'logic', many more suffer and many more decide to stand by and let the suffering continue or become willing accomplices in the slaughter. As much as one would like to think otherwise, ethnic conflicts are stories about deliberate choices made by human beings about action or inaction. Above all, however, they are stories of human suffering.

2

Ethnicity and nationalism

Let us begin our exploration of ethnicity and nationalism with two tales to illustrate how ethnic identities 'come into being' and contribute to the formation of groups that, in some but by no means even the majority of cases, eventually engage in violent conflict with one another. Our first tale begins in Rwanda around 2000 BC. By then the first inhabitants of the territory of today's Rwanda had arrived in the area. They were hunter–gatherers and forest dwellers. Although the oldest of Rwanda's inhabitants, their present-day descendants, the Twa, are only a very small minority of around 1 per cent of Rwanda's total population. About 1,000 years later, farmers began to migrate to the area. Clearing forests and cultivating the land, they quickly grew in numbers, partially displacing the original settlers. Today, their descendants, the Hutu, make up around 85 per cent of Rwanda's population. Another two centuries later, the third of present-day Rwanda's ethnic groups came to the area—Tutsi, who reared cattle, migrated in large numbers from the north, and gradually gained control of the area through conquest and assimilation. Hutu and Tutsi spoke the same language, shared many traditions and customs, intermarried, and lived together unsegregated.

What distinguished the two main groups was occupational status. Tutsi, originally cattle herders, had also become soldiers and civil servants. Hutu remained mostly farmers. Even though the occupational status of Tutsi gave them a dominant position in society, the existing clan system cut across group membership, and several

clans included members of all three groups. Clan identification was often more important than what was later to become the main social cleavage—ethnic identity. Within this clan system, patron–client relationships involved reciprocal bonds of loyalty within and between groups. However, it also created a hierarchical system, in which patrons were mostly Tutsi and clients mostly Hutu. As the hierarchy was multi-layered, some Tutsi were also clients, but rarely of Hutu. These social structures, eventually, created Tutsi-dominated political and economic structures, which were reinforced first by German and then by Belgian colonial rulers from the late nineteenth century onwards, and provided the institutions within which ethnic difference became the most important social cleavage in the post-colonial era.

Already in the mid-1950s, political demands were formulated in ethnic terms. Hutu called for decolonization and democratization, denying that Tutsi were anything but immigrants with no place in a Rwandan nation. Tutsi, on the other hand, drew very different inferences from history and rejected any Hutu role in the running of the emerging country because of their own superiority. Little wonder then that political parties, created in the 1950s in preparation for the country's independence, were formed along ethnic lines and reinforced the already existing deep divisions. Given the numerical supremacy of Hutu—85 per cent over 15 per cent Tutsi—the first parliamentary elections in 1961 returned a clear Hutu majority. As a consequence of intra-Hutu rivalries and Hutu–Tutsi conflict, Rwanda had become a one-party state by the mid-1960s in which Hutu rule had replaced Tutsi domination. As Hutu leaders appealed more and more to ethnic sentiments, drawing on their past inferior status and exploitation by Tutsi, a Hutu ethnic identity solidified alongside that of an already existing Tutsi group identity. Over the next three decades, these identities were further consolidated and, by the time of the genocide in 1994, they had become the most significant reference points for members of both groups, reinforced also by frequent anti-Tutsi violence over the decades and regular incursions by Tutsi militias based in refugee camps in neighbouring states.

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Bosnia and Herzegovina tells a different story. If comparisons of this kind can be made at all, the country today is probably as deeply divided as a society as Rwanda. As a result of a three-and-a-half-year war between 1992 and 1995, which had a number of quasi-genocidal episodes involving significant ethnic cleansing, over 200,000 of the country's almost 4.5 million pre-war residents are dead or missing and almost a third were driven from their homes. The war, and the peace settlement reached at its end, have left the country divided territorially, politically, and socially, with ethnic splits among Serbs, Croats, and Muslims being the primary fault line. The viciousness with which the war was fought and the emotionally intense way in which most members of the three groups interpret its causes, conduct, and consequences suggest that, similar to Rwanda, there has been a long history of inter-ethnic animosities and hostilities that culminated in a bloody civil war in the early 1990s. Although the myth of 'ancient hatreds' has long been done away with, the evolution of ethnic identities among the three groups living in today's Bosnia and Herzegovina is nevertheless vital in understanding the meaning of ethnicity and nationalism in a broader context.

The year 1992 marked the beginning of a fundamentally different period in the history of Bosnia and Herzegovina—its existence as an independent state. Before that, the territories of present-day Bosnia and Herzegovina had belonged to empires—to the Ottoman Empire from the middle of the fifteenth century onwards, to the Habsburg realm, *de facto* since 1878 and *de jure* since 1908, and to the various incarnations of Yugoslavia from the end of the First World War to 1992. Throughout this period of several centuries, ethnicity was politically of little relevance in the territories of present-day Bosnia and Herzegovina, where members of all three national groups spoke the same language and lived together peacefully and without clear territorial borders separating them. If anything, religion was the main distinguishing feature among the three communities—Muslims, Orthodox Serbs, and Catholic Croats—and began to become a component of emerging national identities. Although Serbs and Croats could always be identified ethnically,

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the ethnic origin of Muslims remains disputed. Serbs and Croats claimed Muslims, respectively, as converted under the Ottoman Empire, whereas Muslims traced their origins to a pre-Ottoman Bosnian kingdom. Muslims in the Ottoman Empire did enjoy a number of privileges, whereas non-Muslim populations were excluded politically and socially, not least through the millet system, which, however, offered them some autonomy in the regulation of their religious, cultural, and educational affairs. Thus, although the upper echelons of power were occupied exclusively by Muslims, Serbs, Croats, and Muslims were all represented among the socially and economically disadvantaged lower strata of society. Emerging ethnic group identities were thus based on a mixture of distinctive features—religion, status, and origin.

The control, and subsequent annexation, of Bosnia and Herzegovina by the Habsburg Empire contributed further to a consolidation of ethnic distinctiveness. Initially welcomed only by Croats hoping for unification with other Croatian parts within the Empire, Vienna was smart enough to try to win over the Muslim élite as the most numerous and, after four centuries of Ottoman rule, also the most powerful community in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Despite this accommodative approach, large numbers of Muslims left Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbs became the numerically dominant group. Nevertheless, Habsburg cooperation with Muslims continued, and Bosnia and Herzegovina soon came to be known as the most loyal province of the Empire.

