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Identity, Culture, and Collective Action

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The Theory of Ethnic Conflict

There is not much consensus among specialists regarding the nature of ethnicity and the origins of ethnic conflict. The rich variety of theoretical options produced by scholars of ethnicity reflects the variety of cultural interpretations of such phenomena as well as the absence of any consensus on a single paradigm. A classification of types of theory reads like a classification of the social sciences rather than as a clarification of anything. Still, the differences in the definitions are not merely formal. They reflect the diversity of positions on the key questions of whether ethnic conflict is inevitable; whether it differs from other forms of social conflict; and whether it is more virulent, cruel, and barbaric. Above all, the choice of theory points to the usually implicit preference of the best method for resolving ethnic conflict.

It is widely acknowledged that ethnic loyalties tend to be very strong and that such loyalties are often manifested in extremely virulent conflict. Ethnic conflicts are often characterized by a high level of emotionalism, sometimes leading to the commitment of atrocities and even genocidal acts. Many observers believe that ethnic loyalty involves some degree of irrational behavior, or at least a willingness to sacrifice oneself for the good of the larger group. Others argue that ethnic martyrdom is a manifestation of altruism and deserving of admiration. But most observers see little good coming out of an ethnic narcissism that conduces to the demonization of the other. At the same time, ethnic sentiment is often praised as the moral foundation of an integrated, and caring, political community, perhaps the only type of community capable of sustaining a true democracy.

Thus, theorists differ over whether ethnicity is natural, primordial, historical, cultural, linguistic, psychological, economic, or class-based, traditional, modern, moral, strategic, collective, or political.
Taking up each of these as briefly as possible, the natural or biological theory argues that humans are already wired for ethnic sentiment at birth (Kuran 1998, 39). Our sense of self or identity necessarily involves the concept of a group of which each of us is a part. The primordial argues that ethnic identity is based on actual kinship and was imprinted on the human consciousness when the species was young and that it has been passed on ever since. Some primordialists hold the view that ethnic identity is merely remembered as primordial rather than actually being so. The historicalists maintain that ethnic loyalties have developed at different times in diverse parts of the world among various groups, so that the meaning and purport of each ethnicity is derived from the circumstances of its origin. In particular, each ethnicity is specifically shaped by the groups against which it struggled and in the light of which it identified itself.

Anthropologists are inclined to see ethnicity as the outcome of the processes by which a common culture is shaped. Thus an ethnic group is a group defined by its cultural resources including its values, its theories of kinship and social obligation, its religious beliefs, its myths, and its ontological and eschatological beliefs. Linguistic theories of ethnicity single out language as the most important cultural factor, but they also relate ethnicity to the processes of linguistic development, assimilation, and formalization. Consequently, ethnic groups are not primordial but the product of the evolution and competition of vernacular languages, the diffusion of literacy, and the development of mass print media.

A great many theorists hold that ethnicity is psychological, but not all of them have the same conception of psychology. Some seem to believe that anything that is mental is psychological while others employ some aspect of Freudian or Eriksonian theory. Some relate ethnicity to the theory of identity; others to group psychology, narcissism, and prejudice; others yet to irrational beliefs or to the consequences of social stereotyping. Many writers simply translate the naturalist and the primordialist theories into psychological terminology.

Those who argue that ethnicity is motivated by economic or class interest reason that material interests conduce toward the justification of the economic exploitation of others by using ethnicity as an excuse for limiting economic opportunity, the right to own property, the right to employ others, and so on.

Some modernization theorists argued that ethnic loyalties are characteristic of traditional societies based on ascriptive and particularistic values and respect for traditional political authority. Other modernization theorists argue that the group to which ethnic loyalty is now committed has actually been shaped by the process of modernization. Traditional groups were smaller, localized, and parochial; while modern ethnic groups are only “imagined communities” because they have been forged by the development and integration of smaller and undifferentiated societies.

In the same way, some theorists argue that ethnic communities are moral
communities because they share moral values as part of a larger cultural sharing, and such sharing encourages an unusual level of selflessness and commitment to the common good.

Rational choice theorists are inclined to see ethnic solidarity as the product of rational strategic choice by many individuals, each seeking to maximize their own utility. There may well be collective constraints on the utility functions of individuals, but, according to this point of view, if alternate choices offered higher payoffs, individuals would disengage from ethnic groups and ethnic authority.

Collectivist theories postulate the existence of something like a group mind or a conscience collective, which preempts the formation of the individual consciousness and results in a willing subordination of individual wills to the common ethnic will.

It may also be argued that ethnic groups are essentially political in the sense that they are a type of political group, which, like other political groups, is organized with a view to maximizing its political influence in competition with other similar and dissimilar groups, and where possible, even seek to dominate the state. But the political character of ethnic groups may exceed that of other interest groups in that at least some ethnic groups are potentially sovereign, independent political communities. Hence every active ethnic group which is not itself the dominant political group poses some level of threat to the cohesion or integration of the existing regime. In this manner, ethnic politics include at least an implicit international dimension, and frequently an explicit one.

There is yet another, related, way in which ethnic groups can be political. Rather than being seen as autonomous political actors pursuing their own agenda, many writers insist that ethnic groups and related movements are frequently exploited by ruling elites and/or manipulated by foreign governments. Benedict Anderson, whose views will be discussed at length below, is particularly critical of the ruling elites of the prenationalist absolutist dynasties of Europe, the bourgeois imperialist states, and even the postcolonial elites of some Third World states for their exploitation of the idea of the national community to enhance their own authority (Anderson 1991, 83–111, 139, 155–62). In his view, the originally benign idea of the nation was “pirated” and used as an instrument in balance-of-power games. His belief that nationalism has become an instrument of raison d’état is sustained, for example, by a typical article in the *New York Times* (June 16, 1997) reporting that Uganda, under Museveni, has been supporting ethnic oppositions in southern Sudan, Rwanda, and the former Zaire for many years, and suggesting that this support has made the difference in all three cases (*New York Times* 1997). The support of established regimes and the use of ethnic groups by ruling authorities in both domestic and foreign arenas provides an obviously political answer to the question of why ethnic groups are so successful in achieving collective action.
IDENTITY, CULTURE, AND COLLECTIVE ACTION

The principal concern of the political study of ethnicity is the analysis of the consequences of the adoption of an ethnic norm for the allocation of political power within the collectivity defined by that ethnic norm. It follows, and hence provides a second concern, that the adoption of one or more ethnic norms within such a collectivity will impact on the norms of social organization and the allocation of power within and among other collectivities (or social aggregations) insofar as they may be included, excluded, and either implicitly or explicitly delimited or even negated. Hence the political consequences of the adoption of an ethnic norm are “relational” in at least two ways: (1) regarding the competition among alternative norms proposed for the governance of a potential community, and (2) regarding the competition between the self-definition and the external (situational or even dialectical) definition of political communities. In this context, the term “relational” invites attention to the possibility of conflict and to strategies of conflict resolution, coexistence, defense, and, of course, domination.

All political norms proposed as foundations for the governance of collectivities produce the same sort of conflict—not excluding the norm of anarchy as a means of achieving absolute equality and absolute freedom without reciprocal contradiction. And the same simple rule holds for more complex, hybrid, normative systems which seek to reconcile alternatives, such as Liberal-Nationalism or Democratic Socialism or Islamic Liberalism (Tamir 1993; Binder 1988). Ethnic norms may be differentiated from some alternatives in that they belong to the genus of exclusive norms, seeking to solve the question of political community by reference to cultural, ascriptive, or “faith-based” criteria. While many liberals as well as conservatives have adopted a strongly favorable evaluation of exclusivist political norms—either for themselves or more often for others—many remain uneasy about the tension between the universalist cum individualist foundations of Liberalism and the collectivist implications of exclusivist norms of political authority and allocation.

The intellectual discourse which has addressed this uneasiness, not to speak of the increase in ethnic conflict which has attended the end of the Cold War, has focused, among other topics, on the question of whether ethnicity can be simply rejected on normative grounds or whether it is an ineradicable component of human nature or an essential function of human association, and therefore must be included in any political anthropology. A recent and not untypical example of this discursive conceit may be found in the introductory chapter to the symposium, The International Spread of Ethnic Conflict, where Lake and Rothchild propose a triadic typology of ethnic theory (Lake and Rothchild 1998, 4–7). The three reductive theoretical types chosen are the primordialist, the instrumentalist, and the constructivist. The primordialist postulates that ethnic sentiment and the solidarity it produces is either an original part of human nature, or “rooted . . . in centuries of past practice,” and hence “natural,” unalterable, nonintentional, and
nonrational. In fact, by omitting reference to all other nonintentional theories of ethnicity, Lake and Rothchild dismiss the entire category of functional, psychological, and nonintentional theories as nonrational.

The instrumentalist postulates that ethnicity is one among many possible or available instruments that can be used by groups to gain control of resources and improve their material circumstances. The instrumentalist accords with the rational choice perspective, provided that it addresses the question of why an ethnic strategy was preferred over alternative means of attaining the same set of goals.

The constructivist postulates that ethnicity is neither natural and unchangeable, nor a matter of rational choice, but rather an aspect of the historically evolved human condition, dependent upon prevailing social and cultural conditions and the structures of meaning which all articulate members of the political community place upon it. The central postulate of the constructivist position is that ethnicity itself is constructed, but the constructivist differs from the instrumental in that it denies that ethnicity can be wholly invented and strategically manipulated without limit. It also differs from the primordial and the functional, as Lake and Rothchild assert, in that the instrumental and the constructivist are not mutually exclusive, and because the constructivist is subordinate to the instrumental, or rationalist theory:

\[ \ldots \text{individuals may rationally choose an identity within the limited range that is socially available to them. Given some identity, individuals or groups can also rationally choose strategies that are the best means to their ends. (Lake and Rothchild 1998, 7)} \]

In this case, as in so many other cases of trichotomous classification, the overstatement of the extremes is persuasive in recommending the middle alternative. Constructivism is the only game, and it asserts the possibility of an ethnic norm within imprecise pragmatic/empirical limits; and those limits, in turn, determine the rational choice among alternative, available, strategies. It should be noted that Lake and Rothchild indirectly reject the view of those constructivists who argue that under given historical conditions (modern Yugoslavia), a particular ethnic construction is forced upon individuals.

The major types of discursive strategies are reflected, as we might expect, in the major types of ethnic theory, the variety of which is unfortunately reduced in the misplaced Ockhamism of the L/R reductive typology. The full array of ethnic theories may in fact be instructive insofar as it can help identify the types of political interest that can be served in particular cases—a consideration which suggests the following general proposition: The wider the range of ethnic identities available in any given political context, the more likely it is that some construction of ethnicity will be found to be instrumentally useful by any group; and
the wider the range of identities available, the higher the payoff to any leader who can successfully limit the identities selected by his target group. Thus, the primordial definition is itself a strategy for limiting choices, while the constructivist legitimates putting a pragmatic spin on ethnic identities and expanding the range of choices. Limiting choices or expanding choices can both be rational ethnic strategies.

The central question addressed in the Lake/Rothchild typology, and in much of the contemporary social scientific discussion of ethnicity, is whether or not ethnic solidarity is rational. But it is important to distinguish between the two possible meanings of the question. One meaning asks whether ethnic solidarity can be defended on grounds that can be rationally linked to foundational values. The second meaning asks whether the encouragement of ethnic solidarity can ever be a rational strategy. The first meaning displaces the question of whether nationalism is benign or evil, in either domestic or international affairs. It alters the perennial question of the moral consequences of nationalism by restating the issue as one of practical ethics. After all, if it is advantageous or biologically unavoidable to identify one’s interests with those of the ethnic group to which one belongs, how can one ask individuals to sacrifice those interests on behalf of universalist principles which no one else is willing to adopt?

