

International Handbook of Violence Research

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CHAPTER II-2.2

Ethnic Violence

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I. INTRODUCTION

Western public opinion finds ethnic violence a particularly repellant and illegitimate form of violence. 'Ethnic cleansing' in the form of mass shootings, systematic rape or massacres on a genocidal scale is considered the quintessence of terror and a prime symbol of the 'new world disorder'. The systematic use of violence against the noncombatant civilian population is particularly repulsive, as too is the random selection of candidates for liquidation based solely on the logic of categorical ascription, knowing that once thinking along ethnic lines has become firmly established, a murder victim will always be seen as a Catholic or Protestant, Serb or Croat, Tamil or Singhalese.

Researchers agree that there has been a significant quantitative increase in ethnic violence since the fall of the Berlin Wall and that since then it has been the proportionally most significant category of violent political conflict (see Gurr, 1993a:101, 1994:369-374; Scherrer, 1994:74). However, interpretations of these trends are highly divergent. Some see ethnically motivated violence and in particular ethnic cleansing as an intermediate stage on the path toward a culturally homogeneous state capable of modernization (e.g., Gellner, 1991; Nairn, 1993). Others explain the currency of ethnic violence in terms of the delegitimation of class-struggle based models of conflict interpretation and their replacement with ascribed identity-political characteristics which have gained respectability globally since the fall of the Wall (see Brubaker & Laitin, 1998). Others again (e.g., Wimmer, 1997) are of the opinion that the spread of ethnic-national conflicts in the Balkans, along the southern rim of the former Soviet empire, in the southeast Asian archipelago, and in West Africa can be attributed to a new wave of nation-state formation and democratization.

It would certainly make sense to give an overview of these different explanations of the currency of ethnic violence. Perhaps it would be even more convincing to review the literature along the lines of paradigmatic classifications, for example by contrasting the

work done in a rational-choice perspective with that informed by structural functionalism or symbolic discourse theory—as in the comprehensive overview by Brubaker and Laitin (1998). We decided to take a different path and to integrate the diverse perspectives and approaches into a composite view of our own. We proceed from the idea—epistemologically naive but useful for our purpose—that different paradigms deal with different aspects of reality using their own terminological and theoretical tools and that an encompassing approach may integrate these different aspects. Therefore our discourse will be cumulative, not falsifying.

We first want to outline the phenomenon of ethnic violence in greater detail and to clarify to what extent we are dealing with a particular type of violence with a logic of its own. The second section will address the macropolitical changes which form the background conditions for the emergence of ethnic violence. Our third task is to inquire into the more specific institutional and political conditions which make violence a feasible option in ethnic conflicts. Finally, we will present an anatomy of the violent escalation of such conflict. We thus progress from the general to the specific, from macrostructural prerequisites to microanalysis, from structural conditions to the processual logic of violence.

II. THE SPECIFICITY OF ETHNIC VIOLENCE

Ethnic violence can be defined as actions aimed at physically harming persons on the basis of their ethnic background (see Popitz, 1992; von Trotha, 1997). Pogroms, riots, and massacres are forms of collective violence which occur frequently in the context of ethnic conflicts but can also be observed in conflict constellations which are not ethnically tainted. Ethnic cleansing, ethnocide, and the extreme case of the Holocaust, however, represent specific forms of ethnic violence. Since various authors in this volume deal with individual aspects of ethnic violence (Bergmann with pogroms, Longerich with the Holocaust), this essay discusses the specificity of ethnic violence without looking at the differences between its various manifestations.

At the individual psychological level ethnic violence has the effect of projecting (repressed) aggressive desires and fears onto an outgroup. The ego identity is thus freed from ambivalence and its identificatory alignment stabilized in the ethnic dimension (Volkan, 1988). On a large scale this mechanism leads to the reinforcement of ethnic boundaries. The ethnic group is now perceived as a community sharing a common fate and the boundaries between ethnic groups become increasingly rigid (Conversi, 1999:568–570).