With much delay compared with other areas of the Balkans, a national movement in Bosnia and Herzegovina emerged only in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. It was not, however, a unified national movement as in Serbia or Albania, for example, but split along the lines of its population groups. These divisions were further enforced in the first constitution of Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1910, introducing specific group rights, autonomy, and a system of rotation in the highest offices in the province. Elections also held in 1910 contributed to the consolidation of these differences as well, operating a system according to which seats in the new assembly were allocated according to religion—to

Orthodox Christians, Muslims, Catholics, and Jews—and in proportion to each religious group's share in the overall population. This encouraged the formation of political parties along those religious lines that corresponded, for the most part, to the three main ethnic identities in Bosnia and Herzegovina.[1]

The First World War brought an end to Habsburg rule and the creation of the first of many Yugoslav states—the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes. Even though Muslims were not recognized as one of the constituent peoples, Muslim parties existed in Bosnia and Herzegovina and attracted, just as their Serb and Croat counterparts, a share of the vote largely equivalent to their share in the population.[2]

An inner-Yugoslav compromise between Serbs and Croats in 1939 included Croat-inhabited parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina into a Croat province, which was to enjoy substantial autonomy. German and Italian military advances into the Balkans and the territorial reorganization during the subsequent occupation annexed all of Bosnia and Herzegovina to the fascist Croatian state established under German protection. A guerrilla war soon embroiled the entire region, with Communist resistance forces emerging as the most effective, attracting support from all ethnic groups in the region. After the victory of the Partisans, a socialist and federal state was established in Yugoslavia in which Bosnia and Herzegovina became a constituent republic, endowed as were all the other republics of socialist Yugoslavia with a qualified right to secession. Although the territorial entity of Bosnia and Herzegovina was recognised as such, the recognition of Muslims as a constituent people happened only in 1968 and contributed to affirming the existence of a separate Muslim ethnic identity. This manifested itself in a revival and strengthening of this identity—many of those who had previously identified as Yugoslavs now 'switched' their ethnic identification to Muslim, changing the demography of Bosnia and Herzegovina to a society with a plurality of Muslims, followed by Serbs and the much smaller Croat community. What did not change, however, was that the defining characteristic of Bosnia and Herzegovina remained its constitution by three distinct groups—Muslims, Serbs,

and Croats—who lived together without conflict or clear territorial borders between them. This was even more remarkable given that Serbs throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina and Yugoslavia more generally occupied a disproportionate share of high offices in state administration and the Communist Party.

The death of Yugoslavia's post-war leader, Josip Broz Tito, in 1980 marked the beginning of the end of multi-ethnic society in Yugoslavia as a whole. With Tito gone, leaving behind a strongly decentralized state, the constituent republics became increasingly important power centres. This had particularly devastating consequences for Bosnia and Herzegovina, the most ethnically diverse of all the former Yugoslav republics, as ethnically based nationalism began to emerge in the late 1980s. Three of the five political parties contesting the first multi-party elections in Bosnia and Herzegovina at the end of 1990 were explicitly mono-ethnic and sought to appeal to 'their' respective ethnic communities. As moderates within them were sidelined and the three parties cooperated in undermining the two multiethnic parties, ethnic identification became increasingly important and eventually emerged as the dominant point of reference for most people living in Bosnia and Herzegovina. As with elections under the Habsburg Empire and in the 'first' Yugoslavia, these three ethnically defined parties carried most of the votes in the 1990 elections and the composition of the two chambers of parliament and of local assemblies accurately reflected census results.

It is important to emphasise again that the three ethno-nationalist parties continued to cooperate after the elections and that inter-ethnic tensions, inasmuch as they existed at all, were minor and did not involve any violence. Yet, as the conflict in the wider Yugoslavia escalated with the secession of Slovenia and the war in Croatia, the competing visions that each of the ethnic groups had for a future Bosnia and Herzegovina proved too much for the political structures just established in the republic. When attempts to rescue Yugoslavia, even in a territorially smaller and more decentralized version, failed, Croats and Muslims favoured independence for Bosnia and Herzegovina, whereas Serbs resisted it

strongly. Fearing marginalization and discrimination, Serbs and Croats began to establish their own self-rule in areas in which they dominated numerically, thus pre-empting in some ways the subsequent territorial divisions of Bosnia and Herzegovina established in the Dayton Accords of 1995. When a referendum on 29 February and 1 March 1992, boycotted by Serbs, returned an almost 100 per cent majority in favour of independence the fate of Bosnia and Herzegovina was sealed. Within a period of only a few years, centuries of peaceful inter-ethnic relationships had been wiped out and a war was to begin in which atrocities would be committed unseen in Europe since the Second World War.

If anything, these two accounts enable us to understand how powerful a resource ethnicity can be in politics. Perhaps more importantly, they also highlight that ethnicity is not always the most relevant means by which people organize themselves in a society, or are categorized by others and, even if it is, that this need not cause bloodshed on the scale of the Rwandan genocide or the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina. As ethnicity, above all, means identity with one's own ethnic group—English, German, French, Kurd, Chechen, and so on—everyone has an ethnic identity. Yet, people have many other identities, too, as speakers of distinct languages, believers in different religions, professionals, members of certain age groups, men or women. In different contexts, different identities are more important—we are more aware of some than of others. Ethnicity acquires enormous power to mobilize people when it becomes a predominant identity and means more than just a particular ethnic origin; it comes to define people as speakers of a certain language, belonging to a particular religion, being able to pursue some careers but not others, being able to preserve and express their cultural heritage, having access to positions of power and wealth or not. In short, when ethnicity becomes politically relevant and determines the life prospects of people belonging to distinct ethnic groups, it is possible to mobilize group members to change a situation of apparently perpetual discrimination and disadvantage or in defence of a valued status quo.

Nationalism, on the other hand, is at the same time a narrower

and a broader concept. At its most basic, it is an ideology that puts the nation first before all other forms of social or political organization. More to the point, however, nationalism has occurred, and continues to occur, in different varieties. Chechen, Kurdish, and Palestinian nationalisms are state seeking. Hutu nationalism in the mid-1990s in Rwanda, and German nationalism in the 1930s, manifested themselves in attempted genocide. Nationalism among Serbs, Croats, Bosnian Muslims, ethnic Albanians, and ethnic Macedonians in the Balkans had occasional genocidal tendencies, but was mostly aimed at building ethnically 'pure' homelands through what became infamously known as ethnic cleansing. All these types of nationalism are primarily ethnic based—that is, they define the nation in ethnic terms and exclude from it anyone who is not a member of the same ethnic group—by means of genocide, ethnic cleansing, disenfranchisement, and so on. Civic nationalism, in contrast, finds its expression in a definition of the nation on a territorial basis: everyone who is a citizen of France is French, albeit not necessarily in an ethnic or linguistic sense. Although not always as conflict prone as ethnic nationalism, civic nationalism may be discriminatory as well, if only in the sense that it does not acknowledge ethnic differences and thus potentially deprives members of ethnic communities other than a country's dominant group from opportunities to preserve, express, and develop their distinct identities.

Ethnicity and nationalism are not mutually exclusive concepts. In fact, there are only a few cases in which there are no clear links between the two. The USA, essentially an immigrant society, may be one of the few examples in which an overarching national identity exists almost completely independently from individuals' ethnic identity. This is not to say that ethnic identities, or some of their components, such as language or religion, do not matter. On the contrary, affirmative action programmes are perhaps the most obvious indication that ethnicity is politically relevant. However, different ethnic identities do not stop people from identifying themselves and others as 'fellow Americans'. This is obviously in stark contrast to the links between ethnicity and nationalism that

made up the deadly compounds creating the conditions in which the Balkan wars of the 1990s, the genocide in Rwanda, and many other conflicts around the world have become possible. In order to understand why ethnicity and nationalism have this powerful capacity to mobilize people, we need to begin by taking a closer look at each of the two concepts in turn.