It may be agreed that, in many but not all cases, ethnic solidarities produce violent interethnic conflict. In some of those cases, the costs of such conflict will be greater than the benefits for both parties. Wherever such Lose-Lose outcomes are predictable, we should assume that both sides would adopt the rational strategy of seeking a peaceful compromise. This benign outcome is only possible where the described negative symmetry obtains. It is consequently rational but not necessarily moral to proceed with ethnic conflict where one side holds an advantage over the other. But there are additional consequences of this arrangement that may limit the rationality of ethnic solidarity for particular categories of individuals. These categories may be described as those who would be disempowered by the redefinition of the political community as an ethnic community, or those who would be disempowered by the particular construction of ethnicity adopted in order to maximize the solidarity requisite to the successful prosecution of the conflict. But once ethnic conflict turns violent, it is notoriously difficult to stand apart from one’s ethnic community or to establish meaningful alliances with independent or detached members of other ethnic communities.

It follows that strategic rationality depends upon the state of the game. There are situations in which it may be rational in a strategic sense to act irrationally in a universal or absolute sense. I think that simple paradox is well understood and accepted by ordinary folks, but it has produced a tortured ambivalence among many scholars, whether advocates of the morality of community or of the civic virtues of collective action.
Theoretical Ambivalence: Psychological Rationality?

Let us examine a few examples of the theoretical ambivalence that I have mentioned. Robert Bates, who has presented an excellent case for what he calls the “instrumentalist” or rational choice view of ethnic behavior, notes that Clifford Geertz proposed “a consummatory interpretation.” This terminology, apparently invented by David Apter, but based on Parsonian theory, contrasts gratification based on values and ends with gratification derived from means or instrumentalities. While Bates declares instrumentalist “considerations to be paramount,” he still concedes that “both principles are at work,” or that ethnicity is cathected as both means and end (Rothchild and Olorunsola 1983, 166).

Ernest Gellner, describing the paradoxical character of nationalism, argues that “there is no need to assume any conscious long-term calculation of interest on anyone’s part.” But, “had there been such calculation (which there was not) it would, in quite a number of cases (though by no means all), have been a very sound one” (Hutchinson and Smith 1994, 68–69).

Ian Lustick takes note of this paradoxical characterization of nationalism and ethnic identity, calling this scholarly phenomenon the “riddle of nationalism.” The riddle is manifested in the contradiction between the constructed character of ethnic identity and the intense seriousness with which the realization of that identity, politically and otherwise, is pursued. Like a number of others, Lustick solves the riddle by treating nationalism as an elite ideology which is successfully marketed to the masses.

In a skillfully expounded statement of the constructivist/rational choice position, David Laitin nevertheless invokes the Eriksonian definition of identity. Erikson, writes Laitin, “positioned himself” to see both the primordial and the constructivist/instrumental faces of this Janus-like identity. “He [Erikson] understood with the primordialists that not any identity will do” (Laitin 1998a, 20). Yet the social and cultural constraints on the choice of identity do not constrain young people from exploring alternative identities and even selecting or constructing such an alternative. We note that, here, Erikson describes identity as individual and psychological even when it is constructed.

In a jointly authored article with James Fearon, Laitin and his coauthor describe both the rational and the psychological approaches as collectivist, while they proudly claim to “have taken individual interactions . . . as their point of departure.” In another place they describe the individual interactions they study as providing a “different rationale for ‘groupness’ . . .” (Fearon and Laitin 1996, 717). That is different from the usual theories of collectivist ethnicity. But they also concede that “it is obvious that interethnic relations frequently involve powerful emotions which interact in complex ways with rational calculation” (Fearon and Laitin 1996, 731).
The theoretical significance of Fearon and Laitin’s emphasis on their radical departure from the standard collectivist paradigm rests with their claim that collective rationality can, under specified circumstances, be based on individual rationality. Under special circumstances, the benefits of collective solidarity manifest themselves as individual payoffs, leading to the reinforcement of the power of the leaders of collectivities. But it is important to note that the Fearon-Laitin model is employed to explain interethnic peace rather than interethnic strife.

The usual rationalist explanation of interethnic strife states that collective ethnic violence is based on emotional appeals, fear mongering, and elite manipulation of mob psychology. By contrast, Fearon and Laitin argue that most of the time, collective action, based on individually rational action, produces interethnic peace. In making their case, the authors point out that the absence of interethnic strife is far more prevalent than the reverse and the reasons for its absence may suggest the ways in which interethnic strife may be even further diminished. With this reasoning, Fearon and Laitin are able to argue that ethnic solidarity is not only rational, it is also benign under certain circumstances. Presumably, if those circumstances can be proliferated, ethnic peace will also be proliferated. So the question is whether collective action based on ethnicity is benign or malign.

The Fearon-Laitin argument is based on the assumption that fellow ethnics know one another better than they know the members of other ethnic groups. Hence, in dyadic transactions between members of different ethnic groups, there is a higher probability of default, deceit, or defalcation, possibly leading to a higher frequency of disputes and conflict than in transactions among fellow ethnics (i.e., members of the same ethnic group). If the injured party resorts to her own ethnic group to gain restitution or to implement punishment, upward spiraling group-level ethnic conflict will probably result; but if the ethnic group to which the defalcator belongs assumes responsibility for restitution or punishment, it can achieve such restitution more efficiently because it knows its own. A reciprocal arrangement of this sort saves both groups from the costs of spiraling violence while reducing the number and severity of incidents of interethnic crime. As a consequence, ethnic peace will prevail—permitting a relatively high level of mutually beneficial interethnic transactions to continue.

Fearon and Laitin do not, in so many words, argue that the “in-group policing” alternative will be selected versus the spiraling violence alternative, but their hyperbolic technical explanation of the relatively rare occurrence of ethnic violence might lead one to the conclusion that the more rational of the two alternatives must be selected most of the time. This conclusion is strengthened by the hypothetical truth that spiraling violence causes more net harm than does in-group policing. But it is not always the case that the harm caused by spiraling violence will be equally visited upon both parties. The logic which sustains the
probability that in-group policing will prevail includes more than individual rationality and more than the absence of a strong state authority enforcing the law. It also includes, as Fearon and Laitin themselves state, the requirement that the two ethnic groups be roughly equal in size—not to mention power.

While there is much more to their argument, and to the critique of their argument, it seems to me that the equal size requirement renders their findings uninteresting if not trivial. Despite the adduction of several so-called empirical cases, I would argue that there are almost no situations in which ethnic groups are just about equal. If it may be granted that inequality is by far the usual case, but that most of the time ethnic peace prevails, is it not possible that the reason why ethnic peace prevails and the reason why self-policing occurs among more vulnerable ethnic groups is precisely because some groups are larger and more powerful than others—thus making it obviously irrational for the smaller of the two to engage in spiraling violence and unnecessary for the larger to do so?

Self-policing remains the collectively rational option, in the abstract; as I have myself stated in a piece called “Strategic Reciprocity: The PLO and Israel.” But there are several conditions which render it highly improbable, as the exasperating experience of the Peace Process demonstrates. The first of these is intraethnic multipartism or competition for leadership, and the second is the potential for transnational intervention to alter the expected payoffs for defection (spiraling) and cooperating (self-policing). These two conditions alone are sufficient to counterbalance the effect of the size and power of the respective groups engaged in the sputtering Peace Process, but, as Fearon and Laitin point out, the greater the number of interethnic transactions, the more likely is it that the number of individual miscalculations or irrational “mistakes” will occur, possibly in the form of individual acts of violence or revenge.

For the Fearon-Laitin solution to work, ethnic group solidarity must be maintained, and the temptation to engage in free-riding must be suppressed. This end, it is argued by Fearon and Laitin, can be achieved if the leaders of each ethnic community can structure the payoffs to their respective group members so that they are rewarded for punishing fellow ethnics who cheat or harm members of other ethnic groups. Consequently, the Fearon-Laitin solution winds up strengthening ethnic leadership and ethnic social divisions, diminishes the frequency of interethnic transactions because of the monitoring problem, and weakens transethnic state authority by shifting law enforcement functions to ethnic groups. Far from providing for a unique and innovative solution to ethnic conflict, the Fearon-Laitin solution invokes the triumphs and the tragedies of the Lebanese confessional system, with its ethnic elite cartel, its informal consociational institutions, and its periodic breakdowns.
Honor and Anxiety

The monumental work of Donald Horowitz offers a good and possibly the best example of the synthesis of the psychologically irrational and the rationally political (Horowitz 1985). Although he is at pains to demonstrate that ethnic groups are not primarily motivated by material interests, that they are not the product of class conflict, that they are not the result of impersonal forces of development and modernization, that they are not essentially strategic, nor are they primarily rational actors, Horowitz concedes that all of these characteristics are true of ethnic groups either some of the time or frequently, but always as secondary characteristics.

For Horowitz, the most important motive in shaping ethnic group behavior is honor. The essence of ethnic group politics is timocratic, not democratic, not economic, not aristocratic, and not tyrannical—although it may lead to any of these things. The universality of this insight is limited by the limitation of Horowitz’s empirical scope to what he calls unranked multiethnic societies. In ranked multiethnic societies, the honor question has been more or less settled; but in the unranked societies, following a suggestive assertion made by Max Weber, Horowitz flatly states that the big issue is which ethnic group has more honor.

Weber’s dictum is that:

ethnic coexistences condition a mutual repulsion and disdain but allow each ethnic community to consider its own honor as the highest one: the caste structure brings about a social subordination and an acknowledgement of “more honor” in favor of the privileged [sic] class and status groups. (Horowitz 1985, 24)

Horowitz does not interrogate Weber’s “suggestion” nor does he elaborate on the context in which Weber used it. He simply accepts Weber’s authority and goes on to offer examples of ranked and unranked multiethnic societies. He thought that the Tutsis and Hutus were ranked communities, but that the former Ottoman districts which became Lebanon were/are not ranked societies. He acknowledges that whichever group gains more honor is likely to gain more of everything else of value, but more honor is what they really want. How Horowitz can tell whether it is the honor, or the wealth and power that goes with the honor, that they really want is not explained even though numerous empirical examples are adduced. And like all historical examples, including the Rwandan and the Ottoman, each is ambiguous.

Horowitz notes that unranked ethnic groups, neither of which recognizes the superiority of the other, are likely to be more competitive and less well integrated socially and economically. Their relations more closely resemble the anarchy of
the international system than the orderly arrangements of caste society. He con-
cludes that the absence of a hierarchical culture and ideology may conduce to-
ward a more benign type of competitive politics. Horowitz believes that the
central political issue in a ranked society is that of inequality, while the central
issue in an unranked society is group cohesion. Group cohesion is the primary
goal of political action, but cohesion is achieved by historical or cultural claims
to higher honor, precedence, prestige, and about who really belongs and who has
only lately arrived. Ultimately, unranked ethnic groups may come to realize that
they can neither dominate the other groups nor get along without them, where-
upon competitive panegyrics and mutual defamation subtly change into a conde-
sending and grudging acceptance of the other.

It is this timocratic contest under conditions of forced cohabitation that
shapes the way in which the various unranked groups come to define themselves
and to understand how others see them. Consequently, ethnic identity is the re-
sult of a dialectical process involving any of a number of ascribed characteris-
tics. Thus ethnic identity is neither fixed nor natural. It changes over time, but it
cannot be shaped at will, and is not likely to be shaped for purely political rea-
sons. Horowitz seems, therefore to adopt a constructivist rather than an instru-
mental position, admitting that ethnic identity can be shaped to some extent for
strategic goals. The following quotations reveal the ambivalence which creeps
into Horowitz’s emphasis upon psychology and consciousness:

[ethnic identity is] “based on a myth of collective ancestry, which usually carries
with it traits believed to be innate.” (Horowitz 1985, 52)

The mutability of boundaries does not mean that ethnic affiliations are merely
“strategic,” that they may be called forth whenever it is convenient to do so in the
quest for competitive advantage.

