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MODERN HATREDS
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Stories about Ethnic War

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Beginning in the spring of 1992, Bosnia experienced an ethnic slaughter whose savagery replayed some of the worst horrors of the Nazi era. Serbian paramilitary forces swept into defenseless towns, murdering indiscriminately in order to terrorize the Bosnian Muslim population into fleeing. In some cases, the killers set up ambushes and machine-gunned their victims in flight. In other cases, they rounded up the population, singled out educated men for murder, shipped the remaining men to concentration camps, and expelled the women and children. Women were often gang-raped; the men typically beaten and tortured before being killed or imprisoned. While the perpetrators of these acts were usually outsiders, local Serbs also participated, shipping their neighbors to concentration camps and identifying their acquaintances on the executioners' lists.

In the concentration camps, the horrors were even worse. According to one account:

> Humiliation, terror and mental cruelty were almost universally deployed. Captured men would be told that they were to be executed the following day. At dawn they would be taken out, convinced that they were to be killed, only to be thrown into a new detention camp. They were forced to sing Serb nationalist songs to entertain their jeering tormentors, and to avoid being beaten. They were told that their wives had been raped and then killed, that their children were dead. They were forced, on pain of death, to perform atrocities against each other—mutilation, physical and sexual, and, even, mutual killing. They were forced to dig mass graves and collect and bury the bodies of their families and neighbors. Sometimes, those on grave detail would themselves be killed and thrown on top of the bodies they had just delivered.[1]

In other cases, it was the guards who mutilated and tortured prisoners to death.[2]

Such events cry out for explanation. What could motivate the leaders of a nation to organize the expulsion, torture, rape, and murder of a large portion of their country's inhabitants? What could motivate their followers to sink to such savagery, often aimed against their own lifelong neighbors? The purpose of this book is to answer that question—to develop a theory to explain why ethnic wars occur and how they might be prevented.

Bosnia is, of course, an extreme case, but it is not unique. Three of the four ethnic wars examined in this book also featured ethnic cleansing, atrocities, and massacres of civilians, albeit on a smaller scale. I open this book with a reminder of Bosnia's horrors to make the point that no account of ethnic war is adequate which does not explain how such things can happen. How do leaders capable of ordering such savagery come to power? What makes them decide to give such orders? What motivates their followers to carry them out? And most difficult of all, how can we devise an explanation that accords with the facts not only in Bosnia but in other ethnic wars as well?

A number of explanations or stories about ethnic war have been offered. Many of them can be summed up in a simple phrase: ancient hatreds; manipulative leaders; economic rivalry; and so on. The argument of this book is that an adequate theory of ethnic war must combine the insights from all of these approaches to explain why ethnic war happens when it does and—just as important—to explain why it usually does not happen. A saying has it that to every complicated question there is at least one simple, direct, easy-to-understand wrong answer: the simple stories about ethnic war are, individually, wrong answers of this overly simplified type. The mistakes are important because, even though the stories are insightful, they too frequently lead to mistaken policy conclusions about how ethnic wars might be stopped. The second purpose of this book, therefore, is to show how an enhanced understanding of the driving forces behind ethnic wars can lead to better ideas about how to avoid or stop them.

I begin by surveying the stories analysts have told about the conflict in Yugoslavia, since these stories span the gamut of explanations of ethnic war generally. The narratives differ in fundamental ways: in their accounts of the nature of ethnic groups, in their contentions about what spurs the groups to fight, and in their evaluations of who is to blame and what can be done about such conflicts. Understanding the different assumptions is the first step toward combining the insights conveyed by each story into a more comprehensive explanation.

Stories about Ethnic War

Ancient Hatreds

One of the stories most favored by journalists to explain ethnic wars is that they are the result of "ancient hatreds" or long-standing bitterness. Journalist Robert Kaplan is the most prominent teller of this story, writing of the Balkans: "This was a time-capsule world: a dim stage upon which people raged, spilled blood, experienced visions and ecstasies. Yet their expressions remained fixed and distant, like dusty statuary. 'Here, we are completely submerged under our own histories,' Luben Gotzev, Bulgaria's former Foreign Minister, told me."[3] On Bosnia, specifically, Kaplan adds: "Bosnia is rural, isolated, and full of suspicions and hatreds to a degree that the sophisticated Croats of Zagreb could barely imagine.... Bosnia did have one sophisticated urban center, however; Sarajevo, where Croats, Serbs, Muslims and Jews had traditionally lived together in reasonable harmony. But the villages all around were full of savage hatreds, leavened by poverty and alcoholism. The fact that the most horrifying violence—during both World War II and the 1990s—occurred in Bosnia was no accident."[4]

There is much here that is insightful. The attention to rage, suspicion, and hatred is necessary to understand the ethnic cleansing, mass murders, and other atrocities that visited the region in the 1990s. Although the bloodless conventions of social science make it simpler for academics to sweep such messy emotions aside when building their theories, those who visit the region find it impossible to explain what they find without reference to emotions.

The most discerning of the journalists also note the curious defensive justifications participants use to rationalize their brutality. Thus Reuters correspondent Andrej Gustincic, on the start of war in Bosnia:

> "Do you see that field?" asks a Serbian woman, pointing to a sloping meadow by the Drina river. "The jihad (Moslem Holy War) was supposed to begin there. Foca was going to be the new Mecca. There were lists of Serbs who were marked down for death," the woman says, repeating a belief held by townspeople and gunmen. "My two sons were down on the list to be slaughtered like pigs. I was listed under rape." None of them have seen the lists but this does not prevent anyone from believing in them unquestioningly.[5]

The fear expressed by this woman is manifest, but even taking that fear into account, such ridiculous accusations—a town in Bosnia to be the new Mecca?—can only be believed by someone already deeply prejudiced.

Kaplan is right also to point to the historical origins of these attitudes. The hatreds actually do have "ancient" roots, tracing back to the legends

surrounding the 1389 Battle of Kosovo Field, at which the Serbs were defeated by the Ottomans, ushering in five centuries of Muslim Turkish rule. Strictly speaking, resentment of such events cannot be "ancient," but must be renewed in each generation. Here Kaplan points to the role of culture, especially the epic poems about Kosovo that glorified the Serbian defeat there as a necessary sacrifice for building a "heavenly kingdom." It was through these poems that generation after generation of Serbs passed down hatred of Muslim Turks, even after Turkish rule was overthrown in the nineteenth century.

On closer inspection, however, the story Kaplan tells is misleading. First of all, Kaplan seems to be portraying a hatred which is not only "ancient" but continuous. In his telling, the Balkans is a blood-drenched region whose inhabitants have always been killing each other: bloody Bosnia was the scene of savage warfare not only in the 1990s, but also repeatedly in the past, most recently during World War II. The trouble with this picture is that Bosnia was also the locale for some of the most openly pluralistic attitudes in the Balkans, where intermarriage among ethnic groups was high before the war, and where Sarajevo celebrated its religious diversity with significant populations of four great religions—Islam, Eastern Orthodoxy, Catholicism, and Judaism. The hatred may have had deep roots, but it increased dramatically in the years before the war, while tolerance decreased equally. Why?

Second, myths of Kosovo notwithstanding, the disputes that generated the wars in the Balkans—and the South Caucasus—are invariably modern, the product in every case of twentieth-century conflicts, not medieval or "ancient" ones. Serbs and Croats had a tradition of conflict but not of war against each other until World War II, and the dispute that caused them to fight then traced back only to the founding of the "first Yugoslavia" in 1918. Kaplan's account of the Serb-Croat dispute actually supports this point, as the historical disputes that get most of his attention are the ones concerning the events of World War II. The same is true regarding the Bosnian Muslims: although the Muslims were involved in the World War II bloodshed, it is only by the most egregious historical sleight of hand that Serbs conflate the secularized, Serbo-Croatian speaking Bosnian Muslims with the Turkish-speaking holy warriors of the Ottoman Empire.

A third problem concerns the assumptions about ethnic identity that underlie this story. In ethno-nationalist mythology, the ethnic group has existed for millennia, and has always yearned for a country of its own: this is the "primordialist" theory of ethnicity. The fact that people believe their ethnic groups to be primordial does not, however, mean that they are. Ethnic nationalism is a modern ideology which, for most of the eastern half of Europe, has been current for little over a century. Before that time, the peasants of the Balkans and the South Caucasus did not usually identify themselves

as, say, "Croats" or "Georgians" or "Azerbaijanis" at all: it is only in the twentieth century that they were convinced to adopt these identities on the basis of shared language, religion, and historical mythology. Before that, identities were typically much more local. Ethnic groups are not necessarily "primordial" at all.

A final problem with this story is the implication for policymakers. President Bill Clinton is reported to have concluded, after reading Kaplan's book, that any sort of external intervention in the Balkans was doomed to failure, since the conflict was driven by uncontrollable "ancient hatreds." Journalist Misha Glenny offers the opposite prescription based on essentially the same analysis, writing: "Historically, the only way to keep these people apart once fighting begins has been for an outside power to intervene and offer its protection to all citizens, in particular, from the imperial urges of Croatia and Serbia."[6] But this is not true: the only previous time Croatia and Serbia fought each other, during World War II, their conflict was started by outside intervention—the Nazi invasion—and stopped by Tito's indigenous communist Partisans. In the 1990s, reestablishing peace depended primarily on establishing a new balance of power, which the parties were quite rational enough to respect. Balkan violence is indeed driven in part by violent emotions, but those emotions rise and fall; studying how and why they do so, and in connection with what other sorts of events, is required to understand how the passions can be calmed.

MANIPULATIVE LEADERS

An alternative account of Yugoslavia's ethnic wars focuses on the role of the leaders of Yugoslavia's constituent nations in starting the war. Scholar Bogdan Denitch puts it this way: "Rather than being caused by a popular upsurge of national hate from below, the civil war was the result of policy decisions from the top combined with an all-too-effective use of the mass media, especially television."[7] V. P. Gagnon generalized this conclusion into an overarching theory of ethnic war, stating: "I argue that violent conflict along ethnic cleavages is provoked by elites in order to create a domestic political context in which ethnicity is the only politically relevant identity. . . . [B]y constructing individual interest in terms of threat to the group, endangered elites can fend off domestic challengers who seek to mobilize the population against the status quo, and can better position themselves to deal with future challenges."[8] In other words, leaders of ethnic communities provoke ethnic war in order to keep (or, perhaps, grab) power for themselves.

When this story is told about Yugoslavia, the central character is Slobodan Milosevic, President of Serbia and, according to former U.S. Ambassador Warren Zimmerman, "the slickest con man in the Balkans." Milosevic first came to power by provoking an ethnic riot in the Kosovo region,

and then exploiting the political fallout to betray—and replace—his erstwhile patron Ivan Stambolic as president of Serbia. His ruling strategy centered around using the media to drum up Serbian nationalist passions, exaggerating the plight of ethnic Serbs in the mostly Muslim Albanian region of Kosovo, denouncing Croats as equivalent to World War II–era Ustasha fascists, blaming other nationalities for the economic problems facing Serbs, and so on. Milosevic then harnessed the passions he had aroused, mobilizing crowds for demonstrations that led to the overthrow of independent regional leaders. When regional leaders in Slovenia and Croatia began to resist, Milosevic began to mobilize for war.

Milosevic's partners in crime, according to this story, were his adversaries Franjo Tudjman, avatar of Croatian chauvinism, and Alija Izetbegovic, courtly proponent of Bosnian Muslim self-assertion. While Milosevic was doing everything in his power to provoke conflict, these two leaders played into his hands by justifying many of his charges of ethnic chauvinism. Thus Milosevic's charges that Croatia was "Ustasha" seemed justified when Tudjman was filmed kissing the traditional Croatian flag, which had also been the banner of the Ustasha fascists. Tudjman's determined attempts to relegate ethnic Serbs to the status of second-class citizens similarly helped Milosevic's argument. Then, when they approached the brink of war, the leaders of Slovenia, Croatia, and Serbia pushed the situation over the edge by negotiating in such unconscionable bad faith that they delegitimized the very idea of holding talks. The fires of war, according this story, were thus the result not of spontaneous combustion but of the efforts of leaders to fuel and ignite them.

While this story captures part of the truth about Yugoslavia, it too has its limitations. First, if there was an "absence of gut hate among the broad layers of the population" in Yugoslavia, as Denitch claims,[9] how did the leaders manage to arouse such violent passions against other groups? While the media campaigns sponsored by Milosevic and neighboring leaderships undoubtedly deserve much of the blame, such campaigns can work only by playing on hostile attitudes or prejudices that already exist.

