Ethnicity as Uncertainty Reducing Behavior:

Explaining Acquiescence to Ethnic Violence

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Abstract

Scholars of ethnic violence have moved beyond the traditional primordialist constructivist debate into a much more thorough discussion exploring why mobilizations to violence along ethnic divisions are successful. This debate has sparked insight into many components that help to explain varied motivations for participation in ethnic violence. However, as of yet there has not been a systematic theory that can explain the prevalence of ethnic violence as opposed to violence based upon other categorizations. This paper argues that ethnic mobilization to violence is successful because ethnic identity offers a means of uncertainty reduction in times of chaos that allows people to create more effective risk assessments in their daily interactions. However, ethnic violence will only occur under conditions where more effective risk assessment tools are sufficiently weakened.

Keywords: Bosnia; Balkans; Civil War; Constructivism; Ethnicity; Instrumentalism; Northern Ireland; United Kingdom; Uncertainty Reduction; Yugoslavia.

Introduction

Prior to the Yugoslavian conflict, the region of Prijedor represented an exemplar of intercultural tolerance and interaction within Bosnia. When the Muslim political party, the SDA, won the elections in 1991, they refrained from taking all leading positions in the government, despite their mandate, because they believed that hoarding power threatened the stability of the government (Oberschall 2000, 985). One Muslim refugee described the situation prior to the conflict:

In Prijedor there were no conflicts between nationalities. We didn't make the distinctions. My colleague at work was an Orthodox Serb, we worked together. When we were children we went to the Orthodox church or the mosque together... I don't understand. Before there were never any problems between us. We lived together. My sister is married to a Serb, and a brother of my wife is married to a Croat (Oberschall 2000, 986).

On April 29, 1992, a Serb militia of two thousand local Serbs overthrew the government. Muslim political leaders were detained or executed. Muslims who were detained were tortured, starved, and killed, and their houses were looted and burned (Oberschall 2000, 986).

What explains turning against your neighbor in such a brutal fashion? Why are mobilizations to violence along ethnic lines able to overturn years of peaceful coexistence? Until recently, societies in which this violence occurs were denigrated as primitive, and eternally scripted into paths of ancient hatred. However, this theory has been thoroughly debunked. In its place ethnicity scholarship has stoked a lively debate seeking to explain the motivations for engaging in, or tacitly supporting, ethnic violence. This paper will argue that ethnic mobilization to violence is successful because ethnic identity offers a means of uncertainty reduction in times of chaos that allows people to create more effective risk assessments in their daily interactions. However, ethnic violence will only occur under conditions where more effective risk assessment tools are sufficiently weakened.

This paper first examines the three major groups of scholarship that explain why ethnic mobilization is successful. It then explains why the theory of ethnicity as a mechanism to reduce uncertainty holds the most explanatory power. Next, it offers evidence from the conflicts in Bosnia and Northern Ireland to support that claim. It concludes by examining areas for future research.

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¹ Risk assessment refers to the process by which people attribute certain levels of risk to their interactions with community members and strangers.

Literature Review

There are three major groups of theories that seek to explain under what conditions ethnicity can be mobilized towards violence. This paper, like Henry Hale's work, will abandon the traditional primordial constructivist theoretical split for two reasons. First, there are very few true primordialists left. Second, constructivism as a blanket term limits the nuance necessary to advance a complete theory of ethnicity. The first group defends an instrumentalist theory. It will be called epiphenomenal individual-action theory. The second and third groups are constructivist theories. The second group is institutionalist theory. The third group is ethnicity as relational theory.

David Laitin and James Fearon argue that there are three standards by which we should adjudicate the explanatory power of an ethnic conflict theory. First, it must explain why interethnic relations are characterized by tension and mistrust while these characteristics are relatively absent from intra-ethnic relations. Second, it must explain why despite greater tensions, peaceful and cooperative relations are more likely in inter-ethnic relations. Finally, it must explain why "in some cases inter-ethnic tensions are occasionally punctuated by spirals of violence, while in other cases tensions exist, but interethnic disputes are more often "cauterized short of war" (Fearon and Laitin 1996, 715). This paper will use these standards to evaluate theories of ethnicity.

Epiphenomenal Individual-Action Theories

Epiphenomenal individual-action theorists argue that there is not an inherent quality to ethnicity that explains why it is mobilized. These scholars hold that ethnicity is just a category used to shroud other motivations. Within this group there is a split between scholars who advocate that these mobilizations occur as result of elite interests and those who argue they occur as a result of localized individual interests.

Elite-based epiphenomenalists argue that 'ethnic entrepreneurs' invoke ethnicity to obscure the motivations behind their violence. Grievance based upon what is considered as an immutable characteristic is used to justify certain actions that may have separate motivations. Paul Brass argues that identities are shaped by elites who are competing with other elites for economic and political power. This competition arises when elites face either internal or external threats to their power bases (Brass 1996, 87-90). Lee Ann Fujii, examining the Rwandan case, argues that the conflict can be explained at least in part by elite competition within the Hutu community. For Fujii, these ethnic divisions are not real: rather, ethnicity only becomes salient when elites mobilize the population around it. For example, Fuji argues that attempts at reconciliation were

hampered by radical actors faking Tutsi attacks to encourage identity homogenization (Fujii 2009, 127). Kanchan Chandra contends that the reason why these ethnicities are mobilized is that they are highly visible and relatively unchangeable, which allows elites to exclude certain communities from the spoils, and assists them in preventing cooperation between rival political factions (Hale 2008, 29). However, this argument fails to explain why mobilizations can occur when ethnic differences are not visibly distinguishable.

