

## Identity and Ideology in Political Violence and Conflict

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### Abstract

A familiar narrative in International Relations scholarship suggests that a fundamental shift in the dynamics of global political violence has taken place in recent times, involving a decline in 'ideological' conflicts, and a rise in conflicts of 'identity'. But the contrast this argument relies on, between ideology and identity, is untenable and unproductive, implausibly denying that ideologies and identity are inextricably interrelated, and exaggerating the novelty and causal centrality of identity's role in conflict. But this is not to say that identity plays no such role. This article explains the failings of the familiar narrative about identity, by demonstrating its fundamentally ideological nature and its nuanced causal role in political violence. It then proceeds to offer a better theoretical framework for thinking about the multiple links between identity and violence. Centrally, I identify six specific causal mechanisms through which identities encourage violence by providing: (i) mobilising coordinates, (ii) targeting categories, (iii) virtue-systems, (iv) obligation hierarchies, (v) victimhood, and (vi) group hatred. Finally, the article considers how this framework permits a more plausible reformulation of some of the kernels of truth in the familiar narrative about identity's importance in contemporary conflict.

A familiar narrative in International Relations scholarship suggests that a fundamental shift in the dynamics of global political violence has taken place in recent times, involving a decline in 'ideological' conflicts, and a rise in conflicts of 'identity'. In her influential work on 'new wars' Mary Kaldor argues that 'the goals of the new wars are about identity politics in contrast to the geo-political or ideological goals of earlier wars'.<sup>1</sup> A central argument of Samuel Huntington's controversial *Clash of Civilizations* thesis is, similarly, that patterns of conflict and cooperation are now produced "not for reasons of ideology or power politics or economic interest but because of cultural kinship."<sup>2</sup> Huntington further quotes Jacques Delors' claim that "future conflicts will be sparked by cultural factors rather than economics or ideology."<sup>3</sup> A range of scholarly and public commentary on "ethnic conflict" also reproduces this narrative. Chaim Kaufmann's work on preventing civil wars, for example, asserts that there is a deep contrast between 'ideological civil wars' and 'ethnic civil wars', suggesting that the latter are both more intractable and more dominant in our times.<sup>4</sup> And recent international conflicts, and media coverage of them, seem to reinforce this picture. In 2014 alone the world saw a bitter contest of sovereignty between the Ukrainian government and pro-Russian armed movements in the Donetsk region, the continuation of a catastrophic sectarian civil war between different ethno-religious groups in Syria, the extension of this violence into Iraq accompanied by mass killings, and the latest round of hostilities between the Israel Defence Forces and the cluster of armed groups, dominated by Hamas, that control the Gaza Strip.<sup>5</sup> Conflicts across the faultlines of identity are never far from the news, and in dozens of less noticed struggles around the world, different ethnic, national or religious groups appear locked in hate-filled mutual killing.

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<sup>1</sup> Mary Kaldor, *New and Old Wars*, 3rd ed. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012), 7.

<sup>2</sup> Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Free Press, 2002), 22.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> Chaim Kaufmann, "Possible and Impossible Solutions to Ethnic Civil Wars," *International Security* 20, no. 4 (1996). See also: Benjamin Valentino, Paul Huth, and Dylan Balch-Lindsay, "'Draining the Sea': Mass Killing and Guerrilla Warfare," *International Organization* 58, no. 2 (2004): 381-2; Siniša Malešević, *Identity as ideology: understanding ethnicity and nationalism* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 18.

<sup>5</sup> See also: Gregory Treverton, "The new cold war: Iran versus Saudi Arabia - how far will it go?," *Prospect* 2014, 22 & 24.

Yet this general story about contemporary violence, which I shall refer to as the ‘identitarian narrative’, is fundamentally untenable. It’s two central components – the postulation of a basic contrast between ‘ideology’ and ‘identity’, and the suggestion that ‘identity’ is now much more central to conflict than it has been in the past – are completely at odds with leading empirical and theoretical research on identity, ideology, and violence. And beyond its descriptive inaccuracy, this narrative obstructs efforts to develop sophisticated models of the complex dynamics of real world political violence. The simplicity of the story is alluring, and there are kernels of truth to be found in it. But rather than elegantly capturing genuine insights about the contemporary world, it reinforces myths and entrenches impoverished conceptual and theoretical constructs in the study of international politics.

In this paper I aim to put the study of the relationship between identity, ideology and political violence on a better footing. In section one, I explain why the identitarian narrative must be discarded, reviewing the theoretical and empirical defects of its two main components – the dichotomy between ideology and identity, and the attempt to explain contemporary violence primarily through identity. In section two, I then offer an alternative account of the importance of identity, and its relationship to violence, better grounded in recent research on both phenomena.

## I. The Errors of the Identitarian Narrative

### *Identity as Ideology*

The identitarian narrative treats identity and ideology as being fundamentally separate, dissimilar, and contrasting – with contemporary conflict about identity *rather than* ideology. But, whilst this a common way of talking within International Relations scholarship, the idea that there is a fundamental contrast between identity and ideology is a peculiar one. In most of the disciplines that study them, identity and ideology are seen as essentially overlapping and interpenetrating, though not identical.<sup>6</sup> Identities – constructed conceptualisations of individual or group selves – are always ideological, and ideologies – distinctive systems of ideas that shape individuals’ perceptions of their political and social world and their behaviour in that world – always include and appeal to various identities. The argument that identity must be viewed as ideological has been made forcefully within the literature on conflict and violence by Siniša Malešević,<sup>7</sup> but it is also widely affirmed by specialist theorists of both ideology and identity.<sup>8</sup>

Of course, ‘identity’ and ‘ideology’ are both ultimately analytical tools, and are topics of definitional disputes between scholars.<sup>9</sup> As such, it is obviously possible to define identity and

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<sup>6</sup> Leonie Huddy, “From Social to Political Identity: A Critical Examination of Social Identity Theory,” *Political Psychology* 22, no. 1 (2001): 131-2 & 148; Philip L. Hammack, “Narrative and the Cultural Psychology of Identity,” *Personality and Social Psychology Review* 12, no. 3 (2008): 223 & 230-2; Manfred B. Steger, “Political Ideologies in the Age of Globalization,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Political Ideologies*, eds. Michael Freeden, Lyman Tower Sargent, and Marc Stears (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 217; Teun van Dijk, *Ideology: A Multidisciplinary Approach* (London: Sage Books, 1998), 118-125; J. Christopher Cohrs, “Ideological Bases of Violent Conflict,” in *Oxford Handbook of Intergroup Conflict*, ed. L. R. Tropp (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 56, 61 & 67.

<sup>7</sup> Malešević, *Identity as ideology*; Siniša Malešević, *The Sociology of War and Violence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 325-6.

<sup>8</sup> Huddy, “From Social to Political Identity: A Critical Examination of Social Identity Theory,” 131-2 & 148; Hammack, “Narrative and the Cultural Psychology of Identity,” 223 & 230-2; Steger, “Political Ideologies,” 217; van Dijk, *Ideology: A Multidisciplinary Approach*, 69-72 & 118-125; Cohrs, “Ideological Bases of Violent Conflict,” 56, 61 & 67. See also: Jonathan Leader Maynard, “Rethinking the Role of Ideology in Mass Atrocities,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 26, no. 5 (2014).

<sup>9</sup> Raymond Boudon, *The Analysis of Ideology* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989), 24; Matthew Humphrey, “(De)contesting ideology: The struggle over the meaning of the struggle over meaning,” *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy* 8, no. 2 (2005): 229. For some influential efforts to clear up such definitional

ideology in such a way as to sustain the identitarian narrative's sense of contrast between the two. But the test here, as with any definitional move, is a) whether this results in a clear and intuitive way of talking about the phenomena one wishes to denote, and b) whether it is productive for various research goals – analysis, research design, theoretical understanding, and so forth.<sup>10</sup> The decision to set up identity and ideology as contrasting phenomena cannot pass this test. On the contrary, when interrogated it leads to idiosyncratic, perverse and deeply counterintuitive theoretical implications, and runs counter to important and sometimes obvious truths about the things scholars typically call ideology and the things scholars typically call identity.