Some such groups were “artificial” creations of colonial authorities and
missionaries, who catalyzed the slow merger of related peoples into coherent eth-
ic entities . . . though many such groups also retained the older identities as alter-
 natives, available for frequent invocation in appropriate circumstances.

Strategic judgments of this sort, about the shape and scope of group boundaries
necessary for competition, are not incompatible with more spontaneous perceptual
judgments. Rather, deliberative strategic judgments are made possible by prior
perceptual judgments about other groups in the same environment. (Horowitz
1985, 66–70)

While the goals of ethnic organization and cohesion are often described in polit-
cal terms, Horowitz continuously turns the reader’s attention away from the
goals to the originating causes in human nature or in the consciousness. It is as though he were differentiating between a prior cause and a subsequent effect. Something in the human consciousness causes ethnic sentiment, but once ethnic sentiment exists it leads to political competition. The problem with this theoretical construction is that we cannot observe the postulated cause and we can only relate it to the observed consequence by means of the shaky concept of purpose or motive.

Nevertheless, it is this perspective which leads Horowitz to argue that the strength of ethnicity lies in its affinity to kinship, family, and community. Horowitz cannot prove that human beings have a biological need for identification with a kinship group, but he argues that the “ubiquity of ethnic loyalties suggests the existence of needs to which they respond” (Horowitz 1985, 75). Despite his pro forma rejection of functionalism, Horowitz concludes that “Ethnicity, then, is functionally continuous with kinship” (Horowitz 1985, 78). But in addition to needs and functions, Horowitz also uses the term “utility,” suggesting that structures alternative to kinship and ethnic community, like markets or political participation, may provide the equivalent goods that compete with ethnicity in their desirability. In particular, Horowitz emphasizes the utility of ethnicity in dealing with the “colonial and post-colonial state” (Horowitz 1985, 82).

The utility of ethnic affiliations cannot be gainsaid, but it need not and should not give rise to a wholly utilitarian or instrumental theory of ethnic conflict.¹
(Horowitz 1985, 83)

Horowitz holds stubbornly to the conclusion that ethnicity is primarily psychological, but he cannot or will not disentangle ethnicity from everything else. Ethnicity shapes the psychological outlook which dominates all other spheres. Modernization theories and utilitarian theories point to the benefits accruing to ethnic elites, but they fail to explain the political behavior of the masses. The same is true of utilitarian theories. Both neglect the symbolic and emotional basis of the ties between ethnic elites and masses. Both ignore the way in which the colonial experience stereotypes ethnic groups in order to fit them into the colonial economic and administrative scheme of things. Both ignore the anxieties which ethnic nonelites experience regarding their position in the society, their future prospects, and their security. Because mass motivations are based on symbols, apprehensions, and anxieties, rather than upon material resources, and because they anticipate the future, Horowitz asserts they are not rational; they are emotional and they can only be explained by such a theory.

None of the theories, however, addresses the significance of symbolic issues in ethnic conflict. None deals with the important role of ethnic-group anxiety and apprehen-
Horowitz offers no empirical evidence for the priority of the psychological. He provides us with ambiguous historical examples, and citations from Freud, Jones, Erikson, Bettelheim and Janowitz, and many lesser lights. Then he deploys this largely speculative apparatus of personality and identity theory to convince us that the essential psychological component in ethnic sentiment is the need to come to grips with, and possibly change, the stereotyping with which one has been characterized in the larger, unranked, multiethnic community (Horowitz 1985, 141–84, chap. 4).

His ethnic psychology is primarily concerned with the ethnic image that has emerged in the cultural dialectic of history, but the colonial period is especially important. Typically, colonial regimes would characterize favored groups as virtuous and diligent, and others as lazy and superstitious. Horowitz believes that the prospect of independence precipitates great anxiety lest the colonial stereotypes be perpetuated and the dominance of the formerly favored group become established. Change the image and, one hopes, one can change the destiny. But at the same time, the effort to change the image and increase self-esteem leads to ethnic cohesion, ethnic power, and ethnic wealth.

Examples of Horowitz’s willingness to suspend disbelief in the employment of speculative psychoanalytic theory may be found in his use of the concepts “anxiety reaction,” “projection,” and group psychology. Thus, he asserts that lurking behind the deep wounds to self-esteem is an irrational fear of extinction. “Anxiety reactions are characterized by a ‘disproportion between the external stimulus and the response,’ and in extreme cases that disproportion is also extreme” (Horowitz 1985, 179). Horowitz admits that he has been led “to speculate [sic] that fear of extinction is actually a projection. Projection is a psychological mechanism by which unacceptable impulses felt by oneself are imputed to others. . . .” (Horowitz 1985, 180). In neither case does Horowitz explain how he can tell, respectively, whether an anxiety reaction or a projection has taken place. The notion of an anxiety reaction seems as inappropriate to the explanation of a bloody phenomenon as any bloodless political explanation; while the notion of an “unacceptable” impulse ought to be related to cultural notions of what is acceptable—a particularly difficult thing to do in a culturally divided society. And finally, Horowitz enters the Bermuda Triangle of unfalsifiable propositions by asserting that there is such a thing as group psychology which is independent of culture: “Without question, there are certain distinctively collective elements at work in intergroup psychology” (Horowitz 1985, 184).
But just as Horowitz argued that ethnic identity is malleable but not strategically so—and then convinced himself and us of the opposite—so does he convince us and himself that the political and economic are all but inseparable from the psychological, and they are much more easily discerned. Consider the following statements, all of which subordinate the psychological to the rational, the political, and the empirical.

Horowitz argues that human beings form groups to gain and hold advantage; but because ethnic groups are based on ascriptive characteristics, they are “difficult or impossible to change,” lending such competition the special urgency of a lifelong commitment” (Horowitz 1985, 147). Regarding the importation of labor into colonial territories, Horowitz admits that the “rationale” was to cut wages, “[b]ut the justification for the employment of immigrants was couched in terms of moral qualities” (Horowitz 1985, 157). Faced with such a policy of “divide and rule” in an economic sense, both immigrants and indigenes did the best they could to respond to the skewed opportunities afforded them, thus producing greater disparities than “anything the colonial rulers did by way of disparate treatment of groups” (Horowitz 1985, 160). Horowitz states that the concern with self-esteem spills over into a “politics of ethnic entitlement” (Horowitz 1985, 186). By an entitlement, he evidently means a claim to some material or political advantage based upon the rank and virtue of the ethnic claimant.³

Why Horowitz insists that the concern with self-esteem is empirically prior to the concern with ethnic entitlements is mysterious, but he asserts that the overwhelming concern of ethnic groups with political domination is an “otherwise inexplicable” feature of ethnic conflict (Horowitz 1985, 186). But let us examine the logic of the explication Horowitz himself offers:

Power is a diffuse goal, desired for unspecifiable purposes, to avert potential threats and to prevent possible domination by others. Control of the state is a central objective of ethnic conflict, because of the fear that an unranked system might be transformed into a ranked system. It was expected that the political power gained by any ethnic would be used exclusively for the benefit of fellow ethnics. It was also apprehended that inherited colonial institutions would function in an ethnically biased manner after independence. As political entitlements became more and more tied to the size of ethnic populations, political competition focused on census taking, immigration, and the causes of demographic change.

The question is whether the context of decolonization produces an “overwhelming concern” with political domination, or whether ethnic conflict alone produces such a concern. Is ethnic conflict essentially emotional, leading to absolutist goals and winner-take-all strategies? Is ethnic conflict over entitlements or over domination of the state? Does it not seem more reasonable to argue that
the intensity of the conflict stems from the fact that everything seems up for grabs in the colonial twilight? Only under such circumstances is it plausible to argue that the primary motive for seeking domination was to avoid humiliation and maybe even extermination. Under such circumstances, it seems rational to be overwhelming concerned with political domination. Under other circumstances, the logic of ethnic conflict over entitlements is not necessarily zero-sum, but under the circumstances of decolonization, ethnic conflict can easily become a zero-sum game.

The mixture of the political and the psychological is even more difficult to disentangle when we come to the issues which Horowitz calls “symbolic.” These include which group is truly native and which is intrusive. Exclusionary policies are, of course, the ultimate form of the reallocation of wealth and power. Similarly, issues of group legitimacy may be related to primordiality or virtue or skills, but translate into political domination in any case. Language preference is even more clearly a political matter. Horowitz writes that, “Language, then, is a symbol of domination” (Horowitz 1985, 219). But why not an instrument of domination? Horowitz himself seems to agree that ethnic politics is about much more than symbols:

There is another side to language conflict, not captured by my analysis of the ethnic symbolism of language. Policy choices have consequences, not just for careers of members of one or another ethnic group, but for social-class mobility, for bureaucratic effectiveness, and for international contact. To opt for multilingualism usually means perpetuating the colonial language as the interethnic “link,” thereby preserving the advantages of the advanced [ethnic] group. . . . To choose an indigenous language is to make job recruiting more egalitarian classwise [sic], but to discriminate ethnically. . . . (Horowitz 1985, 223)

It is difficult to romanticize anything as prosaic, practical, and putatively rational as a modern bureaucracy, but Horowitz manages to present an image of the colonial civil service more as a symbol of ethnic honor than as the substance of ethnic power:

The economic component to ethno-bureaucratic conflict is the tail and not the dog. The dog responds when the tail wags. . . . (Horowitz 1985, 225)

. . . it is undoubtedly the case that vicarious satisfaction plays an important part in the attribution of significance to the ethnic composition of the civil service. And the quest for this symbolic satisfaction is no chimera. . . . Symbols have substance. (Horowitz 1985, 226)
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And, again:

Claims of this kind [symbolic recognition] need have no direct effect on the distribution of tangible resources among the contending groups, but they usually connote something about future treatment: who will be discriminated against and who will be preferred. (Horowitz 1985, 216)

And I suppose one could just as easily argue that substantive political power, whether administrative or authoritative, is laden with symbolism, but how can one know which is cause and which is simply an indicator? Surely an ethnic kinsman approaches a civil servant with far less trepidation than he might approach an official with whom he shares only suspicion and the alienation of class and status difference. Even the ignorant, illiterate peasant knows that he stands a better chance for a payoff if the person behind the desk speaks his language, shares his religion, and recognizes his status.

Horowitz set out to prove that ethnic conflict in unranked multiethnic societies is fueled by competition over prestige, legitimacy, and status. Power and material wealth are secondary. Primitive kinship and modern ethnicity are related because they both fulfill similar functions, but the anxieties and fears that are linked to the survival of primitive tribal communities are transformed into a psychological need for social precedence when the ethnic group becomes the nurturing community. This phylogenetic evolution is shared by all groups and presumably explains both why ethnic masses support exploitative ethnic elites and why ethnic conflict is so violent. Yet it seems to me that every time Horowitz sets out to prove that ethnic conflict behavior is irrational, his explanation strongly suggests that the symbolic elements mimic the substantive, while the fears, anxieties, apprehensions, and projections reflect the strategic realities whenever ethnic politics are pushed to the limit—as in Bosnia, Rwanda, and even India in 1947.

Dynastic States, Nation-States, and Imagined Communities

It seems to me that many questions about how and why ethnic conflict occurs can be more directly answered with reference to the literature on transnational historical sociology. Thus ethnic conflict usually has its origin in either conquest and/or migration or revolution or imperialism or colonial settlement or the expansion of markets or the transformation of the mode of production or the introduction of new technologies of war or production or several of these together with the reactions to them which often involve the politicization of ethnicity or religion as nationalism or as a nationalist theocracy.

For the most part the politicization of ethnicity or religion serves either of two purposes. The first is to identify and thus legitimate the sovereign people
who have dispensed with their traditional monarch. The second is to delegitimize the foreign conqueror. In both cases, regardless of conscious motivation and ideological beliefs, power changes hands and a reallocation of ethnic rents takes place. The probability of the success of nationalist strategies of popular mobilization against traditional authority or alien imperialism increases with the cost of either suppressing or paying off the nationalist leadership. That cost to traditional authority can be increased by foreign powers—third parties who find it expedient to do so on either strategic or ideological grounds. The more that the international community sees itself as a community of nation-states, the more likely that nationalist movements will succeed. Unfortunately, the political success of nationalist movements, with or without divine sanction, does not guarantee their economic success nor their long-term security—so they are not immunized against the same processes which originally led to the politicization of ethnicity and may now lead in another direction.

