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ABSTRACT

Dominant-ethnic group conflict can be treated as either an independent or dependent variable. In this paper, dominant-ethnic conflict is discussed as the dependent variable. The paper's objectives are to: (1) present a preliminary sociological realistic theory of dominant-ethnic conflict; (2) compare and contrast the theory in terms of 2 types of models (a "static model" and processual system); (3) illustrate by the processual system the theoretical advantages of considering "feedback loops"; and (4) discuss the methodological distinctions in terms of a classification of different types of relations and linkages. The type of conflict discussed is one which is infrequent, intense, and violent. The theory holds that conflict between an ethnic and a dominant group is a function of 13 independent variables. Among these 13 variables are the competitive threat, large power differences, loss of powerful friends (by dominants), gain of powerful enemies (by dominants), ethnocentrism, degree of segregation, and goal contradictions. In the "static model", all the independent variables simultaneously influence the dependent variable. In the processual system, each and every variable has both independent and dependent functions. (NQ)

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A THEORY OF DOMINANT-ETHNIC GROUP CONFLICT

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A THEORY OF DOMINANT-ETHNIC GROUP CONFLICT

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The outburst of ethnic social movements in the 1960s in the United States was not even remotely anticipated by sociologists, and to compound our ineptitude we were caught with our conceptual pants down -- the sociology of conflict is profoundly underdeveloped as Dahrendorf (1957) has demonstrated. This paper is an attempt to make a contribution to an emerging theory of social conflict. For current contributions see the Reference List at the end of this paper.

Obviously dominant-ethnic group conflict can be treated as either an independent or dependent variable. Grimshaw (1969) points out that prejudice and discrimination are not so much the cause of dominant-ethnic conflict, contrary to the usual assumption, but that conflict is the more fundamental cause of prejudice and discrimination. In this paper, however, we shall take dominant-ethnic conflict as the dependent variable.

One recent and important contribution to the emerging field of dominant-ethnic conflict is that of Newman (1973). Newman begins his theory by first dividing the dependent variable, conflict, into three dimensions: frequency, intensity, and violence (see Glossary 1). He points out, of course, that these dimensions are not necessarily correlated -- there can

be, for example, frequency without violence, and vice-versa.

The theory which Newman (1973) presents is really not a theory of the "causes" of all ethnic conflict, but rather a consideration of two, broad, static, limiting conditions -- segregation-desegregation and reward parity-disparity -- within which both ethnic group conflict and prejudice and discrimination occur. How do all ethnic group conflicts begin? Newman (1973) has no explicit answer to this question; surely his two explicit independent variables -- segregation-desegregation and reward parity-disparity -- are insufficient at best. It is precisely the question of cause which Newman does not systematically answer with which we are concerned. This paper, therefore, presents our preliminary, general theory about the causes of ethnic group conflict.

II. SOME RELEVANT VARIABLES

What are the causes of dominant-ethnic group conflict? We shall arbitrarily limit the effect, the causes of which we are seeking, to only one type of conflict -- conflict which is infrequent, intense, and violent.

Our theory holds that conflict between an ethnic and a dominant group is a function of 13 independent variables. Included among these thirteen are Newman's previously mentioned two, plus one other from Newman -- the competitive threat posed by the ethnics. We shall first briefly discuss some of the more involved and less self-evident of them.

(Table 1 about here)

The twelfth independent variable in Table 1 is class difference. The only thing we wish to say here is that we prefer the standard term, class differences, i.e., differences in stratification variables, to Newman's neologism of reward disparity.

The first independent variable in Table 1 is power difference. The first hypothesis may be stated thus: The greater the power differences between the dominant and the subordinate ethnic group, the greater is the likelihood that conflict will be infrequent, but intense and violent when it does occur. We shall argue that power relations, and particularly as they interact with competitive threat, are the best single indicator of ethnic group conflict, and, indeed, that they profoundly influence the effect of all the other independent variables.