Whereas such group differentiation can also be observed with other forms of violence, the specificity of ethnic violence arises from the way groups are defined. In Weber's view (1980:238) an ethnic group is conceived as a large, extended family. Common origins and shared cultural traditions shape the focus of this form of self-identification (Wimmer, 1995:468).

When violence spreads, this belief in community can intensify and become a purity fetish which is often further strengthened by the 'racialization' of the notion of descent: one's own community is now formed through the purity of blood and must not be polluted by the blood of 'others'. The body of one's group is to be purged of the otherness (Chasseguet-Smirgel, 1996; Appadurai, 1998; Volkan, 1999).¹ This purity fetishism can

¹The most obvious example of the significance attached to the belief in blood ties in ethnic-nationalist concepts is the linking of nationality to *jus sanguinis*, which is embodied in law in many countries.

lead to the exclusion or even the extermination of people of dubious or hybrid ethnic classification so as to allow clear borders to be drawn (Hayden, 1996; Herzfeld, 1993, 1997). In extreme cases this obsession with racial purity becomes pathological hatred and prepares the ground for the systematic extermination of the ethnic outgroup (Anderson, 1983).

Against this background women gain extraordinary significance as guarantors of the continuation and reproduction of the group. They symbolize its purity and represent its most vulnerable and precious possession. Rape, an expression of aggression and the will to power and domination which accompanies every war (Seifert, 1993), can thus gain additional symbolic and strategic significance in ethnic conflicts (Calic, 1996:140; Nagengast, 1994:121). Rape means not only the humiliation and dishonoring of the enemy, who has thus proven incapable of protecting 'his women', but is also intended to weaken his reproductive capacity (see Kora, 1994:502; Mac Kinnon, 1994). In the Bosnian conflict Serbian propaganda revived a perverted model of the 'devshirme' or 'child-tribute'. In accordance with patrilineal modes of thought, Muslim women were now to bear Serbian children, thus increasing the number of Serbs while demographically decimating the Muslims (see Allen, 1996; Volkan, 1999:95-97).

A second specific feature of ethnic violence is ethnic cleansing. It too is closely related to the idea of ethnic descent and purity and can be interpreted as an "almost sacral act of purification" (Waldmann, 1995:351). The spectrum extends from policies of enforced assimilation with threats of violence (Stavenhagen, 1990:91; Hayden, 1996:784) to the expulsion of ethnic aliens from the territory claimed as one's 'own', and culminates in ethnocide as practiced in Rwanda (Prunier, 1995), Bosnia-Herzegovina (Calic, 1996) or Armenia (Dadrian, 1995). All of these acts of violence are not only an assault on the life and limb of those classified as ethnic enemies, but also on the symbols of their history and identity, for example memorials, places of worship, and graves.

Ethnic violence is often described as being particularly brutal. There is a widespread opinion among journalists (e.g., Kaplan, 1993) and politicians (e.g., Eagleburger cited in Holbrooke, 1998:23) that 'deep-seated, ancient feelings of hatred' handed down from generation to generation are responsible for this particular intensity (Bowen, 1996). There are arguments which speak against this theory. Members of different ethnic groups often lived in harmony and only became enemies in the course of an ethnicization of political conflicts (Harvey, 2000:43; Rajasingham, 1997). Many ethnic groups were constituted in the recent past or only attained political significance in the course of recent developments, as we will show in the following chapter (see Elwert, 1989). A prominent example is the ethnic difference between Hutu and Tutsi which became politically salient only by the (post-)colonial practice of divide and rule (Lemarchand, 1994; Malkki, 1995). The argument that ethnic hatred is handed down from one generation to the next often corresponds to the hostile parties' own perception, but not always to the actual historical development. This is not to contest the fact that the memory of past violence and atrocities can be of great significance for current conflicts, as is shown by the events in the former Yugoslavia, in particular the mobilization of the Serbian population (Denich, 1994).

