Causes of conflicts
Today

- Course essay
- Causes of (religious) conflicts
  - Indian 1857 Rebellion
- Analyzing causes of conflicts
  - Ervin Staub
- Next time: analyzing the role of religion in conflicts
Course essay

Write a 8-10 page essay using the lectures and course material to deal with the following:

1. Choose a news article relevant for the theme of the course and write a commentary of the report.

2. Apply the course material to analyze the Indian 1857 Rebellion, see the text in Matskut: *Indian 1857 Rebellion*

All the material for the course are in Matskut: https://matskut.helsinki.fi/handle/123456789/768
Homework


What were the causes leading to the conflict?

1. A critical look at the text
2. Group work: Prepare a short presentation of causes that lead to the conflict.
Causes of Indian 1857 Rebellion

- No "neutral" descriptions
- Where and when does something begin?
- How to describe events
  - X caused Y
  - X was the cause of Y
  - Y was the consequence of Y
  - Because X therefore Y
  - The reason why Y took place was that X
- Models of explanation and understanding
Understanding causes of conflicts

- Erwin Staub’s work on group violence and genocide
  - Social psychological model
  - Multilevel, dynamic view
Functioning of a society consists of interaction between

- psychological processes (both social and individual)
- modes of action
- patterns of thought

governed and directed by

- cultural factors
- ideological models.
Definitions

- **Society**
  - (Official and informal) institutions and organizations and their activities
- **Psychological processes**
  - Thoughts and feelings that (help to) give meaning and significance to what is happening and to incidents that take place
- **Culture**
  - Shared conceptions, feelings and meanings based on institutional (or otherwise codified) practices
- **Ideology**
  - All-embracing explanation concerning society and (political) life
Living conditions

- Living conditions can be divided into three dimensions:
  - Material conditions
  - Social and political conditions
  - Psychological and emotional conditions

- Compare: Biopsychosocial Model of Health and Illness
  - http://cnx.org/contents/9e83e04b-17bd-4c78-80d9-6cc4d56640e3@2
Living conditions and change

• All changes in society have an effect on each of the three dimension of the living conditions.
  • Positive change = new (kinds of) and/or more possibilities
  • Negative change = new (kinds of) and/or more numerous threats
  • Changes can be both positive and negative at the same time/for different people/groups.
• Individual people and communities use their cultural resources to give an interpretation to the changing living conditions.
• Process of overcoming (negative) change = adaptation.
• Ideologies are a central means for adaptation.
Material living conditions

- Satisfaction of basic needs
  - Nourishment, housing, safety
- Factors relevant for the worsening of material living conditions:
  - Intensity and duration of scarcity
  - Distribution of material wellbeing
  - Level of equality in society
- Material wellbeing (of individuals, communities and societies) also depends on the (psychological, social and political) possibilities and capacities available.
Social and political living conditions

- Political order
- Social structures
  - Means and methods of participation and influence
    - as individuals and groups
    - to society and to one’s own life
  - Stability of social and political structures
  - Reliability of institutions and authorities
  - Predictability of social, economic and political environment
  - Significance and power of prevailing tradition
  - Work
  - Privacy and the scope of the private sphere
Psychological and emotional living conditions

- Types of identity models available for individuals and groups
- Possibilities to form and sustain a positive and coherent self-identity
- Possibilities to belong to groups and to be part of groups
- Conditions determining one’s membership in groups
- Possibilities to form and sustain a positive and coherent group-identity
Change as possibility and challenge

- Radical change of living conditions gives rise to
  - strong needs (e.g. safety and security)
  - and compels people to modify their (personal, social and political) goals.
- As part of the challenge, people try to find (new kinds of) ways to fulfill their (basic) needs and to reach the (essential) goals.
- Needs and goals evoked by radical change of living conditions require intensive psychological processing.
Worsening of living conditions

1. Poses a threat to one’s self-image:
   - Weakened resources to steer the course of one’s life and to fulfill one’s central duties and commitments

2. Evokes a strong need to protect oneself and to strengthen one’s threatened self-image

3. Strengthens the need to belong to a (protective and affirmative) group

4. Gives rise to the need to find an ideological framework (for regaining the sense of meaning and significance).
Ideological framework 1

1. Protects the weakening self from threat posed by deteriorating living conditions
2. Helps to regain the sense of meaningfulness despite the change
3. Gives an (acceptable) explanation to one’s deprived position
4. Provides a channel for needs and goals evoked by the change
5. Helps to rebuild a (positive and coherent) self-image
6. Creates and strengthens (positive and coherent) group-identity
7. Helps to find ways to act in the novel situation
8. Can be hostile or reconciliatory towards dissidents
9. Can guide action towards a destructive or constructive direction
The way to violence