Second, even if the leaders of Yugoslavia did play an important role in provoking ethnic violence, it is misleading to overgeneralize from that fact. In other ethnic conflicts, including most of those in the Caucasus region, hostility and violence bubbled up from below rather than being provoked by top-down manipulation. Stories of ethnic war need the flexibility to consider that different conflicts are dissimilar in this regard: a one-size-fits-all theory of manipulative leaders simply is not adequate.

Third, too much of a focus on the role of leaders encourages analysts to gloss over the role of historical and situational effects, which are important in explaining why manipulative leaders succeed in some times and places but not others. Thus Denitch spends so much effort distancing the Croatian

people from the atrocities perpetrated on their behalf by the Ustasha fascists that he underplays the deep scars those events left on the Serbian psyche. Focus on the leaders may also lead one to gloss over the reality of the grievances on which the leaders play: Milosevic was plausible because it was uncomfortable for the Serbs in Kosovo to live as a minority among the culturally different Albanians, and Serbs were suffering from the effects of a decade of economic stagnation.

One strength of the "manipulative leaders" story is that it has room for leaders who manipulate not only the interests of their ethnic group but also the group's identity. The "constructivist" theory of ethnicity starts from the fact that most ethnic identities are new, and points out that new group identities can be "constructed" when the situation is favorable. This will turn out to be important in explaining the case of Moldova, where ethnic Russian leaders increased their political leverage by creating a "Russophone" identity that embraced not only ethnic Russians but also the Ukrainian minority and committed communist ideologues from other groups. This story helps explain one of the mysteries of ethnic conflict: how the identity of the groups themselves can be changed in the course of such conflicts. Still, by itself, the "manipulative leader" story is insufficient for a full understanding of ethnic war.

ECONOMIC RIVALRY

The basic question of politics is "who gets what?" The "who" usually refers to groups with a shared interest in getting a particular "what." Theorists applying this perspective to ethnic conflict come to the conclusion that ethnic groups are simply another sort of interest group, competing with each other for economic and political goods just as other groups do. The story they tell is that the choice of mobilizing one's ethnic group instead, say, of a social class, is a purely "instrumental" one: people organize as an ethnic group when it seems the most practical way to get what they want, and they organize on different lines when *that* seems more likely to work.

While no one tells the story of Yugoslavia's fall as purely a case of economic rivalry, the work of Brookings Institution scholar Susan Woodward comes fairly close.[10] Woodward emphasizes what the other stories overlook—the decade-long economic stagnation which, as is typical in such cases, made all other conflicts including ethno-nationalist ones more tense. Although Yugoslavs increasingly agreed that economic reform was necessary, they disagreed over the sort of reform they should adopt because of regional differences across the Yugoslav economy. Croatia and Slovenia, with the most economically developed and internationally competitive regions of the country, favored economic decentralization that would take power—and their tax money—away from the notoriously

inefficient federal government. Serbia, leading the other, less-developed parts of the country, argued in favor of recentralization and especially a strengthening of Yugoslavia's central bank to tame the country's equally notorious inflation problem. This conflict was also a tug-of-war over political power, with each side wishing to concentrate power where they would have the most access to it.

The trouble with this story is that it does not explain why people might resort to war. Surely if the root of Yugoslavia's problem was economic, no one could have considered that a rational solution was a war that would sever economic ties between different parts of the country, provoke international economic sanctions against some areas while other areas were bombed to rubble, promote massive looting, and destroy the rule of law that made normal economic life possible. If different regions could not agree on an economic policy, they could have amicably split, as the Czech Republic and Slovakia did. All would have been better off economically had they done so.

Another problem with this story is that it is even less true of other ethnic wars than it is of Yugoslavia's. The outbreak of the ethnic wars in Palestine and India in 1947, for example, occurred not because of economic problems but because the withdrawal of British colonial troops created an opportunity for long-standing hostility to be expressed by leaders and followers. Similarly, while the collapse of the Soviet Union was in large part the result of Soviet economic weakness, the pattern of ethnic violence cannot be explained by economic hardship: ethnic wars occurred in Georgia and Armenia, relative bright spots in the Soviet economy, while most harder-hit areas avoided them. Economic hardship may contribute to ethnic war, but it is not always a necessary precondition.

A third problem with the "economic rivalry" story is that it does not explain why most people mobilize for political action in the first place. If ethnic violence is to be explained as the result of people acting rationally in pursuit of self-interest, as these "instrumentalist" arguments tend to assume, what explains individuals' participation? For most people, getting involved politically is not rational, because the benefit they stand to gain is typically not worth the effort they would have to expend to get it. They should therefore be more likely just to sit back and let someone else do the work. Of course, if everyone sits back, no one acts and no one gains the benefit: this is the collective action problem. Obviously, the Serbian paramilitary groups—all composed of volunteers—found a way to overcome that problem, but self-interest cannot fully explain it: while it might be rationally self-interested to join a group engaged in looting and (for the depraved) rape, pursuit of individual self-interest does not explain torture, murder, or risking one's own life in battle. Ultimately, behavior of this kind

must be explained by reference to the factors mentioned in the "ancient hatreds" stories—economic or instrumental rivalry is not enough.

SPIRAL OF INSECURITY

Political scientists who consider the above explanations too simplistic tend to gravitate toward more abstract theories aimed at combining several ideas. The most commonly promoted abstraction focuses on "the structure of the situation," especially the strength of the federal government, as the main explanation for ethnic war. A weak federal government, these analysts point out, is unable to provide a peaceful process for competing groups to resolve their differences, and it is also unable to prevent the groups from fighting with each other should they choose to do so. According to the structural argument, little more is needed to make an ethnic war occur.

The story begins with the insight that some sort of breakdown is the likely outcome of a government that cannot effectively resolve ethnic disputes. What happens then is outlined by MIT scholar Barry Posen:

> "In areas such as the former... Yugoslavia, 'sovereigns' have disappeared. They leave in their wake a host of groups... [that] must pay attention to... the problem of security.... [Thus], there will be competition for the key to security—power. The competition will often continue to a point at which the competing entities have amassed more power than needed for security and, thus, consequently begin to threaten others. Those threatened will respond in turn.... This is the security dilemma: what one does to enhance one's own security causes reactions that, in the end, can make one less secure.... [T]hese strategic problems show that very little nationalist rabble-rousing or nationalistic combativeness is required to generate very dangerous situations."[11]

Posen's logic is that ethnic groups in Yugoslavia found themselves in the situation of "anarchy" faced by hostile independent states. In the absence of a common central government, no group could trust the others not to arm—in fact, someone would inevitably inherit the arms of the Yugoslav army—so all had to arm in self-defense. Their memories of World War II spurred them on in their efforts and promoted a spiral of insecurity as the self-defense efforts of each group increased the insecurity of the others. Once they began thinking in terms of self-defense and the World War II precedent, the groups could not help noticing that whoever attacked first would gain a big advantage, especially over unprepared groups of "enemies" isolated in one's own territory. Eventually, someone was bound to

give in to the logic of preventive self-defense and attack first, especially after armed groups of extremists began to appear.

While this story does tell us something about how dangerous the situation was in which the Yugoslav republics found themselves, it says less than meets the eye about the reasons for the danger. First, the Yugoslav republics did not arm themselves because the federal government collapsed. Rather, the federal government collapsed because the republics were mutually hostile enough to arm themselves: anarchy resulted when the federal government lost control of the republics' behavior. Posen's logic is therefore backwards; anarchy was not the cause of the run-up to war, but the result of the run-up to war. This fact is further demonstrated by what did not happen—conflict among the other former Yugoslav republics. Serbia and Croatia fought each other, and tore Bosnia-Herzegovina between them, but security dilemmas did not arise between Croatia and Slovenia despite some border disputes; neither did Macedonia feel compelled to arm itself against Serbia in spite of historical rivalry.

Posen is therefore wrong to say that the security dilemma causes conflicts with "very little nationalist rabble-rousing and nationalistic combativeness." His argument is useful, however, in explaining the results of a security dilemma once it emerges, and in illuminating the factors that may worsen the security dilemma. Once Croats began moving toward independence and reviving their World War II–era symbols, the Serbs in Croatia could not help remembering the genocidal violence carried out under those banners during World War II; this helped motivate them to arm themselves. The Croats realized the advantages of a preventive attack and actually tried to disarm the Serbs within Croatia before the latter could fully organize, but they were prevented from doing so by Yugoslav army threats. That intervention, in turn, increased the motivation of the Croats for independence. A year later, the emergence of armed Serb extremists helped motivate the Bosnian Muslims to go ahead with their dangerous push for independence. In sum, Posen's argument is generally wrong about why security dilemmas emerge, but the idea of the security dilemma is useful for explaining how conflict escalates to war when it does so.

Combining the Stories

It seems clear that a satisfactory explanation of the wars in Yugoslavia and of ethnic war in general must combine these stories into a single theory. The more sophisticated explanations of Yugoslavia's wars do indeed combine them, but none offers a systematic general theory.[12] Building such a theory is the purpose of this book.

The best place to begin is with the concept of symbolic politics.[13] Consider the American "welfare queen" of the 1980s. First, though the term is not explicitly ethnic, it does have a distinctly ethnic connotation, building on stereotypes of African-Americans as lazy and disproportionately likely to be on welfare. Beyond the appeal to stereotypes, however, the term also taps any feelings of hostility that might be present: not only is the recipient black, the term suggests, but in this view "those [insert pejorative term here] blacks" do not deserve help anyway, so hostility to their demands is appropriate. The term appeals, in short, to racist myths. This is how ethnic symbolism works and why it seems linked to "ancient hatreds": it refers to preexisting historical myths in the same way that, for example, the Confederate battle flag refers to American racial myths.

It is important to realize, however, that although the hatred is all too often real, it is not "ancient" but modern. Ethnic hatreds are renewed in each generation by mythologies that are typically modern revisions of older stories with quite different messages. For example, in an article entitled "Modern Hate" (from which I adapted this book's title), University of Chicago scholars Susanne and Lloyd Rudolph find that the mythology behind Hindu extremism in India traces in large part to 1980s television and audio performances recasting the ancient legend of the god Ram into a version more standardized, and in that way less tolerant, than in the past. This new, high-profile recasting of Hindu identity provided the symbols politicians used to spark communal violence.[14] In the Balkans and the Caucasus, the myths used now are similarly modern recastings of narratives that are themselves only a century or two old, though they often recount much older events. American racial politics, so different from these other cases in many ways, also follows this pattern: contemporary controversies over the Confederate battle flag, for example, trace less to the mythology of the Civil War than to the recasting of that mythology to fight racial integration in the 1960s.

Another way ethnic myths and symbols are modernized is to attribute contemporary economic woes to the despised out-group. The symbol of the "welfare queen," for example, appeals to the economic interest of (white) taxpayers by implying that taxes could be cut if money were not wasted on "welfare queens." While there was some substance to that claim, focus on "welfare queens" exaggerated the amount of money spent on anti-poverty programs, not to mention the proportion of that sum that went to people with "queenly" standards of living. In India, similarly, Hindu hostility was turned against Muslims by blaming Muslims for the trouble that high-caste young Hindus were having finding jobs. Thus, more than a means of appealing to interests, ethnic symbols are a tool for elites to use in mobilizing ethnic groups, especially their own, in pursuit of policies the

elites prefer, but for reasons only partially explained by the tangible interests ostensibly at stake.

The idea of ethnic symbolism is useful, therefore, because it combines the logic of the ancient hatreds, manipulative elites, and economic rivalry stories. Ethnic symbols are tools used by manipulative elites, but they only work when there is some real or perceived conflict of interest at work *and* mythically based feelings of hostility that can be tapped using ethnic symbols. All three elements are needed to make mobilization happen: Without perceived conflicts of interest, people have no reason to mobilize. Without emotional commitment based on hostile feelings, they lack sufficient impetus to do so. And without leadership, they typically lack the organization to act.

The second part of the story is how ethnic politics can escalate from peaceful rivalry to war. Vibrant, emotionally laden ethnic politics are ubiquitous in multiethnic areas, but they very rarely turn to war, even when government breaks down. For example, nine of the fifteen former Soviet republics avoided ethnic war, though all are multiethnic and all were affected by the collapse of the Soviet Union. One of the fifteen, the Russian Federation, itself includes twenty-one ethnic regions, again all multiethnic, but only one of these, Chechnya, experienced overt warfare. When war did happen, the common element was that the politics of ethnic symbolism, shaped by myths justifying hostility against other groups, turned into a contest over who would dominate whom. These hostile myths and extreme goals, not the mere fact of anarchy, created the fears that set off a security dilemma and motivated the drive to war.

