The Perception of Culture in Explaining Ethnic Conflict in Europe

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When two groups have very different cultures they are unable to understand the actions of each other and there is no starting point for discussion, no room for compromise, no way of seeing eye-to-eye.

As Cornell and Hartmann note:

> Human beings live not only in the midst of material relationships and sets of opportunities- political, economic, social- but also in the midst of ideas and understandings. The social world is an interpreted world, as much conceptual as it is concrete. Interpretations, ideas, and understandings are part of culture, and culture is an identity construction site of uncommon importance.[1]

What differentiates one group from another is not necessarily the language it speaks or the religion it practices, it is its culture. A culture develops over time based on the specific history faced by the group. If one group has only known war and violence their culture will develop to expect violence but conversely a group never exposed to violence may look for other avenues to prevent conflict. Moreover, the prevailing culture of a group can change over time due to a change in its situation. A peaceful group may become more militant over time depending on their treatment by the state. This occurs when the group's perception of what is right and wrong, proper and improper changes. This occurs "first in our heads and then in our practices".[2] In short "[c]ulture is sense-making".[3]

In our attempts at finding an explanation for ethnic conflict the academic community should be willing to use all the tools at its disposal. Recently the use of cultural explanations has fallen out of favour. While not abandoned entirely its use has been limited. Researchers have been reluctant to try to assess foreign cultures and are wary not to deem a particular group as having a culture that encourages or allows violence. In place of cultural analysis, the discipline has turned to other explanations for group behaviour and violence. For example, the rational choice theory sees violence as only occurring when the individuals of the group see no other option to achieve their goals and can thus rationalize the behaviour.[4] Conversely, Grievance Theory explains violence as occurring when particular discrepancies in society begin to exist. For a minority group to use non-political forms of dissent the group must begin to notice a growing gap in treatment.[5]

While this reluctance to use culture is understandable, by ignoring the possible ramifications of culture, properly defined and examined, in regard to ethnic conflict this leaves the discipline lacking. This paper will use an effective definition of culture and examine three very different groups to test the potential use of culture as a tool in the study of ethnic conflict. It is important to note that the three cases are not to be compared with one another, rather they offer three very different cultural contexts to be examined. Moreover the analysis of these cultures will come primarily from those involved in the state/minority group relationship directly. This allows for a greater understanding of not only culture but how the perception of group culture shapes the

conflict dynamic between the state and the minority group. It is important to note that this paper will use a very broad definition of political violence. As culture is unique to each group so to is the type of violence the group may develop, use or tolerate.

As discussed above, it is acknowledged that this is a somewhat contentious topic in the discipline. Few have chosen to use this approach to explain the actions of a group. This is unfortunate since culture "orders political priorities and material objects people consider valuable and worth fighting over".[6] Moreover, culture "offers an account of political behaviour that makes particular actions more or less likely".[7]

It could be said that the anthropologist Clifford Geertz is the leading modern author in this particular form of research.[8] Geertz relied on Kluckhohn who defined culture as:

> 1) the total way of life of a people 2) the social legacy the individual acquires from his group 3) a way of thinking, feeling, and believing 4)an abstraction from behaviour 5) a theory . . . about the way a group of people in fact behave 6) a storehouse of pooled learning 7) a set of standardized orientations to recurrent problems 8) learned behaviour 9) a mechanism for the normative regulation of behaviour 10) a set of techniques for adjusting both to the external environment and to other men 11) a precipitate of history.[9]

Using this definition the role of culture in explaining ethnic conflict is clear. How groups react to situations and influences is a direct result of their culture. It is therefore necessary to understand how a group has collectively learned to respond. As each culture is unique, only through understanding how that culture deals with conflict can a true understanding of the situation be reached. Geertz believed that through careful observation, what he referred to as "thick description" a researcher would be able to learn the intricacies of a group and therefore interpret what certain gestures, responses or reactions truly meant.[10] Geertz used thick description in his analysis of groups in Indonesia for example and argued that this style of research was a necessary part of any anthropological analysis.

Others have followed successfully in Geertz's footsteps. Ranging from James C. Scott's examination of culture in a Malaysian village to understand power relations between rich and poor[11] to Frantz Fanon who used his intimate knowledge of the culture of his adopted country, Algeria, to predict how it could successfully evict the French.[12] Both relied on Geertz's idea of 'think description' to back their findings.

Not all researchers have the time or resources necessary to participate in such thick description of culture. Many have to rely on thin description. This requires the researcher to rely on both the observations of previous researchers and the population itself. While all groups will try to present themselves in the best light possible and all researchers bring their own particular biases into their work it is possible to take primary and secondary information and compare it to historical events to come to an informed conclusion as to how a group's culture has influenced its decisions. In arguing why it is necessary to understand the culture of a group through any means

Katzenstein notes that cultural-institutional contexts "do not merely constrain actors by changing the incentives that shape their behavior. They do not simply regulate behavior. They also help constitute the very actors whose conduct they seek to regulate".[13] Culture is such an important component of a person's decision making process it must be accounted for in one way or another. If the ability to directly observe a group is not open to a researcher, they must rely on other sources to understand the situation.