However, even among researchers there is widespread support for the opinion that ethnic disputes are especially violent forms of conflict. With reference to Bourdieu (1983), Esser (1996) attributes this to the fact that ethnic conflicts revolve around the defense of 'specific capital'. This specific capital (e.g., a language, cultural traditions) is only of value within one's own ethnic group. Ethnic conflicts are thus a race to declare one's own specific capital the valid currency in a society and the constitution of a state. For this

particular reason ethnic conflicts often develop into zero-sum conflicts which only allow a winner and a loser. As soon as it is a matter of 'all or nothing', conflicts are fought out with particular ferocity (Senghaas, 1994:87).

A further argument is that people can more easily fall victim to violence in ethnic conflicts because they do not need to be of any particular ideological persuasion, but can be singled out on the basis of their belonging to an ethnic group. In many cases the opponents can be identified by clearly perceptible attributes (Malkki, 1995:88)—language (e.g., in Sri Lanka, in the Kurdish conflict), physical features (e.g., in Afghanistan) or an entry on one's ID card (e.g., in Rwanda) represent simple distinguishing criteria which enable mass violence. Large-scale massacres in which thousands of people are murdered are only practicable when the victims' ethnic identity can be easily determined and the danger of accidentally murdering 'one's own people' is kept to a minimum (Schetter, 1999:104).

There are examples of similar dimensions of violence in ideological conflicts, however, and this speaks against the view that ethnic violence is particularly excessive (see Mann, 1999b). The events in Cambodia, in the Soviet Union under Stalin, or in Peru in the 1980s and 1990s show that mass murder can also be carried out without a predominant ethnic ideology. It must also be taken into account that ethnic attributes are not as unambiguous as some researchers have it: individuals can avoid clear categorization by passing and code switching (Lyman & Douglass, 1973:349–355), and anthropological attributes (e.g., skin color, height) often allow only the broadest of distinctions (Appadurai, 1998:232). The struggle for the validity of specific capital is also present in ideological conflicts ('socialism or barbarism'). As an interim finding we can note that the specificity of ethnic violence is expressed in particular forms of violence such as ethnic cleansing and ethnocide. It seems to us, however, that in terms of its extent or intensity ethnic violence cannot be distinguished from other conflict constellations.

III. POLITICAL MODERNIZATION

In the following we try to locate ethnic violence in contextual and macrohistorical terms. Typical techniques for expelling ethnic-cultural others from one's own area—mass shootings, rape, pillage, and plunder—first arose toward the end of the *reconquista* in the fifteenth century with the expulsion of the Moors and Jews from the Iberian peninsula. The Peace of Westphalia (1648), with its principle of *cuius regio, eius religio*, then institutionalized the ideal of the congruence of political unit and ethnic-religious community which was to become one of the central legitimation models of the impending world order of nation-states (Schilling, 1992; Calhoun, 1997:ch. 4; see also Hastings, 1997). Equals in ethnic, cultural and religious terms were now to rule over their like, and 'foreign rule' changed from being the normal state of affairs in dynastically ruled Europe to the expression of political injustice *par excellence*. The exiling of the Huguenots beginning with the St. Bartholomew's Day massacre (August 24, 1572) and the expulsion and pogrom-like hate campaign against the gypsies under Henry VIII (1491–1547) are further examples in a chain of early-modern outbreaks of ethnic-religious violence which followed the strategic goal of cleansing one's 'own' territory of 'foreign bodies' and thus forcibly bringing about religious-national homogenization.

Ethnic violence acquired an almost systematic dimension as the various waves of nation-state formation rolled through the Western world and then went on to engulf the rest of the globe (on the following issues see Wimmer, 2002). Cultural homogeneity was