First, the assumption of a fundamental opposition or contrast between identity and ideology effaces awareness of the deep importance of identities to *all* ideologies. It implies, for example, that the classic 'big ideologies' of the twentieth century did not incorporate critical conceptions of political, ethnic or national identity. This is clearly false. Even a cursory examination of the central ideological discourse, concepts, and governing practices of the Western and Eastern blocs in the Cold War (seen by most International Relations theorists as the archetypal 'ideological' conflict) reveals the saturation of their politics with conceptions of identity – as Robert Jervis has persuasively demonstrated.<sup>11</sup> Historians have now explored in considerable detail the Soviet government's integration – from at least early in the Stalin era – of traditional Russian nationalism into the doctrine, institutions, and symbolism of Soviet Communism.<sup>12</sup> And scholars have also extensively studied the central importance of ethnicity to practices of Communist rule in both the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia.<sup>13</sup> And, contrary to the assumption of a basic split between ideological and identity-based violence, a plethora of work has demonstrated how Communist violence in the Soviet Union, China, Cambodia and elsewhere was profoundly shaped (though not totally determined) by the conceptualisation of a range of 'ethnic' minorities as being 'ideologically' suspect from the perspective of a Communist regime.<sup>14</sup> The 'national operations' that ran alongside Stalin's more famous 'Great Terror' of 1937-8 and continued during and after World War II with the deportations of 'Finns, Germans, Kalmyks, Karachays, Chechens, Ingush, Balkars, Crimean Tartars, Crimean Greeks, Meskhetian Turks, Kurds, and Khemashils', stand as major examples.<sup>15</sup> The targeting of ethnic Chams, Vietnamese, Chinese and Thai as the most literally genocidal components of Cambodia's 'autogenocide' under the Khmer Rouge, is another.<sup>16</sup> High ideological communist regimes frequently practised ethno-nationalist violence.

Similarly, Western liberal capitalism in the Cold War was not an abstract political doctrine empty of identity. Notions of 'the West' itself, and of American identity, 'manifest

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disagreement on ideology see: John Gerring, "Ideology: A Definitional Analysis," *Political Research Quarterly* 50, no. 4 (1997); Malcolm B. Hamilton, "The Elements of the Concept of Ideology," *Political Studies* 35 (1987).

<sup>10</sup> These are not the only criteria – they are derived from but do not exhaust those in: John Gerring, "What Makes a Concept Good? A Criterial Framework for Understanding Concept Formation in the Social Sciences," *Polity* 31, no. 3 (1999).

<sup>11</sup> Robert Jervis, "Identity and the Cold War," in *The Cambridge History of the Cold War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

<sup>12</sup> D.L. Brandenberger and A.M. Dubrovsky, "The People Need a Tsar: The Emergence of National Bolshevism as Stalinist Ideology, 1931-1941," *Europe-Asia Studies* 50, no. 5 (1998).

<sup>13</sup> Malešević, *Identity as ideology*, 161-2; Jörg Baberowski and Anselm Doering-Manteuffel, "The Quest for Order and the Pursuit of Terror: National Socialist Germany and the Stalinist Soviet Union as Multiethnic Empires," in *Beyond Totalitarianism: Stalinism and Nazism Compared*, eds. Michael Geyer and Sheila Fitzpatrick (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

<sup>14</sup> Norman Naimark, *Stalin's Genocides* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010).

<sup>15</sup> Alex J. Bellamy, *Massacres and Morality: Mass Atrocities in an Age of Civilian Immunity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 226-7; Paul M. Hagenloh, "'Socially Harmful Elements' and the Great Terror," in *Stalinism: New Directions*, ed. Sheila Fitzpatrick (London: Routledge, 2000).

<sup>16</sup> Alexander Laban Hinton, "Why Did You Kill?: The Cambodian Genocide and the Dark Side of Face and Honour," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 57 (1998): 95 fn. 3.

destiny', and uniqueness – all old, ideationally thick and culturally sedimented tropes – played a central role in both public attitudes and elite policy formulation in the Cold War.<sup>17</sup> Key documents that shaped the foundations of American grand strategy, such as George Kennan's 'Long Telegram' of 1946 or his 'X Article' on the 'Sources of Soviet Conduct' that appeared in *Foreign Affairs* a year later, are replete with conceptualisations of both American and Russian identity. Kennan talks of the 'natural outlook of the Russian people', and the 'traditional and instinctive Russian sense of insecurity',<sup>18</sup> and placed important explanatory emphasis on 'Anglo-Saxon traditions of compromise' contrasted with those of the 'Russian-Asiatic world'.<sup>19</sup> Concluding his *Foreign Affairs* article, Kennan could scarcely have made American national identity more central to the effort to formulate ideological opposition to Communism:

'The issue of Soviet-American relations is in essence a test of the overall worth of the United States as a nation among nations. To avoid destruction the United States need only measure up to its own best traditions and prove itself worthy of preservation as a great nation. Surely, there was never a fairer test of national quality than this. In the light of these circumstances, the thoughtful observer of Russian-American relations will find no cause for complaint in the Kremlin's challenge to American society. He will rather experience a certain gratitude to a Providence which, by providing the American people with this implacable challenge, has made their entire security as a nation dependent on their pulling themselves together and accepting the responsibilities of moral and political leadership that history plainly intended them to bear.'<sup>20</sup>

Throughout the Cold War, reference to American values, and intense valorisation of America's national and also religious identity (contrasted with 'Godless Communism'), saturated US political discourse on foreign policy.<sup>21</sup> Jimmy Carter supported his efforts to place human rights at the centre of US foreign policy with the claim 'the very heart of our identity as a nation is our firm commitment to human rights.'<sup>22</sup> Ronald Reagan's 'Evil Empire' speech of March 1983 may be better remembered for its Manichean presentation of the Soviet enemy, but the bulk of the speech was concerned with adulating the American nation and the Judeo-Christian values Reagan presented as its core characteristics (reflecting his immediate audience, the National Association of Evangelicals). Reagan repeatedly referenced the 'greatness of America' and was concerned to argue that Judeo-Christianity 'permeates our history and our government. The Declaration of Independence mentions the Supreme Being no less than four times. "In God We Trust" is engraved on our coinage.'<sup>23</sup> By contrast with the Soviet Union, Reagan asserted that: 'whatever sad episodes exist in our past, any objective observer must hold a positive view of American history, a history that has been the story of hopes fulfilled and dreams made into reality'.<sup>24</sup>

And of course, communism and liberal capitalism are to a degree weak examples of the interrelation of identity and ideology, since they each purport to reject exclusive national loyalties in place of transnational cosmopolitanism or class solidarity. The notion of a fundamental

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<sup>17</sup> See: Michael H. Hunt, *Ideology and U.S. Foreign Policy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987).

<sup>18</sup> George Kennan, "The Long Telegram," in State Department (1946).

<sup>19</sup> George F. Kennan, "The Sources of Soviet Conduct," *Foreign Affairs* 25 (1947).

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> On the origins of such themes, see: Hunt, *Ideology and U.S. Foreign Policy*.

<sup>22</sup> Jervis, "Identity and the Cold War," 22.

<sup>23</sup> Ronald Reagan, "President Reagan's Speech before the National Association of Evangelicals, Orlando, Florida, March 8th 1983," <http://millercenter.org/president/speeches/speech-3409> (accessed 15/09/2014).

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

contrast between identity and ideology looks even more bizarre when considering ideologies like Nazism, or Hutu Power ideology, or sectarian religious fundamentalism. All of these are obviously *ideologies*, in the sense that they are complex systems of ideas about politics and society that direct individuals' behaviour. They are not just blunt assertions of a group label, but rich and dangerously alluring networks of values, narratives, concepts and beliefs about the world – and scholars rightly and consistently use the term ideology to describe them.<sup>25</sup> At the same time, they are blatantly identitarian, demanding exclusive and deep loyalties to racial or religious groups, and characterised by animosity towards certain out-groups seen as polluting, threatening, and criminal/heretical.

This is all aside from the fact that some identities are *explicitly* ideological, in that individuals do not only define themselves as American, Croat, Hutu or other ethno-nationalist labels, but also as 'conservatives', 'socialists', 'Bolsheviks', 'patriots', 'Leftist', 'Maoist', 'progressive', and so forth. To the degree that politics and violence are sometimes organised around 'labels', there is no reason why these must be ethnic or nationalist labels, which have received too exclusive a focus in recent scholarship.<sup>26</sup> If the concept of identity is going to actually do any explanatory work in political science, this must be by invoking a range of sociological and psychological accounts of the specific mechanisms by which identity shapes individual behaviour,<sup>27</sup> and the bulk of those mechanisms apply to any form of identity, including ideological/political/factional identities. These still provide simple concepts around which violence becomes targeted, can still generate strong in-group attachments and out-group animosities, and can still function as evocative pointers to culturally sedimented myths and notions used to motivate and legitimate violence.