Johnston provides an excellent example of how to examine a group's culture without directly observing it. In his analysis of the development of the strategic culture of Maoist China he outlines a three step process as to how to test for the impact of culture in a group. "The first is to come up with a definition of strategic culture that is falsifiable. The second is to test for the presence of strategic culture in the formative 'texts' of a particular society's strategic traditions. The third is to test for the effect of strategic culture on behavior".[14] This study will use the second and third of these processes in its analysis. It is not necessary to create a falsifiable definition of culture for the groups in question. Through secondary sources and the descriptions of culture by members of each group the definitions of each culture will be developed. It is these individual definitions that will be tested against history to test their validity.

Kiel also demonstrates the power of culture in explaining group decision-making. Her analysis concerned the culture of the French military prior to the Second World War. As she notes "culture is not merely derivative of functional demands or structural imperatives. Culture has (relative) causal autonomy".[15] Keil was able to demonstrate how the culture of the French military had developed a particular culture that was ill-suited for the changes that were necessary in order to be prepared for the war. Therefore, while there are other structural explanations that contribute to the failure of the French military in order to understand why those structural issues were of such importance the overall culture of the organization needed to be understood.

This paper will follow the theoretical framework set out by Avruch.[16] Avruch relies on a definition of culture provided by Schwartz:

> Culture consists of the derivatives of experience,
> more or less organized, learned or created by the
> individuals of a population, including those images
> or encodements and their interpretations (meanings)
> transmitted from past generations, from
> contemporaries, or formed by individuals themselves.[17]

Avruch goes further to note that culture or cultural traits are not divided equally within the society. This means that culture is fluid, can change over time and does not require uniform adherence to be an effective tool for researchers. It is most important to understand how culture can influence the behavior of some members of society and see how this culture impacts conflict. By combining Avruch's theoretical framework coupled with Katzenstein's methodology a greater understand of the role of culture in predicting ethnic conflict can be found.

What will become apparent is that all of the groups discussed in this study see their specific culture as being a key, if not the main causal factor in predicting why the group acts the way it does. This paper will demonstrate how different cultures are more or less accepting of violence as means to an end. While the majority of a group may not advocate the use of violence, if the culture of the group allows it, using Avruch's argument of non-uniform adherence to culture, violence can occur. If the culture of a group is to reject the use of violence in all aspects of society, then no matter how angry the group may be at the state, violence will not be considered as an option by any but marginal members of the group. The three cases to be discussed are the Corsican community of France, the Russians in the Near Abroad, specifically Estonia and Latvia and finally the Basques of Spain.

The Corsican identity- An island onto itself

Paul Theroux may best describe Corsica when he says that "it is a French province in name only. Corsica is Corsica".[18] While much of the island has been incorporated with the mainland in terms of economics, education and government, the culture of the Corsicans has never changed. It is still an island that works by its own rules, has its own unique customs and has a culture unlike anything seen in the rest of France. It is this clash of cultures that have led to many of the problems on the island. The French government appears to not fully appreciate the differences in culture between Corsicans and the mainland and are therefore unable to predict how they will react to proposed changes to Corsican society. The Corsicans have refused to alter their culture to be more in line with not only the rest of France but also the rest of Europe.

One cultural difference between Corsica and the rest of France is the role of traditional clans in the day to day business of the island. These clans, the powerful historical families, wield enormous influence on politics and business. Throughout recent Corsican history the same surnames appear over and over in various government posts and segments of the economy. Each clan remains in power due to the loyalty it demands of those within it. This clan system dates back to the 1880's and is similar to other clan systems found throughout Italy. The clan is "the political superstructure of a cultural infrastructure articulated on a base of family and traditional values".[19] The various clans have historically worked not for the betterment of all Corsicans, rather they have used their power to maintain their clan's stature in the community at the expense of all others. This has lead to competition and electoral fraud politically and the hoarding of resources economically. Many blame some of the economic problems faced by the island on the in-fighting and the corruption of the clans. As Jaffe notes the clan use "the culturally valued idiom of kinship to disguise the fact that it does not act on behalf of the collectivity, and undermines the already limited potential for collective, solidary behavior".[20]

One of the main consequences of the continuation of the clan system is the acceptance of violence on the island because the clans have been in competition with one another for so long that rivalries have developed and over time these rivalries have taken on a violent component. This violence is now seen in business

relationships, the prevalence of organized crime on the island and it can be argued in the political arena as well. Quite simply, violence is more accepted in Corsica than in other areas of both France and the rest of Europe. Paul Giacobbi believes that the Corsicans see themselves as a 'mountain people' who are more open to the use of violence within the society. He claims that there is a "tradition of violence" in Corsica that is different than other places.[21] Giacobbi goes further to say that violence is such a common part of Corsican society that when there is an apparent nationalistic terrorist attack it is actually difficult to determine if that attack is for political, economic or personal reasons. By way of example, in July 2003 there were approximately fifty separate bombings in Corsica. Of those, about twenty were directly linked to the FLNC or one of its splinter groups with the rest of the bombings occurring as a result of other non-political disagreements.[22] Violence is a part of doing business on the island. For example, if there are two businessmen who are in competition, Giacobbi contends that the prevailing culture of the island allows for the one who is less successful economically to try to remove the competition by vandalizing the competition. There is less shame in using violence to succeed than there is in failing in a business.[23]