V.P Gagnon argues that elites have incentives to mobilize along ethnic lines when they face challenges from reformist leaders. They use ethnicity to distract attention from economic or political failures that reformists are calling attention to (Gagnon 2005, 132). For example, in Serbia during the late eighties, poor economic performances gave rise to reformist politicians. In response Milosevic began painting Serbs in Kosovo as threatened by Albanian nationalism (Gagnon 2005, 132). Gagnon claims that there has to be some past political participation along ethnic lines that gives legitimacy to ethnic rhetoric (Gagnon 2005, 132). However, that argument and these scholars are limited in their explanations of why publics participate in this elite rhetoric. A precondition of past political participation along ethnic lines is not enough to explain why it is successful in the present.

Gagnon makes some attempt to identify why people might opt in. He suggests it is helpful to have control over information. Milosevic, for example, had an iron grip on the press in Serbia and used it to assimilate all Croatians with the fascist and terrorist Ustashi organization. However, more analysis would be needed about the level of information control necessary to lead to this acquiescence. Moreover, it is unclear why people participated in this rhetoric after years of peaceful coexistence. Gagnon answers this question by arguing that elites use thugs to create cycles of tit-for tat-violence and generate a fear among their domestic base, which forces that base to support hardline elites who can protect them (Gagnon 2005, 132). However, he fails to explain under what conditions that fear becomes operational for elites seeking to mobilize along ethnic divisions. It is unreasonable to suggest that if a gang war were to begin in Sweden, the broad majority of the public would immediately run to one gang or the other for protection. As a result it seems that there is something about ethnicity that causes people to participate in mobilizations to violence. Gagnon's theory denies this and is, as a result, insufficient.

Local actor epiphenomenalists argue that individual motivations can explain why publics opt into elite mobilizations. Stathis Kalyvas argues that most violence is localized (Kalyvas 2005, 475-6). Using a broad anthology of violence during civil wars, he argues that local citizens use the guise of war to carry out personal vendettas or to gain 'booty'. Kalyvas argues that the concept of

group violence implies the interchangeability of individual persons within those groups. He argues that this limits individual agency that is most often the salient explanatory factor in their decision to participate in violence. For example, he cites the Liberal Conservative clash in Colombia, stating that more often than not, the split between liberals and conservatives came out of deep seeded family feuds rather than an ingrained allegiance (Kalyvas 2005, 480-2). These back stage feuds are then played out on the front stage of ethnic conflict.

Kalyvas' analysis is problematic in a few areas. First, he provides no identification of which conditions lead people to be violent, simply suggesting that opportunity and greed are enough. This may explain some portions of thug violence, but to suggest that broad populations are susceptible to this tract needs more justification. His selected stories are not enough to prove that claim. They therefore hit the same block that Gagnon hits, about explaining why the fear caused by initial violent thugs causes people to opt into a system of ethnic violence. Second, assuming that not all violence is local, he does not explain why people who do not participate in ethnic violence still opt into hardline ethnic rhetoric. Kalyvas is correct to point out that not all violence is centered around a master cleavage of ethnicity and that there are local variations of violence. However, it is possible that this local violence hardens identities that allows for group-based violence to occur. He, like other epiphenomenal scholars, is unable to explain this outcome.

Institutionalists

Institutional theorists advocate that ethnic violence can be explained by the breakdown of institutions, or weak institutions. Cindy Crawford and Daniel Posner both advocate that institutions create the conditions whereby people begin to opt into ethnic identities. Crawford identifies colonial discourses that incentivized the choice of ethnic identities by attaching resource allocation to those identities (Crawford 1998, 18). In this way, people believe that opting into those identities increases their life chances. Conversely, this causes feelings of discrimination due to membership in an ascribed identity. For Crawford a history of this institutionalized identity formation is a necessary precondition for violence to occur along ethnic lines (Crawford 1998, 18). Crawford argues that where institutions are weak there are incentives and opportunities for elites to exploit those cleavages for their own benefit. This exploitation takes the form of patronage being doled out along those ethnic divisions (Crawford 1998, 25). Neil DeVotta argues that when those systems of preferential treatment occur the institutions decay through a process of ethnic outbidding. Institutional decay refers to the process whereby the rules of the game become unfair as they are modified in order to play the ethnic outbidding

game. Ethnic outbidding defines the situation where elites now have incentives to maintain the hard line with regards to their relations to the other ethnic community, because if they do not then a competing party will outbid them by portraying them as abandoning their own ethnic community. This becomes salient because the institutional decay has instilled an expectation in each community that resources will be doled out along ethnic lines. So, for example, in Sri Lanka the SLFP and UNP, the two Sinhalese parties, both portrayed the other as betraying the Sinhalese community when they advocated reconciliation with the Tamils (DeVotta 2005, 140-3). As a result of this process, the minority community has no meaningful expectation that the current system gives them a chance of victory and they are likely to mobilize (DeVotta 2005, 140-3). What these theories do not explain is why these identities are not abandoned on the brink of violence, particularly by the dominant party. It is reasonable to suggest that people might opt into ethnic identities to ensure increased life chances, but when those mobilizations threaten their lives one would expect them to abandon those identities. As Fujii notes at the outset of her book, people are better of under conditions of peace than violence (Fujii 2009, 3). This premise will not be true for everyone as there are wartime gains to be made by 'war entrepreneurs'. However, for the general populace you would expect general conditions of life to decline in times of war. Given this premise, institutionalist theories fail to explain mobilizations to violence along ethnic lines.