Indeed, in much 'ideological' violence, the political or factional labels may be more important for many perpetrators and their supporters than elaborate ideological doctrines. In 20<sup>th</sup> Century persecutions of 'communists', whether politically in McCarthyite America or lethally in Indonesia, Chile, Argentina and El Salvador,<sup>28</sup> many participants did not possess any deep understanding of who communists were or what they believed.<sup>29</sup> But their (supposed) identification as communists was enough for them to be targeted. Similarly, Soviet authorities under Stalin famously struggled to develop any thick and coherent definition of 'kulaks', yet killed and persecuted those smeared with the label nonetheless. The same could be said of animosity towards 'Islamic fundamentalists' in our own era. Individuals, organisations and states don't need to have a deep understanding of the ideologies or identities of others to be willing to kill them as an 'other'. In an almost identical way to which perpetrators willingly internalise simple *definitions* of different ethnies as the enemy (though buttressed by a range of ideological

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<sup>25</sup> See, for example: John Weiss, *Ideology of Death: Why the Holocaust Happened in Germany* (Chicago: Elephant Paperbacks, 1997); Jacques Semelin, *Purify and Destroy: The Political Uses of Massacre and Genocide* (London: Hurst & Company, 2005); Robert Melson, "Modern Genocide in Rwanda: Ideology, Revolution, War and Mass Murder in an African State," in *The Specter of Genocide: Mass Murder in Historical Perspective*, eds. Robert Gellately and Ben Kiernan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Jeffrey Haynes, "Al Qaeda: Ideology and action," *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy* 8, no. 2 (2005); James D. Fearon and David D. Laitin, "Violence and the Social Construction of Ethnic Identity," *International Organization* 54, no. 4 (2000): 863.

<sup>26</sup> Malešević, *Sociology of War and Violence*, 189-90; Christian Gerlach, *Extremely Violent Societies: Mass Violence in the Twentieth-Century World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 6-7.

<sup>27</sup> Fearon and Laitin, "Violence and the Social Construction of Ethnic Identity," 874.

<sup>28</sup> Bellamy, *Massacres and Morality*, 160-222.

<sup>29</sup> Gerlach, *Extremely Violent Societies*, 43. This seems true of the perpetrators studied in Joshua Oppenheimer's powerful film *The Act of Killing*, for example, who displayed a vigorous conviction (at least superficially) in the rightness of killing those labelled communists in Indonesia. Yet their ideological understandings of communists, though extant, were very much the messy, impressionistic conceptions of 'everyday' ideology, and not elaborate theory.

justifications and characterisations to support such claims),<sup>30</sup> so they willingly internalise definitions of political enemies as dangerous, criminal, and deserving of violence.

Just as ideologies are so often fundamentally bound up with identities, so are identities inextricably ideological. Central to almost all modern theories of identity is an awareness that they are neither ideationally empty labels nor primordial and eternal attachments. Instead, they are contingent, fluid, ideationally thick and socially constructed notions of selfhood,<sup>31</sup> although often long-lasting ones which draw heavily on well-established historical tropes and myths and which are difficult to change rapidly.<sup>32</sup> Widespread campaigns of political violence cannot be sustained by just a 'label', that label has to have an importance and resonance for relevant actors, and that importance and resonance is a consequence of the thicker meanings and beliefs attached to that label, ones rooted in a complex social processes of identity construction and multifaceted psychological tendencies driving identity attachment.<sup>33</sup> Most clearly, individuals differ in a huge number of ways – they potentially possess a huge number of identities – most of which are never considered relevant for politics. Identity construction is thus about the ideological conversion of certain lines of difference into politically and psychologically relevant axes, and this requires deeper ideological understandings than a mere awareness of difference. Philip Hammack rightly notes how 'the master narratives of Palestinian and Israeli identity clearly possess ideological foundations that contribute to the intractability of their conflict'.<sup>34</sup> And this is true of all such conflicting identities, whether along Sunni-Shia fault lines in the contemporary Middle East, ethnic campaigns of Hutu versus Tutsi violence in Rwanda and Burundi, or Serb-Bosnia-Croatian divides in 1990s Yugoslavia.

In such instances, violence does not just happen because groups of individuals with one label see individuals stuck under another label as different and therefore want to kill them.<sup>35</sup> In most cases periods of violence are preceded by long periods of relative peace, and often harmonious and integrative intergroup relationships.<sup>36</sup> Escalation towards violence involves the creative ideological mobilisation of existing identities – again, the conversion of certain lines of difference into salient lines of conflict (and cooperation), as ideological producers make sense of political events via identity and link identity-based appeals to concrete political problems and solutions.<sup>37</sup> In this respect, as Malešević puts it:

'there is no significance difference here between today's depictions of the citizens of Iraq as mutually exclusive Shia, Sunni and Kurds, and yesteryears' socialist rhetoric of proletariat and bourgeoisie locked

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<sup>30</sup> See: Leader Maynard, "Rethinking the Role of Ideology.": Jonathan Leader Maynard, "Combating Atrocity-Justifying Ideologies," in *The Responsibility to Prevent: Overcoming the Challenges of Mass Atrocity Prevention*, eds. Jennifer Welsh and Serena Sharma (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014 [forthcoming]).

<sup>31</sup> See, in general: Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 2006); Malešević, *Identity as ideology*; Malešević, *Sociology of War and Violence*, 1801-3; Siniša Malešević, *Nation-States and Nationalisms* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013); Hammack, "Narrative and the Cultural Psychology of Identity"; Huddy, "From Social to Political Identity: A Critical Examination of Social Identity Theory"; Ronald Grigory Suny, University of California, *Why We Hate You: The Passions of National Identity and Ethnic Violence*, Berkeley Program in Societ and Post-Soviet Studies Working Paper Series (Berkeley, 2004); Fearon and Laitin, "Violence and the Social Construction of Ethnic Identity"; Alexander Laban Hinton, ed., *Genocide: an anthropological reader* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2002), Part III; Erik Gartzke and Kristian Skrede Gleditsch, "Identity and Conflict: Ties that Bind and Differences that Divide," *European Journal of International Relations* 12, no. 1 (2006): 61 & 78.

<sup>32</sup> Suny, University of California, *Why We Hate You*, 7-8; Fearon and Laitin, "Violence and the Social Construction of Ethnic Identity," 850 fn.12.

<sup>33</sup> Malešević, *Identity as ideology*, 27-30; Hammack, "Narrative and the Cultural Psychology of Identity," 224-5.

<sup>34</sup> Hammack, "Narrative and the Cultural Psychology of Identity," 230.

<sup>35</sup> Gartzke and Gleditsch, "Identity and Conflict.": Fearon and Laitin, "Violence and the Social Construction of Ethnic Identity," 857-60; Malešević, *Nation-States and Nationalisms*, 92-3. Contrary to, for example, Bruce Wilshire, *Get 'Em All, Kill 'Em* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2006).

<sup>36</sup> See: Malešević, *Sociology of War and Violence*, Ch. 8 & 9.

<sup>37</sup> Suny, University of California, *Why We Hate You*, 36.

together in an uncompromising class war. They both invoke group labels as part of a concrete ideological project to justify a specific political course of action, including warfare, and to mobilise popular support. Ethnic, religious and nationalist ideologies are grounded in systematic programmes just as much as the ‘old’ ideologies of socialism, liberalism and conservatism... In other words, there is no identity without ideology and no ideology can successfully mobilise mass support without constructing meaningful group labels.<sup>38</sup>

So ideology and identity are not the same, but they are deeply interrelated, and forms of identity politics rely on complex underlying systems of ideas just as much as the notionally more conventional politics of left and right.<sup>39</sup> As Francisco Gutiérrez Sanín and Elisabeth Jean Wood point out: ‘despite the distinction in earlier literature between “ideological” and “ethnic” groups or conflicts, ethno-nationalist groups in civil conflict also embrace an ideology, namely that of nationalism.’<sup>40</sup> Indeed, *all* collective violence has an ideological dimension (that is, dynamics dictated by the distinctive belief-systems of its participants) just it always has psychological, economic, geopolitical and institutional dimensions – though all these dimensions may vary in their causal significance from case to case. One important part of the ideological dimension concerns the conceptions of identities held by groups and individuals, leaders and masses, killers and bystanders, and so forth. Conceiving of conflicts in this way allows us to trace nuanced changes in the sorts of identities that conflicts are orientated around, the salience of identities (versus other sorts of ideas) in the overall ideological landscape, and the causal pathways through which identities shape violence practices.