Loughlin concurs with Giacobbi's assessment of the Corsican culture. He believes that the need to maintain honor is the most important characteristic of Corsican society. The use of violence, particularly the types of violence usually associated with the terrorist activities of the FLNC and others (bombings, arson, etc.) are not major violations of the codes of the society.[24] Loughlin also ties this type of activity to the traditional Corsican society based on the clans for this acceptance of violence. The competition between the clans has led to the constant need for retribution by one clan against another. When one clan has been wronged, there is a loss of honor, which is unacceptable and therefore the clans honor needs to be regained. This has led to a 'vendetta culture' where one violent act is met with another and this becomes all the society knows as acceptable behavior.[25] This is why, for Laughlin, the main nationalist political groups have refrained from condemning the terrorist attacks. While they may not support them directly and may wish to find a political solution to the nationalist problem, they do not necessarily see what the terrorists are doing as not normal. There is no stigma attached to using violence, so there is no need to condemn such activity because in Corsican society using violence is as normal as negotiating with the state.[26]

The difference in culture between the Corsicans and the rest of the French can be seen in the term *maquis.* During the Second World War the French resistance was know as the maquis and to this day the term refers to a struggle against Nazism. The term means something completely different in Corsica. The maquis refers to those who operate outside of the law. Maquis are similar to Robin Hood in that their actions are criminal but to the people they are considered heroes.[27] Jaffe sees this embracing of criminal activity as a way the Corsicans have dealt with the constant foreign interference on the island. This culture "nourishes a rejection of external authority, and discourages people from recognizing any central authoritative state structure as legitimate".[28] It is based historically on the idea of Corsican pirates who existed

during the times of the Genoan occupation. This ancient conception has been updated in modern times, but the idea of embracing those who live outside the law remains. Therefore the Corsican hero has become a person who above all rejects authority and remains true to their Corsican roots. They are seen as "bandits of honor".[29]

The other aspect of culture that needs to be addressed is the French culture and how it impacts its relationship with Corsica. French nationalism is based on the idea that there are no historical minorities within France. Everyone who embraces the French ideal is French and French nationalism therefore, is ill-prepared to deal with a region that considers itself unique. This culture of 'oneness' has manifested itself into the very strong unitary state.[30] The French government and by extension the French people have been unwilling to work with Corsica and have rushed to judgment on it because their culture cannot tolerate internal division.[31] While it has tried to make improvements recently this clash of cultures has existed for over 200 years and this has lead to growing frustration on both sides. As Jaffe notes the constant misunderstandings between the rest of France and Corsica has led to negative stereotypes against the Corsicans and has led the Corsicans to embrace their own unique culture. A 1989 Le Monde article describes Corsica as "an intolerable island-you forget it for a few months, 55 million people are not by its bedside, and it spikes a fever".[32] Faced with such statements it is not surprising that the reaction of the Corsicans would be "heroic or good-for-nothing, with a slothful or aristocratic soul, bandit or man of law, the Corsican has never succeeded in finding his just place on the continent".[33] The Corsican culture stresses the need to bind together to protect traditions and if necessary to embrace violence as a way of achieving goals while the French culture cannot accept another culture living within its territory. It should not be surprising therefore that violence has not only occurred but why it has remained such a large aspect of the conflict between the Corsicans and the French.

The Russians in the Baltic- A learned culture of non-violence and apathy

If the Corsicans represent a culture that not only accepts violence, but also at times embraces unlawfulness, the Russian community in Estonia and Latvia would represent the complete opposite. The culture of the Russians in the Baltic states has been influenced by both the prevailing Russian and Soviet culture and the Baltic culture in which they have been immersed. The result is a people who lack the organization to carry out violent acts and even if they could organize to such a degree, would not consider violence as an option.

The Legacy of Soviet Nationalism

The Russians in Estonia and Latvia as previously stated can be divided into two broad categories: those who arrived prior to the Soviet annexation, and those who came afterwards.[34] There is agreement by scholars on the region that the two categories have different cultures but there is no agreement on what those cultures are. There are some who argue that the Russians who came during the Soviet period, like those who came before, have become completely 'Balticized' due to their everyday proximity with the Estonians and Latvians. Others claim that the Russians who came during Soviet times were influenced by Soviet culture.[35] This is due to the fact that those who came from Russia during the Soviet period came mainly for the

economic advantages available in the region. They were able to move freely throughout the Soviet Union due to their advantaged position within the Soviet system. Not only were they the largest ethnic group in the country, they were also the dominant group linguistically, culturally and politically. They were able to find the region that best served their needs and were able to move their with the knowledge that everyone would speak Russian, their children would be able to learn in Russian and more than likely all of the important political figures would be of Russian descent. They also would have been influenced by their interactions (and those of the parents and grand-parents) with the Soviet government's policies on nationalities. It will be argued in this paper that the Russian-speakers who came during the Soviet period's culture are heavily influenced by both of these factors: the Soviet system and their interactions with Baltic culture. To understand the Soviet influence it is necessary to look back to the nationality policies of the Soviet Union and the unique place the Russian nationality had in this system.[36]

Nationalism in the Soviet Union

From the earliest days of the Soviet Union its leaders grappled with the nationalities problem. The problem was simple: the Soviet Union was comprised of numerous nationalities, each with its own unique culture, many with its own language. As Slezkine notes: "Lenin's acceptance of the reality of nations and 'national rights' was one of the most uncompromising positions he ever took".[37] To enact the necessary radical economic changes to the society the state needed the co-operation of the various ethnic groups within its border and of all ways of classifying people outside of economics, nationality was the only one that received special attention by the state. Both Lenin and later Stalin divided the various nationalities of the Soviet Union into classes. There were the great, progressive nations, such as the Russians and the Ukrainians, and there were backward nations such as the Tatars. In order to create the socialist society it was necessary to promote the language and culture of the backward societies and through these policies it was hoped that the local intellectuals would be better able to spread the anti-bourgeoisie message and inform the proletariat of what needed to be done. This strategy of appealing to the intellectuals within the titular nationality has been repeated as "every communist regime throughout its history has attempted to gain the loyalty of the intellectuals through a variety of means, be it terror, coercion or co-optation".[38] Co-option came to be seen by the Soviet government as the most effective way to solve the nationalities question.