The foregoing capsule summary of the historical sociology of international ethnic conflict is not intended as an ironic oversimplification. It is rather meant to support the argument that the rationality of ethnic mobilization and collective action, and the strategic character of the definition of particular ethnic identities, may be more readily grasped when viewed from the international side. I think that both the capsule summary and my conclusion are confirmed by the widely noted work of Benedict Anderson (Anderson 1991).

Anderson’s subject is nationalism and not ethnicity, but the two are related in that ethnicity is often evoked as the justification of a claim to national sovereignty. As Anderson points out, one of the interesting aspects of nationalist thought is its tendency to project the origins of the nation back to the beginning of time; which is to say to a time when the nation was more like a community based on kinship. Strangely, Anderson all but ignores ethnicity, tacitly rejecting the idea that nations have actually developed out of ethnically differentiated individuals acting rationally or instinctively to achieve collective political action as nations. Rather than ethnicity, he argues that the driving force of nationalism has been language, and Anderson devotes many pages to describing the linguistic path by which the older conception of humanity as shaped by great civilizations and empires gradually gave way to a new conception of human community as the self-governing nation.

On the matter of the rationality of nationalism, or rather of whether nationalist politics can be restated as rationally self-interested strategic action, Anderson can be said to waffle. He starts out by reminding us that Marxist theory has failed miserably to account for nationalism, while many Marxist movements have been transformed into nationalist movements. Marxism, therefore, stands refuted by its own historical consequences. Thus, one rationalist theory must be rejected as an explanation of the ubiquity of nationalism and of the willingness
of people to sacrifice their lives on behalf of the idea of the nation. That does not mean that capitalism had nothing to do with the historical emergence of nationalism. On the contrary, Anderson argues that capitalism played a very important role, but mostly in fostering printing, the publication of books and newspapers, and the establishment of certain vernaculars as national languages.

The title of Anderson’s book also suggests that as imagined communities, nations are not real. But loyalty to the nation and the willingness to die for the nation are possibly more widespread than any other human allegiance. As Hardin asks, how can it be rational to die for something which is imaginary (Hardin 1995, 230)? Anderson makes it clear at the outset that he uses the term “imagined community” in an anthropological sense. Imagined does not mean fake, as suggested in a quote from Ernest Gellner, another anthropologist (Anderson 1991, 6). Anderson differentiates between imagined communities and real or true communities by asserting that the only true communities are those that are based on the face-to-face interactions of all members. Hence any claim to the existence of a community among a large and dispersed group of human beings must rest upon imagining it as a certain type of Gemeinschaft (Anderson 1991, 143). Since a true community or a Gemeinschaft exists, grows, and adapts via some sort of Parsonian action system or Deutschian process of social mobilization by means of communication, it is shaped in an unselfconscious or natural manner. True community may even be a bit naive, but it is also innocent. The opposite, for Anderson, is expressed in a term omitted from his index, but interesting for our inquiry, and that is “Machiavellian.” But Anderson does not argue that imagined communities are produced by rational strategic political action.

Anderson commingles Hegelian and Parsonian images in explaining the rise of nationalism as the product of large historical forces to which a number of significant actors responded sometimes in an unselfconscious manner and sometimes in an effort to advance their own interests but with unintended results. Thus nationalism does not become a rational strategy until nationalism is virtually triumphant as a legitimizing principle of the international community of states. Because the rise of nationalism to ideological dominance is the consequence of a Hegelian process which is understood only in retrospect, the imagining of a community as a nation is not originally self-conscious and not Machiavellian and not stupid, as Hardin suggests.

Anderson derives the historical origins of nationalism from the rise, decline, and fall of the dynastic empires: Spain, England, Austria, Russia, and the Ottoman Empire; and from the opposition of “subject peoples,” subordinate linguistic groups, and surviving non-European sovereignties. In an effort to respond to foreign and domestic challenges, dynastic rulers pursued policies that eventually encouraged the growth of nationalist thought and hastened their own demise. This seems to be what Anderson means when he writes that once the
idea emerged and the imagined model was expounded, it was “pirated”—evidently by those who had no right to it, or who used it strategically and badly, in both senses of the word.

It is difficult to escape the sense that Anderson attaches moral value to naive and unselfconscious action. But Anderson does not explain how he or those he cites can tell the difference between calculated strategies and naive and unreflective responses in a Parsonian action setting. Thus he points out that the Austrian and the Russian emperors adopted policies of imposing, respectively, German and Russian as official imperial languages, alienating nonspeakers of those languages and rewarding speakers of the official languages with an additional linguistic rent. Anderson then goes on to point out that speakers of the “imperial/national” language, because they are the most favored national community within the polyglot empire, have a vested interest in rejecting the nationalist principle of legitimacy and, paradoxically, insisting on the imperial principle. We may quibble about whether such a utility preference is really counterintuitive, but we cannot avoid the conclusion that Anderson does, implicitly, recognize the possibility of a link between nationalist politics and rational choice.

There is a significant difference between the choice of German or Russian as official languages in order to rationalize the administration of a far-flung, multi-ethnic, multilingual empire and the preferment of a language as a rational means of increasing one’s support in a given population. There is also a difference between imagining a community as a nation rather than an ecclesiola and determining which nation it is. It is also impossible to disentangle each pair of consequences from each of the two decisions.

**TABLE 4.1: The Consequences of Language Choice**

1. Prefer a vernacular as a state language
   a. for efficient administration
   b. to mobilize popular support
2. Imagining a community
   a. nation rather than a religion or civilization
   b. which nation?

It may also be difficult to determine which one of each pair of consequences was the end consciously sought and which was not. Anderson’s exposition suggests that the idea preceded strategic consciousness, and that the idea itself was the product of unintended consequences, thus precluding an explanation of the rise of nationalism as the product of political competition. How could one think
of nationalism as a strategic goal before one could think of nationalism? But Anderson also insists that the Latin American independence movements led by Creole elites against Spain invented, or originally imagined themselves as, the exponents of a national community based on provincial territories rather than language. Anderson insists on this Creole experience as one of his major contributions to the history of nationalism, but he does not draw general conclusions from the Creole contribution (Anderson 1991, xiii). He is more concerned in giving the Creoles the credit for the cultural invention of nationalism than in questioning why administrative divisions and provinces in New Spain as well as in the defunct Ottoman Empire became the basis of incipient nations.

That provinces can be imagined as nations is as interesting as the question of why certain vernaculars became *linguae francae* and others fell into desuetude. Was all of this due to unselfconscious responses that seemed sensible at the time, or were there contests of interest in which some chose more wisely than others? As long as political processes are seen as following cultural processes, and as long as cultural processes are assumed to be pragmatic and ineluctably unselfconscious and evolutionary, as in the action system, so long will it be impossible to offer a political explanation of what is presented as the anomaly of the compelling power of an irrational ideology. The idea of a historic fatality generating an atavistically parochial mindset prevents one from recognizing the extent to which nationalist choices are strategic choices based on the structure of the international system and the availability of groups that can be reimagined as national communities as a means of redistributing influence within existing political units. Anderson’s reliance on unselfconscious processes is merely another way of saying that the particular way in which the Durkheimian *conscience collective*, or group mind, works is itself arbitrary and irrelevant. What is relevant is that rather than questioning the intellectual reconstruction of the *conscience collective*, nationalists and ethnic activists primordialize it and re-present it as the past imposing an obligation on the present.

This is the nature of the game of ethnic mobilization, and Anderson demonstrates that the payoff structure for the domestic game is largely determined by another and totally different sort of game at the state and international level. He argues that nations are formed or transformed as a positive or negative consequence of state policy, and state policy is constrained by the range of possible ascriptive identities that can be politically activated within a target population, whether within or beyond the boundaries of the state.

Anderson tells us that various European dynastic states “settled on certain print-vernaculars as languages-of-state—with the choice of language essentially a matter of unselfconscious inheritance or convenience” (Anderson 1991, 84). But the Czarist policy of Russification was a means of “stretching the short, tight, skin of the nation over the gigantic body of the empire. . . . The cultural
conquistadors of late-nineteenth-century Czardom were proceeding from a self-
conscious Machiavellism, while their sixteenth-century Spanish ancestors acted 
out of an unselfconscious everyday pragmatism" (Anderson 1991, 86). And-
erson argues that such “official nationalism” were not possible until “after the ap-
pearance of popular linguistic nationalisms” (Anderson 1991, 109). “That is 
why so often in the ‘nation-building’ policies of the new states one sees both a 
genuine, popular enthusiasm and a systematic, even Machiavellian, instilling of 
nationalist ideology through the mass media, the educational system, adminis-

In explaining why Japanese nationalism “took on an aggressive imperialist 
character,” Anderson quotes Maruyama Masao’s apologetic explanation of the 
transformation of nationalism when it moved from the Grotian context of the 
Christian states of Europe into the larger international arena. “National con-
sciousness in Europe therefore bore from its inception the imprint of a con-
sciousness of international society.” But, “In the absence of any higher 
normative standards with which to gauge international relations, power politics 
is bound to be the rule and yesterday’s timid defensiveness will become today’s 
unrestrained expansionism” (Anderson 1991, 97).

Anderson’s conclusion, at least for the first edition of the book, was summed 
up in the following passage:

. . . ‘official: nationalism’ was from the start a conscious, self-protective policy, in-
timately linked to the preservation of imperial-dynastic interests. But once ‘out 
there for all to see,’ it was as copyable [sic] as Prussia’s early nineteenth-century 
military reforms, and by the same variety of political and social systems. The one 
persistent feature of this style of nationalism was, and is, that it is official—i.e. 
something emanating from the state and serving the interests of the state first and 
foremost. (Anderson 1991, 159)

But even the successful revolutionary elites have adopted similarly official na-
tionalist policies. Revolutionary leaderships “come easily to adopt the putative na-
tionalnost of the older dynasts and the dynastic state. In a striking retroactive 
movement, dynasts who knew nothing of ‘China,’ ‘Yugoslavia,’ Vietnam’ or 
‘Cambodia’ become nationals. . . . Out of this accommodation comes invariably 
that ‘state’ Machiavellism which is so striking a feature of post revolutionary 
regimes in contrast to revolutionary nationalist movements” (Anderson 1991, 
160).

In the revised edition of the book, Anderson altered this view of the diffused 
influence of the official nationalist policies of absolutist monarchies; but only to 
the extent of attributing a similar influence “to the imaginings of the colonial 
state. At first sight, this conclusion may seem surprising, since colonial states
were typically anti-nationalist, and often violently so” (Anderson 1991, 163). Anderson has little difficulty upholding this slightly altered hypothesis because, of course, colonial policy was an extension of both domestic policy and the foreign policy of balancing power with other imperialist regimes. So the European dynasts “pirated” the spontaneous nationalism of the “reading classes,” and the European revolutionaries pirated the official nationalism of the dynasts, this official nationalism was then exported and adapted to the needs of colonial rule, and then the non-European revolutionary leaders pirated the exported version to consolidate their postrevolutionary domination. Does anyone see parallels with the most recent developments in what used to be known as Zaire and is now known as the Democratic Republic of the Congo?