The origins of the term 'ethnicity' go back to the Greek word for nation—'ethnos'. In Ancient Greek this was used to describe a community of common descent[3]—in other words, 'ethnos' is used to describe a kinship group linked by ties of blood. The roots of the word, and even its original meaning, are widely agreed. Yet, because of its increasingly politicized nature, and the more contemporary meaning of ethnicity, and its implications for the relationships between people and between them and the states in which they live, definitions of ethnicity vary greatly and are hotly disputed among academics as well as among politicians. The definitional chaos that has engulfed the academic study of ethnicity and informed (and at times ill-informed) the public and policy debates on ethnicity and its political consequences may be intriguing in itself, but without a minimum of order it is not helpful to clarify what lies at the heart of ethnicity and if and how its core components relate to ethnic conflict. In order to achieve some clarity on these matters, it is useful to make some basic distinctions between different schools of thought on ethnicity. The so-called primordial school holds that ethnicity is so deeply ingrained in human history and experience that it cannot be denied that it exists, objectively and subjectively, and that it should therefore be considered a fact of life in the relations between individuals and groups who all have an ethnic identity. In contrast to this view, the instrumentalist school argues that ethnicity is by no means an indisputable historical fact. Rather, instrumentalists suggest that ethnicity is first and foremost a resource in the hands of leaders to mobilize and organize followers in the pursuit of other interests, such as physical security, economic gain, or political power.

What both schools agree on is that ethnicity has a number of tangible aspects, such as a common history, customs, traditions,

language, or religion. These are important components of an individual's ethnic identity because they allow more easily the drawing of boundaries between those who belong to the same group and those who do not. In other words, these markers make it possible to establish differences not only between individuals, but also between groups. However, these are two distinct, albeit closely related, matters. It is one thing to determine whether I have the same ethnic identity as someone else; it is quite another thing to turn this into an issue of group membership, even more so if such group membership becomes socially, economically, and politically relevant. Thus, even though everyone has an ethnic identity, this does not mean that every aspect of people's lives has to be organized on the basis of ethnic in-groups and out-groups, or that access to jobs, education, and public office will be determined according to ethnic group membership. To organize society on such principles is a conscious and deliberate choice made by some and often accepted by many. Yet, even if we accept that tangible aspects of ethnicity exist, they cannot fully explain the phenomenon in relation to the intense emotions that 'ethnic issues' generate. We thus have to explore the issue of groups and group dynamics more in order to arrive at a satisfactory explanation.

Before 1871, there had never been a unified German state with a strong central government. A certain fiction of it—the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation—had been kept alive for some 1,000 years, but its hollow nature, weakened by a multitude of disparate and conflicting particularistic interests, unable and unwilling to unite for a common cause, had been exposed by the defeat that it suffered at the hands of Napoleon in 1806. As so often in history, defeat marked the beginning of recovery, or more precisely of discovery. And this 'discovery' was of the common bonds that united all the people of a future Germany to be. The German Romantic movement, which had been around for some time, was now able to turn its cultural project of discovering what united all Germans—primarily language, culture, and descent—into a political project of self-determination. And thus the first modern ethno-nationalist movement was born not as an exclusive or racist one, bent on

genocide or ethnic cleansing, but one with a truly liberal and liberational agenda: to defeat Napoleon and create a German nation-state in which rights of citizenship did not derive from a social status acquired at birth but from ethnic belonging. To be sure, the German Romantics defined Germany and the Germans probably as much in opposition to France and the French as they defined them on the basis of common cultural traits. Yet, while initially all Germans were meant to be equal citizens of this new state, much later some concluded, from the fact that Germans were a distinct ethnic group, that they were in fact more equal than others and many only too willingly believed this. When they did, they used a very specific interpretation of this Romantic view of the German nation to exclude from it everyone not deemed 'racially adequate'. In a frenzy of pseudo-scientific, and above all politically motivated, 'purification', German Jews in particular were singled out as 'alien' to the German nation, completely disregarding that they were probably the most assimilated of all Jews living in the diaspora and had contributed enormously to German economic and political power and to its cultural wealth as a nation. As a group, they were dissimilated and persecuted, and eventually an attempt was made to kill all of them in Germany and most other parts of Europe under German control.

The German case illustrates the extremes of the prevalent approach to defining an ethnic group—what its members have in common and what distinguishes them from others—commonly adopted by advocates of various 'national projects'. The typical 'us' versus 'them' requires activists to define the in-group both in itself and as opposed to the out-group. The more confrontational the definitions—that is, the more 'our' poor situation is a result of 'their' oppression, or the more superior 'we' are compared with 'them'—the more likely are inter-group relations to take a turn for the worse. The creation of such images among group members about themselves and others does not always stand at the beginning of a nationalist project. Rather, as the Holocaust, the Rwandan genocide, and the ethnic cleansing in the Balkans indicate, such negative images are more likely to be invoked at times when they

appear politically convenient—in pursuit of an extreme racist agenda, in attempts to hold on to power, or during, and with the purpose of, the disintegration of multinational states.

The point about the earlier brief excursion into German history is not to single out Germans for inventing ethnonationalism and blaming them not only for driving the political implications of this doctrine to its genocidal extreme, but also for equipping extremists in other parts of the world from central Africa to the Balkans, to the Caucasus and to south-east Asia with an ideology that continues to wreak havoc. Rather, there are two important insights that we can gain from this exploration of German history. First, ethnic groups can be both self-defined—the German Romantics defining the German nation—and other defined—as in the case of the dissimilation of German Jews. Most commonly, self-definition and other-definition coexist. Second, ethnicity is only partly based on culture, myths of descent, historical memories, religion, customs, traditions, language, a specific homeland, or institutions; it is just as much based on what people believe, or are made to believe, to create a sense of solidarity among those who are members of a particular ethnic group, excluding, and at times directed against, those who are not.[4]

This link between tangible and intangible aspects is extremely important for understanding the political implications of ethnic identity and of the formation of conflict groups based on ethnicity. Tangible characteristics of ethnicity are important only inasmuch as they 'contribute to this notion or sense of a group's self-identity and uniqueness'.[5] In turn, then, a threat to, or opportunity for, these tangibles, real or perceived, is considered as a threat to, or opportunity for, self-identity and uniqueness. Confronting this threat or taking this opportunity leads to ethnicity being politicized—that is, to the ethnic group becoming a political actor by virtue of its shared ethnic identity. From this perspective, the debate between primordialists and instrumentalists over what ethnicity really is may very well be a false one altogether, and ethnic identity should perhaps rather be seen as something that has roots in a group's culture, and historical experiences and traditions, but

that is also dependent upon contemporary opportunities that can be a useful instrument for mobilizing people for social, political, or economic purposes that may or may not be related directly to their ethnic origins.[6]