While the early Soviet policy on nationality was to try to promote the development and maintenance of the 'backward nations' it also wanted to suppress any form of Russian nationalism. Lenin saw that "the essence of the national problem in Russia was the development of a core-periphery colonial relationship between the Russians on the one hand, and the non-Russians and their homelands on the other".[39] As a result he felt that "Great Russian chauvinism was treated as the state's greatest problem".[40] By 1923 Slezkine argues that the term Russian as a nationality within the Soviet Union "was a politically empty category unless it referred to the source of great-power chauvinism . . . or to the history of relentless imperialist oppression".[41]

It can be argued that today the Russian-speakers in Estonia and Latvia still lack the nationalist identity necessary to organize.[42] Their culture became linked to that of the Soviet Union. Falk Lang, the Senior Advisor on the Baltic states to the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities describes the Russians who moved to the Baltic states as the prime example of *homo-Sovieticus*. Without the Soviet Union they had nothing to base their culture around[43] and with it gone they are unable to see themselves as Russian because for the past 80 years they have not done so. Without the ability to organize they have been unable to act.[44] They represent the clearest example of what Ken Jowitt sees as a consequence of the Soviet period. For them the political realm was "something dangerous, something to avoid. Political involvement meant trouble".[45] A Russian activist in Estonia describes the Russian community as "like a crowd" unable to mobilize.[46] In this regard it is not that the Russian culture is non-violent, it is merely incapable of rallying the nation due to the Soviet history which forced it to the background and made Russians suspicious of political mobilization.

One aspect of Russian culture that has survived in Russia and may be influencing the Russian-speakers in Estonia and Latvia is its view of sacrifice. There is a sense of fatalism within Russian culture and a view that life at times is difficult. It is a belief held by Solzhenitsyn and others that "it is the suffering of the Russian people that is the essence of their identity. It is through this suffering that the Russian people have advanced to a higher level of humanity".[47] This has allowed Russia (and by extension during its existence, the Soviet Union) to survive famine, war and terrible economic conditions and this has led to a belief that security is the most important aspect of life. As long as one is secure everything else is tolerable.[48] This may also explain the lack of action by the Russian-speakers. As discussed earlier the Russians who have remained in Estonia and Latvia stayed partially because their economic opportunities are better in the Baltic states compared to Russia. It is possible that they are willing to give up some political and economic rights in order to maintain their basic economic security. Since the Russians also suffered under the Soviet system they were not completely shocked by their treatment at the hands of the Estonians and Latvians. They were willing to tolerate this treatment in exchange for economic stability.[49] This can be illustrated through survey data from the 2000 Baltic Barometer survey. In Estonia when asked if there were economic inequalities between Estonians and non-Estonians, 68% of non-Estonians responded that there were very large or fairly large inequalities.[50] However, when asked to disagree or agree with the statement "Conditions for people like me in Russia are worse than here" 67% of non-Estonians agreed, and to the question "This country offers better chances for improving living standards in the future than does in Russia" 67% also agreed.[51]

Obviously the Russians in Estonia have been influenced by their historical ties with Russia but they have also been influenced by Russian culture to this day. The majority of Russian-speakers prefer to watch television programs produced in Russia and prefer to read Russian media sources for information.[52] In Estonia alone in 2000

75% of non-Estonians watched television from the Russian federation 6-7 times a week and 27% read Russian federation newspapers at least once a week.[53]

The Balticization of the Russians

Beyond these cultural ties, the Russian-speakers in Estonia and Latvia have been heavily influenced by the titular populations as well. It would be impossible for the Russian-speaking community to live among the Baltic people during the Soviet period without adapting their culture to be more in line with the Estonians and Latvians. One of the main aspects of both Estonian and Latvian culture is a rejection of violence. Throughout their histories, both Estonia and Latvia have tried to avoid conflict and they describe themselves as pragmatic people who are similar to Scandinavians and Finns in their belief in non-violent strategies.[54] Lieven describes the Estonians as having the "fundamental quality of restraint, pragmatism, and indeed decency".[55] The most recent and most telling example of this commitment to non-violence was seen in the 'singing revolution' of 1989. Many believe that the Estonians and Latvians' refusal to use violence in their dealings with the Soviet Union shaped the Russians living in the region to such a point that violence was not perceived as a viable solution.[56] Due to their interactions both the Estonians and Latvians and the Russian-speaking populations within their borders now share a culture that has created a level of patience not found in other areas of the former Soviet Union.[57] This change is seen in the statement by the Former Deputy Mayor of Tallinn, Boris Yulegin:

> The Russians who have lived here all their
> lives have changed a lot. They have taken on
> something of the Estonian coolness, restraint and
> habit of hard work- whether they like it or not!
> They do not feel at home when they go to Russia.
> The Russians who come here also sometimes do
> not understand our character and ask us, 'Why
> don't you protest? Why don't you go on the streets?'[58]