For example, let us take a look at the fifth independent variable listed in Table 1, contradictions in goals. Schermerhorn (1970) rightly argues that Wirth's (1945) "classical" typology of minority groups based on their goals is inadequate because it fails to take into account the majority group's or dominant group's goals. What is needed for an adequate typology is a cross-classification of the goals of both the ethnic and the dominant groups. Thus it is not the content of the dominant group's goals that is important, for example, forced assimilation or segregation, but whether or not the dominant group's goal contradicts the ethnic group's

goal. The probability of conflict is increased if the goals are contradictory.

However, even in the case of contradictory goals between the dominant and ethnic group, the amount and kind of conflict is profoundly influenced by the state of the power relations between the two groups. If, for example, the ethnics perceive the power of the dominant group as declining, conflict initiated by the ethnic group is more likely.

Under what conditions will the power of the dominants be perceived as declining? The answer to this question transforms the hypothesis from a static to a dynamic one. The answer is that the power of the dominant group will be perceived as declining when: (1) the dominant group is seen as losing powerful friends; (2) the dominant group is seen as gaining powerful enemies; and (3) the ethnic group's power increases even though the dominant group's power has not changed. Often the decreasing power of the dominant group is accompanied by a de-legitimation of its establishment (see Glossary 1). However, a group can be very de-legitimated and still maintain its dominant power position, e.g., the Union of South Africa.

Let us move on to the sixth independent variable listed in Table 1, the degree of competitive threat. Newman gives us the following proposition: "The frequency of intergroup conflict is directly proportional to the degree to which different groups view each other as competitive threats to their social resources, to the resources they wish to obtain,

or to their basic social values" (Newman, 1973: 112). These resources can include economic, political, and demographic ones, e.g., voting in a democracy. Note that Newman's definition of threat includes both fear of losing a present resource plus the hope of future gain. We agree completely with the idea that competitive threat is an important variable, but wish to emphasize that only the powerful can afford to do anything about it.

Moving on to the seventh independent variable listed in Table 1, we encounter a particular pattern of status inconsistency in which the ethnics are higher in achieved status and lower in ascribed status as compared with the dominants who are higher in ascribed status and lower in achieved status. According to this hypothesis, see Demerath (1965), actors exhibiting the former pattern will tend to blame either themselves or the weak for their problems. Even in this situation of status strain, however, the dominants must have the power to either prevent aggression by the ethnics, or to take further advantage of the situation.

We turn next to the thirteenth independent variable in Table 1, changing Channels of Legitimate Protest. Most societies do provide some sort of legitimate protest channels through which dissident citizens can engage in more or less active disagreement with their authorities. In the U. S., to take a case, citizens have the right to take the government to court under certain conditions. The norms, legal and other-

wise, often permit a controlled form of protest "in order to" prevent more uncontrolled, large-scale protest in the future. Legitimate channels of protest often serve the function of "cooling out the losers." The legal system in the U. S. often functions in exactly this manner, e.g., civil rights, the right to assembly, the right to petition and recall, collective bargaining, etc. are illustrative of the point.

An hypothesis may be stated thus: Any change, in the legitimate channels of protest, either the opening up or closing off of them, increases the likelihood of dominant-ethnic conflict. The significant factor in this proposition is the change, the closing or opening of the channels, which can, under certain conditions, lead to conflict. One of the most important of these conditions is power; the dominant group must have sufficient power to prevent aggressive action by the ethnics as a result of their frustration over the closing of the channels, or the power to prevent the escalation of demands which often follow the opening of channels.

A paper of this type does not permit further specification of all possible first-order, interrelationships between the independent variables and the dependent variables, but we hope that the reader can infer the rest of the first-order propositions.

III. A PRELIMINARY THEORY OF DOMINANT-ETHNIC CONFLICT

What are the "causes" of dominant-ethnic conflict? We

again arbitrarily limit the effect, the causes of which we are seeking, to only one type of conflict -- conflict which is infrequent, intense, and violent.

Obviously, the independent variables presented above in Table 1 do not act in isolation from each other -- they are "causally" linked (Zetterburg, 1965) to each other in various ways (see Glossary II). In this context, therefore, we wish to consider as parsimoniously as possible the following two questions. (1) What is the joint effect of these independent variables as they act simultaneously on the dependent variable? And, (2) what other types of "causal" linkages will we consider? In order to answer both these questions we employ Meehan's notion of the system paradigm mode of presentation (Meehan, 1968). We shall attempt to answer each question in turn by presenting a separate "system" paradigm or model for each. Figure 1 organizes our initial answer to the first question concerning the effect of the independent variables acting simultaneously, and Figure 2 organizes our answer to the second question concerning other types of "causal" linkages.