Crawford begins to answer this through her concept of bandwagoning. She argues that elites use vivid acts of public violence to increase emotions and fear (Crawford 2005, 29). At the point where a few people opt into ethnic violence because of that fear, three things occur. First there are reduced social costs to joining these movements. This means that people who want to opt into this violence to assuage local vendettas feel more comfortable doing so. Second, there are more social costs to not joining as there is now an increased expectation that you should join to 'protect your community'. Finally, the presence of ethnic violence from one community reduces the costs and raises the incentives for excluded ethnic communities to also mobilize as that becomes a rational choice to increase life chances (Crawford 2005, 25, 28). Critically, the reason why ethnic mobilization creates bandwagoning but class mobilization does not is that ethnicity is exclusive. As a result of this exclusivity she argues that people feel compelled to opt into these categories because there is no way to enter the other community (Crawford 2005, 29).

While this theory is compelling in explaining the group dynamics that can lead to violence escalating it suffers from two deficiencies. First, as Posner points out, there are many cases where ethnic identities are highly fluid and, thus, not exclusive (Posner 2005, 17). However,

particularly in times of conflict they may seem exclusive. Second, and more importantly, this theory does not explain why the dominant group opts into this rhetoric beyond a material benefit to itself. A Sinhalese person is likely to do fairly well in elections without excluding the Tamils. When that exclusion begins to increase violence, one's life chances would be better served by abandoning those policies and not risking one's physical safety. Why then do dominant groups still participate in this violence? Crawford's theory is reliant upon a critical mass of that community participating for her logic to take effect. Henry Hale begins to answer this dilemma in his ethnicity as relational theory.

Ethnicity as relational

Relational scholars advocate that ethnicity is about reducing uncertainty in our social interactions. These scholars argue that two basic conditions cause people to utilize ethnicity. First, the world is unknowable and consists of infinitely complex possibilities of social arrangements. Second, the brain is imperfect at processing this complexity. As a result, using psychological studies, Hale argues that that ethnicity is a way of grouping highly complex social arrangements to make sense of the world. George Meade argues that we define ourselves based upon our relation to our community (Meade 1934, 200-2). Michael Hogg and Barry Mullins concur:

People have a fundamental need to feel certain about the world and their place within it--subjective certainty renders existence meaningful and thus gives one confidence about how to behave, and what to expect from the physical and social environment within which one finds oneself (Hogg and Mullins 1999, 253-5).

When we feel uncertainty we feel that we no longer have control over our lives. As a result uncertainty reduction becomes a prerequisite to facilitate purposeful interaction. Hogg and Mullins reproduced Henri Tajfel's 1982 experiment and found that contrary to popular interpretations, people do not opt into groups on the basis of relative self-esteem but rather on the basis of uncertainty reduction. Indeed, self-esteem only came into play as it related to uncertainty reduction (Hogg and Mullins 1999, 251). As a result ethnicity becomes a simplifier, a tool to reduce this complexity by creating rough predictions about the interactions we have with other individuals and groups (Hale 2008, 34-5). It contains basic information that allows people to fill in blanks of knowledge in regards to strangers they interact with. The question becomes, why does ethnicity as a grouping mechanism hold more informational content capable of reducing uncertainty than other types of groups?

Hale argues that there are three metrics by which groups can be evaluated to determine their 'thickness', or relevance and meaning to people. The first metric is intrinsic importance, or when life chances are directly affected by the grouping distinction. For example, having a common language significantly reduces transaction costs. The second metric is imposed importance. This importance becomes salient when a particular grouping distinction is tied to material allocation of resources (Hale 2008, 34-7). For example, as Posner argues, the British colonial administration in Zambia provided resources to certain tribal chiefdoms that allowed them to dole out patronage in a way that gave imposed importance to those identities (Posner 2005, 34). The final metric is usefulness as a rule of thumb. This becomes important when an easily perceptible social category frequently coincides with less perceptible points of reference that are independently important (Hale 2008, 37). For example the accent of a Northern Irishman can allow you to reasonably infer the class of the person and which neighborhoods within a city they are likely to live in. The more of these metrics a grouping distinction meets, the more information is available to create rough predictions.

For relational theorists the activation of a rule of thumb is dependent on the accessibility of the category and how it fits with observed social reality. The grouping mechanism is 'thickest' when it is both chronically and situationally accessible. An identity is chronically accessible if people can access it in their memories. So, for example, a Croat who has been told their entire life that a Croatian is different from a Serb is more likely to view their interactions along this distinction. An identity is situationally accessible if it is immediately available through environmental cues. For example, Putin flooding the media with images portraying Ukrainians as fascists, and distinct from Russians, makes it more likely that Russians will view interactions between Russians and Ukrainians along this distinction. However, as has been discussed above, while these may be preconditions, they are not sufficient to explain the rule of thumb being activated. The group must also be evaluated on its ability to fit. The category has to make sense of the situation by at least representing distinctions between people somewhat accurately. However, Hale notes that people frequently use categories that are far from perfectly accurate (Hale 2008, 39).