By contrast, the notion of identity and ideology as fundamentally different leads to paradoxes, such as Kaldor’s confusing conclusion that whereas identity-politics are ‘inherently exclusive’ (as if no efforts to form inclusive political identities had ever been attempted), ‘the politics of ideas...are open to all and therefore tend to be integrative’ (as if systems of racism, discrimination, oppression and identity-conflict did not depend on ‘ideas’).<sup>41</sup> This distinction – which seems to amount to ‘ideas’ denoting the projects Kaldor sees as legitimate whereas ‘identities’ denote nasty movements – cannot be maintained consistently, since it is obvious that one can have identities that one might consider progressive, and ideas which can be terribly damaging. Consequently, Kaldor is forced into needless contorted assertions to try to iron out the inevitable wrinkles in this conceptual framework. Recognising that projects she sees as legitimate are sometimes also mobilised in the name of religion or culture, Kaldor declares that ‘this is not what is meant by identity politics’ because these projects are ‘demands for cultural and religious rights’ which are still built around ‘a political programme’.<sup>42</sup> But how can this distinction be operationalised, other than by the thick and thoroughly contestable normative judgements of the analyst? Contrary to portrayals of identitarian violence as wild hatred of those carrying another label, vicious identitarian movements – like the Nazis, Serbian nationalists under Milosevic, or Islamic State – often frame their demands as being assertions of legitimate ‘rights’, and do have powerful visions of the future and programmes they believe will get them there (often involving authoritarian policies and violence, framed as necessary measures to protect

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<sup>38</sup> Malešević, *Sociology of War and Violence*, 325-6.

<sup>39</sup> Though this is also an unhelpful schema, see: Jonathan Haidt, Jesse Graham, and Craig Joseph, “Above and Below Left-right: Ideological Narratives and Moral Foundations,” *Psychological Inquiry* 20, no. 2-3 (2009); Jonathan White, “Left and Right as political resources,” *Journal of Political Ideologies* 16, no. 2 (2011); Jonathan Leader Maynard, “A map of the field of ideological analysis,” *Journal of Political Ideologies* 18, no. 3 (2013): 314-16.

<sup>40</sup> Francisco Gutiérrez Sanín and Elisabeth Jean Wood, “Ideology in civil war: Instrumental adoption and beyond,” *Journal of Peace Research* 51, no. 2 (2014): 215. Though see also: Michael Freedman, “Is Nationalism a Distinct Ideology?,” *Political Studies* XLVI (1998).

<sup>41</sup> Kaldor, *New and Old Wars*, 3rd ed., 8.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 80-11.

national or group security). The distinction between a politics of identities and a politics of ideas is a bogus or at least no more than polemical one.

And the effort to crudely hive off identity from ideology does not produce a heuristic analytical gain which might justify putting up with these problems. We can, as I show in section II, capture some of the genuine differences Kaldor wants to point to – such as the increasingly fragmented nature of identities – without deploying rigid and misleading divisions between identitarian and ideological conflicts. These promote those simplistic characterisations, firmly rejected in case-specialist and comparative scholarly research, of conflicts as being driven by mysterious and unchanging ‘ancient hatreds’.<sup>43</sup> They encourage the crude and essentialist conceptions of identity for which Huntington’s work has been so extensively criticised,<sup>44</sup> and suppress awareness of complex processes of political and ideological contestation of identity. As Christian Gerlach writes: “If scholars view ethnicity as immutable and rank it as a cause of violence by itself, they rarely discuss just why and how ethnic ascriptions may become so strong and irreconcilable.”<sup>45</sup> And ultimately identitarian portrayals of conflict often prove impressionistic or even arbitrary – sorting conflicts into notionally distinct types based on highly superficial portrayals, which do not correspond to qualitatively distinct dynamics on the ground.<sup>46</sup>

### *Identity and Violence*

The second component of the identitarian narrative – which sees contemporary political violence as centrally (and to a greater extent than in the past) driven by cleavages between different identities – is also dubious. The fact that the faultlines of conflicts often correspond to group boundaries for which prominent labels are available makes it easy to look at contemporary violence and see it as ‘about’ identity. But the best in-depth quantitative and qualitative studies have repeatedly cast doubt on such assessments.

In quantitative research on conflict there is little support for the suggestion that identity cleavages are a primary cause of violence. Having conducted an extensive analysis of conflicts between 1950 and 2001, Erik Gartzke and Kristian Skrede Gleditsch summarise their findings that:

“cultural traits and identity influence dispute patterns, but in ways that run counter to conventional beliefs. Most notably, we find little evidence of clashes between civilizations or that conflict is generally more common between states where the dominant groups possess different cultural affinities, broadly defined. Indeed, if anything, our results suggest that ties of similarity rather than difference often give rise to conflict”.<sup>47</sup>

A similar study by Errol Henderson and Richard Tucker on interstate wars between 1816 and 1992, conducted with respect to Huntington’s clash of civilisation thesis, similarly finds no

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<sup>43</sup> Suny, University of California, *Why We Hate You*, 22; John Mueller, “The Banality of ‘Ethnic War,’” *International Security* 25, no. 1 (2000); Benjamin A. Valentino, *Final Solutions: Mass Killing and Genocide in the 20th Century* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), 16-22; Fearon and Laitin, “Violence and the Social Construction of Ethnic Identity.”

<sup>44</sup> See also: Malešević, *Sociology of War and Violence*, 64-5.

<sup>45</sup> Gerlach, *Extremely Violent Societies*, 260. See also: Fearon and Laitin, “Violence and the Social Construction of Ethnic Identity.”

<sup>46</sup> See the detailed interrogation of various forms of ‘new wars’ in Errol A. Henderson and J. David Singer, ““New Wars” and Rumors of “New Wars,”” *International Interactions* 28, no. 2 (2002).

<sup>47</sup> Gartzke and Gleditsch, “Identity and Conflict,” 54-5. The analysis controls for mere geographical proximity, which might otherwise have been thought to exhaustively explain this finding.

correlation between civilizational difference and conflict in the Cold War and early post-Cold War era, and an inverted relationship (civilizational similarity provoking conflict) prior to the Cold War.<sup>48</sup> As these theorists emphasise, identity divides are simply far more common than violent conflict – so whilst it is statistically likely that conflicts often occur between groups with differing identities, this does not make identity a generalizable cause of violence. As David Laitin demonstrates, for any randomly chosen pair of neighbouring ethnic groups – those defined by the form of identity most emphasised in scholarship as a cause of violence – only 5 in 10,000 show recorded violence in a given year.<sup>49</sup>

In research on genocide and mass killings – often seen as characteristic of vicious identitarian conflict – the findings are the same. In three independent research projects Barbara Harff, Benjamin Valentino et al., and Matthew Krain all find no reliable correlation between measures of divided identity and mass killing.<sup>50</sup> Summarising a number of leading works in the study of genocide and mass atrocities, the leading genocide scholar Scott Straus writes:

“The authors make several related claims. First, deep divisions, prejudice, and discrimination are more frequent occurrences than is genocide. Many societies are fractured ethnically, racially, culturally, and religiously, but only in a few does genocide materialize. Second, cultural explanations cannot explain the timing of genocide. Deep divisions, prejudice, and discrimination are fairly constant; genocide is not. Third, evidence from several cases suggests that divisions, prejudice, and discrimination do not necessarily predate the violence... Fourth, authors cite social-psychological experiments and studies of perpetrators showing that individuals do not necessarily commit violence because of ethnic or religious hatred.”<sup>51</sup>

Of course, just because identity cleavages are not good predictors of conflict does not necessarily mean that they do not, in a number of particular conflicts, play an important causal role. But prominent in-depth qualitative or mixed-method work, better placed to trace specific causal mechanisms in major instances of contemporary conflict, also finds weak support for the thesis that the violence in such conflicts is primarily driven by identity. Indeed, some of these studies are extremely sceptical. John Mueller, for example, has influentially declared that ‘ethnic conflict’ tends to be ‘banal’, perpetrated mainly by petty criminals, gangsters and football hooligans for whom the overarching political objectives and narratives of the conflict are just so much rhetorical cover for plunder and other forms of self-interested criminal violence.<sup>52</sup> V.P. Gagnon’s examination of the wars in Yugoslavia declares ethnic war to be a ‘myth’, concluding that “there was virtually no evidence that the violence in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina was the result of ethnic hatreds, despite the tenacity with which Western journalists clung and continue to cling to that story.”<sup>53</sup> Like Gagnon, Stathis Kalyvas presents ethnic civil wars as far more instrumental and strategic in character than the image of passionate identitarian conflict suggests, and suggests that ‘actions “on the ground” often seem more related to local or private issues than to the war’s

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<sup>48</sup> Errol A. Henderson and Richard Tucker, “Clear and Present Strangers: The Clash of Civilizations and International Conflict,” *International Studies Quarterly* 45, no. 2 (2001). See also: Gartzke and Gleditsch, “Identity and Conflict,” 56.

