

17.523: Ethnicity and Race in World Politics-Fall 2005

Prof. M. Nobles

Lecture 6: What are the Political Dimensions of Ethnicity and Race? (Contd.)

Kurds and Nicaragua

- First chapter, Kurds and Miskito Indians.
 - Both want autonomy
 - Kurds
 - Book provides history with a focus on the Ottoman Empire.
 - Who are the Kurds?
 - They see themselves as a national group.
 - They speak a shared language, but there are also different dialects.
 - Most are Muslims.
 - Perceive themselves as having a history of hardship.
 - In general, there is the myth of shared origins.
 - Ottoman Empire was large.
 - People were members of the Empire, and were organized along religious lines, not ethnic.
 - With dissolution of Empire after WWI, Allied Powers broke it up.
 - Turks wanted their own state. Didn't want to share it with Kurds.
 - Second treaty in 1923 (Treaty of Lausanne) set out present day boundaries.
 - Made it impossible for the establishment an independent Kurdish state.
 - Punchline
 - Kurds lost. Didn't get what they wanted. Kurdish nationalists feel entitled to an independent state because the Treaty of Sevres originally provided for one, but the Treaty of Lausanne was the one that was actually put into effect and didn't allow for an independent Kurdistan.
 - Turkey, Iraq, and Syria got what they wanted→independent country.
 - If Kurdistan was established, Turkey would lose land.
 - Kurds see themselves as losing out on an opportunity.
 - This situation resulted in a political circumstance that can also help strengthen Kurdish identity. It has the potential to build up a sense of historical grievance.
 - A large international interest exists in the region because of oil.
 - What has happened to the Kurds in Turkey?
 - Turkey rejects the existence of a Kurdish identity.

- Turks force a policy of assimilation up until the late 1980s –early 1990s.
 - Kurds couldn't claim that they were Kurds (called mountain Turks), they weren't allowed to speak the language.
 - The denial of identity undercuts any claims to independence.
- Things got better for the Kurds in the 90s
 - Turkey wants to enter EU
 - It is speculated by some that the EU has been hesitant because of the majority of Turks are Muslim. The EU is predominately Christian and Turkey is Muslim. EU has not bluntly rejected Turkey for this reason, but it is speculated.
 - Turkey's desire to get into the EU has forced it to address its treatment of the Kurds.
 - EU wants to see a more multicultural Turkey that shows accommodation of its Kurdish minority.
- What would explain the reticence of some Turkish officials to better treatment of Kurds?
 - Recognition of Kurds could lead to separation of Kurds from Turkish population, adds fuel to a separatist movement.
 - A challenge to Turkish nationalism and national identity.
- Should governments be fearful of potential separatism?
 - Student: nationalism is very important. It's probably not possible to crush a nationalist movement, and it has a high price.
 - Student: long term, it won't help to crush separatism movements. It works for the short-term.
 - Student: Make the minority happy, and they won't have a reason to want a separate state.
- Prior to Iraqi war, the real carrot for Turkey was entry into the EU
 - If Turkey could become more multicultural
- Everything changed with the Iraqi war
 - Iraq has a large Kurdish population and due to the instability during war and post-war, the Kurds could potentially have their own independent country.
 - Not everyone is going to have the same view. The Kurds in Iraq may not be on board with everything as the Kurds in Turkey. And vice versa.
- Pan identities are very difficult because different factions have different agendas (e.g. Kurds in Iraq vs. Kurds in Turkey).
- Kurds in Iran
 - Kurds fought some in Iran for autonomy, but didn't seem as determined as in Turkey.