- Worsening living conditions weaken the possibilities to have a say in one’s life and to carry out one’s commitments.
- Social and psychological resources that the dominant culture (of the majority/those in power) offers or makes available are insufficient in terms of providing satisfactory, supportive and constructive ways of action.
- An ideology offers itself as a totalizing solution to problems concerning self-identity, meaning of life as well as the cause of current problems and of resolving them.
- The ideology presupposes that its adherents adopt the new way of thinking and acting, and do not oppose it.
Modes of action

- Modes of action depend on one’s
  - **Beliefs**: Is there anything I /we can do?
  - **Attitudes**: positive/negative, hopeful/hopeless
  - **Resources**: Do I/we have a chance?

- Modes of action depend on one’s horizon
  - **Past**: the good old times, commemorating x
  - **Present**: stable/unstable situation
  - **Future**: a better future – end of the world
Modes of action

- Where do we come from?
- Where are we now?
- Where can we go?
- What can we do?
- Action as a means of getting from where we are to where we want to go.
Modes of action as a result of beliefs, attitudes, resources and the time horizon:

- Submission
- Adaptation
- Action for improvement: individual, collective, short term, long term
- Protest
- Sabotage
- Revolt
Revolt as action

- Goal of action?
- Means of action?
Can violence be a means for a positive goal?

- Revolt is a reaction against something bad or evil.
- Can violence be used for achieving something?
  - Stopping more harm from happening
  - Preventing something bad/evil
  - Punishing the culprits
  - Creating a new order
- Violence is – by definition – always in some way destructive.
  - Justifying violence?
Circles of actors in violent conflicts

- Violent conflicts involve different types of actors depending on their proximity to violent acts and their attitude to the use of (ideologically justified) violence.
  - Servants of ideology (fanatics: ideology as an end in itself)
  - Parasites of ideology: ideology as a means for individual ends (e.g., revenge or individual psychological needs).
  - Sadists who find an outlet for their desires through ideology
  - Exploiters of ideology (for economic gain or the like)
  - Conformists (adaptation as a means)
  - By-standers
  - Retreaters
  - Passive resisters
  - Active resisters
Most crucial roles

- Fanatics
  - Problem: How does good turn into evil?
- Bystanders
  - Often the largest group, a role to play?
- Resisters
  - A futile victim or an effective agent of beneficial change?
The fanatic

- The purpose of (most) ideologies is to make the world a better place to live.
- How does good turn into evil: the way from devotee to fanatic
- Decisive questions:
  - Means and ends: do the noble ends justify the use of just any kinds of means?
  - The role and position of outsiders and dissidents: Is there just one way of life?
  - Are the critics treated as enemies or respected as an important resource for improvement?
  - Does the ideology define what is good or can we criticize the ideology morally?
The bystander

- The behavior of bystanders is (often) decisive:
  - Escalation of the conflict into violence – resolving or transforming the conflict nonviolently
  - Bystanders form a critical mass.
  - Even a minimal sign of opposition may be decisive.
  - Silence is most often interpreted as consent.
  - If there is someone who breaks the silence or acts differently, it becomes easier for others to join in.
It’s hard to get involved

- It’s natural to people
  - not to meddle in each others’ business
  - to obey what an authority figure tells us to do (even when we would not like to)
- because we have a strong innate need to
  - belong to a group and to be part of a group
  - be accepted by a group/ be one with the group
  - be a good member of a group (being good makes me one of us)
  - excel and succeed
  - take part in co-operation
- Differing from the view and behavior of the majority (or of our own group) endangers these basic social goods
The resister

- Is the price paid for resisting too high: a futile and meaningless sacrifice?
- What is the motivation behind resistance: is resistance just a mirror image of the ideology it opposes?
- What is the motivation of the resister: vanity, self-aggrandizement, or the like? Does the motive matter?
- Do the ends and means of the resisters differ from those they wish to oppose?
- Are just any kinds of (dumb) heroes morally admirable?
  - Resisters should do the cost-benefit-analysis before acting.
  - In the end, team play, not individual heroism is what counts.
- Less may be more: the invisible work of “small” people
People (=we) tend to think and structure our view of reality along fixed patterns of thought.

Patterns of thought have the tendency to become an integrated part of our sense of reality that directs our actions.
Patterns of thought

- Patterns of thought that direct our action
  1. We – others dichotomy
  2. The just world fallacy
  3. Image of the radical evil
  4. Finding the scapegoat
  5. Utilizing the victim position: self-victimization
  6. The myth of scarcity
1. We – others

Starting point
1. I am good.
2. Those who belong to the same group as I, are like me.
3. We are good.
4. Not everyone belongs to our group.
5. Outsiders are different from us.