Anderson thus expresses his strong disapproval, even disdain, for those revolutionary movements which seize power and establish regimes which adopt either the official nationalism of the older dynastic absolutists or “the imaginings of the colonial state” in the name of both the people and the state they have come to control. This disdain is only partly moral and partly aesthetic. Conscious copying, as opposed to spontaneous creation and extemporaneity, is itself unworthy of respect and it produces negative results. The original is natural, unplanned, and manifestly appropriate. The original arises from the consciousness, but in an unselfconscious manner. And the consciousness, of course, is formed pragmatically by means of the artless symmetry of the Action System. Hence, the original national consciousness which grew out of the gradual formation of an imagined community of readers of a given print-vernacular which was also the product of print-capitalism was natural, original, spontaneous, sincere, sensible, and historically evolved. Except for the fact that Heidegger is never mentioned, one might use the word “authentic” to describe that original nationalism.

So Anderson admits of more than a single type of explanation of social movements and the formation of political communities. On the one side there is the anonymity of Deutschian processes, while on the other is the calculating Machiavellism of dynasts, dictators, colonial proconsuls, and revolutionary tin-pots. The heroes of anonymous processes are the faceless and nameless individuals who are shaped by and in turn shape culture, while the villains representing state power exploit the culture they find and strive to prevent that culture from continuing to evolve.

Anderson’s dualism is crucial to understanding his answer to the $64,000 question in the study of ethnic conflict. That question, essentially the same one Hardin set out to answer, is posed in the first sentence of the blurb on the back cover of the book: “What makes people love and die for nations, as well as hate and kill in their name?” (Anderson 1991, back cover). Anderson’s own formulation of the question is a little more elaborate.
Finally, it is imagined as a *community*, because... the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship. Ultimately it is this fraternity that makes it possible, over the past two centuries, for so many millions of people, not so much to kill, as willingly to die for such limited imaginings.

These deaths bring us abruptly face to face with the central problem posed by nationalism: what makes the shrunken imaginings of recent history... generate such colossal sacrifices? (Anderson 1991, 7)

The passage needs at least a little deconstruction. First of all, note that “community” is in italics. Anderson uses a lot of italics in this book, but never in a more meaningful way. Italics suggests that the word is being used in a special way. The word “community” is actually defined to mean “a deep, horizontal comradeship,” which is the kind of fraternity for which people die. Imagining a community is not the same as imagining a society.

A community is a fraternal comradeship. One wonders what happened to the rest of the family.

There may well be fraternal sentiments and attachments that are so deep or so horizontal that brothers are willing to die for one another. We call nonfraternal attachments fraternal, because they remind us of an ideal form of fraternal attachment. But we also know the story of Cain and Abel. Which is to say that structural relationships may be assigned certain sentiments and behavioral rules by a culture but incumbents in those structured roles do not always act in accordance with the rules.

Then there is the question of what is a deep, horizontal relationship? Maybe this is a technical term of some school of anthropology, but I must admit that I am ignorant of its meaning. Is it deep as in strongly emotional, willing to die for, or loving? Or is it horizontal as in shallow, including a great many persons with whom one has no direct, face-to-face contact, or members of a categorical social group or stratum? Or does horizontal refer to the absence of a hierarchical political structure?

Then there is the question of limited and shrunken imaginings—hardly the way one would expect Anderson to describe the exalted artistic, musical, poetic, and architectural tributes to the nation that he will later adduce as proof of the sublime purity of nationalism. Here, however, he virtually accepts Hardin’s view that the philosophical ground of nationalism lacks any compelling reason. The imagined community of the nation is the product of a shrunken imagination. Why, then, should people be willing to die and to kill for such an impoverished idea? Why should the ultimate expression of nationalism be manifested in a martyrology?

And, finally, why does Anderson stress that nationalism makes it possible for millions of people to die willingly, and leave unexplained why nationalism makes it possible for so many thousands of people to participate in the killing of
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millions of others? Hardin, as we shall see, focuses on the indescribable crimes that have been associated with ethnic conflict. He does not believe that those who have been murdered willingly gave up their lives, or gave up their lives for so shrunken a concept. Go ask the Rwandans whether they were given a choice.

Anderson focuses on the evil committed by state authorities who have stolen nationalism from the people. But Anderson does not explain how it is possible for so many people to be so infatuated with the national idea that they fail to realize that their fraternal idealism has been misappropriated so that their love of their own likenesses has been turned into hatred of significant others. For Anderson, nationalists are primarily victims, while the murderers are not really nationalists at all. Were the Iranian masses nationalist only when they rose against the shah and not when they fought against Iraq? Were the Jewish victims of the Holocaust Zionist devotees and the Nazis, well, not Nazis? Are the Turks the nationalists, or the Kurds? Are the Palestinians nationalists when they rise against the Zionists, but not nationalist when Arafat pirates the official nationalist paradigm of the Israeli occupation? Which are the nationalists and which the racists among the Serbs, the Bosnian Muslims, and the Croatians? Where, indeed, are the nationalists to be found now that the nationalist idea has been pirated by governments on a truly global basis, and now that the greatest ideological rival to nationalism has collapsed?

Despite the primacy given to this “why?” question, both inside and outside of the book, Anderson devotes astonishingly little space to the matter. The matter is taken up seriously in a single chapter where Anderson compares nationalist patriotism to the viciousness of racism. The two are quite different, argues Anderson. Nationalism inspires self-sacrificing love which is often expressed in a panoply of artistic creations. This “political love” is revealed in words like “Fatherland,” “Homeland,” and the like and in expressions which suggest that national ties are natural, unchosen, disinterested, and have about them the “beauty of gemeinschaft” (Anderson 1991, 143). Nationalism inspires a familial commitment, and like the family, it is disinterested and this disinterestedness allows it to ask for sacrifices. “The idea of the sacrifice comes only with an idea of purity, through fatality. There is a moral grandeur about dying for one’s country” (Anderson 1991, 144).

Anderson presents nationalism as the wholly benign part of a duality in which all the evil that is traced to nationalism is attributed to racism—and racism is attributed to “ideologies of class, rather than . . . those of nation: above all in claims to divinity among rulers and to ‘blue’ or ‘white’ blood and ‘breeding’ among aristocracies” (Anderson 1991, 149). But, didn’t he just say that the nation was imagined as natural, like the family, something like “skin-colour, gender, parentage . . . all those things that one can not help” (Anderson 1991, 143)? The point, of course, is that such a sublimely deep form of nonrational
commitment to such an idealized community, which by definition excludes the rest of humanity, also establishes an insurmountable barrier of otherness. It is this sense of otherness which permits the killing, and which allows collective action to be achieved for the most horrible of human purposes by means of the cheap talk that transforms the interest of a particular group into the parochial epitome of disinterestedness.

In the last chapter of the book, Anderson considers the implications of Renan's dictum that nationalism requires not only a historical memory, but also that many things be forgotten. He tells us that the forgetting is not a mere obliteration from memory, but a reimagining of past events in the light of the present. Thus past conflicts might be seen as evidence that those groups which are now imagined as members of the same nation were once members of different communities. Such an admission casts doubt on the primordiality of the nation and might even allow the thought that nations are invented or are somehow artificial. So these to-be-forgotten conflicts are to be reimagined as fratricidal conflicts—conflicts among brothers who, by nationalist definition, should be willing to die for one another. Because these conflicts have been reimagined as fratricides, they reassure later generations of the moral unity and the ancient origin of the nation. Hence these fratricides become "reassuring fratricides."

Anderson then goes on to extend the use of the metaphor "reassuring fratricides" to suggest the emotional yearning for a way to imagine or fantasize, overcoming contemporary ethnic estrangements. He discovers the oxymoronic theme of fratricidal love in the works of James Fennimore Cooper, Herman Melville, and, especially, Mark Twain. How much more American can you get? Yet, having provided himself with such an opportunity, Anderson stops short of applying the theme to the universal brotherhood of Man, and instead limits what he suggests is an eroticized nationalism (rather than a national eroticism) to possibilities of transcending social and cultural conflicts within nations.

It is interesting to note, however, that he imagines fraternal/fratricidal love as a way of overcoming ethnic differences within nations by means of redefining different ethnic groups as members of the same nation. A Middle Easterner would be inclined to reply, "Only in America." But this conclusion, which now focuses on the myriad of meaningless deaths, does not differentiate between the killers and the killed. The former enemies have been transformed into brothers whose very antagonism in the past is evidence of their love; and through that love, their fratricide has been turned into fraternity—no, more than that—into identity. Anderson's martyrlogical conclusion upholds the idea that national and even ethnic identity is not only constructed, but that it can even be reconstructed to identify historic enemies as members of the same imagined community.

Paradoxically, Anderson praises both the innocence of unselfconscious identity formation and the manifest self-consciousness entailed in redefining histori-
cal enemies as brothers. It is easy to expose the historical and cultural tenden-
tiousness of constructed identities. Why, then, should rational persons make sac-
rifices to sustain such fictions? Presumably, because redefining an ancient
conflict as a misbegotten fratricide serves the interests of those who will benefit
from the cessation of violence. But it will take a massive suspension of disbelief
to imagine all Jews as descendants of Isaac, and all Arabs as descendants of Is-
ma’il. It may not be irrational to do so. The question is rather whether the
thought can only work retrospectively, as Anderson seems to argue.

The Logic of Collective Action and the Morality of Free Riding

As we have seen, much if not most of the literature on ethnicity and ethnic con-
ict assumes that ethnic groups are both natural and original, and, therefore,
need no explanation. From the perspective of rational choice theory and game
theory, ethnic groups are like any other group, and therefore subject to the logic
of collective action which postulates that efforts to achieve collective action will
succeed only to the extent that the free rider problem can be overcome. Simply
stated, the free rider problem poses the question, why should anyone contribute
to the production of a public good if no one can be excluded from enjoying that
public good even if they made no contribution to its production. Alternatively, a
public good, or a general good for some defined collectivity, may be produced if
a subgroup, often referred to as a “K group,” so values that good that it is will-
ing to bear the cost of producing the good and sharing it. If the good in question
is political order, or simply a regime of some sort, then there may be many po-
tential K groups willing to provide it, and the resulting competition might be
very costly for that community.

Potential K groups, competing with one another, can win only if they can
succeed in organizing and maintaining disciplined and coordinated collective
action among a subset of the population. To be successful, a K group must ei-
ther (a) mobilize a large part of the population without promising side payments
to all, or (b) make strategic alliances with the minimum number of weaker
“third” groups needed to overcome their strongest rival. If success is out of
reach, rival K groups must decide, in the language of international relations,
whether to balance or bandwagon, i.e., whether to try to block the strongest K
group, or join it in the hope of negotiating for a side payment. For example, in
the Middle East (including Israel), Pakistan, and Malaysia, legalized, participa-
tory religious parties are not usually in a position to lead ruling coalitions.

If ethnic groups are neither natural nor original and must be rationally ex-
plained, then their solidarity, their strategies, their goals, their ambiguous victo-
ries, their disastrous defeats, and even their identity cannot be known a priori,
and cannot be the product of a “historical fatality” in the words of Benedict An-
derson (Anderson 1991, 146). Regarding the Middle East region, prevailing opinion agrees with Anderson and believes that these groups are the victims of an ancient and inescapable fatality. Rational choice theorists are more likely to accuse them of being tragically poor strategists. The rat-choice types are clearly the optimists here; because if they are wrong, the solution is either to change heads, sort them out, or chop them off.

Ethnic cooperation or coordination must be explained not only in terms of the general good made available to all members of the categorical group, but also in terms of the superiority of that good when compared with alternative general goods that might be made available by other subgroups—both ascriptive and nonascriptive. Hence, from the political point of view, the obstacles to collective action include competition over which group will produce the greatest benefits at the least cost, and disagreement over whether a single political community can sustain a multiplicity of collective action groups. Individuals trying to decide which group to support will have to consider the opportunity costs of joining exclusive groups as opposed to groups which permit multiple affiliations (Hardin 1995, 230). Opportunity costs may also be measured in terms of alternative definitions of the same ethnic group, the proposal of either a more or a less comprehensive group, or the substitution of a religious group which may or may not coincide with some ethnic group. Often enough, the choice may include both partitive and universal nonascriptive groups and the individual will usually consider her own payoffs as well as the total increased benefits that may accrue to the entire society. The collectivity itself may be defined as a part of a larger community, or as the entire community as determined by the state or the nation or some other principle.