<sup>49</sup> Cited in: Malešević, *Nation-States and Nationalisms*, 92.

<sup>50</sup> Barbara Harff, “No Lessons Learned from the Holocaust? Assessing Risks of Genocide and Political Mass Murder since 1955,” *American Political Science Review* 97, no. 1 (2003): 66-8; Valentino, *Final Solutions*, 16-22; Valentino, Huth, and Balch-Lindsay, “Draining the Sea,” 394; Matthew Krain, “State-Sponsored Mass Murder: The Onset and Severity of Genocides and Politicides,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 41, no. 3 (1997): 346 & 351.

<sup>51</sup> Scott Straus, “Second-Generation Comparative Research on Genocide,” *World Politics* 59, no. 3 (2007): 481.

<sup>52</sup> Mueller, “The Banality of ‘Ethnic War.’”

<sup>53</sup> Valère Philip Gagnon, *The Myth of Ethnic War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), 178.

driving (or “master”) cleavage.<sup>54</sup> And a range of other qualitative case studies finds mere cultural difference between identities of limited importance in violence.<sup>55</sup> Even peaceful fractures of identity often prove to be driven by issues other than identity. There is evidence that some of the early, non-violent steps towards the breakup of Yugoslavia were more motivated by frustrations over the heavy redistribution of tax revenues between the different (and highly economically unequal) republics and related economic crises than by deep animosity between ethnic groups.<sup>56</sup> And surveys suggest that support for independence in the Scottish referendum campaign was not driven primarily by perceptions of incompatibility between Scottish and British identity, but by economic issues and ideological differences with the Conservative UK government over welfare policy.<sup>57</sup> Again, Kalyvas’ advice is well heeded – just because political conflicts occur *between* groups of differing identities, does not mean that identity is actually a key *driver* of the conflict.

Still, it is not the case that identity plays no role in contemporary political violence – and some of these more sceptical presentations go too far in dismissing the role of identity (and, indeed, other ideological phenomena) out of hand. Identities can exacerbate and intensify conflict. Wucherpfennig et al. find that civil wars in which one party sees itself as fighting on behalf of excluded ethnic groups tend to last considerably longer than other civil wars.<sup>58</sup> Kaufmann, despite the problems of his firm conceptual distinction between ideological and ethnic civil wars, still importantly finds that civil wars which have an ethnic quality are far more intractable than those which do not.<sup>59</sup> Weak social cohesion between groups also appears to increase the risks of terrorist violence,<sup>60</sup> and Krain tentatively finds that ethnic fractionalization increases the *severity* of state mass murder (though not the chances of its onset) – though he finds that states with large majorities and small minorities (rather than very divided states with many large groups) see the worst instances of mass killing.<sup>61</sup> And whilst Harff does not find measures of ‘divided societies’ a good predictor of mass killing, she does suggest that ‘exclusionary ideologies’, that reject the legitimate membership of some specific groups of society, are a key predictor.

We do need, then, causal accounts of the role of identity in political violence. But the upshot of my argument so far is threefold. First, accounts of the role of identity cannot simply ascribe causal weight to it whenever conflicts appear to be between distinct groups. Given the number of identities in the world, and the number of personal identities any individual could in principle attach salience too, such superficial patterns tell us very little about political violence – the overwhelming majority of lines of difference between individuals, after all, see no conflict at all.<sup>62</sup> Second, where identity is important, it operates through complex, contingent, and varying pathways, suggesting that there is little value in sweeping narratives about its ‘contemporary’ role. To the degree that the identitarian narrative amounts to pointing at various contemporary conflicts that seem to have some identity-based dimension, this would be possible in almost any period of modern history, from the national revolutions of the late 1840s; to the wars of extermination against the Native Americans; to the genocides and mass killings of the first half

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<sup>54</sup> Stathis N. Kalyvas, “The Ontology of “Political Violence”: Action, and Identity in Civil Wars,” *Perspectives on Politics* 1, no. 3 (2003): 475-6. See also: Fearon and Laitin, “Violence and the Social Construction of Ethnic Identity,” 846.

<sup>55</sup> See: Fearon and Laitin, “Violence and the Social Construction of Ethnic Identity,” 859-60 & 868-72.

<sup>56</sup> Malešević, *Identity as ideology*, 169-83; Fearon and Laitin, “Violence and the Social Construction of Ethnic Identity,” 858.

<sup>57</sup> <http://www.theguardian.com/politics/scottish-independence-blog/2014/feb/12/scotland-referendum-sirtomhunter>

<sup>58</sup> Sanín and Wood, “Ideology in civil war,” 216.

<sup>59</sup> Kaufmann, “Possible and Impossible Solutions,” 138-51.

<sup>60</sup> Institute for Economics and Peace, Institute for Economics and Peace, *Global Terrorism Index 2014* (Sydney, 2014), 40-41.

<sup>61</sup> Krain, “State-Sponsored Mass Murder,” 353.

<sup>62</sup> Malešević, *Identity as ideology*, 159-61.

of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century against the Herero, Namaqua, Armenians, Pontic Greeks, Jews, Ukrainians, Kikuyu, Poles, Chinese and others; to the Balkan Wars, Arab-Israeli conflict, Eritrean War of Independence, Tamil rebellion, and dozens of other available armed conflicts. Gartzke's and Gleditsch's finding that 'there is little evidence that [intercultural] conflicts have become more prevalent after the Cold War' looks rather unsurprising when we take stock of the vast range of superficially or genuinely identitarian conflict over history.<sup>63</sup> Third, when identity does play a role, it is as part of a broader matrix of ideological perceptions, beliefs, attitudes, commitments, meanings and motives – without which the links between identity and violence make little sense. It is the content of identities which matters for conflict, not just the existence of distributions of different identity labels, and that content is substantive and ideologically embedded.<sup>64</sup> Claims that conflict is 'no longer about ideology' rely on crude, narrow and idiosyncratic conceptions of ideology that stymie efforts to understand the motivational complexity of violence.

## II. From Identity to Violence

The alternative approach to theorising the links between identity, ideology and political violence sketched here embraces the real world complexity of these phenomena.<sup>65</sup> Parsimonious treatments of identity and ideology may be useful in certain circumstances, but tend to rest on superficial characterisations of individual conflicts gleaned from common-sense discourse that bear little relation to a contextually rich empirical reality. Whilst degrees of simplification are at the heart of all effective theory-building, the detailed identification of specific causal mechanisms linking identity to violence will generate more knowledge than sweeping and misleading single narratives about modern conflicts being 'about identity'.<sup>66</sup> Following from the discussion in part one, this approach starts with a number of plausible stipulations about identity:

- (i) Identities (notions of individual or group selfhood) are components of broader ideologies (the distinctive systems of ideas that shape individuals' perceptions of their political and social world and their behaviour in that world).
- (ii) Both identities and ideologies are mental phenomena – complex sets of information stored in memory that shape cognitive processing.<sup>67</sup> Given that there are not truly such things as 'group minds', all talk of shared identities or ideologies represents something of an abstraction, but a productive and benign one. Just as every individual's way of speaking is unique, every individual's personal ideologies and identities are unique. But just as we can still productively talk about people speaking the same language when their ways of speaking are similar, so we can talk about people sharing ideologies or identities when their ways of thinking and their notions of selfhood are sufficiently alike to enable meaningful generalisations to be made about them.<sup>68</sup>
- (iii) Roughly speaking, all components of ideologies can fulfil two different (though deeply interrelated) roles: a descriptive/interpretative role which conveys meaning, information, and purportedly factual beliefs about the world, and a normative/affective role which attaches felt evaluative valences to objects and

<sup>63</sup> Gartzke and Gleditsch, "Identity and Conflict," 55 & 72-3.

<sup>64</sup> Russell Powell and Steve Clarke, "Religion, Tolerance and Intolerance: Views from Across the Disciplines," in *Religion, Intolerance and Conflict: A Scientific and Conceptual Investigation*, eds. Steve Clarke, Russell Powell, and Julian Savulescu (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 16-18.

<sup>65</sup> Gartzke and Gleditsch, "Identity and Conflict," 77; Kalyvas, "Ontology of Political Violence," 476. See also: Thomas Homer-Dixon et al., "A Complex Systems Approach to the Study of Ideology: Cognitive-Affective Structures and the Dynamics of Belief Systems," *Journal of Social and Political Psychology* 1, no. 1 (2013): 341-4.