Inference:
Those who are not part of us, are not good.
Those who oppose us are bad/evil.
Need to protect one’s self-image

- Worsening of living conditions often gives rise to the need of protecting one’s self-image.
- Factors that strengthen the need to protect one’s self-image:
  - Sense of superiority (change poses a personal insult)
  - conviction concerning a right to rule over others
  - (often unconscious) uncertainty concerning one’s own value
- The need to protect one’s self-image calls forth the need to strengthen one’s group-identity.
- Easiest way to strengthen group-identity:
  - Creating a threatening Other.
Strategies in terms of the "Other"

1. Projecting guilt to the Other:
   - Cherishing a memory of offence, suffering, humiliation or victimhood

2. The Other as impediment:
   - Fight for a common cause: struggle against those who are seen as hindrances (struggle-identity)

3. The Other as exploiter:
   - Life is a battle to regain what is rightfully ours (battle-identity)

4. The other as stain:
   - Cleansing the community/society/world and purifying oneself (sanctification-identity)
   - Two strategies:
     - Isolating or eliminating the Other – Isolating one’s group
We-groups

- We-groups tend to strengthen uniformity of opinion and aggravate differences (between us and “them”, against dissidents).

- Antidote:
  1. Allowing and encouraging expression of different opinions
  2. Cherishing an atmosphere of self-criticism

- 1. and 2. help to prevent
  - schematic thinking in terms of we – the others
  - misrepresentation of reality
We-groups

- Communities based on a singular model of good life maintain their stability through pressure to uniformity.
- A collective culture of social compliance serves as a basis for authoritarian leadership and weakens the resource to think and live differently.
2. Fallacy of a just world

- We tend to think that there is (basically) some sort of justice behind everything that happens.
  - Those who fare ill (must) have (somehow) deserved it.
  - “They must have done something.”
  - “There must have been something wrong with him.”
  - “You reap what you sow.”
- Blaming the victim
- Law of Karma
3. The myth of pure evil

• Evil comes from outside
  • We, in our group, are basically good.
  • Evil occurs unexpectedly and takes us always by surprise.
  • “He was always so polite and nice to children.”
• Evil has no connection to anything that took place previously.
  • The 9/11
• Evil is inexplicable and resembles forces of nature.
• Explaining the cause of evil
  • totalizing explanations and static features such as a person’s character, becoming crazy, ethnic attributes, etc.
The myth of pure evil is detrimental

- The easiest (and most efficient?) means of improving things is to start from oneself (and one’s group).
- If evil is something outside of us and it is seen as something alien and incomprehensible, we give up (perhaps the only possible) means to change things.
- The myth of pure evil distorts our picture of reality (and of ourselves) and weakens our resources of constructive action.
4. Scapegoat

• We have a strong tendency to
  • keep up a positive self-image
  • make sense of reality by seeking explanations
  • find a culprit when something goes wrong.

• For this reason:
  • It is characteristic for human beings to find someone to blame when things go wrong (even because of my own mistakes but especially in adversity)

• Fallacy of social blame:
  • Solving problems = placing guilt on someone and punishing them
5. Making use of the victim position

- The world is basically good and just:
  - People get what they deserve.
  - There is an exception:
    - If I/we fare ill, someone else (an evil outsider) is to blame.
    - “It’s really, really unjust!”
    - I am / we are an innocent (and helpless) victim of circumstances/evil people.
- Victim position offers many kinds of advantages but it
  - prevents us from taking notice of the situation as a whole.
  - weakens our resources of action.
  - restrains us from taking responsibility.
6. Myth of scarcity

- There is not enough of anything:
  - space, nutrition, employment, possibilities, power
- For this reason others are our rivals/adversaries.
- Myth of scarcity combined with a totalizing ideology reinforces the dichotomy between us and them:
  - Immigrants take over our country!
  - Heretics will corrupt the purity of our faith!
  - Foreign influences will destroy our culture!
Force of patterns of thought

- Patterns of thought have an impact on our views and actions.
- Patterns of thought are linked with ideological models of explanation.
- Particular cultures
  - enforce or weaken fixed patterns of thought
  - help or inhibit to criticize fixed patterns of thought,
- The more different points of view we can attain, the less prone we are to act according to fixed patterns of thought.
- Essential resources: humor, comedy, satire, farce and joking are focal in making visible the force and nature of patterns of thought and revealing their ridiculousness.
Sources

Roy F. Baumeister

Robert Chialdini
   Influence. The Psychology of Persuasion, 1993

Ervin Staub