now the standard and it was linked up structurally to the basic political principles of the modern age, i.e., to the development of democratic procedures of legitimizing power and to the legal enforcement of equality, codified in the institution of citizenship. Political modernization thus meant the transformation of the mechanisms of integration and exclusion, more precisely the dissolution of the hierarchical, potentially global mechanisms of inclusion characteristic of premodern empires, and their replacement by egalitarian and at the same time territorially defined mechanisms such as operate in modern national states. Political modernization and ethnic-national modes of integration and exclusion are interlinked by three mechanisms. Firstly, hierarchically structured society with its culturally defined stratification—which often overlap with ethnic categories—is reconceived as an egalitarian community of equals. The external borders of this community are defined in ethnic-cultural terms: only those who are the same can be equal. The people in the sense of the community of citizens with equal rights and duties toward the state is identified with the people as a cultural community. Secondly, the democratic principle of popular rule—institutionalized in the possibility of the citizens effecting a change of government through an expression of their will and in the political participation of the entire population in this process—is interwoven with a discourse on ethnic homogeneity. Since the sovereign and the source of legitimate power is no longer the prince by the grace of God but instead the national community, the rulers and the ruled now have to be alike in ethnic-cultural terms, i.e., they have to speak the same language, be of the same religious denomination, and adhere to the same everyday practices which constitute their ethnic distinctiveness. Thirdly and finally, this isomorphism of a people as citizenry, sovereign, and nation leads to the coincidence of the three corresponding territorial delineations and thus to the intensification of a process which had begun when absolutist states emerged: the external borders of the state were no longer vaguely defined zones of transition between the spheres of influence of distant political centers as they had been in premodern empires, but were now sharply drawn and guarded lines separating the homogeneous inside from the heterogeneous and hostile beyond (see Giddens, 1984; Guenée, 1986; Nordman, 1996).

These three mechanisms cause an ethnicization and territorialization of the principles of inclusion and exclusion and thus lead to the development of various 'minorities': citizens of other states ('foreigners') who live on one's 'own' territory; ethnic minorities whose 'own' state is somewhere else; religious or ethnic diasporas without their 'own' state who live side by side with the dominant ethnic group. Because legal and political inclusion is linked to the principle of nationality, the relationship to these 'minorities' becomes structurally problematic: since only those who belong 'to us' in cultural-ethnic terms can legitimately be included in the community of equals before the law, and since only those who belong to the 'right' nation can be part of the electorate and be voted into political office, minorities are more often than not denied their full right to equality and the assumption of loyalty. They are perceived as a political problem, a fifth column of foreign powers on own territory, a thorn in the flesh of the nation.

The past two centuries have seen myriad examples of ethnic violence: the wars of extermination against the Indian 'minorities' of the United States and Argentina and the Yaqui in Mexico, the Western European 'wars of national liberation and unification' in the second half of the nineteenth century, the two Balkan Wars (1912–1913) and the outbursts of violence in the course of the transformation of the Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian empires into a series of nation-states at the end of World War I, the wave of nationalist-motivated cleansing and expulsion at the end of World War II, the bloodshed accompanying many a declaration of independence and the ensuing ethnic conflicts—for instance the

foundation of India and Pakistan in 1948—and the wave of violence in the course of the foundation of nation-states after the fall of the Wall (Bell-Fialkoff, 1996; Jackson Preece, 1998). All these manifestations of ethnic violence were driven by the endeavor to realize the same ideal—one people, one state, one territory—in a world which de facto is characterized by ethnic-cultural intermixture, overlapping, and ambiguity.

In terms of the scale and the systematic nature of the politics of extermination involved, the Holocaust represents the culmination of modern terror. Mann (1999a) correctly emphasizes that reference to 'the people', in whose name violence against members of the outgroup is practiced, represents a perversion of the idea of democratic inclusion and lends the appearance of modern legitimacy to even the most monstrous acts of extermination.

The claim that there is a correlation between the establishment of popular rule and ethnic violence seems however to contradict the findings of Gurr's statistical study (1993b:183ff.) according to which a greater degree of democratization is accompanied by peaceful forms of ethnic conflict resolution. However, Gurr's sample also includes many Western democracies which are more readily able to resolve conflicts through redistribution and decentralization on the basis of their strong resources. If one looks closely at Gurr's study, the examples given (Gurr, 1993b:184ff., 187) show that between 1975 and 1986 *democratization* in developing countries had the effect of tending to exacerbate conflicts which often ended in renewed authoritarianism (Gurr, 1993b:184ff.).² In a recently published study Snyder (2000) gives a range of mainly European examples taken from two centuries to show that democratic inclusion and exclusion on the basis of ethnic-nationalist ascriptions are historically and systematically interlinked and frequently lead to violent conflict constellations. This theory is not exactly popular with the political advisors and politicians since it contradicts the idea that democratization, as it were, leads all by itself to the civilizing of society and the dissolution of ethnic-national patterns of conflict.