<sup>66</sup> Fearon and Laitin, "Violence and the Social Construction of Ethnic Identity," 874.

<sup>67</sup> See, in general: van Dijk, *Ideology: A Multidisciplinary Approach*; Suny, University of California, *Why We Hate You*.

<sup>68</sup> See also: Homer-Dixon et al., "A Complex Systems Approach," 346-7.

actions in the world and imagined future worlds.<sup>69</sup> Such valences shape desires, motivations, interests and prescriptive (including moral) beliefs about what to do. Indeed, recent research in psychology and neuroscience demonstrates that without affective attachments to outcomes, objects and actions, human beings face extreme difficulty in engaging in even the most basic acts of decision-making.<sup>70</sup> Recently, political science has begun to grapple with this, abandoning notions of an opposition between ‘rational’ and ‘emotional’ decision making.<sup>71</sup>

- (iv) Individuals possess multiple notions of selfhood: familial, communal, class, ethnic, national, political, gender, religious, corporate, and so on. All of these are identities – identity is not limited to ethnic and national conceptions of selfhood. Such identities vary in content, affective strength and quality, social prominence, and context of relevance – many may, at least most of the time, be fairly unimportant to the individual and other individuals in their society. But all can, in principle, be ‘activated’ as salient in a particular political context (a critical process), and such activation is primarily achieved through reference to broader ideological claims and notions which impute significance into the identity in question.
- (v) Identities can be self-identities or other-identities – that is, individuals possess notions of both their own selfhood and the selfhood of others as parts of their broader ideologies. Importantly, an individual’s sense of the identities of others can diverge from those others’ own sense of their identity. In other words, the *subjectively felt* and *socially ascribed* content and salience of individual identities do not need to line up – a society or group may care very strongly, for example, that an individual is a ‘Jew’ even if that identity has no salience for the individual themselves, and society’s conception of what a ‘Jew’ is may bear little relation to the conceptions of those deemed to be ‘Jews’.<sup>72</sup> Identities are not always self-generated and personal, they may be ascribed and even forcibly imposed.<sup>73</sup>

Building on this basic framework for thinking about identities, I suggest that we can better theorise how identity matters in political violence by identifying a number of distinct (though overlapping and mutually reinforcing) causal mechanisms through which identity encourages violence.<sup>74</sup> In order to emphasise the need to move away from crude pictures of identity conflict as rooted in ‘ancient hatreds’ or other portrayals of intense, fanatical hate-filled violence, I discuss the mechanisms in a rough order of increasing affective strength, with only the last one or two mechanisms corresponding to such classic depictions of identitarian violence.

### 1. Mobilisation Coordinates

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<sup>69</sup> In some disciplines or paradigms scholars argue that this distinction is considered false, see, for example: Raymond Geuss, *Philosophy and Real Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008). I’m aware of such claims but, whilst lacking space to enter into the debate here, consider them deeply misguided.

<sup>70</sup> Todd H. Hall and Andrew A.G. Ross, "Affective Politics After 9/11," 2-10; Suny, University of California, *Why We Hate You*, 3-5 & 9-15.

<sup>71</sup> Rose McDermott, "The Feeling of Rationality: The Meaning of Neuroscientific Advances for Political Science," *Perspectives on Politics* 2, no. 4 (2004); Hall and Ross, "Affective Politics.," Suny, University of California, *Why We Hate You*; Wendy Pearlman, "Emotions and the Microfoundations of the Arab Uprisings," *Perspectives on Politics* 11, no. 2 (2013); Paul Thagard, "The Cognitive-Affective Structure of Political Ideologies," in *Emotion in group decision and negotiation*, ed. B. Martinovski (Berlin: Springer, 2014 [forthcoming]).

<sup>72</sup> Gerlach, *Extremely Violent Societies*, 260.

<sup>73</sup> Kaufmann, "Possible and Impossible Solutions," 143-4.

<sup>74</sup> Though of equal number, these mechanisms bear no one-to-one relation to the six *justificatory mechanisms* of mass killing I have identified elsewhere (though there are many points of overlap), see: Leader Maynard, "Rethinking the Role of Ideology." The mechanisms proposed here are a more targeted set eliciting the links between identity constructs and violence.

Large scale political activities present substantial collective action and coordination problems from the perspectives of *both* leaders and followers. The former need to articulate appeals, ideas and interpretations of social problems that effectively mobilise support, the latter need to organise backing for or contestation of leaders they favour or oppose, advance collective action on issues of a local nature (which may not map on to elite concerns), seek participation in co-operative ventures (including institutions and established procedures) which appear to further their interests, and through all of these avoid an ennui-inducing sense of futility and political alienation. Ideologies provide rich repertoires for achieving such top down and bottom up mobilisation, with identities typically the most prominent part of that repertoire.<sup>75</sup> Leaders try to induce similar action from those who appear to share basic similarities, and ordinary individuals try to shape leaders' behaviour, tackle local issues, and seek out others like them or institutions that appear open to them in order to engage in collective action (though the degree of presumed correlation between particular *identities* and common *interests* is a key and contingent variable here). Leaders may also be able to use affirmations of their own identity as a way of generating trust and credibility in unstable information environments where populations need to choose who to believe whilst lacking ways to carefully interrogate their reliability – further facilitating mobilisation.<sup>76</sup>

A now extensive literature on democratization and nationalism rests on an awareness of these dynamics: when democratization (or possibly other forms of regime collapse) dislocate traditional channels of coordinated collective action, leaders seek to produce new co-ordinates for collective action by increasing the salience of those identities they prefer to mobilise around.<sup>77</sup> The critical choice of *which* identities to use should reflect two variables – a) the relative prominence, familiarity, and emotional resonance of extant identities in members of the social context in question and b) the ideological preferences of those seeking to mobilise. Many socialist movements around the globe failed because of an ideologically-rooted determination to keep articulating appeals built around (largely European) class identities that made little sense in local contexts, and eschewing more powerful national, communal or religious identities on doctrinal grounds. Conversely, as already noted, the Soviet Union gained much mobilising capital through nationalist appeals, disregarding the tensions these had with Marxism's internationalist theoretical doctrine.

But there is no *a priori* reason why some sorts of identities should be always expected to be stronger than others. The fundamental weakness of Arab nationalism, after a brief heyday in the 1950s and 60s, has persisted into the modern era.<sup>78</sup> As recent events remind us, religious identities have tended to offer far more powerful lines of mobilisation and conflict the Middle East, where the (rather distinctly) European story of manufacturing nations after the 17<sup>th</sup> Century wars of religion does not apply.<sup>79</sup> Indeed, in most of the post-colonial world, there is a weak general correlation between dominant identities and states' territorial boundaries, with state nationalism often lacking resonance and unable to triumph over longer standing ethnic, communal, religious, caste or political identities.<sup>80</sup> This is one reason why mobilisation coordinates are not always limited to those within one's state, but can be directed at external actors – whether diaspora members, members of a contiguous ethnic group that crosses borders, or patron states like the Cold War superpowers.

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<sup>75</sup> See, in general: Fearon and Laitin, "Violence and the Social Construction of Ethnic Identity."

<sup>76</sup> See also: Leader Maynard, "Combating Atrocity-Justifying Ideologies.;" Leader Maynard, "Rethinking the Role of Ideology," 7-8.

<sup>77</sup> Edward D. Mansfield and Jack Snyder, "Democratization and the Danger of War," *International Security* 20, no. 1 (1995); Jack Snyder, *From voting to violence: democratization and nationalist conflict* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2000); Gagnon, *Myth of Ethnic War*, 188-9.

<sup>78</sup> Fouad Ajami, "The End of Pan-Arabism," *Foreign Affairs* 57, no. 2 (1978).

<sup>79</sup> See: Anderson, *Imagined Communities*; Suny, University of California, *Why We Hate You*, 15-21.

<sup>80</sup> Gartzke and Gleditsch, "Identity and Conflict," 61-2.