- Nicaragua, Central America
 - Miskito Indians
 - Protestant Religion
 - Language: Indigenous Miskito
 - Part of their distinctiveness is their connection with the British. Colonized by protestants, not the Spaniards
 - Their region had been recognized by British.
 - Exercised a lot of political independence because British tolerated it.
 - Spoke English.
 - In 1894, Nicaragua was careful not to tread on the independence of the Miskito Indians.
 - Miskito lands rich in lumber, and bananas and attractive to mining interests
 - Many American firms set up shop in that area, and people were exploited in the banana plantations.
 - Many Miskito men especially worked on these plantations and in the mines. As a result of these jobs, many moved away from subsistence agriculture.
 - In 1936-1979. Somoza family dictatorship rules by force
 - U.S. supported him, in part, because he did not threaten U.S. economic interests.
 - Somoza family wanted some share of the region's wealth and made some inroads, but didn't threaten the U.S. hold. Also, didn't infringe on political autonomy of Miskitos.
 - Somoza didn't have a bad reputation because he gave the Miskitos a certain amount of political autonomy.
 - Somoza overthrown in 1979 and left national treasury essentially bankrupt.
 - Sandinistas come in.
 - Seen as threat by U.S. (Reagan administration) because of Marxist ideology.
 - Sandinistas wanted to institute populist policies
 - Promoted people's revolution through land redistribution.
 - Required very active government intervention, including where the Miskitos lived.
 - At first there were good relations between Miskitos and Sandinistas. Over time, buying in, meant selling out to the Miskitos Indians. Meant losing autonomy.
 - When they thought the government was a threat, the Miskitos picked up arms.
 - It would have remained a small story if it hadn't have been for the Cold War.
 - The Miskito Indians known as the Contras were supported by U.S. and the conflict escalated from a national issue to an international issue.

- Could the Sandinistas have done something different?
 - Student: When bringing the country together as one, it's hard to understand a group's desire to do the complete opposite. It's mixed ideologies that were incompatible.
 - Student: need to look at the situations of the Sandinistas.
- Is there a difference between Turkey's treatment of the Kurds and the Sandinistas treatment of the Miskitos?
 - Student: speculating, Sandinistas would team with Miskitos for a common good.
 - They were driven by notion to redistribute wealth more fairly than had ever been done. They thought naively that the Miskitos would be better off. Didn't take into account the ethnic identity of Miskitos or their desires.
 - Reagan said that by virtue of it being a revolution, the Sandinistas coming to power was illegitimate. (They were not democratically elected.)
- "Country of No Heroes" reading
 - No one pays attention to Nicaragua anymore.
 - USSR dissolved
 - Cuba is adrift.
 - Threat of communist revolution in western hemisphere is no more.
- Chinese in Malaysia
 - Who are the main groups in Malaysia?
 - Malays (46% based on survey in 90s)
 - Are considered Malaysia's indigenous peoples.
 - Survived by working the land. Agricultural people.
 - Didn't want to recognize British rule.
 - Politically loyal to local sultans
 - Chinese (32 %)
 - British brought them over for work.
 - Arrived during late 19th century along with Pakistani
 - Most came from south china.
 - There is an ethnic division of labor prior to WWI
 - Malays are mostly in the agricultural sector, some in civil service
 - Chinese were in public sector. Some in mines.
 - Chinese were loyal to British
 - Others: Pakistani (8%), other(2%)
 - British content to rule indirectly.
 - In 1948-early 1950s, known as "the emergency"
 - Allowed for crackdown of Chinese who were members of the communist party
 - During WWII, the communists and Chinese were main resistors of Japanese occupation of Malaysia.

- Independence comes in 1957
 - Malaysia's elite is comprised of Malay, Chinese and Indians
 - The political compromise: Indians and Chinese will submit to Malay political dominance and in return, there will be acceptance of Indian and Chinese cultures. Malays are to be deliberately advantaged by certain public policies because they are indigenous.
 - Importance.
 - Tacit agreement among elites, not popular agreement
 - Enshrined in Malay constitution.
- Chinese democratic action party decided they didn't like this elite agreement.
 - Argued for equal rights for all citizens.
 - Riots ensued and were directed at Chinese.