So, what is the joint effect of all independent variables as they act simultaneously on the dependent variable? See Figure 1 below.

(Figure 1 about here)

The model contained in Figure 1 now enables us to develop more systematically the propositions we alluded to before, plus some more complex propositions.

Time and space limitations do not permit us to formalize all of the propositions, simple and complex, contained in Figure 1, but we do wish to state explicitly one of the most significant propositions in the set. Conflict between dominant and ethnic groups of the infrequent, intense, and violent kind is much more likely when a highly ethnocentric dominant group, with a tradition of prejudice and discrimination against a particular ethnic group, perceives that ethnic group as a competitive threat to its resources or to any resources it wishes to obtain. This holds if and only if the dominant group believes that it is sufficiently powerful to win the conflict and obtain the desired resource.

This proposition is obviously long and complex, but it is even more obviously sociologically realistic: it avoids atomistic reductionism, psychologistic reductionism, and simplistic two-variable statements. Up until very recently the general treatment of the subject of ethnic conflict has not been sociologically realistic, at least not in any systematic sense.

Note that in Figure 1 almost all independent variables impinge directly on the dependent variable, conflict; the exception is the following triad of variables: de-legitimation, loss of powerful friends, and the gaining of powerful enemies by the dominants all of which feed into the power-difference variable. This exception makes our model more dynamic than Newman's because we can with this triad of variables predict when the power differences will begin to decline.

Figure 1, however, fails to consider other types of relationships and linkages. For example, Figure 1 seems to imply for the most part that the independent variables do not influence each other, but this is manifestly untrue. Of course, the relevant question here is whether or not the independent variables interact in a manner such that they influence the dependent variable. See Glossary II for a classification of the possible types of relationships or linkages which can obtain between two or more variables.

(Figure 2 about here)

One feature of any relationship is time, and one type of temporal relationship is the sequential one; formally stated we have: sequential, if X, then later Y. Figure 1 did not have a time dimension, but Figure 2 does. In general the variables on the left hand side of the page came logically and temporally before the variables on the right hand side of the page, e.g., the independent variables of class difference, tradition, etc. come on the extreme left and the dependent variable, conflict, is on the extreme right. This is one advantage of Figure 2 over Figure 1, but there are many others.

Another advantage of the model in Figure 2 is that it permits us to present the interrelated variables as a processual system. A processual system is one in which all variables both act and are acted upon or serve both independent and dependent functions. Note that in Figure 2 all variables

except one, the dependent variable, have arrows going into them and coming out of them. There is no logical reason why the dependent variable could not, and in fact often does, act as an independent variable, too, and "feedback" into the system. Ethnic conflict takes time, and its outcome at any one point is determined in part by the action of both parties after the conflict has begun. However, in this paper our goal is to explain the onset of the conflict, and not its perpetuation and final outcome. Because of this exception Figure 2 does not qualify as a complete processual system.

Thus far in the paper we have stressed the theoretical importance of the power difference concept; however, a glance at Figure 2 must force us, in all honesty, to revise this emphasis somewhat. A rule of thumb for judging the relative theoretical importance of any concept within a processual system, as represented by a graphic design, is the number of arrows coming into and going out of it. By this rule the competitive threat concept emerges as a most theoretically significant one.

Another advantage of Figure 2 is that it enables us to deal with the feedback loops which, on theoretical grounds, we have good reason to expect. A feedback loop in General System Theory (Bertalanffy, 1968) may be defined as follows.

Any relationship between at least two variables (X and Y) which is reversible (i.e., if X then later Y) such that the change in value of one variable (X) changes the value of the other variable (Y), and in time (Y) changes (X); this relationship is a feedback loop.

In negative feedback loops the changes of the values of the variables remain within a

given range (set by the goals or norms of the system). Negative feedback loops are deviation counteracting.