## 2. Targeting Categories

Purposeful violence also requires conceptual schemas in its perpetrators' ideologies to sort out who violence is meant to be directed *against*.<sup>81</sup> Benjamin Valentino, Paul Huth and Dylan Balch-Lindsay have influentially argued that mass killing tends to reflect the inability of states to successfully identify guerrillas with precision, making the extermination of a broad group the most effective military strategy.<sup>82</sup> One of the most common ways identities affect patterns of violence, therefore, is by addressing this targeting problem, and serving as simple concepts that specify apparently appropriate objects of violence. In parallel, Scott Straus emphasises that as a form of group-selective violence, genocides are in an important sense not indiscriminate (and the point stands for all forms of group-selective violence). They involve violence perpetrated against particular individuals on the basis of their membership in certain groups, groups denoted by identity concepts which are deemed salient in perpetrators' ideologies.<sup>83</sup>

Often the identity concepts used in the selective distribution of violence are embedded and long-lasting, but this is not always the case. Political violence in the Soviet Union, for example, was conducted against a wide range of identities, several of which were largely novel creations of regime ideology (such as 'kulaks' or 'Zinovievites') and some of which were more or less amorphous national groups reified by the regime.<sup>84</sup> In waging a campaign notionally aimed at America, in an effort to force it to stop killing Muslims and withdraw from the Middle East, al Qaeda and its various progeny organisations have used 'Western' identity as a targeting logic, frequently killing members of societies that cannot remotely be expected to influence American policy (though it should be remembered that the bulk of al-Qaeda violence has been targeted at fellow Muslims).<sup>85</sup> In trying to liberate Algeria from French occupation, the Front de Libération Nationale similarly targeted "European" civilians as a contrasting category with Algerians.<sup>86</sup> And in World War II, British and American air forces frequently engaged in area bombings against cities because they were 'German' or 'Japanese' with relatively low prioritisation of the actual military significance (let alone civilian culpability) of the targets.<sup>87</sup>

Targeting categories rest on associational, collectivising logics: whether collective punishment, the perception of groups as representing some sort of structural threat due to their racial, class, institutional or other social position, or some other reasoning. They thus illustrate clearly the lethal power of collective labels or 'demonyms'. Once discourse becomes orientated around categories like 'Japs', 'Gooks', or 'the Soviets', vast groups of people can be reified as a single collective actor, with members of that group seen as uniformly and equally blameworthy for whatever acts are attributed to 'them' (obviously this phenomenon runs through many of the mechanisms discussed here, not just targeting categories). Crucially, members of targeting categories may be attacked *with or without* intense affective animosity towards the members of the group. Often it may be the mere fact that violence against a particular identity is permitted by higher authorities that allows on-the-ground perpetrators to engage in violence against them for other reasons entirely. In other words, by being placed in targeting categories, victims can

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<sup>81</sup> Sanín and Wood, "Ideology in civil war," 219.

<sup>82</sup> Valentino, Huth, and Balch-Lindsay, "Draining the Sea."

<sup>83</sup> Scott Straus, *Making and Unmaking Nations: The Origins and Dynamics of Genocide in Contemporary Africa* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2015 [forthcoming]), Ch.1. C.J.M. Drake makes the same point regarding terrorism, see: C.J.M. Drake, "The Role of Ideology in Terrorists' Target Selection," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 10, no. 2 (1998): 53 & 60.

<sup>84</sup> Wendy Z. Goldman, *Inventing the Enemy: Denunciation and Terror in Stalin's Russia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); James R. Harris, "The Purging of Local Cliques in the Urals Region, 1936-7," in *Stalinism: New Directions*, ed. Sheila Fitzpatrick (London: Routledge, 2000), 280.

<sup>85</sup> Haynes, "Al Qaeda."

<sup>86</sup> Drake, "Role of Ideology," 60.

<sup>87</sup> Richard J. Overy, "'The Weak Link'? The Perception of the German Working Class by RAF Bomber Command, 1940-1945," *Labour History Review* 77, no. 1 (2012): 27; Bellamy, *Massacres and Morality*, 151.

become targets of opportunity for violence driven by a panoply of different motives.<sup>88</sup> In Yugoslavia, for instance, Serb forces were relatively efficient in targeting the groups deemed by Serb leaders to be appropriate targets of violence. If Mueller is right that many perpetrators were opportunistic criminals rather than deeply convicted nationalists,<sup>89</sup> it would still appear that they often deployed the identity schemas articulated by Serbian elites in identifying which families and communities to target, plunder and rape. So the fact that identities are used to co-ordinate the targeting of violence need not, and frequently does not, mean that hatred of that identity drives the violence at the level of direct perpetrators. But nor does the lack of such hatred make the identity category causally irrelevant – far from it.

### 3. *Virtue Systems*

A third way that identity can influence patterns of violence is through more specific normative codes, standards, ideal self-images and norms that are attached to specific identities, forming essential parts of the normative ideals espoused by broader ideologies. As argued throughout this paper, identities are ideationally ‘thick’, involving a complex array of different notions, images, beliefs, and attitudes beyond a mere label. Importantly, almost all identities have a normative dimension – as part of being socialised into certain types of identity, individuals are socialised into the explicit and implicit codes of expected and valorised behaviour associated with those identities. Such codes of behaviour govern external social responses of praise and ridicule, and also shape the internal moral compass of individuals – together, these generate potent drives towards certain forms of action so as to obtain positive moral self-identity.<sup>90</sup> These ‘virtue systems’<sup>91</sup> that inhere within identities are important building blocks of the moral order in any group or society, and powerful sources of legitimation by political actors (again, the aforementioned Cold War discourse of ‘American values’ is a classic example).<sup>92</sup>

In the justification of political violence, mobilisers frequently appeal to the normative codes within identities.<sup>93</sup> Violence can be made to look permissible and even desirable by appealing to those qualities valorised in the self-ideals individuals feel deep emotional pulls to approximate – appeals to ‘loyalty’, ‘manliness’, ‘duty’, ‘strength’, ‘toughness’, ‘courage’ and similar provide a particularly common forms of such ‘virtuetalk’.<sup>94</sup> But identities are not all equally predisposed towards the sort of machoistic values and virtues that most easily facilitate violence. Some identities, those dominant, for instance, inside the sorts of hooliganistic gangs emphasised by Mueller in Serbian violence, vicious militia forces like the Interahamwe, conventional militaries, or especially brutal fundamentalist religious groups like Islamic State, appear to heavily adulate violence and brutality. But other identities – those of more pacific religious denominations, humanitarian organisations, most civilians, many professional identities (like doctors), or nations or communities that strongly identify with peace – may generate radically different social and psychological responses to violence.<sup>95</sup> The normative content of dominant identities may thus be a crucial influence on the likelihood of violence. And like targeting

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<sup>88</sup> Kalyvas, “Ontology of Political Violence,” 475-6 & 483-7; Fearon and Laitin, “Violence and the Social Construction of Ethnic Identity,” 868-72.

<sup>89</sup> Mueller, “The Banality of ‘Ethnic War.’”

<sup>90</sup> Henri Tajfel, “Social identity and intergroup behaviour,” *Social science information* 13, no. 2 (1974): 67-72; Cohrs, “Ideological Bases of Violent Conflict,” 66; Sanín and Wood, “Ideology in civil war,” 219-220.

<sup>91</sup> Leader Maynard, “Rethinking the Role of Ideology.”; Jonathan Leader Maynard, “Ideologies and Mass Violence: The Justificatory Dynamics of Deadly Atrocities” (Doctoral Thesis in Politics, University of Oxford, 2014), 139-44.

<sup>92</sup> Huddy, “From Social to Political Identity: A Critical Examination of Social Identity Theory,” 133-7 & 143-5.

<sup>93</sup> Garrett O’Boyle, “Theories of Justification and Political Violence: Examples from Four Groups,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 14, no. 2 (2002).

<sup>94</sup> Leader Maynard, “Ideologies and Mass Violence,” 139-44. See also: Fearon and Laitin, “Violence and the Social Construction of Ethnic Identity,” 869-70.

<sup>95</sup> Sanín and Wood, “Ideology in civil war,” 221.

categories and mobilisation coordinates, virtue-systems attached to identities can encourage violence even in the absence of deep, specific animosities towards those that end up being its victims.