As late as in the first half of the twentieth century practices of ethnic cleansing were still legitimized in some cases by international treaties and were played down with euphemistic terms such as 'exchange of population', as in the Treaty of Sèvres (1920) between Greece and Turkey. Today different political conditions prevail and the weight has shifted in favor of those normative components of the modern age which allow the protection of human life and the right of existence of minorities to be held up against the unitary impetus of the national idea. From this perspective—simultaneity of the nonsimultaneous—the episodes successfully repressed from the historical memory of the formation of one's own state are projected in the present on to the others and transmuted into an expression of their perceived primitiveness (as in the case of Rwanda and Burundi) or fundamentally violent character (as in the case of the Balkans).

One structural precondition for the occurrence of ethnic violence is thus political modernity which first gave legitimacy to ethno-nationally definitions of friend and enemy and corresponding strategies of violence. Premodern violence, however, sought its objects with a different logic whose constitutive elements were the dichotomies loyal-rebellious (violence of the imperial centers against rebellious peripheries), conformist-nonconformist (institutionalized violence against delinquents or witches), believer-unbeliever (campaigns against heretics, anti-Jewish pogroms) (Moore, 1987). It is interesting to note that none of these forms of violence explicitly intended the extermination of its victims; rather, they were to be reintegrated into the hierarchical structure of society. It would seem, as

²On the possibility of genocidal excesses in democracies in general see Mann (1999a).

Bauman (1992) has established, that programs of extermination spring from the genuinely modern incapability to tolerate ambivalence.

The context of political modernization reinforces the special feature of ethnic violence that we derived from the structure of ethnic categorization in the preceding section. In the framework of the logic of the nation-state, according to which every territorialized national group should have its own state, the strategy of ethnic-cultural 'cleansing' of territories and their unambiguous allocation to a single state pays off. All attempts at de-escalation through external mediation are correspondingly difficult. The experiences of the past decade (in Chechnya, Bosnia, Liberia, or also in the great lakes region of east-central Africa) show that efforts to bring about 'win-win' situations at the negotiating table often end in failure (see Sisk, 1996): the logic of ethnic-territorial classification ordains that a particular village or region must always belong to one or the other project of nation-state formation.

IV. POLITICAL-INSTITUTIONAL CONFLICT CONSTELLATIONS

However, examples such as Switzerland, Belgium, or Cameroon show the limits to the explanatory power of the model delineated above. Evidently, democracy and a civic ethos can be introduced and linked to the national idea without this necessarily leading to the outbreak of ethnic violence. Political modernization represents a necessary but not a sufficient condition for ethnic violence—a structural prerequisite and not a cause with uniform effect. All in all, ethnic violence is relatively rare when seen in proportion to the possibility of its occurrence (Brubaker & Laitin, 1998:424).

Whether or not this potential for ethnic conflict is activated depends on the structure of the political institutions and processes. In keeping with the cumulative logic of our argumentation, we must therefore also enter the field of political science research, in which a large number of studies on the phenomenon of ethnic violence have recently been published. Two fundamental remarks should be made at the outset: Firstly, ethnic violence occurs in all types of modern political systems, both in multi-party democracies and in one-party regimes, in consociational democracies and in military dictatorships (see Wimmer, 1997)—contrary to the liberal conviction that all good things in life go together and that democracy as the best of all forms of government also rules out ethnic violence. Secondly—and contrary to the equally popular theory of violence as a pressure valve—violence does not represent the final stage of a build up of pressure in a situation of pervasive conflict. Rather, violence can also be consciously employed as an escalation strategy and create the very conflicts which seem to be the cause of the phenomenon of violence (Brubaker & Laitin, 1998:426; Eckert, 2000). In the following we distinguish between four paths of escalation that depend on the institutional structure of the state and the constellation of actors involved.