Obviously, prejudiced symbolic politics and insecurity feed each other. Thus, ethnic prejudice and hostility make people more likely to see the other group as threatening; while feelings of threat and insecurity contribute to the success of efforts by elites to stir up ethnic extremism. Ethnic wars differ in the extent to which each of these factors is primarily to blame. In some cases, prejudice and hostility are so strong that they result in violence almost as soon as the opportunity arises. In these cases of *mass-led violence,* theories about ancient hatreds seem particularly appropriate. In other cases it is incumbent leaders who play on ethnic prejudice to provoke hostility and violence. Such cases of *elite-led violence* seem more explicable in terms of manipulative leaders.

These are the main elements of my argument: the necessary preconditions for ethnic war are ethnic myths and fears and the opportunity to act on them politically. Ethnic war occurs when the politics of ethnic symbolism goes to extremes, provoking hostile actions and leading to a security dilemma. In some cases, the turn toward extremism is mass-led; in other cases, it is elite-led. Either way, war results from a process in which extremist politics and insecurity mutually reinforce each other in an escalatory spiral.

The rest of the book is aimed at filling in the details: When do such extreme fears arise? How do extremist elites use ethnic symbolism to provoke war? What can outside parties do to prevent or stop such wars? And how, exactly, do these ideas explain the outbreak of ethnic wars, especially in the former Yugoslavia and former USSR?

I begin in chapter 2 by laying out the details of the symbolic politics theory of ethnic war, explaining how the passionate politics of ethnic symbolism can lead to war, why it so frequently does not, and how different paths to war can be blocked. The heart of the book that follows is a series of case studies that explain how these ideas illuminate the causes of ethnic wars in the former USSR and former Yugoslavia. I begin with the mass-led conflicts of the South Caucasus—the Armenian-Azerbaijani dispute (chapter 3) and the civil wars in Georgia (chapter 4). Chapter 5 considers the curious hybrid case of Moldova, which began as a mass-led conflict but required elite manipulation to result in war. The elite-led breakup of Yugoslavia is treated in chapter 6, with a focus on the war in Croatia. Chapter 7 sums up the lessons learned, especially about the options and prospects for war avoidance and termination. The most optimistic conclusion is that while ethnic wars are difficult to stop, they are also difficult to start—which means that it is usually not too difficult, especially for the government of the threatened state, to prevent them from starting in the first place.

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The Symbolic Politics of Ethnic War

Explaining ethnic war requires answering two different but related questions. The first is the question of ethnicity. What exactly is an ethnic group? Why do ethnic groups stick together in politics when individual interests often cut across ethnic lines? Why did ethnic groups become especially important politically only in recent times? The second question concerns the causes of war. How do ethnic wars get started, and why do they happen? Why are people willing to fight and die for their ethnic group?

To be convincing, a theory needs to answer both questions in compatible ways—showing the ways in which the nature of ethnic groups explains how and why they fight. For example, if the theory assumes that ethnic groups act like economic interest groups, it should explain why economic interests motivate people to stick with their ethnic groups and fight. Additionally, the best theory will be supported by evidence at every stage. Thus, for an ancient hatreds account to be convincing, it should show that ethnic groups are ancient, that the hatred is ancient, that their hatred is the motivation for them to fight ethnic wars, and that variations in the amount of ancient hatred explain why ethnic wars break out in some places but not others. The task of this chapter is to assemble these combined theories, pinpoint their weaknesses, and explain how a symbolic politics approach offers a stronger alternative.

Clarifying Definitions

The terminology used in discussions about ethnic conflict is so confused, and confusing, that it is important to sort out the meanings of key terms before beginning the analysis. First, *ethnic group* and *nation* are separate but

overlapping concepts. An ethnic group, in Anthony Smith's definition, is a group sharing five key traits: a group name, a believed common descent, common historical memories, elements of shared culture such as language or religion, and attachment (even if only historical or sentimental) to a specific territory. These elements are all tied together by a "myth-symbol complex" (defined below).[1] A nation, by contrast, is a socially mobilized group that wants political self-determination.[2] Thus, not all nations are ethnic groups (some, like the American nation, are ethnically heterogeneous); and not all ethnic groups are nations (many do not aspire to political autonomy). Cases of ethnic war, however, are always cases of competition for political dominance, so they all involve ethnic nations on at least one side. Strictly speaking, therefore, this book is about "ethno-nationalist" wars, but I will stick to the shorter formulation for the sake of simplicity.

Another set of terms relevant to the discussion is *nationalism, chauvinism,* and *hostility*. Nationalism is the belief that one's own group should be politically autonomous—the belief, that is, that one's own nation should take its rightful place among the nations of the world. Chauvinism is the belief that one's own group is *better* than others, and therefore has the right to dominate or displace them.[3] Hostility means relating to another group as to an enemy. The phenomena are separate: nationalists may seek equality for their group, and avoid being chauvinists; chauvinists may be content with their nation's status and see others paternally as "younger brothers" rather than enemies. Frequently, however, extreme nationalists tend to be chauvinists, and chauvinists tend to be hostile to nationalists of other groups.

Central to understanding ethnicity are the terms *myth* and *symbol*. According to Murray Edelman, on whose theory of symbolic politics I build, a myth is "a belief held in common by a large group of people that gives events and actions a particular meaning."[4] The truth or falsity of the myth is irrelevant; its purpose is to help a person understand what a set of events means to him or her. For this reason, it is appropriate to talk about the "myth" of Kosovo or the Armenian Genocide: while these are real events, what affects politics now is less the events themselves than the mythologies that have grown up around them.

A symbol is an emotionally charged shorthand reference to a myth. In Serbian mythology, for example, the meaning of the Battle of Kosovo Field is the martyrdom of the Serbian nation in defense of Serbian honor and of Christendom against the Turks. "Kosovo" therefore is a symbol referring to this myth of Serbian martyrdom; the point of invoking the symbol is usually to express, to communicate, or to evoke among Serbian listeners the emotions, such as pride or a sense of national grievance, associated with the myth. The web of myths and related symbols like these that collectively define what it means to be a Serb forms the Serbs' *"myth-symbol complex."*[5]

Ethnic war, finally, is a war in which the key issues at stake—that is, the express reason political power is being contested—involve either ethnic markers such as language or religion or the status of ethnic groups themselves. A war is organized armed combat between at least two belligerent sides in which at least one thousand people are killed.

Theories of Ethnic Group Origins and Violence

Attempts to explain the origins of ethnic groups and the reasons they fight fall into two basic but diverse categories: rational choice explanations and psychological arguments.

RATIONAL CHOICE APPROACHES

Ethnic groups as instrumental

According to the "instrumentalist" approach, ethnic groups are merely coalitions formed in a rational attempt to compete for scarce goods in the context of social changes brought about by modernization.[6] As evidence, instrumentalists point to ethnic conflicts in Africa, which are often essentially conflicts between ethnically defined patron-client networks over economic goods distributed by the state. This is even true, they argue, when the rhetoric of leaders emphasizes such noneconomic issues as cultural autonomy.[7]

In this view, ethnic nations formed in the last two centuries when a "national" language was chosen from among a variety of different dialects, written down, and made the basis for mass literacy in specific states.[8] This was done because industrial society requires a standard means of communication, thus a single standard is set for an entire territory.[9] In empires with many unrelated languages, certain economic classes of subordinate groups promoted literacy and ethnic nationalism in their linguistic groups, thereby creating new ethnic groups.

In sum, the key to this explanation is the self-interested basis of ethnic group formation: elites form people into ethnic nations because of a combination of linguistic and class interests. Furthermore, while all group members share these interests, the elites have an additional interest in organizing the group to pursue them—the elites gain power by leading that pursuit.

Rationalist theories of ethnic war

Rational choice theorists starting from this instrumental understanding of group origins have produced several different theories of ethnic war. I will focus here on three: the "economic rivalry" approach, the "hard rationalist" school, and the "soft rationalist" account.

The economic approach. Arguments that ethnic wars result primarily from economic concerns come in several different versions. One version has it that the issue is distribution: poorer areas might want to secede because they consider the central government to be discriminating against them; and richer areas might want to secede because they do not want to be burdened by union with the poorer ones.

Such arguments have a poor track record empirically. They cannot explain ethnic mobilization in general: analyses find that ethnic groups mobilize under virtually all economic circumstances.[10] Statistical studies come to a similar conclusion: economic discrimination has no significant effect on ethnic group mobilization or on demands for group autonomy.[11] These economic arguments also fail to account for the pattern of violence in the dying Soviet Union, as Table 2.1 shows. Rather, all four of the non-Russian republics that suffered ethnic war—Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Moldova—were middle-income republics. There is no pattern among secessionist subregions either: some, such as the Transnistria region of Moldova, were more industrialized and prosperous than the unit they were seceding from; while others, such as South Ossetia, were less so.

Another prominent approach focuses on relative deprivation,[12] and specifically on declines in standard of living. This logic would seem to apply to Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union, both of which experienced serious declines in standard of living in the years before their collapse. It does not, however, explain the pattern of violence, which should show that those areas which suffered more were more prone to ethnic violence.

As Table 2.1 shows, Tajikistan fits the relative deprivation logic—it was second-worst off in both economic performance and national income, and it did experience a civil war—but its conflict was not an ethnic war. On the other hand, Armenia and Georgia, which did experience ethnic wars, actually saw their economies grow relative to Russia's in the years before their wars, while the declines in Azerbaijan and Moldova were minimal. Since the Soviet economy overall grew at a reasonable pace in the 1960s and 1970s, and was stagnant from 1980–88 (the rapid decline began only in 1989),[13] even the mild declines relative to Russia suffered by Moldova and Azerbaijan may not imply absolute decline. The data seem clear: ethnic violence does not correlate closely with economic hardship or economic decline.

In addition to this trouble with the evidence, economic explanations of ethnic war face the additional problem of logical inconsistency: for most people, fighting an ethnic civil war is not economically rational. The reason is simple common sense: fighting a civil war over the benefits of a fragile national economy is obviously likely to destroy that economy. Peaceful ethnic mobilization may make economic sense, but running a serious risk of ethnic war does not because the economic risks vastly outweigh the potential gains, except for would-be profiteers. The Yugoslav conflict of the

Table 2.1. National Income of Soviet Republics
(As a percentage of Russia's national income)

Republic	1962 Income	1988 Income	Change	1988 Rank
Belarusian SSR	63.6	100.5	+37.2	3
Lithuanian SSR	84.8	95.0	+10.2	5
Georgian SSR	69.2	77.4	+8.2	7
Armenian SSR	68.8	75.6	+6.8	8
Russian SSR	100.0	100.0	0.0	4
Kazakh SSR	61.2	61.0	–0.2	11
Azerbaijani SSR	67.1	65.6	–1.5	10
Moldovan SSR	73.1	71.0	–2.1	9
Turkmen SSR	61.2	56.9	–4.3	12.0
Latvian SSR	112.8	107.3	–5.5	1
Kyrgyz SSR	55.6	48.7	–6.9	13
Ukranian SSR	88.9	80.0	–8.9	6
Estonian SSR	114.8	105.3	–9.5	2
Tajik SSR	50.8	39.3	–11.5	15
Uzbek SSR	55.8	43.0	–12.8	14

Source: O. G. Dmitrieva, *Regional'naia ekonomicheskaia diagnosticka* (St. Petersburg: Limbus Press, 1992), p. 79.

early 1990s illustrates the point. That conflict was to a considerable degree triggered by disputes over the distribution of economic goods. However, it very quickly became apparent that almost everyone would lose economically once war began disrupting trade, destroying factories and infrastructure, and turning workers into fighters, refugees, or casualties. In fact, virtually everyone in the former Yugoslavia and the South Caucasus (except for a few profiteers and looters) lost economically from war by every measure. Given the economic costs of postwar hostility, even most of the winners ended up worse off absolutely, worse off than they would have been had the status quo continued, and even worse off than they would have been had they acceded to the rival group's demands.