This convergence of past experiences and present opportunities manifests itself in the different claims that leaders of ethnic groups make, supposedly on their constituents' behalf. These are generally related to one or more of the following closely linked areas. At the broadest level, ethnic groups seek self-determination, a demand that is often, but not always correctly, equated with the desire for independent statehood: nationalism, defined in ethnic terms, seeking its fulfilment. Generally perceived as less threatening by the international community, but not necessarily more willingly granted by the state in question, some ethnic groups are content living as minorities in a given state, provided that their linguistic, religious, and cultural distinctiveness is respected and that they are granted adequate rights to preserve, express, and develop their identity in a society with a dominant culture that is not their own. In other cases again, ethnic groups are happy to assimilate into such a society and not stake any specific claims for rights related to their cultural, linguistic, or religious distinctiveness, but merely demand equality of opportunity. In other words, they want to be treated exactly the same as any other citizen and not experience any discrimination because of their distinct ethnic identity. Depending on their actual situation, ethnic groups make these claims vis-à-vis the state in which they live, vis-à-vis their kin-state or other kin-groups abroad, and vis-à-vis other external actors, such as international organizations and individual states which may be sought out and lobbied to assume a patron role.

Claims for self-determination by ethnic groups are often seen as the most threatening by states because they suggest, implicitly, that a particular group seeks to establish its own independent state. But this equation of self-determination with secession is questionable. Empirically, there is very little evidence that ethnic conflicts are about, or resolved by granting, independence. Outside the decolonialization context, which saw independent statehood

granted to most of the colonial possessions of European powers such as Britain, France, Spain, Portugal, Belgium, and the Netherlands, the period since 1945 has seen only one other major wave of new state formations, namely in the aftermath of the collapse of communism. The dissolution of the Soviet Union and the so-called velvet divorce of Czechoslovakia were both consensual, whilst Yugoslavia disintegrated in a sequence of bloody wars. To be sure, there are other examples, too. Eritrea negotiated its secession from Ethiopia, after Eritrean and Ethiopian rebels jointly ousted the dictatorship of Mengistu Haile Mariam. East Timor, on the other hand, achieved its independence after Indonesia was forced to hold a referendum on the issue and to accept its results. East Timor may well have been the last but one case of decolonialization, with only Western Sahara, currently occupied by Morocco in contravention of international law, left to be resolved. Arguably, all of these cases had an ethnic or ethno-national dimension to them, but with the exception of the former Yugoslavia and East Timor, as well as Western Sahara, there was very little if any violent conflict involved that could be directly traced back to competing ethnic identities.

Furthermore, if we consider the vast range of other ethnic conflicts in which groups claim the right to self-determination, not all of them equate independent statehood with such claims, and in virtually none does the organized international community endorse unilateral declarations of independence or recognize entities controlled by ethnic groups as a result of their military strength as independent states. Thus, for example, the predominant position of the international community in Kosovo remains that further boundary changes are acceptable only if they are achieved consensually, and the so-called Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus has not been recognized by any country other than Turkey. Despite this poor track record, in a number of cases ethnic groups demand outright independence, such as in Spain's Basque country, in Corsica, Kosovo, Chechnya, the Transdniestria region of Moldova, and Sri Lanka. Importantly, it is not always the case that all sections of a particular ethnic group share these demands, nor, as is evident in many other cases, is establishing a state of their own what ethnic

groups actually desire. Although they may still seek a greater level of self-determination, many such claims stop short of demands for independence and rather seek higher degrees of autonomy within the boundaries of an existing state. This is true, for example, for the Chittagong Hill people in Bangladesh, for tribal people in Burma, for the Tripuras, Bodos, and Nagas in India's Assam province, for Uighurs in China's Xinjiang province, for Moros in the Mindanao region of the Philippines, for the Casamance region of Senegal, and for the Miskito Indians in Nicaragua. All of these groups are united by one specific feature that often makes them look like a particular threat to governments: they live in compact settlements, often in their traditional homelands, and frequently in peripheral regions. Thus, even if their demands are 'only' for greater autonomy, governments tend to see this as the beginning of a slippery slope towards independence and thus a serious threat to the territorial integrity of what they consider, rightly or wrongly, their state.

Take the example of Indonesia. After the fall of its long-term military dictator Suharto on 21 May 1998, the new Indonesian government bowed to long-standing international pressure and agreed to hold a referendum in East Timor in which the population could decide on whether to remain part of Indonesia or become an independent state. Illegally occupied since 1975, the territory had been subjected to fierce fighting between government forces and rebels, killing close to a quarter of a million people over three decades. East Timor, however, has not been the only independence-minded province of the world's largest Muslim country. Thus, acceding to East Timor's demands was a risky strategy for Indonesia, and in the wake of the referendum in 1999 violence not only escalated there but in other parts of Indonesia as well, most notably in Aceh. Yet, rather than seeking long-term accommodation with other separatist groups, the Indonesian government relied on the use of force, and the collapse of a peace deal with the Free Aceh Movement in 2003 seemed to confirm, in the eyes of the government in Jakarta, that violent repression is the only viable strategy to keep the ethnically highly diverse country together. In the wake of the tsunami disaster in December 2004,

there was quite considerable movement on both sides and it seemed that negotiations on a peaceful resolution could be resumed.

Yet, between these two options of independence and bloody repression, illustrated by the two extremes of East Timor and Aceh, there is no dearth of conflict resolution options available to governments and ethnic groups in such similar situations. The key is for individual leaders to recognize and use the opportunities that exist for settling their differences without recourse to violence. Weighing, and shaping, present opportunities in the context of the past experiences of an ethnic group is a responsibility that leaders in situations of potential or actual ethnic conflict cannot simply abdicate. The fact that ethnic identity has its roots in the past and present is thus a curse as well as a blessing. People cannot escape the fact that ethnic differences exist, but what they make of these differences is in their hands, and those of their leaders.

Not all ethnic groups are in a situation in which independent statehood or increased autonomy within an existing state is a possible or desirable option. They may be impossible, or at least difficult, to achieve because members of the group live dispersed across the state's territory. They may seem undesirable because group members are relatively well integrated into the social, political, and economic life of the country in which they live. In neither situation, however, does this imply complete cultural assimilation. Even a well-integrated ethnic minority may take pride in the preservation of its cultural heritage, wish to pass it on to following generations, and be able to express its ethno-cultural distinctiveness without fear of discrimination. This then leads to demands for specific linguistic, religious, or cultural rights that allow members of the ethnic group to do just that. The development of often-extensive minority rights legislation, which recognizes and protects difference, has helped avoid violent conflict in a number of countries. This is very obvious if we consider a number of recent examples in the European context. Not only are there international instruments such as the Council of Europe's Framework Convention on Minority Rights and the Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, but countries like Slovenia and Hungary, and

to a lesser extent Slovakia, Poland, Romania, Bulgaria, and the three Baltic states have gone to some lengths to accommodate minority demands for linguistic, religious, or cultural rights.