The adaptation of the Russian-speaking community to Baltic culture is one of the few issues that both sides agree on. The current Estonian Minister for Population and Ethnic Affairs, Paul-Eerik Rummo contends that one of the leading causes for prolonged peace during the integration process was the embracing by the Russian community of the Estonian ideal of non-violence.[59] His predecessor Katrin Saks believes that the Russians have learned from the Estonians to "be tolerant, survive and integrate".[60] From the Russian-speaking perspective, Vadim Poleshchuk contends that Estonians and Russians now have the same view of what is involved in identity and have similar views on adherence to state institutions and practices which has led to a lack of violence.[61] In Latvia, Boris Tsilevich notes that the Russians never developed a leader who was willing to be responsible for bloodshed (which would have contrasted with the singing revolution) so violence was never a viable option.[62]

A New Russian-Speaking Identity

The Russian-speaking community in Estonia and Latvia finds itself in a unique position. The majority of them have a culture that is heavily influenced the heritage of the former Soviet Union and yet they do not share the exact same culture as those in the Russian federation. They have been influenced by the culture of their Estonian and Latvian neighbors, yet they have not fully integrated. It does not appear that a uniform culture can emerge. Those who arrived prior to 1940 are more influenced by the Baltic culture than those who arrived after the annexation. The latter group has an identity more closely linked to communism. Their ideological base was taken away from them after 1991 as it was no longer acceptable to be seen as communist. They have adapted to try to survive in this new reality. There appears to be a hybrid culture forming in the region with the Russian-speakers beginning to come to terms with their own unique history. This new cultural awareness is most prevalent among the young Russians in the region.[63] Laitin describes this as "a new form of national identity that blurs the divide between titular and non-titulars".[64] Laitin goes on to describe the new identity as 'russkoiazychnoe naselenie' or the Russian-Speaking population of the Baltic, neither Russian or Baltic, but both.[65]

Regardless of how the Russian-speaking communities in Estonia and Latvia define themselves, it is clear that their culture has prevented violence from occurring. They have been influenced by the Estonians and Latvians to avoid conflict and were aware that any use of violence would have prevented any advancement of their cause. Even if they had chosen to follow a more violent path, the policies of the Soviet Union in regards to not fostering Russian nationalism has made organizing around this nationality difficult. Combined the result is a new nationality that is prepared to endure hardships and does not think to resort to violence. With the Estonian and Latvian cultures also stressing non-violence, patience and pragmatism it is not difficult to ascertain why the region has been relatively violence free despite the real (and more importantly perceived) inequalities in the societies.

The Basques- Violence Begets Violence

The culture of the Basques would fall in between the non-violent, dis-organized culture of the Russians in the Baltic states, and the violence-accepting vendetta culture associated with the Corsicans. The Basques represent a culture that radically changed over the course of the 20th Century. While the acceptance of violence was not an aspect of their culture in the past, it became accepted in the face of extreme repression. When faced with this repression the Basques were able to draw upon specific aspects of their cultural past as inspiration and use other aspects for mobilization.

There are some that argue that there is nothing in Basque culture that makes them prone to violence.[66] Conversi believes that when the nationalism that developed in the Basque country is compared to that of the Catalans, there are the same opportunities for violence to have developed because both had used it in the past and there were times when "Catalonia was one of the most violent societies on the continent".[67] The fact remains, however, that Catalonia no longer has violence associated with it, yet the Basque country does. Therefore, while it may not be

inherent in Basque culture, there must be something within Basque culture that allows it to continue.

Most believe that it was the repression faced by the Basques during the Franco regime which radically altered the culture of the Basques. Kurlansky notes that for the Basques "culture has always been a political act, the primary demonstration of national identity. One of the keys to Basque survival is that political repression produces cultural revival".[68] Franco treated the Basques more severely than the Catalans or any other group in Spain. His goal was the eradication of the Basque culture and specifically the Basque language. This threat to the language had a pronounced impact on the Basques because much of Basque identity is tied to their language. The combination of the threat of having their language taken from them and the actually physical repression they endured (or heard others enduring) was enough to change how the Basques viewed violence. Due to Franco "Basque nationalism was reborn in a thoroughly new shape" and further "a new Basque identity was formed in the process".[69] When the ETA broke from the Basque Nationalist Party and began to employ violence against the state it was seen by the Basque people as a legitimate way of fighting back against Franco. The ETA was seen as something similar to Robin Hood, while their actions were illegal their motives were right and therefore they were embraced.[70] If Franco had not targeted the Basques and their culture to the level he did it is unknown if the Basque culture would have changed to such a point where it would have tolerated being associated with violence. As a result "ETA's violence achieved strong affective support within broad sectors of the Basque population, given the total prohibition on public expression of discontent or of any ideological or cultural manifestations from the official ideology. This state violence, symbolic and physical, provided legitimacy to the political violence".[71]

The ETA used references from the Basque culture to justify its actions. They have created a mythology that allows violence. An example is the use of the image of the mythical Basque soldier as proof that the Basques have always resisted foreign occupation. The Basque soldier (called Eudari) is thought to have been extremely adept at fighting, was very strong and extremely brave.[72] This is coupled with the myth of the rural farmer and even though the majority of the Basques are urban, the nationalist movement has always come from the villages and their lifestyle is transposed onto the entire population.[73] The idea of Basque strength is reinforced through the sporting activities enjoyed by the Basques. The majority of these activities emphasize bravery and brute strength. Bull-fighting was popularized by the Basques and many other sports emphasize strength.[74] Combined, these myths and cultural traits were used by the ETA to convince the people that not only were their goals noble but they were also in line with the Basques' historical culture.