Hard rationalist approaches. Another rationalist explanation for ethnic war, promoted by Russell Hardin and others, takes a step away from the instrumentalist understanding of ethnicity, arguing that ethnic war is explicable as a function of individuals' rational pursuit not of material benefits but of personal security.[14] The argument suggests that in cases of "emergent anarchy," when the state will not or cannot guarantee people's safety from violence, it is rational for groups to start mobilizing in preemptive self-defense. The result is a security dilemma, in which each group's acts of self-defense threaten other groups, leading to escalating preparations for violence and ultimately to the outbreak of fighting. "Risk-aversion is enough," in this account, "to motivate murderous violence."[15]

The process of mobilization, in this view, is a "tipping process" driven by peer pressure: the more people join in ethnic mobilization, the more they can pressure others into joining, and the more credibly they can argue that it pays to join because their growing movement is likely to succeed. Thus the mobilization process snowballs. And if a group norm in favor of violence somehow emerges, it becomes rational for individual members of the group to engage in murder.[16]

A third argument Hardin makes relies on selective incentives. In this account, people may engage in violent conflict because they are promised rewards for killing or threatened with punishment if they do not kill. To the extent that the participants in Yugoslavia's conflict, for example, were conscripted, this argument explains the conflict as the result of the coercive power of the state, especially Serbia. Criminals may also be useful for aggressive governments, as they can be promised loot or locations for mafia-style operations in exchange for leading their gangs (armed by the state) into battle.[17]

David Lake and Donald Rothchild suggest two additional reasons to think that "emergent anarchy" by itself might be enough to motivate violence.[18] One is information failures: each side has reason to conceal its true desires and strength, but doing so makes it harder to reach a negotiated agreement. The second issue is the problem of credible commitment: even if the sides make promises in good faith, there may be no way to guarantee the promises will be fulfilled later. Added to the security dilemma, these problems make negotiated agreements hard to reach and war more likely.

However, Lake's and Rothchild's understanding of the security dilemma assumes that both sides want to avoid war, and that they are willing to compromise to avoid it. War results, in this logic, only because the sides do not trust each other.[19] The problem with this argument is that I know of no case in which ethnic war resulted from such a process. In every case I am familiar with, security dilemmas were the result of the sides' openly stated pursuit of dominance, not the result of overzealous self-defense under "emergent anarchy." Each side's goals, and expectations about the other, came from hostile interpretations of history encoded in each group's "myth-symbol complex." In such cases, information failures and problems of credible commitment are irrelevant: the sides would rather fight than compromise for reasons that better information and stronger commitments cannot change.

In fact, by focusing on "emergent anarchy," these theorists ignore evidence that they have the causal chain backwards: in ethnic conflict, the security dilemma causes anarchy to emerge, not vice versa. In the Soviet case, for example, there was little evidence of "emergent anarchy" before the

Karabagh crisis exploded into violence in February 1988. It was, rather, the accumulation of ethnic and nationalist disputes across the Soviet Union that eroded the effectiveness of the Soviet state, and finally caused it to break up more than three years later. In most cases—in ten of fifteen Soviet republics and twenty of twenty-one ethnic regions in Russia, all of them ethnically mixed—no ethnic war occurred in spite of the "emergent anarchy" of the Soviet breakup. When violence did erupt, the issue was usually not fear about what rival groups might do, but an open struggle for dominance. This insight explains why nationalism is, in Jack Snyder's words, the "default option" for identification when empires break up:[20] empires break up because the forces of nationalism are already in control.

Another weakness of these "hard rationalist" arguments is that although they begin as arguments about individual self-interest, they end up depending on the emergence of group norms. If groups formed instrumentally merely to seek security, it would be rational for people on the weaker side to switch groups, and for their opponents to let them. It might sometimes be rational, however, for one's own (selfish) co-ethnics to betray one, rendering the whole idea of group self-defense problematic.[21] These problems can only be avoided by assuming that effective group norms prevent such conversions. The switch to group norms weakens the theory, but is supported by the evidence: studies suggest that the values that motivate people to engage in political violence are collective interests, not individual self-interest.[22] The trouble is that these theories do not explain why this happens.

Additionally, this argument requires that group norms justify extreme violence, which then spreads due to a "tipping process." But it would seem more rational for people threatened by violence to reinforce norms against it. Norms can define self-defense in a narrow and immediate sense that does not encourage preemptive mobilization or violence. Rationalists such as Hardin do not explain why violent norms emerge instead. Appealing to a history of conflict does not help: most neighboring groups have some history of past violence that can be used and exaggerated. Alternatively, neighbors can be conflated with mythical enemies, as when Serbs associate Bosnian Muslims with the depredations of the Ottoman Turks.

Soft rationalist approaches. The soft rationalist approach, pioneered by Alvin Rabushka and Kenneth Shepsle, concedes that extremist group values are the core causes of ethnic violence and builds on that assumption.[23] "Rationality" in these models means the rationally calculated pursuit of any consistently defined goals, including those defined by a nationalist ideology. In this version, it is easier to explain why people are willing to join in ethnic movements, since one can appeal to nationalist values to explain

people's behavior. Rabushka and Shepsle's argument is that if people have extreme preferences—for example, they want to try to dominate the other group even if trying is very risky—then extremist politicians are likely to outpoll moderates. These extremists, once in power, can then use the machinery of government to organize their willing followers for war.

When preferences are extreme, a "softer" version of Hardin's tipping argument can also be used to explain ethnic wars that start from the bottom up, without government help. Alexander Motyl points out that some people are more strongly nationalistic than others, and they can be divided into "martyrs," "fanatics," "true believers," and "believers of convenience."[24] Nationalist martyrs and fanatics can be counted on to be politically active even in the face of certain repression, so there is always likely to be someone promoting nationalist policies. If political repression decreases, true believers will join in and the nationalist movement will grow. If the incumbent government then shows signs of responding, more moderate nationalists will join as well. The more who join, the greater the incentives for others to join, as a larger movement is both safer to join and more likely to succeed. Martyrs or fanatics may also play an important role by starting the cycle of violence, provoking retaliation which shocks moderates into the belief that extremist policies are necessary.

The inadequacy of rationalist approaches

Available rationalist explanations of ethnic war are inadequate. The economic rivalry argument is logically inconsistent and fails to explain the pattern of ethnic violence. Hardin-style "hard rationalist" arguments fail to explain why ethnic groups hold together. They are also wrong empirically: "emergent anarchy" does not cause ethnic security dilemmas; rather, mutual hostility causes insecurity, ethnic mobilization, state breakdown, and therefore anarchy. Deprived of this argument, these hard rationalist explanations for violence collapse. While the soft rationalist approach works, it does so only by assuming group norms and hostile attitudes, which is most of what the theory is meant to explain.

Rationalist approaches do offer important insights, however. First, they point out that elites, who powerfully shape the course of ethnic conflict, may use ethnicity instrumentally in pursuit of their own personal interests. Second, the mass-led "tipping" process and selective incentives provided by elites are convincing explanations for how mutually hostile groups might mobilize. Finally, information failures and problems of credible commitment can exacerbate interethnic security dilemmas, though rationalists misunderstand the origins of those security dilemmas.

To explain why ethnic groups hold together and hostile attitudes emerge to create security dilemmas, we must turn to psychological theories.

PSYCHOLOGICAL THEORIES

Psychological roots of ethnicity

Primordialism. A powerful statement of the primordialist position is Harold Isaacs's *Idols of the Tribe*, which states, "basic group identity consists of the ready-made set of endowments and identifications that every individual shares with others from the moment of birth by the chance of the family into which he is born."[25] The markers of group identity, Isaacs points out, are basic personal characteristics that fundamentally shape how individuals view the world and how the world views them. Group identity is indeed for most people ascriptive—that is, assigned at birth—and is often marked on the body, either naturally as racial characteristics or carved on by circumcision, tattoo, or other artificial process. Native language provides the words, and therefore the conceptual lens, through which one understands the world. And religion shapes values, identity, and therefore how people define their wants and needs. Walker Connor, who takes a position similar to primordialism, argues that the sum of these markers defines a group which acts like, and indeed claims to be, a kin group.[26] According to this logic, ethnic loyalty taps some fundamental biological drives, such as defense of kin and territoriality. It is these mutually reinforcing bonds which give ethnicity its power in the primordialist view.

The trouble with this argument is that the history and kinship ties are usually fictitious, while most national identities are new. Thus in France, the epitome of a European nation-state, many peasants felt only local rather than national loyalties down to the end of the nineteenth century.[27] National identity can hardly be "primordial" if it is new; and it cannot be genetic if its members are not related.

Constructivism. The constructivist position begins from the insight that the meaning of an ethnic identity—who is included in the group, what its values are, and so on—is a set of ideas. Those ideas, constructivists point out, are generally either newly invented or newly interpreted by ethnic or nationalist intellectuals. It is therefore these intellectuals who "construct" ethnic identity, sometimes by inventing group history from whole cloth.[28] In some parts of Africa and the Soviet Union, even ethnic labels and literary languages were first created by outsiders such as missionaries or anthropologists, and the resulting identity came to be accepted by the groups only after governments began applying the label to them.

This fundamental point is actually conceded by both primordialists and instrumentalists. Thus, the above-mentioned instrumentalist account of the creation of nineteenth-century European nationalisms is also a construc-

tivist account, dependent on the role of ethnic elites and intellectuals in "constructing" nations. And Clifford Geertz, considered the founder of the primordial school, agrees that ethnic markers are culturally rather than biologically determined.[29] The primordialist point is that there is a limit to the plasticity of ethnic identity. Although intellectuals can feel free to invent, reinvent, or obscure their group's past to a large extent, they must build on certain preexisting foundations, such as language, religion, culture, and territory. The trick for the intellectual "cultural entrepreneur" is to link a name and cluster of cultural elements to a history and mythology that both creates ethnic symbols and answers contemporary group needs. In short, while ethnic groups are not permanent and fixed, they are not infinitely malleable either.[30] Weakly supported national identities such as the Yugoslav and Soviet do not survive.

In some cases, ethnic identities may be used to justify conflicts not intended by their creators. For example, myths of "ancient" Sinhalese-Tamil conflict in Sri Lanka were recreated by Sinhalese activist Anagarika Dharmapala in the late nineteenth century to help promote a cultural and Buddhist religious revival among the Sinhalese people, and secondarily to build political opposition to the British colonialists. Decades later, S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike used those myths to mobilize Sinhalese around an anti-Tamil program in the 1956 election campaign.[31] Thus the politicians who exploit ethnic myths may not be the thinkers who created them.

The symbolist synthesis. The different schools of thought about ethnicity are more compatible than normally understood. The barrier to theoretical reconciliation has been the misperception that primordialists see ethnic ties as immutable, genetic links. Understanding that most primordialists see ethnicity as *culturally* rather than genetically determined opens the way to combining all three schools of thought. The outlines of a synthesis were sketched out by Crawford Young in the mid-1970s.[32]

The synthesis begins with the argument that group loyalty is likely to be evolutionarily favored: those who can in a crisis count on fellow group-members' loyalty—including such non-kin as in-laws—were presumably advantaged over strict egoists, who would have died when their groups fractured under stress. "Nationalism gets its force," in this view, "by drawing on [this] primordial sociality." This argument is sometimes caricatured as a simplistic "killer ape" theory of human nature, but in fact its more sophisticated version is consistent with constructivist logic. The argument is not that ethnic violence is somehow encoded in human genes, but that *cultural* tendencies toward collective group self-defense are evolutionarily favored.[33]

Ethnic or national leaders then create nationalist identities, using ethnic symbols to mimic the cues that originally invoked a genuine kinship/

group-defense response—hence the "motherland" and "fatherland" symbols commonly used by nationalists to combine the notions of home territory and family.[34] The core of the ethnic identity is the "myth-symbol complex"—the combination of myths, memories, values, and symbols that defines not only who is a member of the group but what it means to be a member.[35] The existence, status, and security of the group thus come to be seen to depend on the status of group symbols, which is why people are willing to fight and die for them—and why they are willing to follow leaders who manipulate those symbols for dubious or selfish purposes.

Nationalism is further strengthened by the religious nature of ethnic or nationalist ideologies. In this view, what nationalist ideologues create is in some sense a religion. For the nationalist, the nation is a god—a jealous god—to whom one pays homage, venerating its temples (monuments), relics (battle flags), and theology (including a mythical history); and receiving in return a sort of immortality as a participant in what is conceived as an eternal nation.[36]

This synthesis explains why ethnicity is so powerful and ubiquitous: it draws its power from many sources. If cleverly cast, an ethnic or nationalist appeal can claim that the ethnic warrior is fighting simultaneously for self-respect (identity), self-interest (material goods), clan survival, clan territory, the propagation of the faith, and country; and if the fight is successful, the warrior will have achieved immortality (through martyrdom and the defense of progeny) even in death. Ethnic group or nation is, therefore, a god so powerful that it is irresistible to invent him wherever he does not exist. Attempts to create ethnic loyalties are only successful, however, when the symbolic claims seem credible and relevant.