Even more widespread, and more easily conceded, are demands for equal access to resources and equality of opportunity for members of ethnic minorities, in short for non-discrimination on ethnic grounds. Laws banning discrimination are commonplace in most democratic states, but even there they are often difficult to enforce outside the public sphere. Take the example of the Roma minorities in central and eastern Europe. Despite attempts by governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and international organizations to address the often desperate social and economic situation of Roma in countries such as Bulgaria, Romania, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, and Hungary, their efforts often fail because of widespread social prejudice that penetrates all levels of state and society, including the police, social services, and the education system. Existing prejudice becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy: the state fails in its duty to provide public services, minority groups see their perception of discrimination confirmed and disengage or try to force the issue, whilst majorities feel confirmed in their belief that minorities are essentially 'enemies of the state' who do not deserve any special rights.

The test for non-discrimination legislation as well as for specific laws on minority rights is not merely their existence in the statute book, but the degree to which they are implemented and meaningful in everyday life. Where they fail this litmus test, demands are likely to increase and the means with which their realization is sought can easily escalate. This also means that the nature of demands made by ethnic groups is not necessarily an indicator of the strength and cohesiveness of the ethnic identity of group members, but rather a reflection of the degree of threat under which group identity is perceived to be. Current perceptions and past experiences often function as an escalator in this context—the worse a group's historical experience within a particular state and the more threatening current state policies are perceived to be to the identity of the group and its members, the more likely will

demands be high and the means with which they are realized be indiscriminate, including violence. In the Chechen conflict, so-called Black Widows—young female suicide bombers—have become more common only since the escalation of violence in this restive region of Russia as a result of which large numbers of civilians were killed by Russian armed forces in a conflict in which hardliners on both sides insist on the realization of their maximum demands, independence, and subordination under Moscow's rule, respectively. In contrast, other regions in Russia, such as Dagestan, Tatarstan, and Bashkiria, have managed to negotiate extensive autonomy arrangements with Moscow satisfying the regions' concerns, and violence has consequently been largely absent. A long tradition of accommodation and by-and-large peaceful dispute resolution has so far prevented violent escalations in Canada over the issue of Quebec and in Belgium, where stakes are equally high, including some secessionist demands. By the same token, and even though there was sporadic violence, demands of French speakers in Switzerland's predominantly German-speaking Bern canton, after a struggle that lasted over 30 years and, which also had socio-economic dimensions, led to the formation of a new Jura canton in 1978. None of this can be taken to suggest that the degree of violence with which ethnic claims are pursued corresponds to the strength of ethnic identity that a particular group feels. Rather, it emphasizes that there is no automatism that leads from the existence of ethnic differences to violent conflict between different groups or between groups and the state. In other words, the existence of different ethnic identities within the same state is not a problem in itself; it is what people—leaders as well as their followers—make of it that determines whether claims based on such different identities can be accommodated peacefully or whether they will lead to bloody civil wars.

There is one additional issue that, although it can be a prominent feature of ethnic identity and almost always overlaps to some extent with ethnicity, needs to be considered for a better understanding of inter-ethnic relations—territory. Its significance stems from the fact that it can be used as a defining criterion in relation to

citizenship rights and identities, the basis of political entities from states, to regions and local communities, and a potent source of mass mobilization in the form of regionalism and nationalism. All these functions can also be performed by ethnicity, and often territorial components form a significant dimension of ethnic identities, primarily in the form of actual, and sometimes mythical, homelands to which a given ethnic group traces its origins. Nevertheless, it is important to distinguish between ethnicity and territory as key factors in the dynamics of interethnic relations.

For states and ethnic groups alike, territory possesses certain values in and of itself. These include ownership of natural resources, such as water, iron, coal, oil, or gas; they extend to the goods and services produced by the population living in this territory, and they can comprise military or strategic advantages in terms of natural boundaries, access to the open sea, and control over terrestrial transport routes and waterways, as well as communication channels. Thus, throughout history wars have been fought over territories; territories have changed hands as a result of wars and new wars have arisen as a consequence of that. Yet, all of that took place largely without consideration of the people living in these territories, and it was only with the advent of nationalism that the issues of state, nation, and territory became linked. True, there are some early examples from Europe of peace treaties and territorial settlements in which, to use modern terminology, minority rights provisions were included. These include the Treaty of Perpetual Union between the King of France and the Helvetic state (1516), the Peace of Westphalia (1648), and the Final Act of the Congress of Vienna (1815). But, by and large, concern for the populations living in the territories that the Great Powers used to maintain a basic balance of power in Europe was not very high on the agenda of diplomats. Nor should it necessarily have been, given that notions of national identity, especially in its ethnic variety, began to emerge more broadly only in the course of the nineteenth century. Once they did, however, they became powerful forces to dominate not only European power politics throughout the 'long nineteenth century', which effectively ended only with the post-First World

War peace settlements, but also far beyond and into the post-Cold War world order.

The European vision of the territorial nation state was also superimposed on other parts of the world, recreating many of the problems of incompatible political and ethnic borders that Europe had experienced itself. And just as European states were unable, or unwilling, to resolve the resulting conflicts peacefully through accommodation, so the states modelled in the European image during the decolonialization process in Asia and Africa found it difficult to provide security, liberty, and prosperity to all their citizens on an equal basis. Some, like India, managed this process relatively more successfully and experienced less conflict; others like Pakistan and Nigeria, for example, had to go through prolonged and bloody civil wars to establish credible sovereign institutions, albeit with quite different outcomes: West Pakistan, now Bangladesh, asserted its independence (after an Indian military intervention), while the Nigerian central government prevailed in the secessionist conflict with the northern state of Biafra and maintained the country's territorial integrity.

As a result of the significance of territory as a symbol of individual and collective identities, its political, economic, and social importance for the constitution of states, and its strategic value as a source of control and influence, states and ethnic groups alike make claims to territories that they consider essential from any one of these perspectives. Some claims to territory are justified with reference to history. Albanians in Kosovo see themselves as descendants of the ancient Ilyrian people who first settled in this area. But Albanians and Serbs also both employ more recent history: the cradle of the Serbian Orthodox church is said to be Pec in western Kosovo, whilst the birthplace of the Albanian national movement is Prizren in the south. Some Israeli Jews, on the other hand, rely on a different kind of history and cite the divine rights that they have to the land of Israel according to the Bible. Settlers and colonists, to give a third example, often justify their claims to territory in disputes with indigenous groups, or 'first nations', by referring to their own cultural superiority or to that of their methods of production

and exploitation. In this reading, claims to territory are legitimate if claimants can prove that they use, and use better, the resources that the disputed territory has, be they agricultural, mineral, water, and so on.[7]

Regardless of these or any other reasons given in their justification, territorial claims can occur in different guises. They can be secessionist, irredentist, or autonomist. Secessionism is best understood as the political movement of an ethnic group that hopes to succeed in establishing an independent state of its own on the territory on which it lives. This has been the pattern of demands across much of the Balkans and the Caucasus. In contrast to such a group-based movement, irredentism is primarily a state-based movement that seeks to enlarge its own territory by laying claim to territories in neighbouring states, which are normally inhabited by members of the same ethnic group. In the case of Serb irredentism in relation to Serb-inhabited areas of Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, irredentism and secessionism went hand in hand. Abkhaz and South Ossetian desires to secede from Georgia and unite with Russia were predominantly driven by the secessionists, with little if any irredentist desires on the part of Moscow. In contrast, the Armenian 'national project' comfortably accommodates secessionism in Nagorno-Karabakh and irredentist demands within Armenia to this part of the territory of neighbouring Azerbaijan.