In the first path of escalation, radicalized political groups, which according to Waldmann (1989) originate mainly in proletarian-peasant social milieus, employ a strategy of violence as a means of attaining goals which they cannot reach in any other way—for example through the ballot-box or through the political mobilization of large sections of the population. Examples of this are the terrorist activities of ETA, the Quebecois separatists or the Shivsena in India. Sometimes it is the violent action which first leaves an ethnic mark on a particular political constellation and forces the established actors to take

a stand on the issue of the ethnic character of a state and to respond to the ethnicizing discourse of the groups with a propensity for violence.

The holding of elections in an environment of politicized ethnicity can also lead to violence (see Horowitz, 1985:319–332). In constellations of this kind, the parties have already redefined themselves along ethnic lines so that the general perception of party A is that it stands for ethnic group X and party B for ethnic group Y. Under these circumstances an election becomes a census establishing the size of each group, and the democratic principle of majority rule determines and cements the ethnic balance of power. For radicalized party militias it is thus a conceivable and possibly even worthwhile strategy to use violence and intimidation to keep the other party—or rather its voters—from participating in the elections.

The third, most widely discussed path to violence evolves by itself, as it were, from the very logic of the democratic process: in an ethnicized party system the political positions frequently radicalize (Rabushka & Shepsle, 1972; Horowitz, 1985:ch. 7). In non-ethnicized party systems politicians have to try above all to gain the support of floating voters in the middle of the political spectrum: thus they exercise moderation. An ethnic party, on the other hand, competes for votes only *within* a clearly demarcated segment of the population, because in a climate of tension the affiliation of individuals to a particular group is beyond doubt. For the leaders of ethnic parties it therefore makes sense to adopt radical positions and in this way beat their rivals in representing the ‘true’ interests of the group; in ethnically divided electorates they can be assured of receiving the support of moderate voters. After all, where there are clear demographic majority conditions and open political competition, the political subordination of minorities is cemented, and a change can only be brought about through violence. However, the question as to whether this dynamics of escalation is inevitable, or whether the majority ethnic group can—or must—split into several moderate parties, so that in the end trans-ethnic coalition governments can be formed, is still a controversial issue (see van Amersfoort & van der Wusten, 1981; Rothschild, 1981; Horowitz, 1985:ch. 8; Brass, 1991:ch. 9; Kaufman, 1996).

The fourth and final path to violence is taken by state authorities themselves when they organize state terror or even extermination campaigns against individual ethnic groups (van den Berghe, 1990; Harff & Gurr, 1989; Mann, 1999b). It would perhaps make sense to distinguish between cases in which the state apparatus is controlled by an ethnic minority (see Horowitz, 1985:486–501) and those where the demographic majority ethnic group controls the state. Under modern political conditions—where the ethnic-cultural representativeness of the government is a central legitimizing principle—the status and position of minority elites are particularly precarious; for this reason they tend to a drastic use of violence at any sign of protest against their ethnocracy. The events in Burundi in 1972, 1988, and 1993 were exemplary: no sooner had educated Hutu dared to question the dominance of the Tutsi than they were massacred in pogroms throughout the country (Lemarchand, 1994). A different logic would seem to apply in cases where violence is used by a state elite belonging to the majority ethnic group to preempt or neutralize irredentist aspirations—for example the case of the Armenian genocide in the course of the foundation of the Turkish state (Dadrian, 1995). Such policies are also typically connected with the foundation of new nation-states upon the ruins of empires, for example after the collapse of the Soviet empire in the 1990s—national polarization within the state and the accompanying mobilization of the population at the very moment when the issue of the republics’ borders was on the political agenda led to a spiral of violence (Beissinger, 1998).

These four paths of escalation can lead to similar or different forms of ethnic violence, to phenomena characteristic of ethnic violence such as ethnocide or general ones such as terrorist acts against individual members of an enemy group. Irrespective of the institutional-political context discussed above, the very logic of ethnic-national category-formation implies certain dynamics of violence and counterviolence, a specific dramaturgy of terror.