The foregoing view of the logic of collective action is reasonably compatible with the pragmatic Bentleyan conception of group formation and collective action as a dynamic process, ever in flux. Bentley argued that the process is the group, in the sense that group membership was constantly changing, as was group size and solidarity. Since all political power is the product of group activity, politics itself is a process of dynamic change (Bentley 1908). But the fact of the matter is that ethnic groups are not only ubiquitous, they are often quite stable in terms of both membership and goals. In many cases, they succeed in competing for members against groups which claim to produce either greater economic benefits, or a more equitable distribution of benefits, or a higher degree of individual autonomy. The question therefore arises as to how ethnic groups succeed in overcoming the obstacles to collective action if they are not natural and original.

The answer, from the point of view of rational choice theory, is that Bentley’s description of how politics works is only possible under ideal democratic and Habermasian conditions. In the real world, the group process is structured by
the distribution of goods produced by existing solidarities. The process of change is not the atomistic resultant of millions of free individual choices. It is the result of strategic political action aimed at either changing the distribution of goods or the pattern of solidarities within the framework of an existing distribution of resources and affiliations. A successful strategy will exploit the logic of collective action within a given, structured situation—and that, of course, is what game theory is all about.

Recently, Russell Hardin, the noted theorist of games and rational choice, addressed the question of why ethnic groups are so successful in achieving collective action despite the undeniable truth that they often produce unspeakable public bads rather than goods (Hardin 1995). In laying a groundwork for his argument, Russell Hardin emphasized the distinction between cooperation and coordination in games. In ordinary language, coordination may be only one among many forms of cooperation, but in game theory, for Hardin, cooperation and coordination are generically different. Therefore, he would prefer to use the term “cooperation” only for games in which the interests of the players are opposed, and he gives the example of the opposition of the interests of buyers and sellers in a market where buyers seek the lowest price and sellers seek the highest price. The actual completion of a sale represents a form of cooperation mixed with conflict, and though it may even produce a gain for both sides, it is episodic cooperation based upon the different roles played by each. One is immediately reminded of Durkheim’s distinction between mechanical and organic solidarity. Exchange cooperation is a manifestation of organic solidarity, however brief the Bentleayan moment. Hardin’s coordination, however, represents mechanical solidarity.12

But Hardin’s description of games of coordination is at odds with their usual characterization. Coordination games usually have more than one optimal solution, requiring coordination of the player’s moves in order to produce one of those solutions (Rasmusen 1990, 35–37). The interests of the players are assumed to overlap, but not to be identical. Hardin defines games of coordination as interactions in which there is no conflict of interest and each party can gain only if the others gain. His iconic model for such cooperation is the convention by which we all coordinate to drive on the same side of the road. But games of coordination do not provide that all players will receive the same payoff or that all players will evaluate the joint payoff as having identical utility.13 The differences in the individual evaluations of the benefits of coordination are even more significant when we have a large number of “players” and when the benefits are such that few if any can be excluded from enjoying them. Consequently, whether the political game is essentially a coordination game or essentially a cooperation game (a variant of the Prisoner’s Dilemma), free riding and/or the skewed distribution of benefits and costs will be common.
In fact, the rule that none wins if all do not win, and that none can benefit if all do not benefit, fits the definition of a public good. Thus, \( \text{Coordination} = \text{Public Good} = \text{Provision of a Regime} \). Other game theorists have also argued that the provision of a regime is a public good. Most agree that the public good may be provided in a number of ways, including that identified with the Leviathan. The most widely held view is that public order is almost always provided by a minority that expects to benefit more than others when it comes to the second-level games of exchange. But whether some privileged minority provides the public good or not, they find themselves positioned to gain more than others whenever a public good is provided.

Following his distinction between these two types of games, Hardin argues that there are two kinds of power: exchange power and coordination power. Exchange power (the power to buy and sell or to engage in games of cooperation) is based on resources and is fungible, but the value of resources is derived from social peace which is the product of coordination power. Coordination power is the result of social support of political leadership and it is “superadditive” in the sense that the sum of such power is greater than the additive value of each individual contribution (Hardin 1995, 37). The more that people are willing to accept a given authority, the more powerful will that authority be, and vice versa. One might consider the Mobutu regime, or that of the shah of Iran as examples of power by coordination which entailed accepting the convention that the existing government was as good as any alternative. In both cases, there was an illusion of power, sustained by the widely shared interest in a modicum of political order—an interest analogous to the interest in maintaining the driving convention. This reasoning allows Hardin to pronounce that Hobbes was wrong in believing that the “central problem of political order...was a general prisoner’s dilemma. It is a coordination game” (Hardin 1995, 38). And the best and most enduring solutions to coordination games are those that happen accidentally or just happen to be there like the driving convention.

Hardin’s refutation of Hobbes is based on his assertion that political order cannot be maintained by force alone. Political order is willingly maintained because many benefit from the existence of order and because the existing order can only be overthrown by a coordinated opposition. The alternative to coercion is coordination rather than cooperation/noncooperation, so political order is possible only where there is a high level of coordination. At least a substantial plurality must coordinate on the rules of the political game or on the legitimacy of a particular ruler so that most of the others can be reasonably assured that social discipline will be rewarded by the protection of their lives and property. In addition, “most of the others” must be discouraged from coordinating against the “substantial plurality” when they calculate the cost of rebellion against the potential political rents to be won and redivided (Hardin 1995, 41).
Hardin’s political philosophy is grounded on the belief that coordination on some convention of political order without prior agreement or contract is both possible and rational for the aggregate of humanity, if not for individuals and/or groups. But Hardin cannot tell us how such a convention comes to be, without falling into the logical trap of arguing that “we should act collectively in order to resolve our problem of collective action”\(^\text{14}\) (Hardin 1995, 45). Earlier, however, in his critique of “contemporary efforts to refurbish Marx’s prediction of socialist revolution,” Hardin wrote that such efforts rely on a miraculous metamorphosis of self-interest into class interest. But Hardin himself relies upon a miraculous shift from conflict or exchange to coordination on matters that literally concern life or death. Conventional coordination just happens, and then its advantages are recognized and all those benefited by those advantages begin to support the convention consciously and may even impose sanctions on those who fail to do so. This miraculous extension of the “unseen hand” is particularly noteworthy because Hardin is at pains to explicitly deny Elster’s definition of functional behavior as necessarily entailing “unintended consequences”\(^\text{15}\) (Hardin 1995, 242 n. 31).

The point is important, because it raises the question of whether functional, or unintended outcomes, including unplanned or coincidental convergences of behavior, can be considered rational, strategic, or collective. Since Hardin is committed to pushing the rational choice paradigm as far as it will go in explaining ethnic conflict, one wonders why he insists that coordinating behavior can be both functional and intended when it reaffirms distinctiveness (ethnicity), but is unintended and fortuitous when it leads to the establishment of a convention (driving).

Moreover, in his effort to make a sharp distinction between coordination and cooperation in games and in life, Hardin suggests that the two must be separated in a valid application of rational choice analysis. In spite of the emphasis upon this distinction, Hardin argues that state authorities have learned that brutal repression can interrupt the process of spontaneous revolutionary coordination in an industrial state. Hardin writes:

> If the old state raises the costs enough to individuals for revolutionary activity, it overcomes the power of coordination to reduce the costs of revolutionary activity. It forces potential revolutionaries to see their problem overwhelmingly as a prisoner’s dilemma in which free-riding is in the individual’s interest. (Hardin 1995, 41–42)

Apparently, one side in the interaction can change the nature of the game at will, so that a coordination game can be transformed into either a conflict game or an exchange game. But if there are no methodological implications which
control analysis, and no practical political implications limiting the use of force, what is the significance of the distinction between coordination and cooperation? If coercive power and exchange power can both be used to preempt, intimidate, or defeat coordination power, can they also be used to bring about coordination? If it is possible to use state resources, or the resources of any K group, to “mobilize” coordination (à la Karl Deutsch), does not the very application of exchange power transform the game into a PD?

Despite his insistence on coordination as a logical prerequisite for political order, Hardin recognizes that the conventional acknowledgment of the legitimacy of a regime may be based on the rationality of cooperation. Coordination may be morally preferable and logically prior to cooperation/exchange, but ethnic or communitarian coordination dominates universalist coordination, producing less than optimal political results. Hardin deplores this outcome because it produces much more harm than good in the aggregate. If only these individuals would form groups after the establishment of universal order, then it is likely that such partitive groups would attempt to preserve the system of political order which was the prerequisite of their very existence. If only—then the knowledge and information and beliefs applied in the secondary games of exchange would have been formed in the context of a broader, heterogeneous, and liberal society and culture.

Subgroup, or partitive coordination, prevents coordination at the societal level, and it is much easier to achieve. The interpolation of a stage of competitive group coordination which both produces exchange values and redistributes them for the groups in question rather than for the society as a whole does not produce a Hobbesian state of nature but a polity dominated by groups engaged in a continuous game of cooperation/noncooperation or a game of exchange based on their complementary resources and characteristics rather than their identity as human beings.

Hardin’s argument accords with the widely held view that where there is general agreement on fundamentals, political order will be achieved, and political conflict will be limited to “secondary” matters. Consequently, the real question is whether his game theoretic formulation adds anything to what is already believed or helps us to solve the problem of why some persons contribute more to collective groups than they get out of them. My own view is that nothing is added by arguing that human beings in a state of nature have a common interest in political order and then deducing that the problem they face is best represented by a coordination game rather than some other game. It is possible to say that a type of game represents a typical political situation, but it is not very convincing to say that there is only one political game for the establishment of political order. Hardin does not describe the political game in which coordination is the preferred strategy. In fact, he tells us that the typical regime is one in which the organization of exchange power has preceded the organization of co-
ordination power, thus rendering civic order dependent upon the benign and stable outcome of an iterated cooperation game.

Now how does this finding help explain the asymmetry of the input and output of ethnic and other ascriptive groups? This asymmetry is expressed in the oft-noted fact that some individuals are willing to sacrifice their lives for the presumed benefit of the ethnic or other ascriptive group to which they “belong.” Many persons have been killed because of their “membership” in a particular ascriptive group. Others have been induced or compelled to commit atrocities in the name of such groups. All of these “costs” may be considered against the benefits of group membership in considering whether it is true that costs exceed benefits for the average group member. It goes without saying, that such a calculus only makes sense if we believe that members of ethnic groups have a choice. If ethnicity is determined biologically, or even culturally, or functionally, individuals have no choice but to pay more for ethnic affiliation than they get out of it. If death is a realistic penalty for leaving the group, then individuals have little choice.

Hardin’s treatment of the question of the input-output imbalance involves five “moves.” The first move is to assert the rationality of ethnic group membership, in accordance with rational choice theory (remembering that, historically, exchange precedes coordination). The second move is to describe both the offsetting costs of ethnic group membership and the evil consequences of ethnic conflict. The third move is to demonstrate that the evil consequences of ethnic conflict are related to philosophical positions which attribute both moral and/or epistemological significance to the idea of “community.” The fourth move is to establish a logical as well as a moral connection between the idea of community and the idea of collective action. The fifth and last move is to show how free riding mitigates the evils of ethnic communal self-righteousness by limiting collective action. The bottom line is that ethnic solidarity is situationally rational and leads to horrible consequences, but rational choice theory, in explaining the grounds of free riding points to the rational and self-interested explanation of the continuous struggle for freedom from the authoritarian consequences of the imposition of the idea of community. Free riding undermines ethnic coordination and provides an opening for the evolution of a transethnic conventional coordination game. Free riding leads to freedom.