Among territorial claims, the demand for autonomy is the only one that does not seek changes to existing international boundaries, but expresses the desire of a particular ethnic group to gain a measure of self-governance within its homeland, which it recognises to be part of an existing state. In some cases, this is chosen as a second-best option by ethnic groups who recognize that their claims to independent statehood are unlikely to be fulfilled or who realise that their ability to survive as an independent state or to provide essential services to their citizens would be limited. In addition, because of its less 'disruptive' impact on the existing system of states, the international community has long since been an advocate of autonomy as a viable compromise between existing states and some of the ethnic groups living within them. This is

reflected, for example, in the Dayton constitution for Bosnia and Herzegovina, in the settlement reached in Moldova between ethnic Moldovans and the Gagauz minority in the country, and in the agreement between the Sudanese government in Khartoum and the rebels in the south of the country.

Disputed territories can thus simultaneously be a phenomenon of inter-state, inter-ethnic, and group-state relations. What is important to note in this context is that inter-group relations must be conceived of more broadly than the traditional pattern of minority–majority relations when territorial aspects are considered. Quite often, disputed territories are inhabited by members of more than one ethnic group with an interest and opportunity structures in relation to the territory in question, which are most likely to be different and thus have the potential to spark further ethnic conflicts. Take the example of so-called 'orphans of secession'—ethnic groups that find themselves on the wrong side of the border after changes to international boundaries.[8] The unilateral declarations of independence by Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, and their subsequent international recognition, sparked serious fears among the two countries' Serb populations about their future. Manipulated by nationalist leaders on all sides, these fears quickly escalated and violence ensued leading to all-out war among Serbia, Croatia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Cyprus is a similarly instructive example concerning the significance of ethnic and territorial claims and the dynamics to which they give rise. Here, a coup attempt in 1974, instigated and supported by the then military regime in Greece, was aimed at over-throwing the Cypriot President, Archbishop Makarios, and bringing about the unification of Cyprus with Greece. With a recent history of inter-ethnic violence between Greek and Turkish Cypriots that was barely contained by a fragile and eventually collapsing power-sharing regime, Turkish Cypriots would have suddenly found themselves an even smaller minority in a Greek state that, even as a democracy, let alone a military dictatorship, had a poor record of minority protection. Subsequent events were heavily influenced by the different interpretations of the Treaty of

Guarantee signed by Greece, Turkey, and the former colonial power Great Britain, which had backed the power-sharing settlement to end the civil war in Cyprus in 1960. Article 1 clearly stated that the Republic of Cyprus would ensure the maintenance of its independence, not participate in any political or economic union with any other state, and prohibit all activity promoting either such unification or partition of the island. In Article 2, Greece, Turkey, and the UK recognized and guaranteed the independence and territorial integrity of Cyprus, and assured each other that they, too, would prohibit any attempt to change the sovereign status of Cyprus. Crucially, Article 3 provided that, in case of any breach of these provisions, the three guarantor powers would seek to take joint action to restore that status quo. However, each of the three states also reserved the right in Article 3 to take unilateral action if no common position could be achieved. Thus, the Greek-backed coup against Archbishop Makarios was a clear infringement of the Treaty by both Greek Cypriots and the Greek military junta, and Turkey was arguably in its rights under the Treaty of Guarantee to invade the island in an attempt to restore the democratically elected government of Cyprus. However, what followed the invasion was also in clear breach of the Treaty—Turkish forces occupied a large part of the island, massive ethnic cleansing on both sides created two ethnically almost completely homogeneous parts of the island, and the introduction of a UN peace-keeping force and subsequent creation of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, recognized only by Turkey, effectively partitioned Cyprus. Although these events in 1974 have spelled an end to ethnic conflict on the island, they have not resolved any of the underlying issues that led to it in the first place, nor have they done anything to mitigate the political significance of ethnic identity in the relations between the two main groups on the island. Ethnicity and territory remain the main focus of each group's identity and it has been impossible to achieve any breakthrough in negotiations over nearly three decades because so far no formula has been found that can simultaneously accommodate both groups' ethnic and territorial claims.

In both of these cases—Cyprus and the former Yugoslavia—the

significance of territory lies primarily in its symbolic and historical importance for the relevant groups' ethnic identities, regardless of the extent to which claims match up with the historical record, and in the groups' expectations if sovereignty over their homeland changes to a different state. A Croatia without Eastern Slavonia and Krajina was unthinkable for most Croats, whereas local Serbs feared repression and forced assimilation if they became part of an independent Croatian state and were deprived of the protection of a central government in Belgrade. Kosovo has great historical significance for Serbs and Albanians alike, yet local Serbs are fearful of minority status in an independent Kosovo, although it is equally impossible for most Kosovo Albanians to accept Belgrade's sovereignty again. Turkish Cypriots, and Turkey as a guarantee power, were unwilling to accept the prospect of the island's unification with Greece, whereas Greek Cypriots are unable to contemplate partition. Similar cases exist elsewhere in Europe and Asia. Abkhaz and South Ossetians in Georgia are almost classic examples of orphans of secessions. Georgian independence exposed them to growing majority nationalism in the newly independent state of Georgia without the balancing protection of Moscow—hence their desire to remain part of Russia. In the South Ossetian case, separation from their ethnic brethren in North Ossetia was an additional factor that made being part of Georgia rather unattractive. The dynamics of the conflict in and over Nagorno-Karabakh are almost identical. Azeris consider the area an integral part of Azerbaijan, and to hold on to it, or at least to the hope of restoring their country's territorial integrity, has become one of the most important components of an Azerbaijani (ethno-)national identity. Armenians, on the other hand, point to the fact that the area is predominantly Armenian in its ethnic make-up, even more so after a sustained period of ethnic cleansing and homogenization, and should therefore be considered part of an Armenian territorial state. In the disputed territory of Kashmir, partitioned among India, Pakistan, and China, a local conflict between Hindus and Muslims is overshadowed by the rivalry between India and Pakistan.

Yet, there are also a number of cases in which claims to territory are less related to its symbolic value or to the consequences of changes in sovereignty, but more related to the material value of territory. Take the example of the Niger Delta. Since the early 1990s, there has been constant conflict in this region of Nigeria that is the source of most of the country's oil wealth, killing around 1,000 people per year. There are over seven million people who live in the region, belonging to five main ethnic groups. These groups are variously in conflict with oil multinationals, including Chevron, ExxonMobil, and Shell, over land and compensation for environmental damage, with the government over the share that they receive in their homeland's oil wealth, and with each other over land ownership of oil exploitation areas.