This account also explains why ethnicity is increasingly important today, though ethnic groups have existed for millennia.[37] The key changes are mass literacy and mass media, which made it possible to align the appeal of state and (redefined) tribe, and to mobilize the entire group around the combined ethno-nationalist theme.[38] At the same time, the processes of modernization throw together people from different places, making the markers of ethnicity more salient in daily life, while the increasing role of the modern state makes it more important to mobilize politically—hence the incentive to mobilize on ethnic lines. Finally, international acceptance of nationalism as the main principle legitimizing independent statehood encourages emulation, as groups are induced to say, "we too want our own nation-state." All of these factors contribute to the rising importance of ethnicity.

Psychological explanations of ethnic war

The case for emotional motivations in ethnic war is most effectively argued by Crawford Young and Donald Horowitz.[39] Horowitz starts with Henri Tajfel's finding that, when offered the choice between maximizing benefits

for their own group or maximizing the difference between their group and another, people tend to choose to maximize the difference. In other words, people gave up some (potential) benefits for their own group to ensure that the other group gained even less—even when the group is a randomly created one. Horowitz adds that when ethnic conflict turns into such competition for group advantage, the result is frequently a contest for dominance of the state as a way for groups to try to show their superior group worth. The language of the contest is legitimacy, as each group tries to prove its moral and historical claims give it the legitimate right to political dominance in their own homeland.[40] The issue in ethnic conflict, then, is not so much specific economic, linguistic, or other specific benefits, but relative status—superiority over other groups.

Prejudice plays a role as well. In many cases, a group's myth-symbol complex includes prejudice against the other group—that is, stereotypes about the rival group, enhanced by negative feelings about that group. Again, the emotional dimension of prejudice is important: research suggests that negative feelings about the other group are more important than stereotypes in explaining attitudes toward outgroups.[41]

The thinking involved in such conflicts is illustrated by the anecdote of the Russian peasant who finds a genie in a bottle. Offered a single wish, the peasant muses: "Well, my neighbor has a cow and I have none. So—Kill my neighbor's cow." This story illustrates the logic of ethnic war—hostility trumps acquisitiveness. The peasant could have improved both his absolute and his relative position by asking for two cows, but he considered the opportunity to gloat over his neighbor's loss to be worth more than two cows (or a bag of gold) for himself.

Horowitz adds that in cases where conflict leads to ethnic war, there is an additional motivation beyond the contest for dominance: anxiety-laden (that is, exaggerated) fears of group extinction. Such fears tend also to be based on demographic fears and a history of domination by the rival group.[42] Horowitz also agrees with the primordialist view that ethnicity has a "kinship with kinship": ethnic extinction matters, even if one's personal safety is not imperiled, because the future of the kinship group is imperiled. The fear of group extinction, Horowitz argues in sum, leads to feelings of hostility, and then to group violence. Young adds that the atmosphere of hostility and threat is likely to increase group solidarity, encourage the groups to perceive events in ethnic terms, and promote misperceptions across group boundaries.[43]

The insight that the motivation for ethnic war is in part emotional—interethnic hostility resulting from fear of ethnic extinction—helps fill in some of the logical gaps left by rationalist theory. If the issues at stake are defined not merely by economic or linguistic interests, but by a contest for status defined as domination and by anxiety-laden fears of extinction,

then it is easy to see why attitudes would be hostile—that is, why groups prefer to weaken or harm other groups even at some cost to their own material welfare.

These insights do not, however, form a coherent theory. Building them into one requires the addition of a theory of choice that incorporates the emotional nature of ethnic bonds. Murray Edelman's theory of symbolic politics offers a way to do so.

A Symbolic Politics Theory of Ethnic War

Symbolic Choice vs. Rational Choice

Rational choice theory is based on several fundamental assumptions. Two of them are that people have stable, ordered preferences; and that in choosing they try rationally to maximize their utility as defined by those preferences. Those assumptions are useful for some purposes, such as explaining most kinds of economic behavior, ordinary diplomacy, or interest-group politics. However, as symbolic politics theory points out, those rationalist assumptions are often false.

Concerning the first assumption, psychologists Irving Janis and Leon Mann argue that people are "reluctant decision maker[s]" because deciding is stressful: people find it hard to handle complexity—especially the complexity of trading off incommensurable values—and they fear that their decision might be wrong.[44] Therefore, people frequently do not make the tradeoff decisions. Because different criteria lead to different preferences, the result is that people's opinions on complex issues are often unstable. For example, polls in 1966 found majorities of Americans in favor both of President Johnson's policy in Vietnam, which involved escalating the war, and of the idea of de-escalating the war.[45] In this case, what determined people's views was how the issue was framed.[46] If the question was one of support for the president, people were inclined to go along. If the question was about what to do in Vietnam, people were inclined to favor de-escalation. The reason for the uncertainty was partly the difficulty of making a tradeoff in incommensurable values: am I sure enough that I dislike this policy to disagree with the president on it?

Regarding the second assumption, psychologists argue that when people choose—and especially when they choose to act—they often do so emotionally rather than rationally. As Susan Fiske and Shelley Taylor put it, "emotion commits one to action more than does the cost-benefit calculation of intellective cognition."[47] Thus people are more likely to participate in a protest rally or write to a politician on an issue that angers them or otherwise stirs them emotionally—an issue that stirs a "hot cognition"—than on an issue that only involves their material interests.[48] This finding is important because of a

second effect of emotional decision-making: "emotions...divert people from pursuing one goal and point them toward pursuing another goal that has meanwhile increased in importance."[49] Donald Kinder has found, for example, that Americans' feelings of anger against Saddam Hussein during the Persian Gulf War correlated with fewer qualms about the civilian casualties caused by U.S. action, and with greater support for having U.S. troops march to Baghdad to oust Saddam.[50] Emotions change preferences: in this case, anger promoted support for hawkish policies.

Interestingly, even rational choice theorists are inclined to agree that emotions help determine decisions. Thus Samuel Popkin, whose book is entitled *The Reasoning Voter*, notes that "data presented in an emotionally compelling way may be given greater consideration and more weight than data that is statistically more valid, but emotionally neutral."[51] This insight accords with psychological research: for example, one study subtitled "Preferences Need No Inferences" shows that emotional judgments are quicker and stronger than cognitive judgments, people are more likely to remember emotionally keyed information than purely cognitive information, and people may have affective responses to something—liking or disliking it—without even recognizing what it is.[52] Even more important, studies have shown that attitudes which originally formed emotionally are most responsive to emotional appeals.[53] This is the heart of the matter: for some kinds of decisions, people are most likely to base their decisions on emotion.

The core assumption of symbolic choice theory is therefore: *people choose by responding to the most emotionally potent symbol evoked.* According to Murray Edelman, who originated the approach, symbols get their meaning from emotionally laden myths. Myths, as mentioned above, have the role of giving events and actions a particular meaning—typically by defining enemies and heroes and tying ideas of right and wrong to people's identity. Facts, from this point of view, do not matter—either they are redundant, confirming the myth; or else they contradict it and are rejected. To illustrate the point, Edelman uses the example of American attitudes toward the Vietnam War.[54] To those who believed the myth of "America the righteous," the meaning of American military action was a stand against communist aggression, and facts that did not fit that image—American misdeeds of various kinds—were ignored or rejected. To others, the war was symbolized by the napalming of children. They therefore accepted the myth of "Vietnam the victim," the ultimate expression of which was Jane Fonda's visit to North Vietnam, and rejected or downplayed any evidence of North Vietnamese misdeeds.

From this point of view, then, political choice is mostly emotional expression, politics is mostly about manipulating people's emotions, and symbols provide the tool for such manipulation. As a practice, "symbolic politics"

refers to any sort of political activity focused on arousing emotions rather than addressing interests. As anthropologist Zdzislaw Mach aptly sums it up, in politics, "symbols are...selected and combined so as to achieve a desired state of people's minds; to appeal to values, to refer to ideas, to stir emotions and to stimulate action."[55] Politicians manipulate symbols—wave flags, refer to heroes, kiss babies—in order to induce people to make choices based on the values they are promoting (which are evoked by the chosen symbols), or to associate themselves with those values.[56] Thus politicians supporting a war evoke symbols of the nation's greatness and demonize the enemy, while those opposing it try to evoke sympathy for the casualties and reverse the hawks' identification of heroes and villains.

Symbols are so potent because they have both cognitive and emotional effects.[57] Thus when abortion opponents use the imperiled fetus as the symbol of the issue, they are both framing the issue cognitively as one of the life of the fetus and trying to elicit sympathy for what they consider an innocent and vulnerable baby. Ethnicity is a rich resource for politicians engaged in symbolic politics because it is so emotionally laden. Ethnic groups by definition have myths of shared history, common heroes, and common kinship, as well as symbols that evoke those myths. Furthermore, a threatened ethnic symbol can be used to tap a number of values and emotions simultaneously—especially fellow-feeling among those in the group, shared feelings of superiority over and threat from the out-group—in addition to perceptions of conflict of interests. In short, Edelman argues, symbolic appeals create around conflicts of interest a myth of struggle against "hostile, alien, or subhuman forces" as a way to mobilize support.[58]

THE SYMBOLIC POLITICS OF ETHNIC WAR

The central assumption of symbolic politics theory—that people make political choices based on emotion and in response to symbols—fits closely with the psychologically driven understanding of ethnic war suggested by the work of Young and Horowitz. Horowitz argues that emotions such as fear of group extinction are what drive ethnic violence; Young emphasizes the importance of stereotypes (myths) and symbols in sustaining identity and driving group mobilization. And if ethnicity is an emotional bond evoking kinship feelings, then emotional appeals to that bond should be the basic mechanism by which ethnic mobilization works. Research also shows that people experiencing any negative emotion are more prone to feelings of anger and aggression if ideas justifying anger and aggression are brought to mind.[59] Therefore, if emotional appeals to ethnic themes are simultaneously appeals to ideas that lead one to blame another group, those appeals are apt simultaneously to arouse the feelings of anger and aggression most likely to motivate people to want to fight.

Put together, these ideas create a convincing picture of the psychology of ethnic war. On the individual level, appeals to emotionally laden ethnic symbols are what motivate people to participate in ethnic movements, and appeals to myths blaming other groups are what make people feel aggressive and motivate them to fight in ethnic wars. Those emotional appeals short-circuit the complicated problem of making tradeoff decisions because they encourage people to put ethnic issues ahead of other concerns. At the same time, the social psychology of group membership reinforces these processes for the group as a whole. These processes lead group members to want to gain status relative to other groups, encouraging them to pursue dominance over other groups. Additionally, feelings that the ethnic group is like a kinship group make people willing to fight to defend their group, especially if they believe that the group is truly threatened with extinction.

According to symbolic politics theory, then, understanding whether people will engage in ethnic violence requires that we examine the myths and prejudices that determine which symbols are likely to move them, and what evokes their greatest collective fears.

NECESSARY CONDITIONS FOR ETHNIC WAR

Precisely when, then, does ethnic war occur? The key necessary conditions are:

Myths justifying ethnic hostility

According to symbolic politics theory, people respond to ethnic symbols and mobilize for war only if a widely known and accepted ethnic myth-symbol complex justifies hostility to the other group. The myths justify hostility if they identify a territory as the group's homeland which must be defended and dominated politically and define a mythical enemy with which the other group can be identified. Chauvinism—the belief that one's own group is superior—is typically part of the motivation for the goal of dominance. And if the group's identity includes a warrior ethos, as the Chechen mythos does, for example, that group is likely to be more prone to ethnic violence.[60] In this book, I look for such hostile myths in the key themes in each group's mainstream history texts written before the conflicts began, as well as in dissident sources.

Myths can be and sometimes are recast by chauvinist elites, of course, but this process takes a very long time unless it builds on a myth-symbol complex already made familiar by previous cultural entrepreneurs. Jack Snyder points out that these myths are often molded and propagated by national governments as a way of gaining nationalist legitimacy.[61] In Yugoslavia, for example, the long-standing myth of Serbian martyrdom at the hands of Muslims in the Battle of Kosovo was propagated by the Serbian state in the

nineteenth and twentieth centuries, then supplemented and transformed by the fear-invoking slogan "Only unity saves the Serbs," which formed the basis for justifying hostility against Bosnian Muslims and Kosovo Albanians in the 1980s and 1990s.