The concluding argument for the rationality of ethnic allegiance is presented as follows:

In sum, individual identification with such groups as ethnic groups is not primordial or somehow extra-rational in its ascendancy of group over individual interests but is rational. Individuals identify with such groups because it is in their interests to do so. Individuals may find identification with their group beneficial because those who identify strongly may gain access to positions under the control of the
group and because the group provides a relatively secure and comfortable environment. Individuals create their own identification with the group through the information and capacities they gain from life in the group. A group gains power from the coordination of its members, power that may enable it to take action against other groups. Hence, the group may genuinely be instrumentally good for its members who may tend, without foundation, to think it is inherently, not merely contingently, good. (Hardin 1995, 70)

Hardin’s analysis of the bad ethnic bargain rests primarily on three main points. The first is that even though groups provide power, protection, and even side payments, they also demand loyalty, inspire fear, estrange their members from outsiders, and thus limit individual strategic choice. Joining an ascriptive group often entails a gradual loss of autonomy.

The second is that all collective action strategies depend on either knowledge, information, or beliefs. For the most part, knowledge, information, and beliefs are mediated or shaped by culturally defined communities. Thus, in the case of many groups, and especially ethnic and sectarian groups, adherents willingly put in more than they get out (a) because they are misinformed regarding rational alternatives, the intentions of other groups, and their real interests, or (b) the conflictual policies of group leaders toward other groups, has left group members with no rational alternative to personally costly strategies if they are to be protected against retaliation. Distrust breeds preemptive attacks which transform myth into self-fulfilling prophecy.

The third is that members of ethnic groups enjoy significant saving in the transaction costs of communication and group organization (Hardin 1995, 82). But this advantage that they have in competing with other groups is counterbalanced by the fact that the cost of maintaining group discipline within ethnic groups is also relatively cheap because norms of exclusion are easier to enforce than universalist norms and because of the functional, but nonrational value placed upon consorting with fellow ethnics and enjoying their comity.

A fourth point is only partially suggested by Hardin, but nevertheless conforms to the general pattern of his analysis while pointing to a possible extension of his arguments. Hardin is correct in asserting that cultural skills are specialized resources that can be deployed to achieve collective action, and, in some situations, to exchange for more generalized resources such as cash. Consequently, one of the goals of ethnic conflict is to increase the relative value of specialized ethnic cultural resources at the expense of alternate cultural resources. But here again we run into self-defeating consequences, because the value of specialized cultural resources is linked, on the one hand to their scarcity (as in the role of a literate priesthood in an illiterate society), and their ubiquity
when used to mobilize coordination against a rival group. When an ethnic group is victorious, the general principle of ethnicity will no longer suffice as a rational means of allocating resources.

For example, the decline of the authority of the Sunni Islamic ulama and the rise of the authority of the lay leaders of fundamentalist movements is linked to the diffusion of Islamic literacy. When every Muslim becomes his own religious guide, religious discipline and the rewards to religious specialists will decline. By contrast with Egypt and Algeria, thus far, the religious leaders of the Islamic Revolution in Iran have been able to maintain their monopoly of Islamic authority against challenges from a number of lay leaders and intellectuals including Bazargan, Bani Sadr, and Soroush. The continuing effectiveness of the ayatollahs’ monopoly of religious authority and the extent to which it is based on increased coercion is the thing to watch in measuring political change in Iran.

Hardin does not argue that ethnic collectivities always shortchange their members or that costs will always exceed benefits. The payoff structure which rewards ethnic hostility remains largely untheorized, in game theory as in philosophy. So Hardin is unable to tell us whether ethnic aggression provides only short-term benefits before producing diminishing returns as individual freedom recedes and coercion increases in order to maintain coordination. In some cases, he asserts, ethnic aggression produces negative returns in the short run, because of the cost of war, but improved returns in the long run. Short-term rewards and long-term penalties may befall ethnic aggressors like the Serbs and Croats, of whom Hardin disapproves; while short-term costs and long-term benefits may accrue to ethnic revolutionaries such as the dominant groups within the ANC, of whom Hardin approves. Thus, ethnic coordination is not intrinsically immoral, but much more often than not, it is in fact grossly immoral while universal coordination is always rational and moral.

Hardin is more concerned to describe the generally acknowledged evil produced by ethnic allegiance, than he is with explaining whether or not ethnic loyalty is rational. That evil is best understood by means of a philosophical critique of the epistemological justification for ethnic communalism—a justification which encourages ethnic “solipsism” and the suspension of any moral limitation on the use of violence against alien ethnics.

Hardin distinguishes between what he calls epistemological communitarianism and normative communitarianism. The former holds that what human beings know and believe is largely determined by what is held to be valid knowledge in their own communities. The latter holds that we have no other warrant for what is morally true and beneficial than that others in our community hold those views. Normative communitarianism leads to what Hardin calls communitarian solipsism, a position which he believes to be philosophically untenable and irrational. On the other hand, he believes that epistemological communitarianism is a tenable, but in-
correct position. Despite the fine philosophical distinction made between these two forms of self-serving communalism, Hardin admits ethnic group coordination is quite often the product of these two communitarian limitations. That epistemological communitarianism is on the mark most of the time helps to explain the persistence of exploitative ethnic groups and the willingness of members to die for the cause. It also helps to explain the willingness of some people to believe the most absurd claims regarding the nature of communities.

Hardin’s willingness to concede that epistemological communitarianism is at least observationally correct leaves him without any empirical ground on which to refute the primordialist and consciousness theories of ethnicity. Hardin’s argument that ethnicity is constructed—that ascriptive groups are “imagined” (in Anderson’s term) and not “authentic” (in Heidegger’s term) nor “primordial” (in Shils’s term)—demonstrates the absurdity of ethnic solidarity, not its rationality. Even his arguments about coordination power and the distribution of ethnic rents are vitiated by his explanation of the epistemological grounds of rational ethnic behavior.

He concedes that ethnic loyalty is individually rational when rationality is defined as necessarily limited by the knowledge available to the individual (Hardin 1995, 189). But Hardin does not distinguish between knowledge which is the product of socialization and enculturation and knowledge which is strategic, drawn from experience and observation, or discursive. For all of his critique of the communitarians, Hardin’s own conception of a rational epistemology borders on the radically communitarian. The fact that he also uses phrases like “you are what you know,” suggesting a culturally limited identity, makes it even more difficult to distinguish Hardin’s conception of ethnic identity from that of the psychologists and the cultural anthropologists.

To the extent that critics of rational choice theory identify collective action with consensual cooperation, they are inclined to criticize rational choice for pointing out that it is rational to free ride in some situations. They would argue that it is only rational from a self-interested point of view, and they value altruism more than egoism.

Much of Hardin’s argument supports similar values, albeit restated as enlightened self-interest or a peculiar sort of intentional functionalism. But Hardin reluctantly comes to the conclusion that universalistic political cooperation is virtually impossible because collective action does occur in spite of selfishly rational free riding while politics is too serious to be reduced to an uncoordinated convention. Collective action is especially likely to occur among ascriptive groups. Hardin argues that ethnic group coordination, or mechanical solidarity, usually does more harm than good. In fact, the residual freedom of the individual to defect from group norms is the cornerstone of a liberal, democratic society, while communitarian, or consensual democracy, has led to conflict, authoritarianism, oppression, and even genocide. Defection is good and coordi-
nation is evil. Failing a regime based on universal rationality, individual, self-interested rationality is the best option for the entire collectivity.

For Hardin, the universalist and individualist norms of rational choice theory are an integral part of the normative package (including empiricism, rationality, radical subjective freedom, and secularism) that is more familiarly known as modernity. The difficulties with this admirably moral, modern, and liberal vision are, first, that it is completely abstract and ahistorical like the very conceptions of the state of nature that it critiques. Second, it contrasts exploitative groups with the abstract ideal of a universal human community. Third, it proposes the possibility of realizing universal norms of human political community in societies including only part of humanity. Fourth, it reifies the logical distinction between founding a polity and engaging in politics within the already existing polity. Fifth, it neglects the possibility of the interaction of different types of games. Sixth, it reifies norms and conventions as powerful or weak. Seventh, it dilutes the notion of rationality by linking it with group prejudice and functionalist rhetoric. Eighth, it conflates ethnic consciousness with strategic information. And ninth, it all but disregards the international context of competing societies as having systematic analytical relevance.

Hardin argues the modernist case against the subordination of the individual to the group, but the normative agenda behind this case leads to a series of theoretical compromises and away from a rational theory of group conflict. His primary concern with the collective action problem contributes to the relative neglect of the strategies of groups versus other groups. In so doing, Hardin also ignores very important external incentives that encourage the formation and the solidarity of ethnic groups.

Though I am appreciative of Hardin’s spirited defense of rational choice theory and admiring of the rhetorical skill with which he accomplishes his task, I am disappointed that he stopped short of proposing a more rigorous theoretical statement of group conflict. It may, however, be possible to construct a somewhat more systematic analysis of his perception of ethnic conflict from the normative rhetoric that he has chosen to employ in this book.

Let us consider the two levels of cooperation which are usually found in any exchange transaction. The first level is that between buyer and seller, as Hardin elaborates. The second level is a kind of coordination among all buyers and all sellers of a given product in the market. When sellers coordinate to produce a cartel and exact a monopolistic price, buyers may counter by coordinating on a boycott. Ultimately, such coordination may break down because of self-interest, but discipline will be maintained for some period by a combination of self-interest and coercion. Fear of a breakdown of discipline increases the probability of a compromise. Nevertheless, discipline will be maintained for a longer period when sellers or buyers can be easily identified, when the items are bulky and not
easily concealed, when many members of the group are located in a central bazaar or marketplace, or when they wear distinctive religious or ethnic garb. Usually, sellers are fewer than buyers, so cartels are easier to maintain than boycotts. But even if discipline is well sustained until an agreement is reached which reflects the relative power of the two solitary groups, immediately after the agreement, individuals on both sides will be greatly tempted to free ride on that agreement to sell a larger quantity for a lower price, or to pay more for better service.

In this example, cooperation and coordination are mixed in a two-level game in which the outcome is ultimately defined by the balance of power between the two coordinating solidarities. This model addresses itself primarily to the structure of the respective actors and the degree to which they may be considered unitary agents. There are inherent weaknesses in both strategies because it is clear that neither side can benefit without benefiting the other in some way. Both games of cooperation and games of coordination are compatible with skewed distributions among the winning players, but games of coordination are usually supposed to produce the same level of total payoffs whichever equilibrium is chosen, while the prisoner’s dilemma can and does produce suboptimal total payoffs to all players. I see no reason to assume that the two-level game of cartel/boycott will differ from a single-level game of exchange/cooperation in this regard. If the exchange/cooperation game eventuates in mutual defection (PD), then the losses suffered will put pressure on the coordination game within the ethnic group on one or even both sides.

In many ways, an ethnic conflict can be seen as analogous to an economic conflict between groups seeking to withhold supply and groups seeking to limit demand. Each group must coordinate in order to achieve collective action, but the conflict itself is governed by the strategy of exchange. It may even be argued that the goal of ethnic conflict is to increase the value or earning power of each member of the ethnic group, thus producing an ethnic rent. The success of a strategy of ethnic coordination depends on the level of coordination as well as the number of those agreeing to coordinate.

But once ethnic rents have been produced, there will be a powerful incentive to limit the distribution of those rents by preferring functional or organic coordination to mere mechanical coordination, and even by reducing the number of those recognized as truly belonging to the core ethnic group. Consider, for example the distinction between Kuwaiti citizens, the disenfranchised Bidoons, and the Palestinian gastarbeiter. In general, the payoff for each individual member of the dominant ethnic group will be a function of the scarcity of such individuals in the society or the increased supply of other ethnics.

So successful coordination creates exchange values that then lead to strategies of cooperation/noncooperation that erode the level of coordination in the society. In order to maintain or strengthen that level of societal coordination, or
in plain English, to reinforce a weakening consensus, it may be necessary to work out a series of agreements among a number of powerful interests. The parties to such agreements are unlikely to be very concerned with whether they deal with fundamentals or circumstantialis, but political scientists will try to figure that one out.

