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**Tatu Vanhanen, *Ethnic Conflicts: Their Biological Roots in Ethnic Nepotism*  
Ulster Institute for Social Research, 2012**

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The author of the book, Tatu Vanhanen, is Emeritus Professor of Political Science at the University of Tampere, Finland and Visiting Researcher at the Department of Political Science at the University of Helsinki.

The topic of ethnic conflict has generated a lot of debate among scholars from different fields who tried to explain the causes of such occurrences and to understand why some conflicts escalates into genocides and others are moderate and have been resolved successfully.

Most of the previous theories explain ethnic conflicts through cultural and environmental factors and they did not produce results that can be tested. Dr. Tatu Vanhanen provides a new interpretation based on genetics. He argues that the evolutionary roots of ethnic conflict can be traced to “ethnic nepotism” which is defined as the human “disposition to favor and align with relatives in conflict situations”. (Vanhanen IX). This is a behavior that is characteristic in all people but it has more significance in ethnically divided societies. He focused on the idea that all organisms struggle for survival, according to Darwin’s evolutionary theory. This struggle for resources is omnipresent and it affects human societies, too. It is this competition for scarce resources that is at the base of all interest conflicts.

The author uses two empirical variables to test his theory. One is ethnic heterogeneity (EH) to estimate the significance of ethnic nepotism in the conflict. The second one is the scale of ethnic conflicts (EEC) – to measure the intensity of the conflict from minor incidents to genocide.

His book is divided into eight chapters and covers 176 independent countries for the time period between 2003-2011.

Using the Scale of Ethnic Conflicts (EEC) and Ethnic Heterogeneity (EH), the author sets out to test his hypotheses. He has used a scale of 1 to 5 to measure the significance of ethnic conflicts in different countries, with 1 representing minor incidents and 5 representing high level of ethnic violence. Each country was measured based on this scale. Ethnic pluralism is determined by the percentage of the largest homogeneous ethnic group.

Tatu Vanhanen presents three types of ethnic groups : one based on racial differences, one based on linguistic, national and tribal differences and one based on religious communities (Vanhanen, 46.)

The most important for the study of ethnic conflicts are the racial differences. If the country studied has a population with 90% homogeneity, other types of ethnic divisions are taken into account such as national income per capita, human development and level of democratization. He continues with an in-depth analysis of 176 countries based on the variables mentioned above.

The study concludes with the idea that ethnic nepotism measured by the level of heterogeneity is the root of the emergence of ethnic conflicts in any ethnically divided society. It explains 66% of “the global variation in the estimated scale of ethnic conflicts.” (Vanhanen, 215)

Because ethnic nepotism is encoded in our genes, it is expected that ethnic conflicts will continue in the future.

His theory contradicts the explanation of the origins of ethnic conflicts based on socioeconomic development of a country or the level of democratization, although these factors can lead to a peaceful resolution of a conflict. He argues that democratic institutions should be adapted to the ethnic structures of a country to meet the demands of a pluralistic society. Thus, these institutions can prevent the escalation of the conflict.

Another way to mitigate an ethnic conflict is biological mixing. He gives as an example Latin America where a large percentage of population is racially mixed. This process is slow in the United States and Western Europe. In countries with a religious division like Israel, mixing can be very difficult.

Institutional reforms are listed as another possibility to mitigate an ethnic conflict. Each ethnic group should be allowed to participate in national policy. In some countries, parties based on ethnicity are banned but the author quotes Benjamin Reilly from the Organization for the Security and Cooperation in Europe who “affirms the right of the ethnic minority to form their own parties and compete for office on ethnic basis.”(Vanhanen, 224). If democratic ways are not available, ethnic groups will find other ways to achieve their goal. However, power sharing could be very difficult in places where two groups are competing for the same territories, as in Israel.

Partition is the last resort to end a conflict. Some can be peaceful, as in former Czechoslovakia, but others can be bloody, as in former Yugoslavia. In many cases, partition does not guarantee peace; we see tense relations between India and Pakistan.

Tatu Vanhanen moved away from conventional theories regarding the causes of ethnic conflicts and focused on genetics. However, he did not disregard other factors. With precise scholarship, original research and brilliantly argumentation, the book changes our perspective of the roots of the ethnic conflicts.