There does not have to be such a well-developed myth-symbol complex on both sides. Young begins his book with an example of ethnic violence (a conflict between Mbala and Pende in Zaire in 1962) in which one group was relatively well-defined, but the opposing side was essentially a loose coalition of groups that did not long exist as a separate identity. This defines one of the minimum necessary conditions for ethnic war: the existence of at least one group with a myth-symbol complex justifying the pursuit of ethnic dominance (and thus hostility to any who oppose it), and the existence of another group or coalition bound together in opposition to the first group.

Ethnic fears

A fundamental factor causing ethnic conflicts to escalate to war is that first one side, then eventually both sides, come to fear that the existence of their group is at stake. Such extreme fears justify hostile attitudes toward the other group and extreme measures in self-defense, including demands for political dominance. These fears may be anxiety-laden—that is, exaggerated by emotion and by ingroup-outgroup psychology. For example, Horowitz quotes Nigerian Hausa, members of the country's largest ethnic group, as expressing fears at the time of their ethnic war of being "swamped" by minorities from the south.[62] These psychological tendencies explain the power of ethnic fear to motivate ethnic mobilization and murderous violence.

The source of such fear is typically the group's myth-symbol complex, portraying the in-group as peculiarly under threat or peculiarly victimized. In these cases, the more the group's historians emphasize the group's past victimization, the more credible are the emotional charges of genocide that arouse gut-level fears and the more appealing are hate-filled cries for vengeance.[63] Indeed, in most cases of ethnic war, at least one group has been historically dominated by the other,[64] causing fears of ethnic extinction to appear more plausible to the previously dominated, while giving the previously dominant reason to fear revenge. Sometimes both groups have had both experiences: Azerbaijanis fear a return to the Armenian minority's nineteenth-century dominance, while Armenians in Azerbaijan resent twentieth-century Azerbaijani rule.

Demographic threats may also motivate ethnic fears, most insidiously in cases involving an "ethnic affinity problem" in which the minority in a country (e.g., Israel's Palestinians) is the majority in the broader region.[65] The effect of such a situation is that both groups, by viewing borders differently, can think of themselves as potential minorities in danger of ethnic

extinction. Mixed settlement patterns also may contribute to ethnic fear,[66] but they only cause a security dilemma if both communities are threatened. If the minority (e.g., Bombay's Muslim community) is seriously threatened, but the majority (Bombay's Hindus) are not, the result is pogroms instead of a security dilemma.[67]

Myths play a key role in the interpretation of these factors, however. Histories of domination can be invented, as the Serbs do when they identify the Albanians of Kosovo, who never dominated Serbia, with the Ottoman Turks, who did. More generally, ethnic histories always contain episodes of peace and of war; which is "traditional" depends on tradition—that is, myth or interpretation—rather than on actual past events. Some groups that are genuinely threatened by demographic trends (e.g., the Latvians) may not resort to violence at all, while other groups (e.g., the Hausa) may distort demographic trends to invent a danger that does not exist. Finally, mixed settlement patterns may contribute to ethnic understanding rather than violence; while ethnic war (as in southern Sudan) may occur where groups are geographically separate. What determines a group's response to its situation is its mythology—which determines its expectations—more than the situation itself.

Once ethnic fears become prevalent among the members of any ethnic group, for whatever reason, they justify and motivate a resort to violence in self-defense. Such fears are a necessary condition for ethnic war because people are much more concerned to avoid loss than to pursue gains, so they are usually mobilizable only when confronted by some threat.[68] This is why leaders of nations, even when they launch aggressive wars, always justify their actions by claiming that it is aimed at averting some mortal danger. Even the Holocaust was justified by an ideology that Jews were not only inferior, but evil and dangerous.[69]

Opportunity to mobilize and fight

Another requirement for ethnic war is opportunity: ethnic groups must have enough freedom to mobilize politically without being stopped by state coercion.[70] Effective policing can prevent violent episodes from escalating, and political repression can prevent ethnic leaders from articulating their demands and mobilizing their followers for conflict. Therefore, as long as a state maintains an effective apparatus of repression and uses it to suppress ethnic mobilization, large-scale ethnic violence cannot occur. Since the relaxation or weakening of political repression opens up political space for all sorts of political entrepreneurs, such relaxation can make ethnic violence more likely. The way Mikhail Gorbachev's policy of *glasnost* provided the political space for ethnic entrepreneurs to mobilize in the Soviet Union epitomizes this possibility.

Of course, if it is the leaders of the state who want to start ethnic violence, they have the opportunity as long as they are in power: Rwanda's Hutu government in 1994 illustrates the point. If the result is to be ethnic war, however, both sides must have the opportunity to organize and arm themselves. Such opportunity requires a territorial base: if one side has no base—either inside the disputed area or across a friendly border—where it can organize its army, it cannot fight. If one side, usually the state, has an overwhelming military advantage, the result is ethnic cleansing, genocide, or more limited riots rather than war.

When foreign patrons are the key cause of violence, they act by changing the opportunity structure, usually by offering material assistance to one side.[71] Foreign countries or groups cannot directly create mass hostility or extremist elites, but they can provide money, advice, and propaganda support to help extremist elites mobilize politically and promote ethnic hostility. They can also provide money and arms to enable chauvinist elites to initiate violence using the few fanatics the elites can mobilize at first. Moldova's Transnistria conflict, as I show in chapter 5, is an example of this potential, with Russia playing the role of the third party. Third parties can also, of course, act to discourage violence; those possibilities are discussed below.

Transnistria and southern Sudan are examples of another point concerning opportunity: ethnic war does not require the existence of government institutions uniting each conflicting group. While groups in conflict often take over existing regional governments where they can, they can create such institutions if necessary (as the Transnistrians did), or they can operate simply as a loose coalition of insurgents (as do the rebels of southern Sudan).

A final related point concerns level of economic development. Jack Snyder has argued that ethnonationalist mobilization is most likely at levels of per capita GDP between $1,000 and $6,000 in 1985 dollars. Below $1,000 in income, he argues, people tend to mobilize as part of patronage networks rather than as ethnic groups; while above $6,000 the growth of an educated middle class damps down tendencies toward ethnonationalist extremism.[72] This correlation does seem to exist, but both the trend and the exceptions to it are best explained in symbolic terms. Purveying a strong nationalist mythology generally requires an effective educational system associated with at least moderate levels of economic development. Sometimes, however, as in Rwanda and Burundi, strong ethnonationalist mythologies exist at lower levels of economic development, and these are the exception to Snyder's rule. At higher income levels, prosperous middle-class groups in democratic states are not usually inclined to pursue ethnic violence—but in cases where ethnic myths and

fears are strong, as in Northern Ireland and Spain's Basque region, they do resort to violence.

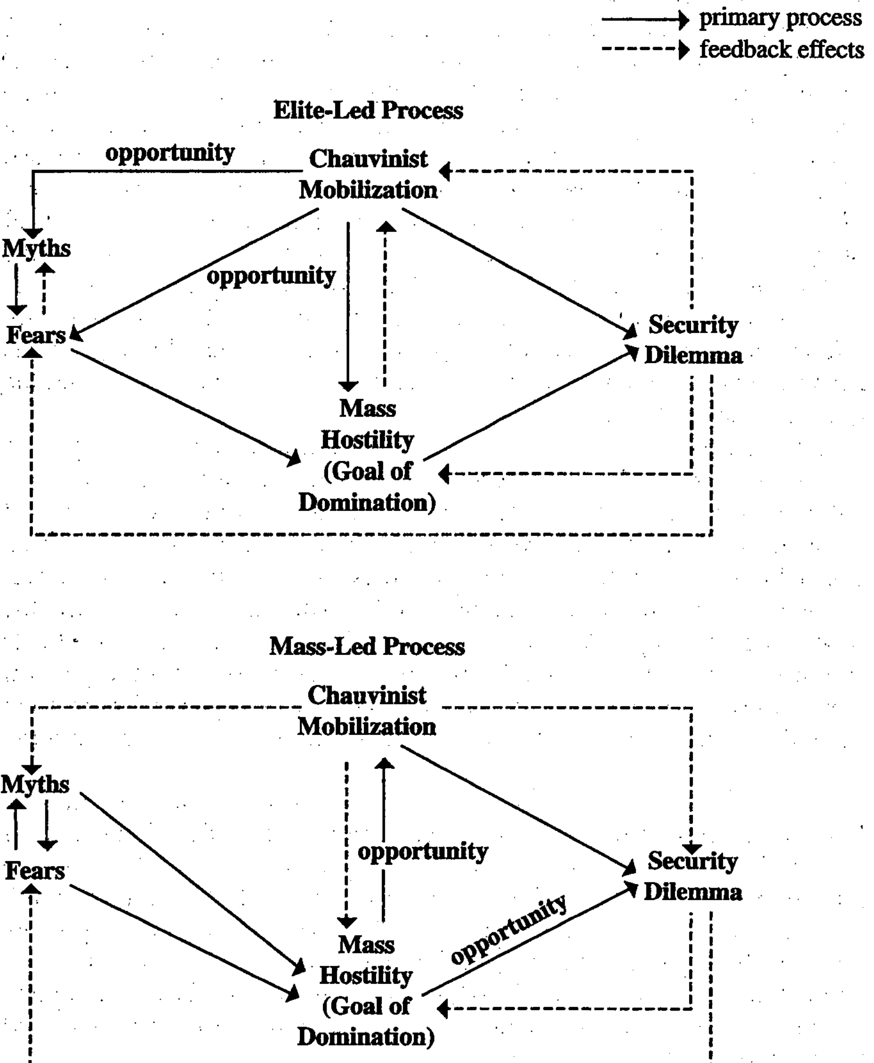
PROCESSES LEADING TO ETHNIC WAR

If the necessary conditions for ethnic war are myths, fears, and opportunity, the timing of war is explained by an increase in fear, opportunity, or hostility justified by the myths. Hostility and fear rise as a result of symbolic events that activate the myths, such as a violent episode that appeals to ethnic stereotypes (e.g., a murder or beating blamed by one group on another); a leader explicitly manipulating symbols (e.g., waving a flag); a threatening shift in political power (e.g., the election of a minority or extremist candidate); or even the emergence of new information (e.g., publication of a census showing a group's population decline). The alternative possibility is that fear and hostility are already high, but a new political opportunity emerges (e.g., emergence of a reforming leader).

The symbolic politics theory holds that if the three preconditions—hostile myths, ethnic fears, and opportunity—are present, ethnic war results if they lead to rising mass hostility, chauvinist mobilization by leaders making extreme symbolic appeals, and a security dilemma between groups. Different kinds of triggering events work by activating either the hostility or chauvinist mobilization. When myths, fears, and hostility are already strong, a new opportunity and a galvanizing event allow a powerful *mass-led* ethnic movement to emerge. Such movements spur politicians to seek support by making chauvinist symbolic appeals, goading mobilization even if the government opposes it; if the result is a security dilemma, war follows. Other conflicts are *elite-led*, in which a few powerful elites, typically government officials, harness ethnic myths and symbols to provoke fear, hostility, and a security dilemma and mobilize their group for violence. In either case, war results from a vicious feedback loop in which hostility, extremist symbolic appeals, and a security dilemma all reinforce each other to spur violence (see Figure 2.1). If any of the three processes is absent, however—if hostility rises but politicians avoid extremist appeals, or if the population resists such appeals, or if the sides' demands do not cause a security dilemma—war can be avoided.

The way an ethnic security dilemma works is most similar to Jack Snyder's concept of the "imperialist's dilemma" or to what Robert Jervis has called a "deep security dilemma."[73] In contrast to Jervis's more commonly cited formulation, in which the sides prefer not to fight but feel driven to do so by insecurity, the sides in an ethnic security dilemma are openly hostile and are perfectly willing to fight. Violence is not their first choice—they would rather get what they want peacefully. Yet, what each group does to pursue its own security-defined-as-dominance is so threatening to a rival

FIGURE 2.1 PROCESSES OF ETHNIC CONFLICT ESCALATION



group that the rival increases its security demands in ways threatening to the first. The tragic element is that the groups are spurred by their mythologies to define their security in mutually incompatible ways when more modest definitions on both sides would permit mutual security instead of a spiral of insecurity and violence.