Ethnicity has four factors that account for its particular prevalence as a grouping mechanism that can reduce uncertainty. First, it has connotations of a common fate and origin. Ethnic symbols that are tied to myths of common origin make ethnicity an accessible grouping. Ethnic symbols like flags and myth-bearing rhetoric that are documented in historical tradition make it both situationally and chronically accessible. These appeals to common origin strengthen appeals to

common future fates. However, as discussed earlier, this clearly is not a sufficient condition to explain ethnicity being so prevalent (Hale 2008, 39).

Second, ethnicity as a grouping can limit barriers to communication. This can occur on the basic level of language, or on a more abstract cultural level. As a result, ethnicity simplifies social interactions, making it a useful tool to reduce uncertainty. Laitin and Fearon build on this particular facet of ethnicity. They argue that ethnicities are usually marked by highly developed systems of social interaction. This allows information to be transmitted rapidly and cheaply. This feature means that not only does the ethnicity itself allow for a crude expectation of behavior from another individual, but it also allows people from within that ethnicity to rapidly assess each other based upon quickly attainable histories of that person's behavior. That information is not available from the other ethnic group, leading to more trust and less uncertainty within the particular ethnicity (Laitin and Fearon, 1996, 718-19).

Third, ethnicity is often tied to physical differences that are both easily identifiable and hard to change. For example, it would be very difficult for a Hispanic gang member to pass as a Black gang member. However, Hale argues that it is often used even in highly imperfect situations where ethnicity is not physically distinguishable (Hale 2008, 41-3).

Finally ethnicity often fits, or makes sense to people, because of its overlap with other salient identities. So for example, because it tends to be territorially based it can often coincide with relative economic differences. Or more simply, its territory-based nature ties the ethnicity to feelings of home (Hale 2008, 42-5). These factors create expectations that allow people to predict the behavior of others within their group, and outsiders towards them. Ethnicity is the simplifier that conveys this information in a way that is both easy to understand and quickly accessible. Other categorizations contain these characteristics, but ethnicity is unique in the depth that it holds.

Hale argues that the initial individual choice of an ethnic group occurs on the subconscious prerational level which then allows the material and security benefit-based choices to occur on the ethnic group level (Hale 2008, 53-4). He argues we have ingrained mental mechanisms that convert uncertainty into risk by creating social categories that "imply probabilities as to how the actions of others are likely to affect" us. Hale seems to suggest that choice made on the subconscious level is still made based upon a rational-choice process given the human need to reduce uncertainty (Hale 2008, 48). Moreover, once people are grouped into these ethnic communities, Hale, like Posner, advocates that ethnic politics are about material and other interests (Hale 2008, 33). Hales' theory should increase its potency under conditions of violence, where uncertainty becomes magnified. Moreover, under these conditions, both Crawford and Gagnon's theories' explanatory power is also more convincing, lending support to the analysis of social pressures that powers their arguments. For Crawford's bandwagoning theory, this uncertainty reducing behavior would explain initial acceptance of violence. Uncertainty reducing behavior both limits the barriers to entering violence and increases the harms to standing against it. This allows the critical mass of people participating in violence to accumulate. This behavior also explains the fear that, as Gagnon demonstrates, leads people to opt into ethnic hardline groups.

Uncertainty as a Driver of Violence

Violence increases uncertainty in social interactions, thereby increasing the likelihood that people will opt into a hardline ethnic identity. The inability to predict people's behaviors becomes much more important when that unpredictability is tied to physical safety. This is particularly true when violence is exerted by elites along communal lines and individual actions do not affect the likelihood of being targeted by violence. So, for example, Protestants in Northern Ireland were often targeted indiscriminately on the basis of their religious identity rather than any action they took against the Irish Republican Army. As a result, all of the factors outlined by Hale, that push people towards ethnicity, become magnified.

That same impetus to opt into ethnic identities in times of chaos makes it much more likely that moderate leaders will lose to hardliners. DeVotta begins to outline this process through his argument of ethnic outbidding. He argues that when institutions fail to discourage politicians who appeal exclusively to their ethnic community, those politicians have incentives to compete with their rival parties on the basis of serving their ethnic community. This patronage-based system creates an expectation and, in turn, comes to define the rules of the game (DeVotta 2005, 141). As a result, moderate parties who seek to reconcile with parties from the other ethnic community are targeted with campaigns that question their loyalty to the ethnic community. Due to the expectations that the patronage-based system has created, moderating parties tend to lose out. This is not because people feel that their ethnicity is being targeted, but rather because they think they will lose ground materially (DeVotta 2005, 142). However, given that DeVotta agrees that institutions are not determinative of behavior, there needs to be more analysis explaining the informal conditions that create incentives for formal institutions to violently marginalize a group.

The desire to reduce uncertainty makes it difficult for moderate reconciliatory actors to achieve success. In cases where ethnic conflict exists, the policies of moderate actors are likely to increase uncertainty. These policies indeed encourage reconciliation with, and relative trust of, the other group. Moderate policies that increase interaction without protective security forces, and place members from the other groups in positions of power increase the uncertainty people feel in their daily lives. As a result, people are much less likely to support these policies.