V. THE ANATOMY OF ETHNIC VIOLENCE

Contrary to the image frequently encountered in the media, recent research has shown that this dramaturgy of terror follows certain rules (e.g., Brass, 1996; Esser, 1996, 1999; Tambiah, 1996; Waldmann, 1999; Horowitz, 2001). Let us first address the spiral of political radicalization, which immediately precedes the outbreak of violence. The propensity to violence grows with increasing fear and deepening mistrust toward the political representatives of other groups, and toward the state as the holder of the monopoly on the legitimate use of force and protector from arbitrary violence.

Various authors (e.g., Tambiah, 1996; Gallagher, 1997; Schetter, 1999) stress that groups with a propensity to violence play an outstanding role in the production of this kind of climate. To do this they must depict ethnicity as the unquestioned principle of group formation in times of crisis and ethnic violence as a legitimate means of defending collective interests (ethnic framing in the terminology of Esser, 1996). Various authors (see Chrétien, 1991; Tambiah, 1996; Neubert, 1999) emphasize that access to the media facilitates this framing. Calls to violence on radio or television accompanied the riots in Southeast Asia, for example, as well as the massacres in Rwanda and the ethnic cleansing in Yugoslavia. The spreading of rumors is also a widely practiced technique of ethnic framing (Tambiah, 1996:236–239).

Fear and mistrust give credibility to rumors and in turn are increased by credible rumors (Horowitz, 1985:175–184). Lake and Rothchild (1996) investigated this process in detail. The misinterpretation of information causes the loss of credibility of the other ethnic group, which can ultimately lead to a security dilemma: each group feels that the enemy is capable of the worst (Posen, 1993). The thinner the network of relations between the groups, the more likely misinterpretation of information becomes (see Kuper, 1977; Varshney, 1997). The greater the mistrust and fear, the sooner relations will be broken off and the greater is the likelihood of misinterpretation. In this way fear and misinterpretation can culminate in the conviction that discrimination, repression, or even destruction can only be avoided by taking recourse to armed offensives before the enemy does so (Waldmann, 1995:350; Elwert, 1999:92).

The radicalization of ethnic stereotypes and the reinforcement of symbolic hierarchies fuels the expectation of and propensity to violence. One's own culture is stylized as the only acceptable form of human existence, and the past is idealized in terms of a history of the oppression or grandeur of one's own group (Malkki, 1995; Schetter, 1999). The more comprehensive such a "shared social frame of reference" has become, the more readily a propensity to violence can be brought about by the propaganda of radicalized groups (Esser, 1999:247). The opposing group is demonized (Gallagher, 1997) and viewed disparagingly as a horde of faceless creatures deprived of all individuality (Rösel, 1997:168). As shown by the defamation of the Tutsi as 'cockroaches' by the Hutu propagandists or of the Hazaras as 'mules' by Tajik and Pashtun leaders, the disparagement of the enemy can go so far as

to be condensed into one single pejorative word. The use of violence against groups denigrated and dehumanized in this way thus appears legitimate and even desirable.

When the fear of a demonized and dehumanized enemy spreads, every new event which fits into the ethnic friend-enemy scheme reinforces the validity of the scheme and the ethnicized interpretation of the situation. Even attacks on individuals in no way directly connected with the conflict can be interpreted as attacks on the ethnic group as a whole. Groups with a propensity to violence can use this mechanism to trigger off dynamics of escalating violence through selective assassinations and thus keep a conflict alive. In this context Wright (1988:11) speaks of the representativeness of (ethnic) violence. The victims are not 'selected' by reason of their personal characteristics but purely on the basis of their group membership. In this way all members of the entire group become potential victims, and the actual victim represents them all. Interpreting violence as 'ethnic' paves the way for further violence (Lemarchand, 1994:19) and can escalate into ethnic riots or even wars.