When Franco died it was assumed that the violence by the Basques would end. The fact that this did not happen indicates the extent to which the Basques culture had changed. Within the nationalist movement today there is still a latent acceptance of some of the activities of the ETA and this acceptance is based on their memory (or in the case of the youth, those most active in the nationalist movement,

what they have been told) of their treatment in the past. This was particularly true during the transition from Franco, as Perez-Agote notes: "within nationalist circles, even those for whom the violence was politically incorrect, there was, nevertheless, a certain sentimental acceptance of it, based on biographical memories".[75] For those within the nationalist movements there is still the belief that the Basques are facing repression currently. They discuss the activities of the Spanish army and police and claim that the Basques continue to have violence forced upon them and their response is the same as what the ETA used during Franco's time, that violence is an understandable and logical reaction to violence.[76] This reaction to violence was seen until very recently in the actions of the terrorist activities of the ETA and also in the growing problem of young urban Basques fighting with both the Spanish and Basque authorities in activities known in Basque as *kale borroka.* The result is a situation where "violence is engendered, materialized, and reproduced as, and within a realm of, violence and terror woven by the rumors of abuse and death circulating within the Basque country".[77] While the ETA's level of support continued to drop to the point that they recently agreed to disband, clearly there are aspects of the new Basque culture which allowed for violence to exist long past when it would have been assumed to die out. This phenomenon is described by Gorka Espiau as the persistence of the logic of violence within Basque society.[78]

It would be remiss if the role of Spanish culture was not addressed briefly. As with the Corsicans and the French state, it is the competing cultures in the Basque country and Spain which contributes to the conflict. The main aspect of Spanish culture which makes the conflict continue is the belief that the Basque region is a part of the Spanish state and there is a lack of understanding that minorities exist in Spain and that they may have needs and goals different from those of the Spanish.[79] Another important cultural factor is the lack of willingness to compromise. In Spanish there is no actual word for compromise, to give in while negotiating is seen as weakness.[80] This leads to a psychological impasse in that neither side is in a position where they can effectively negotiate without being seen as losing honor. As a result the situation has evolved to the point where Dr. Ruiz-Vieytez, Director of the Basque Human Rights Institute describes the relationship between the Basque and Spanish people as "completely broken".[81]

Conclusion

This paper has illustrated the importance of culture in predicting political violence and mobilization. If the culture of a group is such that violence is considered a normal response to a disagreement then this will carry over to the political sphere as well. On the other hand, groups whose culture does not tolerate violence will be more likely to remain peaceful no matter what discrimination they happen to face. This paper has also shown that the culture of a group can change over time but those changes occur slowly due to the Avruch's argument of the lack of uniformity in the group's use of cultural traits across the group as a whole. Moreover, this paper has shown that an analysis of a group's culture can be undertaken without Geertz's thick description.

The cases show three different types of cultures. The culture of the Russians in Estonia and Latvia is influenced by both the titular population with whom they interact and the nationality policies of the Soviet Union. This has created a unique new identity different than any others in the region. This culture is both non-violent and unorganized and it maintains aspects of the Russian fatalistic view of life and adds the pragmatism for which the Baltic communities are known. The result is a group that appears almost incapable of resorting to violence. While individual Russian-speakers may be angry by the policies introduced by Estonia and Latvia they have not resorted to violence and no one in the region appears to believe that they ever will.

The Corsicans are a close-knit community based on clan loyalties. This culture promotes the need to maintain honor and as a result a vendetta culture has developed that accepts violence as an aspect of negotiation. The concept of the noble bandit is embraced and those who continue to break the laws and use violence to achieve political goals, while not endorsed by the majority of the population, are accepted and are seen as carrying on the traditions of the community. If violence is accepted as a part of life and by extension politics then it is extremely difficult to end the cycle of violence that has begun on the island. It apparently does not take a great deal of state action to warrant violence and since the state has a responsibility to try to end the violence they will continue to face resistance and the resulting continuation of violence.

The Basques represent a culture in flux. While historically neither adamantly non-violent like the Baltic states nor embracing violence like the Corsicans, their culture was changed due to severe repression. When faced with the possibility of cultural eradication they began to embrace the need to fight back using any means necessary and as a result violence became an acceptable part of their culture. Those spearheading the resistance were able to use aspects of their existing culture to justify their actions in terms of history. Their cause being noble allowed for the use of violence and an acceptance of such activity by the community, including those who did not use it themselves. Now that the severe repression has ended the Basque culture is once again in transition. There are those who remember the repression faced by the Basques and see it as continuing today and for them violence is still an important aspect of their culture. They are willing to tolerate the violence and those who are involved in it, however, others want to return to the culture of before Franco when they were still strong but not violent. There were enough Basques who believed in the former to allow the ETA to attract many young Basques embracing the romantic ideals of the ETA and continued to embrace violence long after the threat to their culture was in fact real.