This does not mean that uncertainty reduction is a trump card that will always win out and determine the outcome. First, there are ways to decrease expected uncertainties in the aftermath of conflict with reconciliatory policies (e.g neutral occupancy forces). Second, if the conflict creates a certainty of violence in the immediate surrounding, individuals are more likely to risk uncertainty. However, as Hale notes, uncertainty reduction is often a prerequisite for achieving other goals (Hale 2008, 465). Increased feelings of uncertainty are likely to prevent trust in a peace process even if the current conflict poses a certain threat to their physical safety.

This logic empowers elite-based analyses as it explains acquiescence to the grotesque public acts of violence that Gagnon describes. These acts, which encourage tit-for-tat violence, increase uncertainties involved in reconciliation, as there is an increased fear of violence from the other group (Gagnon 2005, 135). That means that those acts serve to increase the impetus towards uncertainty reducing behavior.

However, in order for this theory to be operational, we need to differentiate how it interacts with people operating with different motivations. Fujii is correct to note that there are a variety of different actors that represent varied motivations and actions. For the purposes of this paper we will examine the perpetrators and the joiners. First, as both Fujii and Kalyvas argue, there are those actors who use the central elites' ethnic cleavage as a script that legitimizes their local vendettas or greed-based violence. We will call these perpetrators (Kalyvas 2005, 481; Fujii 2009, 116). Critically, that script is only legitimate because people opt into those master scripts as an uncertainty reducing behavior. If people did not at least tacitly accept the increased risks associated with interacting with the other ethnic community then the actions of these opportunistic perpetrators would be subject to the same scrutiny they would otherwise face. Under these conditions, the first part of Crawford's bandwagoning argument becomes salient. As populations see their community members participating in the violence they feel more comfortable acting out their own vendettas.

However, as Straus notes, in many instances the vast majority of people do not act out this violence. For example, in a one-hundred-person militia in Rwanda, only five people actually committed the violence (Straus 2006, 74). Uncertainty reduction also explains why these joiners choose to acquiesce to violent actions. This decision occurs on two levels. First, for all the reasons discussed above, it is easier to tacitly accept the communally antagonizing rhetoric and limit your interactions with the other community. As a result, the violent members of your community are a safer bet than increasing interactions with the other community. Second, once you have begun participating in that rhetoric it becomes harder to stand against it. Fujii highlights examples where Hutus targeted other Hutus as evidence of ethnicity having no importance. There are two problems with this. First, while ethnicity may not motivate violence it does motivate acceptance of violence. Second, and relatedly, that violence is often used as a tool by elites to increase the risk of opting out of a hardline ethnic identity. Speaking out against the violent leaders of the community increases the risk of facing retribution. It is then unlikely this retaliation would be met with rebuke from other community members. First it would require challenging the entire uncertainty-reducing paradigm that people are clinging to. Second, the would-be rebuker increases the risk to their own safety. Ethnicity as a means of uncertainty reduction only works if there is a meaningful expectation of safe interactions within one's own ethnic community. Standing out against thugs within one's community changes that and limits the ability to use ethnicity to create effective risk assessments. Intra-ethnic policing should not be considered sufficient to explain why joiners acquiesce, however in conjunction with a base desire to reduce uncertainty it holds much more explanatory power.

Finally, we then must address Laitin and Fearon's standards by explaining why "in some cases inter-ethnic tensions are occasionally punctuated by spirals of violence, while in other cases tensions exist, but interethnic disputes are more often "cauterized" short of war" (Laitn and Fearon 1996, 715). If institutions that cross ethnic divisions can offer a meaningful expectation of safety, then they can stand in for ethnicity as an uncertainty reducing mechanism. Ethnicity is not a perfect mechanism for reducing uncertainty, and it has to compete against other mechanisms like adhering to norms of law. When those norms create better risk assessments people will drop ethnicity. This should explain why ethnic violence is a relatively unlikely scenario globally.

Epiphenomalist scholars, conversely, argue that ethnicity is much more fluid. Fujii cites examples where a man changed from Hutu to Tutsi upon acquiring more cows, or when Tutsis were able to buy Hutu's identification cards during the conflict. This fluidity would seem to undermine

uncertainty-reducing arguments because it creates confusions in social interactions thereby increasing uncertainty. However, Fujii also argues that these transitions are contingent upon communal acceptance of the identity change. As a result, during periods of conflict, communal acceptance of identity change, and consequential fluidity, could decrease (Fujii 2009, 115-17).

During initial periods of violence fluidity is likely to decrease. The uncertainty reducing behavior discussed above is likely to occur most prominently in that period during the immediate onset of violence, where some action (e.g the assassination of President Habyarimana in Rwanda in 1994) has created a political opportunity due to chaos. In these periods, even if publics do not believe in communally antagonizing rhetoric, that rhetoric still creates social pressures not to accept someone from the other group. This is because in the aftermath of this initial chaos people grasp for explanations for that violence and, therefore, are more likely to accept these explanations than in other conditions. Moreover, under conditions where elites have control over information and can portray a serious threat to the community, a moratorium on identity changes can reduce uncertainty and allow individuals to create better risk calculations. Given that people are risk averse in these situations it is likely that the level of information control does not need to be that high. It is easier to superficially accept elite rhetoric just in case the member of the opposite community will target you. So, for example, throughout the Croatian conflict, Serb leaders like Ratko Mladic constantly referenced the encroaching threat of the Ustashi Croats. Even if the average Serb did not believe that his neighbors are committing acts of violence, it is still a risk to increase interactions with that community given the presence of some hardline Croats who may escalate violence.