A peculiar feature of the process leading to ethnic war is that it is a process of positive feedback: all of the causes reinforce each other in an escalating spiral of violence.[74] Hostile myths and attitudes are what make chauvinist politics possible, but symbolic appeals to those myths evoke emotions that make attitudes still more hostile. Feelings of insecurity also encourage hostile attitudes, but hostile attitudes on one side cause a security dilemma (and further hostility) for both. Finally, chauvinist political programs promote armed mobilization that can lead to violence; but the violence feeds back to make the chauvinist political programs more popular. This is a key to understanding ethnic war: because all of the causes reinforce each other in an escalating spiral or positive feedback loop, events need not happen in any particular order. The causes are universal, but the paths to ethnic war are multiple.

The existence of these elements—hostile myths, fears, opportunity—is a more-or-less rather than a yes-or-no proposition. The more they are present, the more conflict and violence will be centered around ethnicity and the worse that violence will become. If government breakdown leads to violence but ethnic mythologies and identities are weak, then the violence is likely to be organized around nonethnic coalitions. Also, because the process operates by feedback, different initial mixes of these ingredients can produce war: very strong hostile myths may need very little political opportunity to cause war; while weaker myths may require reinforcement by political leaders before they can serve for mobilizing a group to fight.

Mass-led violence scenarios

Mass-led paths to ethnic war begin with opportunity—the lifting of some previously existing barrier to ethnic self-expression, usually the coercive force of a state—or else with some galvanizing event like a highly publicized murder. In these cases, the other necessary conditions—especially myths justifying ethnic hostility and ethnic fears—are already significant, and nationalism is therefore already the central value of dissident politics. In other words, there are already relatively large numbers of fanatics and true believers in the population.

In these circumstances, long-standing myths justifying group solidarity and identifying threats to group survival suddenly start being articulated publicly. With hostility already high, mass ethnic nationalist movements can spring into being almost overnight, either *de novo* or by pressing previously apolitical organizations into action as vehicles for ethno-nationalist mobi-

lization. A tipping process works to promote that mobilization as the improving safety and prospects for success motivate more and more moderate nationalists to join in. Intraethnic politics then becomes a competition in nationalist symbolism, in which elites in each ethnic group find themselves competing to establish their ethnic *bona fides* and gain adherents by promoting "genuine" nationalist goals—including, if their group fears extinction, the subordination of other ethnic groups to their own.[75] A security dilemma naturally follows from the pursuit of such goals, creating a feedback loop that increases fear, hostility, and extremist symbolic politics on both sides.

There is, however, no single path which all mass-led conflicts follow to ethnic war. In some cases, hostile masses reward elites proposing chauvinist platforms, thereby creating a security dilemma (because the platforms threaten other groups) and leading to violence. This is the likely pattern in cases of *popular chauvinism*, when the group mobilizing first is the majority, as occurred in Georgia (see chapter 4). In other cases, masses engage in widespread but unorganized violence that first creates a security dilemma and only then leads to the replacement of existing leaders with extremists intent on implementing chauvinist policies. This pattern is more typical for repressed minorities—cases of *mass insurgency* such as the Karabagh conflict (see chapter 3). Either way, the first episodes of violence play an important role because they provide vivid evidence supporting previously inchoate fears, and later serve as a symbol of the threat to the group. The emotional impact moves opinion by reinforcing existing myths, often turning latent chauvinism into open hostility.

Elite-led violence scenarios

Elite-led violence involves yet another set of paths. In these cases, leaders motivated either by ideological zeal or by opportunism mobilize their group for ethnic war in pursuit of their own goals. They use the propaganda resources of modern political organizations and mass media to manipulate ethnic symbols and fan ethnic hostility, identifying outgroups with enemies from group mythology and highlighting the "threats" they pose. Thus minor demographic changes can be redefined as mortal threats to group survival, ancient disasters can be recast as current threats, and violent methods can be promoted as the only alternative to group catastrophe.

Additionally, the power of leaders to define the political agenda and control negotiations makes it possible for them to block any potential compromise simply by being intransigent. Blaming the stalemate on the other group then allows them to discredit opponents who promote moderate programs. Eventually, the extremists can organize militias or armies to launch violent provocations which begin a cycle of violence—radicalizing opinion and creating symbols for future use. If the other side responds in kind, a security dilemma spiral fed by violent propaganda takes off. This is

most likely to occur in cases of *government jingoism*—epitomized by Slobodan Milosevic in Serbia (see chapter 6)—in which top government officials are the culprits.

Also possible is a process of *elite conspiracy*, in which low-level elites or guerrilla leaders, typically aided from the outside, initiate a similar process. The case of Moldova's Transnistria conflict (see chapter 5) exemplifies this pattern.

EXPLAINING ATROCITIES

The above logic can explain why people are willing to fight in ethnic wars: because they are frightened, and because they become convinced that their group's political dominance is essential to group survival. Such thinking can logically justify killing, and even massacre in extreme cases. Atrocities, however, require something more. While I cannot present a complete theory of atrocities here, it is possible to suggest an explanation based on the logic of symbolic politics.

Some argue that atrocities occur because they are in the interests of the people who commit or order them. That explanation, however, is not adequate. First, atrocities are not very useful, even if one's goal is ethnic cleansing. The Serbs in Bosnia, for example, were in many cases able to use simple threats of murder, accompanied by a few exemplary killings, to accomplish this aim. Dismembering victims or torturing them adds little to the terror created by threats of murder. Second, atrocities do attract moral opprobrium from third parties: all groups in conflict want outside allies and sympathizers, and engaging in atrocities is undeniably costly in driving away potential supporters. Atrocities, in short, are not a useful policy tool.

The symbolic politics theory would suggest an explanation based less on logical than on psychological factors. If the point of ethnic symbolism is to engage supporters' emotions, and the point of such symbolism during violent conflict is specifically to encourage aggressive emotions, it stands to reason that some proportion of people will react extremely strongly to the aggressive symbolism and express it in extreme ways. At the same time, even atrocities have to have a normative basis, which should consist of two components: a mythical belief that the opponent tends to engage in atrocities and a normative view that retaliatory atrocities are morally acceptable. The key is the last part: ethnic violence is always defined defensively, by the claim that the other group is trying to take away what is "rightfully ours"; atrocities have to be justified by the claim that committing them is a legitimate way to defend what is "rightfully ours."

To be sure, not everyone who engages in atrocities has to accept such beliefs. But some must. Even if atrocities are ordered by political leaders and

enforced both by peer pressure and by government sanction, at least some of the people carrying out the orders must believe in their legitimacy if they are to exert peer pressure. This is the key point Daniel Goldhagen makes about the Holocaust in *Hitler's Willing Executioners*: while obedience to authority, peer pressure, and other factors do play a role in making such behavior systemic, these motivations are not enough to explain cases in which people take the initiative in committing atrocities, or in which they have the opportunity to evade such "duties" but carry them out anyway.[76] Every plea of "they made me do it" must come attached to a case in which someone willingly applied the coercion.

An alternative explanation for atrocities, and for ethnic wars in general, is that they are carried out primarily by common criminals, thugs who like hurting people and find in such conflicts an excuse to do so. There is plenty of evidence to support this proposition.[77] It is not, however, a complete explanation: behind most warlords employing such thugs (such as Serbia's Arkan) is an ethnic nation and leadership (the Serbs and Milosevic) justifying their behavior in terms of national defense. Furthermore, many atrocities are carried out by otherwise ordinary people. Thuggishness explains some of the atrocities, but the motivating force of ethnic symbolism is necessary to fill in the rest of the puzzle.

Policy Alternatives for Conflict Resolution

THE MODEST REQUIREMENTS FOR ETHNIC PEACE

One argument of this book is that it is not easy in contemporary times to get people to fight ethnic wars, and it is even harder to get them to commit atrocities. Ethnic war is possible only in the presence of hostile myths, opportunity to mobilize, and fear of group extinction, and it breaks out only if these factors create mass hostility, a within-group politics dominated by extreme nationalist symbolism, and a security dilemma between groups. If any major ingredient is missing, ethnic war cannot occur. If a group's myth-symbol complex encourages cooperation with other groups rather than domination or defensiveness—if, that is, people are reasonable and moderate—mobilization for ethnic war cannot begin because extremist politics is not rewarded. If people are fearful but not extremely so, they are unlikely to resort to violence. And even if people are hostile and fearful, if elites can moderate political demands and restrain violent popular impulses—avoiding extremist political symbolism and preventing the emergence of a security dilemma—violence can still be averted. Ethnic wars only happen when the attitudes of elites and masses are aligned in hostility.

Given these three key causes of ethnic war—mass hostility, extremist politics, and a security dilemma—a comprehensive approach to conflict resolution would require attempts to ameliorate or prevent all three, either before or after violence breaks out. One way to restrain extremist politics is through *peacemaking*—pursuit of intergroup negotiations and cooperation, whether through mediated talks, building consociational institutions, or some other device.[78] If the problem can be reduced to a classic security dilemma—that is, a situation in which the parties can agree on a preferred outcome but do not trust each other to implement a compromise—then what is needed is *reassurance*, perhaps including *peacekeeping*. If, however, the core of the problem is mutually incompatible security requirements based on hostile myths and fears of extinction, then neither peacemaking nor peacekeeping can lead to a resolution. What is required first in these circumstances is *peacebuilding*—efforts to bring the groups (not just their leaders) together to change their hostile attitudes so they can revise their understanding of their security needs, thereby making peacemaking possible and peacekeeping less necessary.[79] Peacebuilding efforts, I will argue, are unwisely underestimated in conflict resolution practice: while vitally important to make conflict resolution work, they get little attention and few resources. Lack of attention to peacebuilding undermines conflict resolution efforts.

Peacemaking

For leaders faced with managing highly emotional ethnic conflicts, skill and sensitivity in building coalitions, negotiating agreements, and calming volatile passions may make the difference between success and failure.[80] Some political systems may be more likely than others to produce such leaders: the communist systems studied in this book did so only occasionally. The fact that Gorbachev was the first Soviet leader since Lenin to lack leadership experience outside Russia—and lacked therefore the opportunity to develop skill in ethnic conflict management—may be an important reason for the Soviet Union's breakup.

For conflicts that have already exploded into violence, a growing literature explores different modes of peacemaking and different strategies third parties can follow to mediate or broker settlements for ethnic conflicts. One key insight of this literature is that a conflict is "ripe for resolution" only in certain circumstances: if leaders on both sides want an agreement, can find a mutually acceptable formula, are strong enough to "deliver" their constituencies, and have a mutually acceptable process for negotiation. Typically, a mutually hurting stalemate is required for such conditions to emerge.[81]

In this context, there is a long list of things third-party mediators can do, most of which are relevant before violence breaks out as well as after.[82]

Mediators can create a suitable process by convening negotiations, offering a venue, establishing an agenda, and so on. They can suggest possible compromises, propose a formula for resolving the conflict, or set up a conciliation commission to design one. They can make agreement more attractive by offering inducements—resources for reconstruction, rewards for concessions—and by emphasizing the costs of failure to agree. Mediators can also offer to verify and guarantee the settlement. They can even help "deliver" the leaders' constituents by conferring international legitimacy on the process and the outcome—and on the leaders who reach it. More generally, by gaining the parties' trust and helping them communicate, mediators can help the parties reach understandings they might have missed unaided, in part by providing relatively unbiased information. If the parties prove recalcitrant, mediators can try to coerce them by threatening to impose economic sanctions, to aid the other side, or to intervene militarily. Finally, by drawing on international experience, mediators can help structure an agreement to help reduce the dangers that it will collapse in implementation.[83]

There is one problem with this approach, however: it usually does not work for resolving ethnic wars. One study shows that of post-World War II "identity civil wars" that have been settled in some way, over 70 percent were settled by one side's military victory, not by negotiations: and in two-thirds of those cases in which a negotiated settlement was reached, the settlements collapsed and war resumed.[84] Ethnic wars are hard to resolve through ordinary negotiations.

Reassurance

When two sides' goals are compatible but mutual mistrust is an obstacle to resolution, the sides can try to reduce the mistrust with reassuring moves: confidence-building measures such as military reductions or withdrawals; agreement on norms regulating competition; or implementation of strategies such as graduated reciprocation in tension-reduction.[85] The most powerful tool available is for a leader to make a highly visible symbolic gesture of reconciliation, such as Egyptian President Sadat's famous trip to Jerusalem, which started the process that led to the Camp David accords. The trouble, of course, is that by becoming himself the symbol of peace, the leader becomes vulnerable to retaliation by extremists: the assassinations of Sadat and Israeli Prime Minister Rabin are the measure of the incompleteness of Arab-Israeli reconciliation.