Although the case of the Niger Delta may seem rather complex in its amalgamation of ethnic and territorial claims, domestic politics, and international business, it pales in comparison to the war in the so-called Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Involving seven nations, and therefore often described as Africa's first 'world war', at least three million people have died, most of them civilians and most of them from preventable and curable diseases and starvation, rather than as a direct consequence of the fighting. More than another two million people have been displaced from their homes within the DRC or in neighbouring countries, many of whom have no access to any outside humanitarian assistance. The fighting that broke out in 1998 was temporarily halted by the Lusaka peace agreement of 1999, which finally collapsed with the assassination of then DRC president Laurent Kabila in 2001. Angola, Zimbabwe, and Namibia have since then supported the Congolese government under Joseph Kabila, who succeeded his father in the same year, against rebels who were backed by the governments of Uganda and Rwanda—themselves both former allies of Kabila—and Burundi.

The reasons that have brought different countries into this war are complex. Rwanda, for example, has had intermittently up to 20,000 troops in the DRC, officially claiming to secure its borders against incursions by Hutu militias who, after carrying out most of the massacres in the 1994 Rwandan genocide, fled to the eastern

DRC. Yet, this significant troop presence and the limited capacity of the Congolese state to assert its authority across the entirety of this territory also enabled the Rwandan army to take control of diamond mines and precious mineral resources. All other major players, including the government of the DRC itself, also have economic interests related to the country's rich resource base, comprising, among others, water, diamonds, coltan (a rare mineral used in computers and mobile phones), tin, copper, and timber. As in the Niger Delta, competition over land and the resources that it holds extends beyond the level of the states involved to local ethnic groups, creating constantly shifting alliances between these groups and their external backers to maximize the profits of economic exploitation.[9]

The war in the DRC has all the hallmarks of so-called new wars that became prevalent in the 1990s and show remarkable similarities with the events in the former Yugoslavia and many other contemporary ethnic conflicts: the targeting of civilians with killing, torture, and rape; disruption of humanitarian assistance; widespread looting and pillage during incursions of 'enemy' territory; and ethnic cleansing, albeit the last following an agenda aimed at resource exploitation rather than the territorial aggrandizement of a mythical ethnic homeland. Foreign powers, such as Rwanda and Uganda, have thus deliberately promoted inter-ethnic conflicts in the eastern DRC and the accompanying mass killings as a means of maintaining their control over economically valuable territory.

What emerges from this discussion is that a combination of ethnic and territorial claims seems a particularly explosive mix for the occurrence of violent ethnic conflict. In other words, where groups have clearly formed ethnic identities that are in part based on claims to the same stretch of territory, violent escalation of their disputes over rights and self-determination is more likely. This is also borne out if we look at cases in which conflict was averted or settled. For example, the conflict in and over Papua New Guinea's Bougainville province was settled once the conflict parties agreed on a formula that detached ethnic from territorial claims and postponed a final resolution of the claim to independent statehood,

which part of the Bougainvillians had made, to a referendum after a period of 10 to 15 years of substantive autonomy within Papua New Guinea. Similar strategies have been applied in Northern Ireland and in Moldova in relation to Gagauzia. In Northern Ireland, the population north and south of the border between the two parts of the island, created as a result of a unilateral partition in 1920, were asked to approve a settlement in 1998, creating new structures of government within Northern Ireland that provided for fair power sharing between the regions' two main communities, as well as new arrangements between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland and between the Republic and the UK and its constituent parts. In addition, and this is the crucial point, the agreement of 1998 also provides a mechanism by which, at regular intervals, the population will be consulted on changes to the state border now existing on the island. Should a majority decide in favour of a change—that is, in favour of Irish reunification—both governments in London and Dublin have committed themselves to accepting such an outcome and facilitating the necessary constitutional changes. The option for a change of existing international borders is also part of the deal struck between Moldova and its Gagauz minority. In exchange for Gagauz acceptance of Moldovan sovereignty, the minority gained a significant measure of autonomy from the government in Chisinau and the option to hold a referendum on independence should Moldova ever decide to unite with Romania, a country with which a majority population of Moldovans share a common ethnic identity and a history of common statehood. In the north–south peace deal in Sudan, concluded in January 2005 after a 30-year civil war, a similar provision was included: after six years, during which both conflict parties commit themselves to working genuinely towards making the agreed autonomy regime work, there will be a referendum on independence to be held in the southern states, the result of which will be accepted by the government in Khartoum and its erstwhile opponents in the south.

Another way of looking at the links between ethnicity and territory is through the spectrum of nationalism. Most commonly,

nationalism is seen as an ideology that advocates that each nation should have its own state. Yet, this is not the whole story of nationalism. First of all, nationalism embodies the desire to gain political power for a group that believes that it constitutes a nation. This power is then used to gain or preserve the ability of the group to shape its own future, express, preserve, and develop its identity, and maintain its unity. Informed by the principle of self-determination, national movements make claims on behalf of people. Yet, the implications of these claims are very often of a territorial nature—at one end of the spectrum demands are raised for local or regional autonomy and, at the other, secessionist movements become active or irredentist policies are pursued.

Nationalism is not necessarily tied to ethnicity. From this perspective, we could distinguish between civic and ethnic varieties of nationalism. This differentiation often goes hand in hand with a moral judgement—civic nationalism is deemed to be more virtuous and liberal, whereas ethnic nationalism is generally seen as dangerous and exclusive. French nationalism is often considered as the prime example of civic nationalism: all citizens of the Republic are French, regardless of their ethnic, cultural, religious, or linguistic background, and have the same rights and responsibilities. The state is, so to speak, blind to difference in allocating resources and everyone is treated the same by virtue of being a citizen. The other side of the medal, however, is that such an approach does not recognize difference and, in fact, denies that existing differences are in any way politically relevant. This classically liberal approach advocates the minimal and, in a broader sense, secular state, where everyone is equal in the public sphere, and where religion, language, ethnicity, etc., are a strictly private matter. Yet, this alleged egalitarian approach is open to question. Civic nationalism by default advantages majority cultures: their language, traditions, customs become 'official' whereas those of minorities are relegated to the private sphere, and it is the responsibility and choice of individuals whether or not they want to maintain certain aspects of their identity that 'diverge' from the national identity, which, although defined as civic, is in fact nothing but the majority's

ethnic identity writ large. Civic nationalism thus has some very strong assimilationist and possibly exclusivist tendencies. Despite claims to the contrary, these can easily lead to ethnic conflict, as the example of Corsica in France demonstrates. As a result of the difficulty that civic nationalism has with the recognition of difference, such conflicts are hard to resolve as successive French governments have experienced when attempts to grant Corsica greater autonomy were struck down by the French Constitutional Council.