Finally, even in cases where there is fluidity, ethnicity may still be utilized as an imperfect tool. Cases of transition are likely to occur on the margins; as a result ethnicity still contains value as a simplifying tool. People can recognize the imperfection of using it in every case and still participate in ethnic identification in order to create more effective risk assessment writ large.

Evidence

There are a few indicators that help demonstrating that the uncertainty reduction argument explains why violent mobilizations along ethnic divisions are successful. First, whether people respond to stress and chaos by opting into uncertainty reducing behaviors. Second, there should at least be a perception that violence is being exerted along communal lines. Alternatively, if violence targets individual cross-cutting attributes, then resorting to group identities would not be effective in calculating risk. Third, we should see communities homogenizing because

violence increases uncertainties in contexts of mixed interactions. If uncertainty reduction explains why people acquiesce to ethnic violence, then we would expect that same impetus to also lead to efforts to reduce those uncertainties in their daily lives. Finally, we should see repression of moderate actors during cycles of tit-for-tat violence. Tit-for-tat communal violence should dramatically increase the uncertainties that people feel during conflict. As a result moderate actors should lose out to hardliners, because their policies are more likely to increase those uncertainties.

There are two disclaimers to note. First, this paper will draw examples from two varied conflicts. While this methodology has its flaws, it is both necessary due to limited evidence sources and has distinctive benefits since it provides a level of generalizability. The cases selected, Northern Ireland and Bosnia, each provide valuable insights into this question. Bosnia represents an interesting case in which high levels of communal interaction disintegrated into communal violence. Northern Ireland represents a notable case where there are significant amounts of data to test this hypothesis. Second, while this is by no means conclusive and a more thorough case-study-based analysis would be useful, this evidence is still suggestive of uncertainty reduction theory. In order to prove this theory one would need to conduct a psychoanalytic assessment of actors within a conflict. This paper will provide corroboration of that argument by analyzing the indicators that are available.

Responding to Stress through Uncertainty Reduction

Erikson argues that we respond to situations of stress by trying to reduce uncertainties thereby limiting the lack of control we have over our lives. In order to do this we create these identities as social radars to traverse uncertain conditions. Under that assumption, identities are situational, and tend to thicken under conditions of stress (Erikson 1968, 22-4). That drive to reduce uncertainty comes out of an evolutionary drive to preserve life (Van der Dennen 1986, 47). Hogg and Mullin concur and argue that under conditions of massive upheaval, like violence, people revert to identity as a means of uncertainty reduction to create better risk calculations. During these episodes the normal metrics by which we judge those around us become useless and we are forced to create new, or rely more heavily upon old, generalizing metrics. These studies suggest that under conditions of violence people revert to stricter identities (Hogg and Mullins 1999, 266-7). This is because violence increases the basic reason why people opt into and participate in identities in the first place: uncertainty.

Perceptions of Communal Violence

In order for the logic of people opting into ethnicities as an uncertainty reducing behavior to hold relevance, the violence within those communities must be perceptually targeted along communal divisions. Moreover, it should consequently result in increase homogenization of ethnic communities. If violence were targeted on the basis of individual actions then people would not need ethnicity to create better risk assessments as they could judge their relations on the basis of their individualized actions. However, it is critical to note that not all of the violence has to be targeted along communal lines. Frank Wright, in his theory of representative violence, advocates that the effect is the same even if a very small portion of the violence is 'representative'. When "[e]veryone might be a target for reprisal for something done in their name and without their approval", a generalized danger is created and an increase in uncertainty arises, because even if there are only a few perpetrators targeting violence along communal lines, their violence could be targeted at anyone (Wright 1988, 11).

Throughout the Northern Irish conflict there are a number periods in the conflict in which the conflict followed a communal tit for tat pattern. Dillon and Lehane highlight one period in particular, September to October 1972, where Protestants killed two Catholics for every Protestant killed (Dillon and Lehane 1973, 118-139). Republicans were less retaliatory towards Protestants, but followed the same model, particularly in the period surrounding the 1972 truce. Dillon and Lehane note that the retaliatory targets were chosen at random and represented useful symbolic reprisals (Dillon and Lehane 1973, 75-90). Hayes and McAllister echo this by observing that the Provisional IRA's campaign in the early to mid-seventies was largely based upon indiscriminate bombing campaigns (Hayes and McAllister 2002, 903). This does not mean that the motivation behind this violence was ethnically based. The violence was often highly strategic. Rather, it suggests that the perception was that it was being targeted along religious lines.

Hayes and McAllister analysis of the Northern Irish violence provides further compelling evidence to suggest that there was a perception that at least some of this violence was targeted along communal rather than individual lines. By 1998, one in seven people had been a direct victim of a violent incident. During that same time frame one in five had a member of their family injured or killed. Strikingly, over half of the polled citizens had personally known at least one person who had been killed in the conflict. Moreover, by 1998 a quarter had been caught in an explosion and a quarter had been caught in a riot. Only two percent of republican violence was targeted against loyalists and only four percent of loyalist violence was targeted against

nationalists (Hayes and McAllister 2002, 906-7). This widespread and relatively indiscriminate violence suggests that it was not targeted on the basis of individual attributes.