For third parties, the most effective tool of reassurance is peacekeeping the nonviolent use of third-party armed forces to maintain peace among belligerents.[86] In general, peacekeeping only works with the consent and cooperation of the key parties to the conflict: that is, if there is a peace to be kept, and the parties to the conflict want it to be kept, peacekeepers can help by preventing minor incidents between mistrustful belligerents from

escalating to renewed war.[87] Interestingly, this rather broad definition—a simplified version of the usual one—applies just as well to domestic policing, and indeed good policing can have this effect. If initial violent incidents play a critical role in provoking fear and motivating further violence, then prompt and fair punishment of violent actors by legitimate authorities can go far in calming fears and undercutting the motives for group violence. The conditions of ethnic warfare presuppose that authorities are unable or unwilling to accomplish this role.

Classical peacekeepers operate differently, by reminding the parties of their agreed obligations, reporting violations, and sometimes by inserting themselves between parties in conflict to prevent violence. In some cases—Macedonia in the mid- and late-1990s is an example discussed below—peacekeepers can be inserted preventively into a peaceful situation to help prevent the outbreak of violence. Peacekeeping has, however, two fundamental limits. First, when peacekeepers are inserted to maintain a ceasefire pending final resolution, the resulting stable ceasefire may remove incentives for the sides to resolve the conflict. The Cyprus conflict, where UN peacekeepers remained for decades in such a situation, is the clearest case. The second limitation is that peacekeeping only works where the parties want it to work: if the parties to a conflict are determined to fight, they can ignore or overrun peacekeepers. Making the parties want peace is the realm of peacebuilding.

Peacebuilding

Many theoreticians and diplomats tend to dismiss peacebuilding as either naive or ineffective, but doing so is a mistake. According to symbolic politics theory, the core causes of ethnic war are ethnic hostility and the myths and fears that promote it. What peacebuilders do is to bring people from opposing sides of a conflict together to replace the myths about the other side with better information, to replace the hostility and fear with understanding, and most of all to build cooperative interethnic relationships to replace stereotyped hostile ones.[88] From the point of view of the diplomatic practitioner, such efforts among grassroots leaders can build a political constituency for the diplomatic peace process so leaders can "sell" a compromise settlement. For mid-level officials, it includes reconciliation commissions or "track II" diplomacy that helps officials who have access to top leaders to work creatively with the other group to create mutually acceptable formulas for conflict resolution. And by building cooperative intergroup relationships, it creates resources that can be drawn on in implementing a peace agreement once reached.

Peacebuilding is an extremely difficult undertaking that has rarely been attempted except on a small scale. It has, however, already shown some results: peacebuilding can change attitudes. The typical formula is to bring

people from the groups in conflict together at a neutral site, often to live together for a period of time and to discuss in detail the issues that divide them. What they find time and again is that after heated arguments and initial resistance, most participants—for example, Israeli and Palestinian teenagers (including stone-throwing *intifadah* participants)[89] or religious leaders from northern and southern Sudan—come to an increased mutual understanding, and in some cases move on to creative efforts to help resolve real conflicts. One of the proudest accomplishment of peacebuilding is the 1993 Israeli-Palestinian Oslo Accords, which began as a "problem-solving workshop" involving mid-level officials on both sides. In Mozambique, a much larger grassroots effort including church-sponsored dialogues and a UNICEF-funded "Circus of Peace" helped create the environment in which the peacemaking efforts of top leaders could succeed.[90] The biggest problem peacebuilding faces is the "reentry problem": when participants return to their polarized societies, they find few people receptive to hearing their new insights. The best way to overcome this problem is through a coordinated set of peacebuilding efforts large enough in scale to help a networked constituency for peace emerge.

Another set of possibilities involves efforts to recast ethno-nationalist myths into cooperative and tolerant ones, especially by promoting the writing and teaching of fair-minded history instead of the ethnocentric and scapegoating kind.[91] For third parties, this means attention by governments and international organizations to school curricula in multiethnic countries and open criticism of and pressure on countries that teach hostile myths to their schoolchildren. Such myths, however, may not come exclusively or even primarily from history or social studies classes. On the contrary: since ethnic myths are primarily affective, they may be more effectively transmitted by literature than by history texts. Attention must therefore also be paid to the stories children read and the poems they recite. If they learn to hate in school, it may be more likely to happen in literature class than in history class.

In the shorter term, attention can also be paid to efforts at countering scapegoating propaganda—the twisting of ethnic symbols into symbols of ethnic conflict by chauvinist ethnic elites. Here too the means is primarily open criticism, in this case of chauvinist politicians. Chauvinists always try to equate their views with "true" nationalism; the challenge for outside critics is to make clear their disapproval of such chauvinists without appearing to oppose more legitimate sorts of nationalism. Doing so, indeed, cuts against the grain of symbolic politics, as it is easy for the chauvinist to ask: what right do *they* have to dictate the meaning of *our* national identity? Perhaps the best that can be done is to find ways to support the chauvinists' opponents in order to illustrate and demonstrate the benefits of choosing a more moderate leadership. This approach only works, however,

while the chauvinists are out of power; once they come to power, the country is on its way toward elite-led violence, and efforts to head it off become much more difficult.

Crisis management options

Once conflict begins building toward violence, all parties' options for conflict resolution narrow dramatically. If the mobilization is elite-led by government leaders, one option is to offer inducements for peace—a package of political and economic concessions that might help the leaders maintain their power without having to resort to hostile ethnic symbolism. This might be reinforced by deterrent threats to support the other side in case of violence, or by counter-mobilization of peace advocates. If the mobilization is a case of elite conspiracy by leaders of a subordinate group, the most relevant inducement would be co-optation—offering the opposition leaders limited power in exchange for loyalty. Other options include isolating them from outside aid or offering reassurance in the form of new evidence or incentives for government moderation. The trouble with all of these options is that once mobilization takes off, whether under the control of government leaders or of well-entrenched insurgents, the leaders are usually too committed to conflict to be swayed.

Mass-led conflicts may be more amenable to crisis management—if government leaders want to avoid violence. Minorities and majorities are likely to respond to different appeals, however. Mass insurgencies by subordinate minorities, whose fear of group extinction is likely to be relatively well-founded, primarily need reassurance, including from trusted police or peacekeepers, that they will be protected. In Macedonia in the 1990s, for example, United Nations peacekeepers were instrumental in providing such reassurance to the Albanian minority. Dominant majorities, who typically inflate fears of losing control into fears of extinction, are harder to reassure because dominance is the only sort of security their mythology allows. However, peacemaking efforts that grant the majority symbolic dominance while conceding the substantive requirements of security to the minority may be possible; if not, deterrence by the direct presence of superior external force may be the only alternative.

Applying the Symbolic Politics Theory

The symbolic politics theory I have proposed here is a general theory of ethnic war, applicable in any region of the world. Indeed, it is based largely on the ideas of Crawford Young and Donald Horowitz, who write primarily about Africa and Asia. Looking at Africa, for example, the argument that hostile myths and fears of extinction are critical causes of ethnic war holds

up well. Sudan's long-running ethnic war is clearly rooted in the mutually antagonistic identity myths of North and South, and where the symbol of "slavery" as the threat to the black southerners is based on a reality of slave trading by Arab northerners that continued into the twentieth century.[92] Similarly, Nigeria's ethnic war of the 1960s was driven by the Hausa-Fulani fear of group extinction, which was based on the stereotype of "pushy" southerners. In Congo/Zaire in the 1960s, in contrast, most violence was ideologically or regionally rather than ethnically based because myth-symbol complexes, and therefore identities, were relatively weak and undeveloped. And South Africa simmered but did not explode in the 1990s in large part because Nelson Mandela and the African National Congress successfully prevented white fears of group extinction from arising, hence avoiding the emergence of a black-white security dilemma (even as elite-led Zulu-Xhosa violence sparked a security dilemma among blacks in Natal).

The rest of this book is aimed at applying the theory to four cases in post-communist Europe. I selected these cases in part to allow a "most-similar systems" comparison: I can control for the type of political institutions and for political opportunity, which were similar in all cases, and focus on how other variables, such as ethnic myths and fears and leaders' behavior, caused ethnic wars. Brief discussions of peaceful counterexamples illustrate how peace was maintained in similar circumstances when myths and fears were weaker or leaders more restrained. Additionally, because many popular theories of ethnic war were formulated to explain the wars in the former Yugoslavia, I want to challenge those theories on their "home ground," showing how the symbolic politics approach offers a more convincing explanation of that case, while also explaining the mass-led wars of the South Caucasus that rival theories cannot explain.

The purpose of these studies is to illustrate the value of the symbolic theory—to show how the theory generates fairly simple, yet different and convincing, explanations for the causes of violence each case. Strictly speaking, they do not represent a test of the symbolic theory because they mostly "search on the dependent variable"—the discussions of cases in which war was avoided are only brief and suggestive. This procedure is warranted, however, because the aim of this book is not primarily theory testing but theory development. The main case studies demonstrate the usefulness of the theory for explaining those important cases, while the brief studies of non-wars provide some suggestive evidence associating ethnic peace with the absence of key variables in the theory. That, plus the theoretical synthesis, is enough for one book; a full test will have to await future study.

One claim I do test is that some conflicts are mass-led while others are elite-led. How can they be distinguished? The critical variable is the attitude of incumbent government officials at the time that ethnic mobilization begins to gather strength. If mass mobilization occurs without government

assistance, or even in the face of government efforts to repress it, then the conflict has to be mass-led. If incumbent government leaders are replaced by more nationalist figures as mobilization continues, that would be further evidence of a mass-led process. If, however, there is evidence that government leaders support mass ethnic mobilization from the beginning, then the mobilization is probably elite-led. Since the countries in the study were all communist countries with formal party/government control of the media, the attitude of the media is another indicator: media opposition to ethnic mobilization is evidence of a mass-led process; media support for it is evidence of an elite-led process.

The cases also represent a partial test of the theory in that they look for evidence that the key causes of violence identified in the theory are important in each case. The chapters pay little attention to opportunity, as the opportunities opened up by the death of Tito in Yugoslavia and Mikhail Gorbachev's policy of *glasnost* in the Soviet Union are already well-documented. They do, however, examine in detail the nationalist ideologies and myths in each case and the evidence of ethnic hostility and fear. The explorations of ideology and myth provide the context for examining each group's assertions of its interests and expressions of fear.

The cases also represent a "process-tracing" test, examining in detail how ethnic mobilization happened in order to determine whether the mechanism suggested by the symbolic politics theory actually took place. One key issue is the theory's contention that ethnic mobilization works by a process in which government leaders or dissident intellectuals manipulate ethnic symbols to attract support. By tracing the mobilization process in detail, I can determine whether people responded primarily to appeals to their tangible, individual interests, as rational choice theories assume; or whether they responded to invocations of emotive symbols while ignoring concessions to their material interests, as symbolic politics theory assumes. I also add brief discussions of atrocities to illustrate the plausibility of the symbolic politics explanation of such behavior.

The process-tracing also looks for evidence that ethnic hostility, extremist symbolic politics, and security dilemmas were all present in the cases, and that they all reinforced each other in a positive feedback process to cause the outbreak of violence. If the symbolic politics theory were incorrect, there would be evidence that security dilemmas were the result of groups' uncertainty about each other's motives rather than open hostility, and preparations for war would have been justified with the argument: "we must be prepared because we do not know what they will do." Finally, if the symbolic theory were incorrect, there would be evidence that leaders and followers preferred to avoid war and were willing to compromise to do so, but that structural factors and mistrust caused war to break out anyway.

The case studies support the symbolic politics theory. One of the striking findings of this book is the degree to which emotive symbolic issues—assertions of group or language status, the design of flags, the treatment of "sacred" territory—dominated more tangible issues in motivating participants. Leaders also refer again and again to the importance of emotion in mobilizing followers. People's tangible, individual interests—jobs, housing, education—are frequently irrelevant, and often distorted by ethnic myths even when they are relevant. Security dilemmas arise not from uncertainty about the other side's intentions but from strong evidence of the other side's hostility, usually matched by open hostility on one's own side. This hostility always takes the form of political programs aimed at dominating the other group in the disputed region. Thus war results not from mistrust or miscommunication but from a clash of interests, openly stated and defined as irreconcilable.

Measuring the motivations of the followers of chauvinist movements is, of course, difficult. When opinion polls on relevant issues are not available, the best that can be done is to look at what politicians, activists, and the media were saying at the time. Since we know people mobilized, presumably the themes and issues used at the time were the ones that motivated them. Future studies aimed at probing public attitudes and experimenting with their reactions to ethnic symbols will be necessary to prove or disprove definitively the value of the symbolic politics approach.