In positive feedback loops the changes of the values of variables goes beyond a certain range, and frequently go radically beyond. Positive feedback loops are deviation amplifying.

Let us take a concrete example from Figure 2. Note the interrelationships between the four variables: Power Differences, Competitive Threat, changing Channels of Legitimate Protest, and De-legitimation. A change in the power difference leads to or is associated with an increase in competitive threat, which often leads the dominants to alter the channels of legitimate protest, which in turn increases the de-legitimation of the system, which then influences the power differences, which finally set the whole cycle into operation again. In short, in this case we have a positive feedback loop and a deviation amplification of considerable magnitude; if trips around this loop continue, the conflict will escalate dramatically.

What will stop this acceleration or kick function? The two possibilities we wish to point up are: (1) a successful ethnic movement, or (2) a victory by the dominants. Both of these changes will return the system to a steady state. While we have talked about the consequences of our particular feedback loop, we have not talked about what "starts" the feedback loop into operation in the first place.

Upon what is the feedback loop in this case contingent? This kick function is contingent in our model on the pre-

existing structural and cultural factors: changing class differences, ethnocentrism, and a tradition of prejudice and discrimination. A contingent relation, by definition, can be stated thus: contingent, if X, then Y, but only if Z (see GlossaryII). In terms of Figure 2 we are saying that declining power differences (X) will "kick off" the feedback loop (Y), if the pre-existing structural and cultural factors mentioned above (Z) are changing, and our theory postulates that they are indeed changing.

So, to sum up the advantages of the model in Figure 2 over the Figure 1 model: (1) it permits us to deal with time, with sequential relations; (2) it permits us to construct a processual model in which we can deal with reversible and co-extensive relations; (3) it permits us to deal with feedback loops which also involve reversible and sequential relations; and finally (4) it permits us to illustrate and operate in terms of contingency relations.

IV. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

In this paper we have worked at accomplishing the following objectives: (1) to present a preliminary sociologically realistic theory of dominant-ethnic conflict; (2) to compare and contrast our theory in terms of two types of models -- a "static model" in which all independent variables simultaneously influence the dependent variable, versus a processual system in which each and every variable has both independent and

dependent functions; (3) to illustrate by our processual system the theoretical advantages of considering feedback loops; and finally (4) to discuss our methodological distinctions in terms of a classification of different types of relations and linkages.

We argue that our substantive theory is sociologically realistic and that our General Systems' approach to this problem, although complex, helps us to shed some systematic light on a complex but often oversimplified phenomenon. And finally, that if this type of approach is followed in the future a more fruitful type of dominant-ethnic conflict will be developed.

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INDEPENDENT VARIABLES	DEPENDENT VARIABLES: CONFLICT		
	Frequency	Intensity	Violence
1. Large Power Differences	-	+	+
2. De-legitimation of Establishment	+	+	+
3. Loss of Powerful Friends (by Dominants)	+	+	+
4. Gaining of Powerful Enemies (by Dominants)	+	+	+
5. Contradictions in Goals	+	+	+
6. Competitive Threat	+	+	+
7. Status Inconsistency Pattern	+	+	+
8. High Relative Deprivation for both	+	+	+
9. Tradition of Prejudice and Discrimination	-	+	+
10. Ethnocentrism	+	+	+
11. Degree of Segregation	-	+	+
12. Large Class Differences	-	+	+
13. Changing Channels of Legitimate Protest	+	+	+

Legend:

+ = a positive relationship, and - = a negative relationship

Table 1. Dimensions of Conflict by 13 Independent Variables

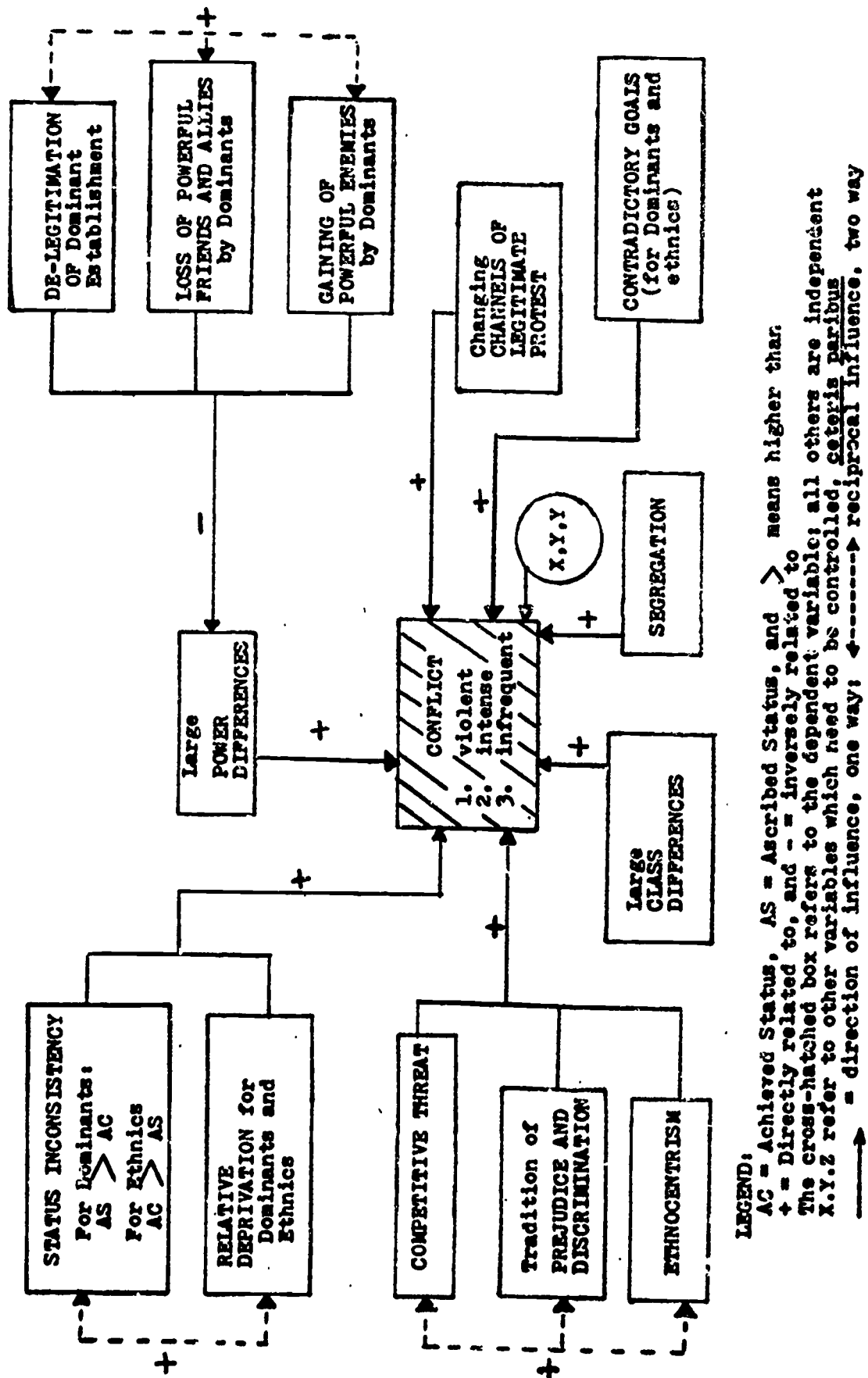


FIGURE 1. A MODEL OF DOMINANT-ETHNIC CONFLICT

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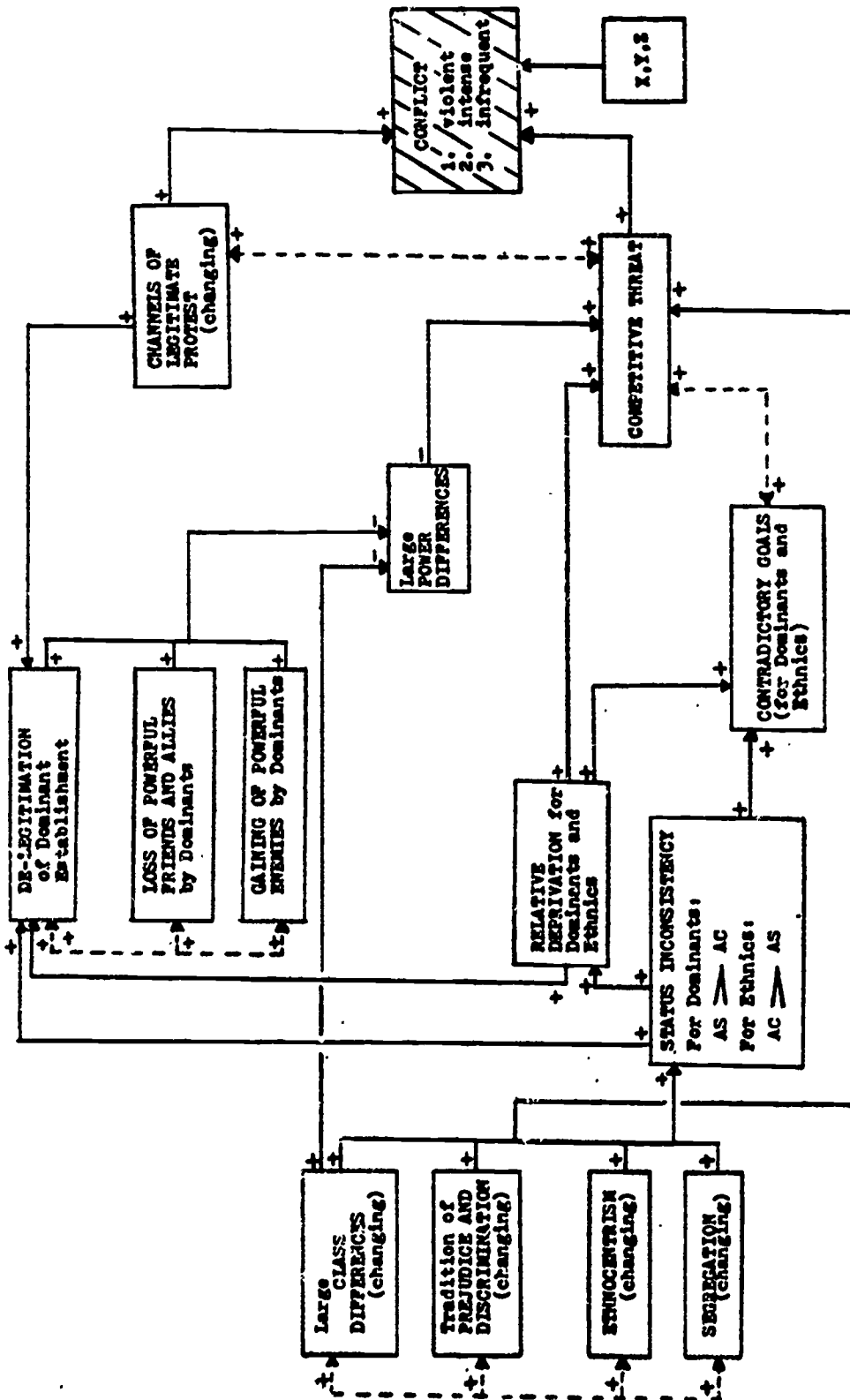


FIGURE 2. DOMINANT-ETHNIC CONFLICT: A PROCESSUAL MODEL

LEGEND:
 AC = Achieved Status, AS = Ascribed Status, and > means higher than
 + = Increase in, greater than, etc., and - = Decrease in, less than, etc.
 The cross-hatched box refers to the dependent variable; all others are independent
 X,Y,Z refer to the *ceteris paribus* clause, i.e., other things being equal
 -----> = direction of influence, one way; <-----> = reciprocal influence, two way

GLOSSARY I: CONCEPTS

Class. We use the term class in its generic sense to refer to all dimensions of the stratification system, and not just in its Marxian, economic meaning.

Competitive Threat. Threat is a psychological concept and refers, in this context, to the expectation or fear of losing or hope of gaining something desirable or valuable from another actor. Conflict refers to the actual behavior in relation to this threat. Also see conflict.

Conflict. Conflict may be defined as a form of group relationship or interaction involving a struggle over rewards, resources, and values in which the struggling parties in the course of the relationship sometimes injure, neutralize or destroy each other.