The conflict in Bosnia followed a similar pattern. Ivana Maček conducted an ethnographic analysis of the conflict within Sarajevo. One woman described the inability to affect your fate: "Everything is out of your hands, you are completely helpless, someone else decides over your life and death" (Maček 2009, 58). This sentiment is echoed in numerous interviews in which people describe the targeting of their communities along ethnic lines and even the creation of strong communal identities where they had not been before (Maček 2009, 256). Moreover, blame was attributed to Serbs or Muslims as a whole rather than individuals (Maček 2009, 221-3). This is suggestive of violence targeting indiscriminately along communal lines rather than based upon individual attributes. Importantly, this argument does not mean that the conflict is ethnically motivated but rather there is at least the perception that it is targeted along those divisions. This violence should lead to increased communal homogeneity as violence creates an increased uncertainty in social interactions.

Communal Segregation

Uncertainties between communities in Northern Ireland have led to communal segregation, along residential and personal lines. Prior to the start of the conflict, 69 % of Protestants and 56 % of Catholics lived in streets where their community was the majority. By 1972 those proportions had increased to 99 % of Protestants and 75 % of Catholics (Wright 1988, 205). This segregation of course diffuses to other areas of social interaction, including which shops you patronize and which football clubs you support. This pattern is typified by the Protestant Shankill community and the Catholic Falls Road community in Belfast, where there is very little interaction with the other (Abrams, Hogg, and Marques 2004, 269). This pattern also exists within personal interactions, approximately 75 % of Catholics stated that all or most of their personal interactions occurred within their community. Moreover when, for example, a Protestant married a Catholic, they were forced to cut all ties with their Protestant community (Abrams, Hogg, and Marques 2004, 270). These patterns indicate a process whereby the inability to predict behavior from the opposite community increased due to onsets violence and led to people opting into stronger ethnic identities.

The process of nationalism within Bosnia is particularly interesting given its history of crosscutting cleavages. However, as violence along communal lines increased, people began to opt into nationalist identities. An interview with a Sarajevo refugee in Sweden suggests that these episodes of violence began to shift identities towards communal definitions. She explains that her neighbors in Dobrijna began to classify her based upon her communal identity, and classified her as the enemy due to her Serb heritage (Maček 2009, 108). This effect was also seen amongst familial relationships. After a fatwa issued by the head of the Muslim community in Sarajevo, mixed marriages were described as unnatural and their children as rotten eggs. Therefore, mixed marriages became perceived as anomalies rather than common practice. Moreover many preexisting mixed marriages fell apart as social pressures to homogenize communities increased. As one Muslim from Sarajevo stated, "A mixed marriage in this place can now exist only if one absolutely does not care [about his/her nationality]. This is very hard to find nowadays, but that is understandable, as so many people have been killed" (Maček 2009, 115-17). One Muslim family had four of their friends and family killed by Croats and refused to let their daughter date a Croat, because they feared the same thing would happen again (Maček 2009, 118).

Sarajevo is known for its intercultural tolerance even during the war: however, even that tolerance began to disintegrate. Some older neighborhoods with mixed nationalities maintained their bonds throughout the war (Maček 2009, 123). However, Tone Bringa's documentary, We Are All Neighbors, highlights how strong friendships started to disintegrate as violence escalated (Bringa 1993). Even in Sarajevo, as rumors of neighbors killing neighbors in other areas of Bosnia increased, suspicion of neighbors from other nationalities also increased:

In an atmosphere where the media were almost exclusively pounding into peoples heads the message of betrayal between neighbors on national grounds, and where people themselves started to repeat this in order to somehow make sense of what was going on around them, it was hard to remember and behave in accordance with the knowledge that many neighbors helped each other and saved each other's lives in similar situations (Maček 2009, 133).

This pattern also manifested itself in much more subtle actions. For example, people began to seek out resources from organizations tied to their national identity (Maček 2009, 153). Such episodes are suggestive of a trend towards limiting interactions with people from different communities due to uncertainty of how they would interact with you. One woman described this process of identity change, "There, I never knew I was a Muslim, but now I know that I am something different [from the Serbs] because somebody is slaughtering me" (Maček 2009, 256). Strict identities thus became a useful tool for people to use in order to calculate risks associated with interacting with another person.

This same pattern also was reflected in formal institutions. The homogenization of military units is particularly useful as an example of this. As communal distrust increased, military groups

tended to separate into exclusive nationalist units (Maček 2009, 203). One man, Emir, switched into a exclusively Serb unit in order to defend himself, "if you had a Serb with you, you knew for sure who they were" (Maček 2009, 264). Indeed, people began to opt into ethnic communities as a way of reducing uncertainty created by communally targeted violence. However, in order for this pattern to be consistent with uncertainty reduction theory, we should see that these periods of uncertainty-increasing violence would experience a corresponding acquiescence to hardliners and a decrease in support for moderates.

Failure of Moderation

If this theory is correct, both decreased support for moderate actors and increased support for hardline actors during periods where uncertainty increases should be observable. While this is not an indicator unique to the uncertainty reduction theory, it is, in conjunction with the abovementioned evidence, suggestive of that end.