An ethnic arrangement of this sort, which stabilizes a situation of friction and change, may be called an ethnic contract, and it may be looked upon as a solution to a game of ethnic competition or conflict. When conditions change, leading to a demand for revision of an existing ethnic contract, ethnic conflict breaks out in earnest.

The ruling authority may choose to legitimate or delegitimate ethnic (or religious) political organization, but, in either case, subordinate ethnics are bound to be made aware of the necessity of ethnic solidarity. The ethnic bargain may be a bad one from the point of view of the subordinate ethnic, but it may be a rational alternative to confronting the dominant ethnic elite armed only with the rhetoric of universalist norms. If there is no segment of the dominant ethnic community which is committed, for its own reasons, to universalist norms and a redistribution of power, the choice of a universalist strategy by members of the subordinate group is unlikely to be successful. This generalization seems to hold even when the subordinate ethnic community is a majority (Iraq); but it may not hold when foreign powers are willing to support universalist, democratic opposition movements led by subordinate ethnics.

It is, therefore, possible to make a plausible case that in most of the countries of the world, ethnic cooperation and organization is rational because political power is linked to ethnic identity. The contemporary world looks much more like Karl Deutsch’s vision of mobilized identities than Arthur Bentley’s vision of groups as ever-changing dynamic social processes based on ever-changing individual interests.

Ethnic Dissimilation and National Assimilation

The preceding arguments regarding state-level ethnic strategies are resonant with the views of Professor Timur Kuran in his contribution to the Lake/Rothchild project (Lake and Rothchild 1998, 35f.). Kuran uses the term “assimilation” to describe a process of detachment from parochial ethnic identification and the assumption of an identity similar to Anderson’s idea of an ethnically neutral member of a national community. He uses the term “dissimilation” to describe the opposite process whereby modernized and assimilated citizens are induced to adopt behaviors that differentiate them as parochial ethnics.

Kuran believes that dissimilation has been on the increase in recent times and he believes that the increase is largely due to state policy and international
competition. In suggesting the number and variety of diverse and objective causes of increased ethnic dissimilation in a number of societies, Kuran writes:

Subnational groups that had appeared to be assimilating into geographically defined populations are now demanding ethnically based economic rights. (Kuran 1998, 35)

Kuran is less concerned (but not unconcerned) with the question of the alternative forms of ethnic identification available to any group than he is with the aggregate level of ethnic dissimilative activity. Kuran argues that many individuals may be driven to falsify their own ethnic behavior by political pressure as well as by economic inducement. Such processes may result in redefining the requirements of ethnic conformity or even setting new demographic boundaries to the ethnic community, in addition to stimulating increased aggregate ethnic activity. Kuran believes that ethnic behaviors are quite unpredictable, qualitatively, quantitatively, and relationally. Consequently, he argues, it is prudent for all governments to minimize the total level of ethnic activity and to refrain from any formal legitimating recognition of ethnicity.

There is, however, good reason to believe that intraethnic conflict, based on class or clan or culture, determines ethnic strategy to a considerable extent. Such conflict is based on the obvious, but frequently forgotten fact that ethnic rents are not evenly distributed among all members of the ethnic group. Privileged ethnic elites, such as Takritis (Iraq), certain Alawi clans (Syria), the intermarried clerical lineages of Qum (Iran), the Sousse “kulaks” (Tunisia), the Third Aliyah Ashkenazis (Israel), the Maronite zu’ama (Lebanon), the Sana’a Sunni elite (Yemen), the dynastic families in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states, the Durrani and other high-status tribes (Afghanistan), and other similar ethnic segments in other countries appropriate more than their share of the available ethnic rents and they would determine the strategies of the ethnic groups they would represent. In all of these countries there are opposition leaders from the same ethnic community who are compelled to choose among dissimilative, assimilative, and universalist strategies, seeking allies, both domestic and foreign, in an effort to wrest control of the state itself, or, at least, to change the distribution of political rents within the ethnic community.

The alternatives to ethnic dissimilation are nationalist assimilation and universalist negation of ascriptive differences (Kuran 1998, 41). Kuran believes that any increase in ethnic dissimilation can induce similar behavior in other ethnic groups. Rather than stimulate ethnic dissimilation, governments should encourage nationalist assimilation, as is the policy of the Turkish government toward the Kurds. Kuran does not tell us what should be the preferred strategy of the minority ethnics, though it is possible to draw the conclusion that minor-
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Identity ethnic dissimilation will backfire by increasing majority ethnic dissimilation and decreasing the prospects for nationalist assimilation.

In spite of the modernist assimilationist preferences which emanate from social mobilization theory, nationalist assimilation is not the most rational strategy for all players. The choice of rational strategy depends on the situation of each player, their resource endowments, and the rules of the game—bearing in mind that the national game is embedded in the international one.

The modernist preference for cultural assimilation and the social integration of political communities is sometimes justified by the assertion that a continuous process of integration is the logical prerequisite of modern democracy. In that sense, it is the prerequisite of both individual freedom and the reconciliation of individual and collective needs. But the collective rationality of assimilation can only be attained if all actors are ab initio free, equally endowed, and absolutely assured that all other actors will sincerely adapt their original culture. Failing such a convergence of the Lockian, Parsonian, and Habermasian utopias, the rational alternative is to opt for guaranteed ethnic contracts which specify political payoffs in return for giving up measures of ethnic independence.

Theoretical Summary

We have tried to support a number of arguments that sustain the rational choice approach to the understanding of ethnic conflict. The first argument is that ethnic identity is constructed rather than primordial. The second argument is that intraethnic competition may center on alternate ethnic identities, leading their various exponents to adopt strategies that will lead to the adoption of their own ethnic construction. The third argument is that the political organization of ethnic groups has the same purposes as other groups and is similarly subject to the logic of collective action and the free-rider problem. The fourth argument is that the resources available to ethnic groups are primarily cultural, linguistic, social structural, and "epistemological." Accordingly, the costs of ethnic organization or mobilization are relatively cheap. The fifth argument is that psychological interpretations of ethnic politics and ethnic conflict are largely speculative and ideological. For the most part such theories rely on unfalsifiable propositions regarding the consciousness of the members of ethnic groups or the collective consciousness of ethnic groups. Such propositions are often used to explain ethnic group behavior which is deemed irrational, but may only be immoral or simply desperate. The sixth argument is that rational political explanations of ethnic competition and conflict are usually quite adequate for purposes of political analysis, even if they fall short of conveying the fullest cultural or emotional character of ethnic confrontations. The seventh argument is that the emergence of modern nationalism in the wake of the development of imagined ethnic communities has transformed every ethnic community or group
into a potential nation, an irredenta, or a secessionist movement. The eighth argu-
ment is that the state, and the nation-state in particular, has appropriated the idea of
the national community and incorporated it into a general political strategy con-
cerned with the recognition of some groups, the denial of recognition to other
groups, the selective allocation of ethnic rents, the promotion of selected cultural
models, and the support of preferred languages. The ninth argument is that the
modern state has developed an ethnic strategy as part of its general foreign policy,
adapting that strategy to the structure of the ethnic situation both at home and in se-
lected foreign countries.

Notes

1. Should not?
2. Quoting Ernest Jones.
3. Here is yet another example of the way in which Horowitz mixes rational choice or
strategic language with emotional terminology as if to suggest that apprehension is irrational:
precipitants (omens of evil intent by rival ethnic groups) may act either to raise the costs or
to reduce the benefits of remaining in the state—provided, of course, that benefits and costs
are understood to embrace nonmaterial as well as material values.
4. I am reminded of the dictum of Michel Aflaq, founder and ideologist of the Ba’th Party,
who declared that nationalism is love (Aflaq 1953, 13). See Binder (1964, 161). Aflaq goes
on to say that nationalism is an identity as intimate as one’s name or physiognomy, just as
does Anderson.
5. Not everyone agrees that a political regime of any kind can be considered a public good
from which everyone benefits. If a regime or a stable government is not a public good, it
may be a partitive good, benefiting only a portion of its citizens or subjects. If a regime is a
partitive good, then there is no need to apply the logic of collective action in order to explain
how a K group cooperates and how it mobilizes support through side payments.
6. Obviously, one might wish to unite the whole population, but that is bound to be too
costly, unnecessary for winning political power even in a democracy, and might even be self-
defeating.
7. Such strategies are not limited to parliamentary systems, but are often clearer in such
cases; e.g., the Yilmaz government in Turkey or the Likud-led coalition in Israel. A side pay-
ment is, of course, any payoff in addition to a share of the public good.
8. Besides Pakistan and Malaysia, examples include religious parties in Israel, Jordan, and
Lebanon. Turkey may have become an exception, if the Refah Party is not banned as a result
of having actually broken the pattern. Of course, extraparliamentary religious factions control
parliamentary processes in Iran and Sudan.
9. Sometimes, the group defines itself simultaneously as both ascriptive and class-based,
like the Jewish Bund; though that particularly convoluted strategy turned out to be disas-
trously irrational.
10. For an alternative definition of the same ethnic group, consider the differences between
the Tashnaks and the Hinshaks; for a more and a less comprehensive definition, consider the
Pan-Turkists and the Turkish nationalists; both Iran and Israel include groups that would redefine ethnicity in religious terms.

11. Bentley (1935) assumes that individuals are free to join and leave groups at will. Similarly, Jurgen Habermas, also a philosophical pragmatist, has expounded a democratic doctrine based on an ideally free and uncoerced system of discursive interaction.

12. Mechanical solidarity is the solidarity of individuals who have identical characteristics. Organic solidarity is the solidarity of individuals who have differing and complementary characteristics (Parsons 1949, 320). “He [Durkheim] starts by remarking that the division of labor cannot have developed from a ‘state of nature,’ a plurality of discrete individuals. Differentiation can take place only within a society. The development of organic solidarity (in a differentiated society) presupposes the existence of mechanical solidarity.”

13. Rasmusen, among others, includes such games as the Boxed Pigs game and the Battle of the Sexes in his discussion of games of coordination—and in both of these, the payoffs are asymmetrical even though neither player gains without the other also gaining.

14. He goes on to write, “But coordination can come about without intent, without overcoming contrary incentives. It can just happen. And if it just happens the same way a few times the result may be a forceful convention that then governs future behavior by giving us specific incentives for action.”

15. I believe that the absence of intentionality is the common core of virtually all functional theory and discourse. This essential characteristic is borne out in the debates over whether all such unintended outcomes are necessarily beneficial (and always lead to more modernization and more enlightenment). When Merton proposed that outcomes could be either eufunctional or dysfunctional, then unintentionality replaced benign evolution as the core meaning of functionalism. Obviously, some group behavior can be eufunctional for the group and dysfunctional for the larger society. But to argue that it is more likely to be eufunctional for the society if it is unintended, but dysfunctional if intended, is to negate Hardin’s thesis regarding the morality of rational behavior and to affirm the essential morality of the naive, the primitive, the unsophisticated, and the primordial. Hardin insists (1995, 82–83, 85–86, 242) that the defining characteristic of functional explanation is feedback, by which he means reinforcement of behavior by positive feedback leading to repetition of the behavior. Hardin offers an example of positive feedback of individual behavior which benefits the group. But his central argument turns on demonstrating that the apparent benefit to the individual is exceeded by the exploitation imposed by the group. Of course, the behavior would not be repeated if there were no positive feedback at all. The individual has intentionally sought a personal benefit, but has unintentionally reinforced exploitative group authority.

16. See also the discussion of ethnic economic rents by the editors (Lake and Rothchild 1998, 10).

17. Hardin’s modernist morality has the same sort of outcome as mobilization theory, but it requires a conscious decision to minimize risk and maximize security.

18. See, for example, Horowitz (1985, 258) where he presents a table titled “The Disposition to Secede.” The column labeled “calculations” is especially relevant for understanding the calculations of the costs and benefits of assimilation, dissimilation, or secession.