (e.g., strategies and tactics of war fighting).

(2.) SPLA stands for Sudan Peoples' Liberation Army that fought for an independent South Sudan from the formerly united Sudan.

(3.) Joseph Rothschild's (1981) *Ethnopolitics* may be considered as a distant second.

(4.) Quote is from Horowitz (1985, p. 13).

(5.) In an earlier review, Brubaker and Laitin (1998) concluded that this wave of literature did not present much progress. Like Varshney (2007), I also beg to differ from their rather gloomy assessment.

(6.) For a critical assessment of the rational choice-inspired inquiry into ethnic war, see Kaufmann (2005).

(7.) Note that Collier and Hoeffler (1998) and their subsequent papers do not differentiate ethnic civil war from non-ethnic civil war. This is a serious defect.

(8.) Collier and Hoeffler (1998, pp. 568–569).

(9.) Note, however, that "greed" and "opportunity" are distinct though overlapping. Thus, the title of Collier and Hoeffler (2004) should be "opportunity and grievance." Collier and Hoeffler measured opportunity with three sets of indicators, namely, availability of finance, cost of rebellion, and military advantage.

(10.) For a recent review on natural resources and civil war, see Ross (2014).

(11.) Again, note that feasibility and opportunity are related but not identical. Moreover, opportunity is at least related to "weak state" (Fearon & Laitin, 2003). Conceptual confusion has thus saddled Collier and Hoeffler.

(12.) For a more detailed discussion of these two studies, see Tang (2015).

(13.) For detailed discussions of these datasets, see Raleigh, Linke, Hegre, and Karlsen (2010); Lujala, Ketil, and Thieme (2007); Weidmann, Rød, and Cederman (2010); and Wucherpfennig, Weidmann, Cederman, and Wimmer (2011).

(14.) I define mechanism as follows: (1) Mechanisms are real processes that drive changes or no-changes within real social systems. (2) Mechanisms interact with factors to drive outcomes in social systems: Mechanisms and factors are thus mutually interdependent. The first part of the definition is from Bunge (1997) whereas this second part is my own innovation. The second part is essential for understanding how mechanisms and factors are related to each other and for designing methodologies for uncovering new mechanisms and factors. For more detailed discussion, see Tang, "Factors and Mechanisms in Social Sciences: From Ontology to Epistemology and Methodology," and "Contrasting Cases and Counterfactuals: On Methodologies for Uncovering Mechanisms," manuscripts in progress.

(15.) Hegre and Sambanis (2006) identified 88 independent variables that have been postulated to contribute to the onset of civil war in statistical studies of civil war. In a later exercise, Dixon (2009) identified more than 200 independent variables in statistical studies of civil war!

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