Patterns of public support within Northern Ireland demonstrate that increased uncertainty led to increased support for hardline groups. Compiling data from the Loyalty Survey (1968), the Irish Social Mobility Survey (1973), and the Social Attitudes Survey (1978), Hayes and McAllister found interesting trends in public support for the use of violence. It is of course difficult to measure support for violence, given its sensitive nature. However, these surveys were conducted using relatively neutral language. In 1968, just prior to the onslaught of what has been labeled The Troubles, roughly half of the Protestant community agreed with the use of violence for political goals. At that time only 13 % of Catholics felt the same way. However, in 1973, 25 % of Catholics believed violence was a legitimate way to achieve goals. Only 16 % of Protestants felt the same way. This is highly significant given the dynamics of violence during the early years of The Troubles. Catholics were two and a half times more likely to experience intimidation, twice as likely to be a victim of a violent incident, and one and a half time more likely to know someone who had been killed or injured (Hayes and Mcallister 2002, 11-12). These events included, notably, Bloody Sunday and the practice of internment. During periods where uncertainties were high, hardline groups thus received increased support.

Within Bosnia, the uncertainties discussed above made it difficult for moderate parties to achieve electoral success. Beginning in the early 1990s, the Muslim nationalist party, the SDA, began to dominate elections (Maček 2009, 160). They capitalized on those uncertainties by institutionalizing preferential treatment for members of their own national community. Muslim soldiers killed in battle got a distinct classification as Sehit (martyr), which ensured them special

commemoration (Maček 2009, 170-1). Moreover, the SDA began changing street names from Serb and Croat names to Muslim names. These symbolic preferences are indicative of a political climate in which nationalism was prioritized over cross-communal interaction. That sentiment was codified in new language and education policies where 'Bosnian' was Islamized and Islam was taught in public schools (Maček 2009,171-3, 176). Hardline parties were able to capitalize on uncertainties in communal interaction by offering policies that solidified their national communities.

Serb groups within Bosnia followed a similar policy. The head of the SDS, Karadzic, justified the radicalization of the SDS as necessary to avoid being outflanked by other parties who could appeal to the increasing nationalism within Serbian Bosnians. Under that ethos the SDS pressured the Serb people into boycotting the Bosnian independence election (Caspersen 2010, 88). Critically this does not mean that this radicalization was present within the Serb community; rather it suggests that it was difficult to advocate for moderate policies given the rhetoric of appeals to increased uncertainty under those policies. The SDS consistently justified their policies through the uncertainty of conditions under a Bosnian dominated government: "the Serb nation does not want to live in an independent state where they will be outvoted" (Caspersen 2010, 90). That rhetoric was given increased salience due to the stories of Serbs being killed by Bosnians and Croats throughout the country. This suggests that Serb leaders were appealing to the fear of uncertainty under a Bosnian government.

These examples are illustrative of a trend towards uncertainty reducing behaviors during conflicts. Nationalist groups were able to beat out non-ethnic groups by offering a community and policies that would affirm that community, in which people could feel secure in their interactions. Within the context of violent episodes of thug-based violence, in which people felt as if they had no control over their lives, these hardline communities allowed them some ability to increase control by creating more efficient risk calculations. They believe they are less likely to be targeted by someone who is so closely tied to them, as a result they support policies which encourage the stability of those communities.

Conclusion

In Prijedor it is unlikely that the local Serbs who acquiesced to violence preferred the leaders and local actors who perpetuated them. But it is equally important not to treat this acquiescence as a result of being duped by elites or motivated solely by material self-interest. Rather, this paper has suggested that people acquiesce to hardline leaders in an effort to reduce the uncertainty in their

everyday lives. However, it is important to conduct a more rigorous investigation into the claims made above. The evidence presented, while circumstantially compelling, is by no means conclusive. Ethnographies should be conducted which specifically target the veracity of the arguments presented here. There is good work being done by psychologists in post-conflict Croatia and Bosnia. A joint study with these groups would be fruitful in understanding why we choose ethnicity. If, as Hale argues, this decision occurs at the pre-rational level, then a joint psychological study will be imperative. Critically, in order to prove that uncertainty reduction is a substantial motivator for people opting into ethnic violence, we do not have to prove that all people opt into it for that reason. Kalyvas provides compelling evidence that some people opt into it on the basis of benefit or vendetta. However, in order to create a more complete understanding of why those actors are able to pursue their vendettas, it is important for us to understand the pre-rational mechanisms that create social atmospheres conducive to those actions.

The implications of this argument are important in so far as they can guide conflict resolution efforts. If ethnicity is an imperfect means to reduce uncertainty, then it may be possible to change the grouping mechanism that people chose. Kurzban, Tooby, and Cosmides conducted an experiment in which people were showed arguments between different people. They were then asked to identify who said what. In the initial stage of the experiment, people used race as a grouping mechanism, evident by the fact that when they made mistakes, the person they incorrectly identified was always the same race as the person who actually said the particular sentence. This racial identification occurred even though the arguments were not racially based. However, when Kurzban, Tooby, and Cosmides introduced different colored shirts to identify different sides of the argument, people reverted to this grouping mechanism and dropped race (Kurzban, Tooby, and Cosmides 2001, 387-92). If it is true that people opt into these violent mobilizations to reduce uncertainties, rather than out of fear or interest, then policies aimed at reconciling conflict ought to be targeted towards reducing those uncertainties or providing a better uncertainty-reducing group. This targeting could come for example in the former of neutral occupancy troops, as we saw with UN peace keepers in Nicaragua, Guatemala, and El Salvador. Or it could come in the form of power sharing agreements that reduce the uncertainties associated with trusting opposite ethnic communities. More research should be conducted into the links between this argument and those polices.

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