Ethnic nationalism traces its origins back to the German Romantic movement and philosophers like Herder and Fichte. At a time when modern nation states did not yet exist in central and eastern Europe, cultural markers, and particularly language, were seen as the embodiment of a people's 'essence'. Struggling to overcome the particularism that had divided Germany into some 200 principalities, counties, and kingdoms with a weak central power, the German Romantics of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were hardly racist in their views, but had a political agenda of state-seeking nationalism built on ethno-cultural distinctions. Although ethnic nationalism may thus be founded on the very recognition of difference that civic nationalism denies, it is not necessarily a better or a worse kind of nationalism. In many ways it is both better and worse at the same time. It is worse in that it is far less accommodating of difference because it often does not allow for equality in the public sphere and discriminates against members of ethnic groups other than the dominant group because they are different. The twentieth century is full of the extremes to which this form of nationalism can be taken: from the Holocaust of the Jews and the organized extermination of Roma by the Nazis to the ethnic cleansing in the 1990 Balkan wars and the Rwandan genocide and to the Apartheid system in South Africa. On the other hand, the recognition of difference can be the first step to address the consequences of difference and thus mitigate their potentially dangerous impact on multi-ethnic societies. Minority rights legislation, autonomy and federal arrangements, and many complex forms of power sharing have been instituted to do just that. Canada, Switzerland, Belgium, Spain, India, Nigeria,

and South Africa are all ethnically diverse societies with often very deep splits on the basis of language, religion, and other ethnic 'markers' that have attempted, and in many cases succeeded, to restore and preserve inter-ethnic peace and stability by recognizing difference and managing it in a respectful and meaningful way.

This discussion about the different varieties of nationalism also raises another question, namely about the primacy of ethnicity and nationalism. This can be looked at from two perspectives. Which of the two came first? And which of the two is politically more important? The first of these two questions is the one that can be answered more easily, and in a sense more definitively. Historically, ethnic groups precede nations. In fact, nations are often nothing but state-seeking or state-controlling ethnic groups. Thus, the key distinction between ethnic groups and nations lies in their relationship to the state. Nations, by definition, require a state to fulfil their potential; ethnic groups do not and historically have not. This is not to say that ethnic groups have always existed or that the make-up of their identity does not change over time. If we assume that some components of ethnic identity are 'objective', such as language, cultural traditions, and religion, then we have to accept that these exist independently of the group's awareness of them. In this sense, one could argue that ethnic groups exist whether or not they know it. It is then up to individuals to 'awaken' their fellow group members to the fact that they share certain characteristics with each other but not with other people. In this way, ethnic identities are as much created as they are based on objectively identifiable, if often small, differences between groups of people. The subjective element within ethnic identities—the perception that people have of differences that matter and those that do not— allows for a certain degree of fluidity of group membership. Ethnic identities change over time and so do the criteria of group membership and vice versa. In this fluidity of boundaries, ethnic groups are in no way different from nations, regardless of whether they are ethnically defined or adhere to some notion of civic identity. Yet, in the same way in which ethnic groups and nations are distinguishable from each other in their relationship to the state, so their

political relevance can be determined, at least in the contemporary world of nation states. Ethnicity does not have to matter politically; nationalism always does. Different ethnic identities can, and in many cases do, peacefully coexist in the same state; different nationalisms cannot. The former Yugoslavia is a case in point. Since the country was founded at the end of the First World War—as the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes—there has never been a dispute between its constituent groups about the fact that they had very different ethnic identities: language distinguished Slovenes from Croats and Serbs, the use of the Cyrillic rather than Latin alphabet set Serbs apart from Croats and Slovenes, religion was a marker on the basis of which one could differentiate Croats and Serbs, and so on. Yet this recognition of ethnic difference did not prevent the emergence of an overarching sense of national identity as Yugoslavs—in some ways 'facilitated' by the suppression of ethnically based nationalism, in others genuinely growing out of intermarriage or a belief in the Yugoslav project. It was only when political leaders invoked ethnic nationalism to create or consolidate their own powerbase that the unity of the state was threatened and ultimately destroyed: temporarily during the Second World War under German and Italian 'tutelage', and permanently in the aftermath of the Cold War. The success of multi-ethnic states is thus predicated on their ability to prevent the emergence of state-seeking nationalisms among their constituent groups—a resounding and unquestionable success in the USA and Switzerland, a clear failure in the cases of Yugoslavia, the Soviet Union, and Czechoslovakia. Other cases are more ambivalent: Quebec may yet decide to secede from Canada; Belgium may, at some point, dissolve. Only constant, and successful, renegotiations between ethnic groups and between them and the state have been able to keep the two states together. In other cases, secession or state disintegration has been stopped only through brutal repression of secessionist movements: Chechnya, Sri Lanka and Indonesia spring to mind as contemporary cases, as do India, Burma, Bangladesh, Nigeria, and Sudan, which all have past and present track records of using force in defending their territorial integrity.

What is thus essentially at stake for ethnic groups is political, economic, and social participation in, and at times control of, the state in which they live. The modern state is, for the most part, a nation state—that is, a state that normally has one dominant ethnic group in which other such groups do or do not have certain rights. Although some may dispute on moral grounds that the nation-state is the best form of political organization of peoples and territories, it remains the predominant one and is coveted by majorities and minorities alike. This may be so, but we should not overlook the fact that the very idea of the nation state is built upon the fiction of either ethnic homogeneity or the willing acceptance by ethnic minorities of living in a state that is not 'theirs'. The more the state is contested in its particular existence—its territorial extent and the people whom it does or does not include—the higher the risk of conflict. For some time now, many ethnic Albanians in Kosovo found it difficult to accept living in the same state as Serbs and that large numbers of their ethnic cousins remain in southern Serbia or Macedonia. As a consequence, demands for Kosovo's independence persist, even more strongly after five years of limbo status under UN administration, irredentist claims to Albanian communities in the south of Serbia and the west of Macedonia are occasionally quite seriously voiced, and the return of Serb refugees from Kosovo remains, at best, very difficult to achieve. Thus, while the modern nation state remains by and large the undisputed form of political organization in the contemporary world, it is in some ways more likely to create problems than to resolve them. Of course, the state in itself is not the problem. It is merely a set of institutions that exist over time and are used to exert control over people and territory—that is, to uphold state sovereignty and maintain territorial integrity. Although sovereignty is a right of states, inasmuch as they can be a holder of rights, it has more recently also been interpreted as a responsibility. States need to provide their citizens above all with security—physical, but also economic, social, environmental, etc. These services, of course, should normally extend to all citizens regardless of ethnic identity. Many multi-ethnic states have gone to great lengths to ensure equality of all their citizens in all walks of life—by recognizing differences and making provisions in law and policy so that difference does not result in discrimination. Complex power sharing and self-governance regimes, including federal solutions, minority rights systems, non-discrimination legislation, and many more measures already discussed above prove the ability of states to accommodate different ethnic groups.

At the same time, however, states may also serve as instruments to ensure the dominance of one ethnic group and enable it to retain its leaders' grip on power. Apartheid in South Africa, segregation in some of the southern states of the USA, the dominance of Protestant Unionists in Northern Ireland for half a century after the partition of the island of Ireland in 1920, and the implicit and explicit discrimination that ethnic minorities in Israel, Kurds in Turkey, and Tamils in Sri Lanka face in their daily lives illustrates the different degrees to which the state can be abused by dominant groups. Importantly, too, we should note that democracies are not immune from such tendencies.

Where does this leave us in our story of ethnic conflict? Perhaps the best way to sum up the discussion so far is to accept that ethnic identity, after all, remains a fact of life. However, we also need to acknowledge that it is what people make of it and how they use it that decides whether there is ethnic conflict or not.