These are only three examples designed to illustrate the different types of culture that potentially can help predict levels of ethnic conflict. This paper does not contend that culture alone is enough to predict the potential for conflict, but it has illustrated the usefulness as a tool culture can play for researchers. This paper shows how a cultural explanation can fill in the gaps left unanswered by other structural or rational theories. Structural theories such as grievance theory can not explain why the

Russians in Estonia and Latvia have not become more militant having watched the discrepancy between themselves and the titular group grow. Conversely, rational choice theories can not explain the continued violence in Corsica and why the ETA was able to exist after the death of Franco. Techniques need to be refined to further the understanding of culture, but what this paper demonstrates is that it cannot be ignored any longer.

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[1] Stephen Cornell and Douglas Hartmann (1998) *Ethnicity and Race* (Thousand Oaks: Pine Forge Press), p.173.

[2] Ibid, p.174.

[3] Ibid.

[4] For the Rational Choice theory see Mancur Olson (1965) *The Logic of Collective Action* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press) and for an example of the theory being used in explaining the use of violence see Mark Irving Lichbach (1998) *The Rebel's Dilemma* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press).

[5] See Ted Robert Gurr (1970) *Why Men Rebel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press).

[6] Marc Howard Ross (1997) "Culture and Identity in Comparative Political Analysis" in Mark Irving Lichbach and Alan S. Zuckerman ed., *Comparative Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), p.46.

[7] Ibid, p.47. See also Marc Howard Ross (1993) *The Culture of Conflict* (New Haven: Yale University Press).

[8] There were other culture based studies prior to Geertz, most notably Gabriel A. Almond and Sidney Verba (1963) *The Civic Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press). Geertz became the biggest advocate of using culture in his explanation however.

[9] Quoted in Clifford Geertz (1973) *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books), pp.4-5.

[10] Ibid, p.20.

[11] James C. Scott (1985) *Weapons of the Weak* (New Haven: Yale University Press).

[12] Frantz Fanon (1963) *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press).

[13] Peter J. Katzenstein (1996) "Introduction: Alternative Perspectives on National Security" in Peter J. Katzenstein ed., *The Culture of National Security* (New York: Columbia University Press) p. 22.

[14] Alastair Iain Johnston (1996) "Cultural Realism and Strategy in Maoist China" in Katzenstein ed., p. 222.

[15] Elizabeth Keil (1996) "Culture and French Military Doctrine Before World War II" in Katzenstein ed., p.187.

[16] Kevin Avruch (1998) *Culture & Conflict Resolution* (Washington: United States Institute of Peace Press).

[17] Schwartz quoted in Avruch, p.17.
[18] Paul Theroux (1995) *The Pillars of Hercules* (New York: Fawcett Columbine), p. 135.

[19] Alexandra Jaffe (1999) *Ideologies in Action: Language Politics in Corsica* (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter Press), p.49.

[20] Ibid, p.51.

[21] Phone interview with Paul Giacobbi, President Haute Corse (North Corsica), August 7 2003.

[22] Ibid.

[23] Ibid.

[24] Telephone interview with with Dr. John Loughlin, School of European Studies-Cardiff University, June 30 2003.

[25] Ibid.

[26] Ibid.

[27] Ibid.

[28] Jaffe (1999), p.44.

[29] Ibid.

[30] Interview with Frederic de Touchet, Political Advisor Permanent Mission of France to the OSCE, July 28 2003 Vienna. While de Touchet admits that the unitary state and the nature of French nationalism contributes to the problem, he contends that Corsica is more of a "pain than a conflict". Possibly illustrating the idea of a clash of cultures, de Touchet believes that it is the closed nature of Corsican culture that is the main cause of the problems, not the actions of the French government.

[31] Phone interview with Giacobbi 2003.

[32] Quoted in Jaffe (1999), p.45. Originally published in French in *Le Monde* on March 19, 1989.

[33] Ibid. The quote is originally by Culioli and is translated from French by Jaffe.

[34] In the interest of space, this paper will concentrate on the ethnic Russians of the Russian-speaking population. As discusses previously there are many Russian-speakers of Ukrainian and Belarusian decent. The majority are ethnic Russians and therefore will be discussed here in relation to their unique position in Soviet society.

[35] See Triin Vihalemm and Anu Masso (2003) "Identity Dynamics of Russian-speakers of Estonia in the Transition Period" *Journal of Baltic Studies* Vol.34 No.1, pp.92-116, for their analysis of the competing arguments of Russian-Speakers cultural identification.

[36] For a full discussion of the development of Russian nationalism see Vera Tolz (2001) *Russia* (London: Arnold Publishing).

[37] Yuri Slezkine (1994) "The USSR as a Communal Apartment, or How a Socialist State Promoted Ethnic Particularism" *Slavic Review* Vol.53 No.2, p.414.

[38] Yitzhak M. Brundy (1998) *Reinventing Russia* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press), p.15.

[39] Jeff Chinn and Robert Kaiser (1996) *Russians as the New Minority* (Boulder: Westview Press), p.25.

[40] Ibid.

[41] Slezkine (1994), p.435.

[42] Boris Tsilevich, a Russian activist and former Member of Parliament in Latvia notes that the Russian community in Latvia has never looked to nationalism as an option. He believes that they have had to rely on more pragmatic issues on which to rally around. Interview in Riga, July 15 2003.

[43] Interview with Interview with Falk Lang, Senior Advisor to the High Commissioner (The Baltics), The Hague, June 26-27 2003.