Riots and civil wars differ in their intensity and scale. Riots can mark the beginning of civil wars, while in some cases wars are directly initiated by militias or armies without the involvement of civilians. Ethnic civil war therefore does not necessarily represent an intensified form of ethnic riots, as implied by the popular idea that ethnic wars are an expression of increasing hatred between opposed ethnic groups. Rather, ethnic conflicts are usually characterized by an oscillation of violence such as in Sri Lanka, the Basque Country, or Northern Ireland, and less by linear dynamics of escalation (Elwert, Feuchtwang, & Neubert, 1999:10ff.).

In contrast to their appearance as spontaneous, unbridled, and uncontrolled manifestations of hatred, riots and pogroms show some regularities and structures. Firstly, instigators, organizers and manipulators play a major role (Tambiah, 1996:266). Often pogroms have been triggered off by public or concealed calls to violence by prominent politicians; the attackers thus thought themselves safe from criminal prosecution and their acts of violence appeared legitimate, or even desirable. Servaes (1996:166ff.) points out that the massacres of Tutsi in Burundi were even initiated and partly carried out by government institutions. Bergmann (1998) even sees a structural feature of pogroms in the passivity or tacit sympathy of government executive bodies with the attackers.

Secondly, the cyclical occurrence of such riots can lead to a routinization and ritualization of ethnic violence. Brass (1996:12) speaks in this context of "institutionalized riot systems." Often ethnic identity is celebrated symbolically in specific locations (memorials, holy places, churches, etc.) and on particular holidays or days of mourning. These occasions often become the trigger and focal point of ethnic violence (Tambiah, 1996:239-243). This is because localized festivals and processions offer an appropriate occasion for riots, or provoke the opposing group to commit acts of violence (for example on the occasion of the Orange Order procession). Attacks and pogroms clearly show that regardless of how an individual defines him or herself, it is ethnic classification that decides life and death (Rösel, 1997:169). The representativeness of ethnic violence makes everyone a 'prisoner' of the groups with a propensity to violence. Anyone who rejects or even simply fails to actively support their 'own' protectors, is branded a traitor or informer and runs the risk of being left completely at the mercy of the enemy. The survival of the individual then depends very much on the power relations between ethnic groups (Bowman, 1994:143). In ritualized 'riot systems' of this kind there is therefore an increasing tendency toward formation of ethnic ghettos within which protection from the enemy is more readily afforded. Communication is limited to members of one's 'own' ethnic

group since those on the 'other side' are no longer to be trusted (Waldmann, 1989:209). This lack of communication, in turn, fuels mutual mistrust.

Such 'riot systems' can stabilise and have a life of their own, often in a localized context without direct repercussions on the macropolitical constellations. In other cases attacks of this kind trigger off—or provide the welcome occasion for—large-scale violence which challenge the basic structures of the political system. In an 'ethnicized climate' in which all political decisions are judged and justified from the angle of ethnic stereotypes, ethnic violence presents itself as an instrument for attaining long-term political objectives. The exact motives and violence strategies vary with the political-institutional constellations, which we described in the preceding section above. However, all the actors in such ethnic civil wars remain tied to the logic of the nation-state—the idea that power can be justified by reference to an ethnically defined people, and that every people is entitled to a state which then merits recognition.

Ethnic civil war frequently begins with the occupation or conquest of territories which are considered strategically significant for the security of one's 'own' ethnic group. The territorialization and ethnicization of concepts of belonging, characteristic for politics in the age of nation-states, also determines the further course of ethnic civil wars: the tendency toward expulsion or destruction of ethnic others from the territory of one's 'own' future state, the use of expellees of one's own ethnic group for the colonization of such 'cleansed' areas, the wanton destruction of remaining niches of interethnic coexistence, the particular brutality unleashed upon everything mixed and hybrid, the destructive frenzy toward everyday signs of the existence of 'foreign' groups: blowing up houses, filling in wells with concrete, the destruction of arable land, razing temples, churches, statues, etc., which could serve as a memory of those who once 'owned' the territory. Members of the enemy group—demonized and dehumanized—fall victim to the violent practices of marauding bands of young fighters: they are shot as an example to terrorize the survivors and make them flee, or they are herded together in camps or 'resettled', or—as the ultimate form of ethnic violence—they are murdered en masse as in Rwanda or in Bosnia in minutely planned operations.

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