Conflict Dimensions. The Major dimensions of conflict employed in this paper are violence, frequency, and intensity. Violence refers to the social destructiveness of the action -- the number of people killed or injured and the extent of property destruction. Frequency refers to how often any type of social conflict occurs -- frequently, infrequently, etc. Intensity refers to the extent of the participation (e.g., numbers of participants), to the duration (or how long it lasts), and to the amount of resources expended.

Dominant and Ethnic Groups. An ethnic group is marked by the following characteristics: subordinate in terms of power, subjection to systematic prejudice and discrimination, having traits (real or imagined) held in low esteem by the dominant group, being a sub-part of a larger society, being endogamous in terms of marriage, and, finally, membership in this collectivity is by arbitrary rule of descent or is involuntary and cannot be escaped from by either resignation or merit. The dominant group for the most part is just the opposite of the ethnic group. All "minority" and "native" groups are ethnic groups; ethnicity is the generic term.

Ethnocentrism. Ethnocentrism may be defined as a tendency of actors to judge other cultures by the standards of value obtaining in their own culture. Ethnocentrism may demand prejudice and discrimination directed to the ethnics or it may not -- it may demand tolerance and equalitarianism instead. Therefore, ethnocentrism is not just another way to say prejudice and discrimination. The same nation could and often is prejudiced in one way and not in another, e.g., high in class prejudice, but low in ethnic prejudice; high in religious prejudice, but low in political prejudice, etc.

Legitimation. Legitimation may be defined as the process whereby the action of the authorities is perceived by the members of a social system to be congruent with the norms and values of that system; hence, the authorities and often by generalization the normative structure, per se, receive high support from its members, even if they are lower class and stigmatized deviants. Delegitimation is the opposite process in which support is withdrawn from the authorities and sometimes by generalization from the normative system, per se; even upper class members sometimes withdraw their support.

Status Inconsistency. Status inconsistency refers to a horizontal or diagonal dimension of the stratification system. It is a structural variable and refers to relations among the statuses of an actor. Some of the statuses are higher and some are lower. Sometimes status inconsistency is called status incongruence, status crystallization, etc.

Some actors characteristically have a pattern composed of high achieved status and low ascribed status, e.g., a Jewish professor; some actors have the opposite pattern -- high ascribed and low achieved status, e. g., the rich, feeble-minded crown prince. These two patterns in interaction with each other often lead to conflict, it is hypothesized.

Violence. Violence may be defined as the use of force with the intent of inflicting damage or injury upon one's opponent sometimes in order to coerce him against his will. In the context of social movements it is more often initiated by the authorities.

GLOSSARY II: TYPES OF LINKAGES
BETWEEN VARIABLES

LINKAGES: Refers to the type of relationship which exists between the variables of a proposition. There are six basic types*

CHARACTERISTICS

USUAL SET

UNUSUAL SET

- | | | |
|-------------------|--|---|
| 1. "Direction" | <u>Reversible</u> : if X, then Y; and <u>if Y, then X</u> | <u>Irreversible</u> : If X, then Y; <u>but if Y, then no conclusion</u> about X |
| 2. "Certainty" | <u>Stochastic</u> : if X, then <u>probably Y</u> | <u>Deterministic</u> : If X, then <u>always Y</u> |
| 3. "Time" | <u>Sequential</u> : if X, then <u>later Y</u> | <u>Coextensive</u> : If X, then <u>also Y</u> |
| 4. "Contingency" | <u>Contingent</u> : if X, then <u>Y, but only if Z</u> | <u>Sufficient</u> : if X, then Y, <u>regardless of anything else</u> |
| 5. "Necessity" | <u>Substitutable</u> : if X, then <u>Y; but if Z, then also Y</u> | <u>Necessary</u> : If X, <u>and only if X</u> , then Y |
| 6. "Special Case" | <u>Interdependent</u> : (Composed of reversible, sequential and contingent linkages) | |

EXAMPLE: Max Weber's famous thesis about the relation between the Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism may be viewed as an irreversible, stochastic, sequential, contingent, and substitutable proposition in its linkages among its variables.

* Adopted from Zetterberg, 1965: 69-74 by Leonard H. Jordan, Jr.

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