[44] Reinis Āboltiņš Director of the Society Integration Department- Former Advisor to the President, July 17 2003, Riga.

[45] Ken Jowitt (1992) *New World Disorder* (Berkeley: University of California Press), p.288.

[46] Interview with Vadim Poleshchuk, Legal Advisor- Legal Information Centre for Human Rights, July 10 2003, Tallinn.

[47] Gregory Guroff and Alexander Guroff (1994) "The Paradox of Russian National Identity" in Roman Szporluk, ed. *National Identity and Ethnicity in Russia and the New States of Eurasia* (New York: M.E. Sharpe), p.87.

[48] Alexei Arbatov (1997) "A Framework for Assessing Post-Soviet Conflicts" in Alexei Arbatov, Abraham Chayes, Antonia Handler Chayes and Lara Olson, ed., *Managing Conflict in the Former Soviet Union: Russian and American Perspectives* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press), p.20.

[49] Interview with Max van der Stoel, Former OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities, June 26 2003, The Hague.

[50] Richard Rose (2000) *New Baltic Barometer IV: A Survey Study* (Glasgow: University of Strathclyde Press), p. 63.

[51] Ibid, p.48. In Latvia the percentages for non-Latvians was 41% and 58% agreeing respectfully.

[52] As Mati Luik, the Director of the Non-Estonian Integration Foundation notes the Russian-speakers reliance on Russian television has been a severe hindrance on integration in Estonia as many Russian-speakers do not have an understanding of issues in Estonia. They only are aware of news from Russia. Interview in Tallinn, July 10 2003.

[53] Rose (2000), p. 62.

[54] See for example the discussion of the Estonians and Latvians use of non-violence in Walter C. Clemens (2001) *The Baltic Transformed* (Lanham MD: Rowman and Littlefield Press).

[55] Anatol Lieven (1993) *The Baltic Revolution* (New Haven: Yale University Press), p.20.

[56] Interview with Illze Brand Kehris, Director of the Latvian Centre for Human Rights and Ethnic Studies, July 14 2003, Riga.

[57] Interview with Falk Lang, 2003 and Mati Luik, 2003. The tolerance of the Latvian society and its impact on the Russian-speaking community was also discussed by Former Latvian Prime Minister Valdis Birkavs in an interview in Riga on July 14 2003.

[58] Quoted in Lieven (1993), p.178.

[59] Interview with Interview with Paul-Eerik Rummo, Estonian Minister for Population and Ethnic Affairs, July 9 2003, Tallinn.

[60] Interview with Katrin Saks, Estonian Member of Parliament, Former Minister of Population and Ethnic Affairs (1999-2002), July 10 2003, Tallinn.

[61] Interview with Poleshchuk, 2003.

[62] Interview with Tsilevich, 2003.

[63] Triin Vihalemm and Anu Masso (2002) "Patterns of Self-identification among the Younger Generation of Estonian Russians" in Marju Lauristin and Mati Heidmets, ed., *The Challenge of the Russian Minority* (Tartu: Tartu University Press).

[64] David Laitin (1998) *Identity in Formation* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press), p.158.

[65] Ibid, p.190. This idea of a new Russian-Speaker in the Baltic identity is also discussed in Vihalemm and Masso (2003).

[66] This was emphasized in an telephone interview with Ignacio Sũarez-Zuloaga, Basque Author, August 14 2003. Mr. Sũarez-Zuloaga did admit that the Basques do have a culture that sees themselves as victims in the past.

[67] Daniele Conversi (1997) *The Basques, the Catalans and Spain* (Reno: University of Nevada Press), p.222.

[68] Mark Kurlansky (1999) *The Basque History of the World* (Toronto: Vintage Canada), p.158.

[69] Conversi (1997), p.231.

[70] Interview with Ibon Mendibelzva, Adviser- Press Services, Basque Country Delegation to the European Union, July 22 2003, Brussels.

[71] Alfonso Perez-Agote (1999) "The Future of Basque Identity" in William A. Douglass et al., ed., *Basque Politics and Nationalism on the Eve of the Millennium* (Reno: Basque Studies Program, University of Nevada), p.63.

[72] Phone interview with Prof. Santiago Petschen, Professor of Political and Sociological Sciences, Universidad Complutense Madrid, August 4 2003.

[73] Interview with Luis Francisco Martinez Montes- Counselor to the Spanish delegation OSCE, July 28 2003, Vienna.

[74] Phone interview with Petschen, 2003.

[75] Perez-Agote (1999), p.64.

[76] Interview with Esther Agirre, Former Member of Parliament- Batasuna, August 19 2003, Bilbao.

[77] Begona Aretxaga (1999) "A Hall of Mirrors: On the Spectral Character of Basque Violence" in Douglass et al., p.117.

[78] Interview with Gorka Espiau, Director and Spokesperson Elkarri, August 18 2003, Bilbao. Davis also notes that there is a split in Basque society between what he refers to as 'active' and 'non-national' Basques. These two versions of Basque identity have very different views of the ETA and group mobilization. Thomas C. Davis (1997) "Patterns of Identity: Basques and the Basque Nation" *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics* Vol.3 No.1, pp.61-88.

[79] Interview with Gorka Espiau, 2003.

[80] Ibid.

[81] Interview with Dr. Eduardo Ruiz-Vieytez, Director of the Basque Human Rights Institute, August 17 2003, Bilbao.