#### 4. *Obligation Hierarchies*

Helen Fein has influentially deployed the concept of ‘the universe of obligations’ to capture the important reality that, beyond a relatively small number of global cosmopolitans, most individuals have a (perhaps loosely defined) boundary on those to whom they perceive that morally regulated behaviour is due.<sup>96</sup> We can nuance this claim a little by recognising that most groups do not have a single in-out moral universe, but obligation hierarchies. Though perhaps ultimately grounded in variables like behaviour (thus most societies place criminals in a lower level of due obligations in light of their crimes) and relationships (many feel stronger obligations to their family or local community in light of special ties),<sup>97</sup> such hierarchies tend to be schematised efficiently through identities – obligations owed to ‘fellow Britons’, to ‘party members’, ‘felons’, or other labelled groups.<sup>98</sup> For most individuals, then, identities can be used to sort expanding concentric circles of decreasingly intense obligations. The intensely different affective weight placed on the deaths of, for example, fellow nationals, fellow members of what is seen as the ‘civilised’ world, and those in the chaotic ‘uncivilised’ world beyond suggest that moral hierarchies of obligation and concern remain very real even in relatively liberal and cosmopolitan societies that officially declare commitments to universal human rights.<sup>99</sup>

But these obligation hierarchies are not fixed and natural, they are ideological constructs – and critical moves can be made by ideological producers in attempting to re-shuffle the positions of some groups or individuals in the obligation hierarchy.<sup>100</sup> The successful spread of human rights norms rests at the micro-level on the development of legal procedures and ideological attitudes which flatten the hierarchy of obligations – with strong duties of moral treatment being extended beyond narrow communal, political or ethnic groups to encompass at least a broader proportion of individual societies, and ideally humanity as a whole.<sup>101</sup> Conversely, violence can be legitimated by the steepening of obligation hierarchies, emphasising obligations to certain identities – co-ethnics, communal kin, political allies, or whatever – and dampening or eliminating felt obligations towards other identities. Though anti-Semitism was certainly extensive in Germany prior to Hitler’s rise to power, the Nazis engaged in a vast propagandistic effort over the course of (especially the second half of) the 1930s to remould Germans’ sense of moral obligations as tracking exclusive racial or national lines. As Hans Frank, Hitler’s governor of occupied Poland, put it: “We will principally have pity on the German people only and nobody else in the whole world.”<sup>102</sup> Likewise, in their brief period in power the Khmer Rouge

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<sup>96</sup> Helen Fein, *Accounting for Genocide: National Responses and Jewish Victimization during the Holocaust* (New York: Free Press, 1979), 4.

<sup>97</sup> Jeremy Waldron, “Special Ties and Natural Duties,” *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 22, no. 1 (1993): 5-7; David Miller, *On nationality* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995).

<sup>98</sup> Daniel Goldhagen, *Worse Than War: Genocide, Eliminationism and the Ongoing Assault on Humanity* (London: Abacus, 2010), 248-9.

<sup>99</sup> See: Geret Gong, *The Standard of 'Civilization' in International Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984).

<sup>100</sup> Valentino, *Final Solutions*, 17 & 20; Alexander Laban Hinton, “Introduction: Genocide and Anthropology,” in *Genocide: an anthropological reader*, ed. Alexander Laban Hinton (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2002), 5-6 & 9-12; Christian Tileagă, “Ideologies of moral exclusion: A critical discursive reframing of depersonalization, delegitimization and dehumanization,” *British Journal of Social Psychology* 46, no. 4 (2007): 721-2; Donald G. Dutton, *The Psychology of Genocide, Massacres and Extreme Violence: Why 'normal' people come to commit atrocities* (Westport, CT: Praeger Security International, 2007), 33 & 37.

<sup>101</sup> Thomas Risse-Kappen, Stephen C. Ropp, and Kathryn Sikkink, eds., *The power of human rights: International norms and domestic change* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

<sup>102</sup> Wolfgang Bialas, “Nazi Ethics: Perpetrators with a Clear Conscience,” *Dapim: Studies on the Holocaust* 27, no. 1 (2013): 20.

vigorously sought to impose a moral order in which ‘the ideal new communist citizen would be able to ‘cut off his or her heart’ from the enemy who was “not real Khmer.”’<sup>103</sup>

## 5. *Victimhood*

Like mobilisation coordinates and normative codes, victimhood is another form of in-group-identity process. Victimhood captures a range of ways in which individuals assert that their own identity is the target of violence (or other moral violations) by others, raising its salience.<sup>104</sup> It is widely recognised that by far the most dominant justification for political violence is the assertion of threats from others,<sup>105</sup> or assertions of crimes committed by others against the in-group.<sup>106</sup> By articulating such threats or crimes, mobilisers seek to raise the perceived salience of certain identities for those who hold them by telling audiences that it is on the basis of those identities that they are in danger or have been maltreated, in the process deepening lines of division with those other identities deemed to embody the guilty party.

Thus, shortly after the assassination of Rwandan President Juvénal Habyarimana, Mbonyumutwa Kayibanda, the son of former President Grégoire Kayibanda, announced on radio that: “[The Tutsi] are going to exterminate, exterminate, exterminate. They are going to exterminate till they alone remain in this country, so that the power their fathers have kept for four hundred years they themselves can keep for one thousand years!”<sup>107</sup> The Memorandum of the Serbian Academy of Sciences, often cited as laying the ideological foundations for Serbian violence in the 1990s, likewise affirmed that: “Except for the period of the existence of the NDH [the Croatian fascist state established by Nazi Germany], Serbs were never so endangered as they are today”.<sup>108</sup> In using such accusations to legitimate violence, there is thus a considerable degree of psychological projection going on in many assertions of victimhood, ‘leading to a situation,’ as Malešević observes, ‘where mass killers saw themselves as true victims.’<sup>109</sup> Assertions that the in-group is the victim of huge threats or terrible crimes has been shown to consistently yield a number of psychological changes in audiences conducive to violence – producing, as Daniel Chirot and Clark McCauley summarise: “an increased feeling of [in-group] togetherness... increased respect for leaders, increased idealization of in-group values, and increased readiness to punish deviates from in-group norms.”<sup>110</sup>

## 6. *Group hatred*

The final and most affectively intense mechanism by which identities can influence violence is as an actual object of hatred. For a range of reasons individuals can come to passionately oppose,

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<sup>103</sup> Hinton, “Introduction: Genocide and Anthropology,” 15.

<sup>104</sup> Jervis, “Identity and the Cold War,” 27-8.

<sup>105</sup> Kaufmann, “Possible and Impossible Solutions,” 142-5; Philip Zimbardo, *The Lucifer Effect: How Good People Turn Evil* (London: Rider Books, 2007), 11; Martin Shaw, *What is Genocide?* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007), 86; Suny, University of California, *Why We Hate You*, 23-4.

<sup>106</sup> Suny, University of California, *Why We Hate You*, 30 & 39-41; Hugo Slim, *Killing Civilians: Method, Madness and Morality in War* (London: Hurst & Company, 2007), 139-43; Fearon and Laitin, “Violence and the Social Construction of Ethnic Identity,” 864-7.

<sup>107</sup> Semelin, *Purify and Destroy*, 174.

<sup>108</sup> Eric D. Weitz, *A Century of Genocide: Utopias of Race and Nation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 195-6.

<sup>109</sup> Malešević, *Identity as ideology*, 223-5; Susan Benesch, “Dangerous Speech: A Proposal to Prevent Group Violence,” <http://www.worldpolicy.org/susan-benesch> (accessed 15 Oct 2012).

<sup>110</sup> Daniel Chirot and Clark McCauley, *Why Not Kill Them All?: The Logic and Prevention of Mass Political Murder* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 65. See also: Hammack, “Narrative and the Cultural Psychology of Identity,” 224 & 233; Herbert C. Kelman, “Social-Psychological Dimensions of International Conflict,” in *Peacemaking in International Conflict: Methods and Techniques*, ed. I. William Zartman (Washington D.C.: United States Institute of Peace, 2007), 83-6; Cohrs, “Ideological Bases of Violent Conflict,” 60.

abhor, feel disgust towards, or rage at those who are *perceived as* members of other groups divided by lines of relevant difference. But again, those lines of relevant difference are themselves ideological constructions injected with salience on the basis of certain reasons: they are produced by the actual thick ideological content of individuals' feelings about specific identities rather than just an irrational spontaneous hatred of those under a different label. Germans under the Nazis did not just hate Jews apropos of nothing, but absorbed a welter of ideological assertions about their subhumanity, criminal guilt in German defeat in World War II, parasitical nature, participation in a global conspiracy, and so forth. Though some such ideas had been present in Germany for centuries, their intense dissemination by state propaganda and through tightly bounded social networks in the post-World War I environment inculcated ideological shifts in attitudes towards Jews.<sup>111</sup> These ideas were causal, not mere window dressing on an unchanging and eternal German-Jewish hatred. Contrary to the narratives of Western media, politicians and some scholars,<sup>112</sup> members of different ethnicities in Yugoslavia, it is now well established, did not generally possess long-standing acrimonious relationships or mutual hate. Indeed, in a 1964 survey, 73% of Yugoslavians sampled described relationships between ethnic groups as good, and in 1966 85.3% of Croats and 81.7% of Serbs showed only slight ethnic distance towards other Yugoslavian ethnic groups.<sup>113</sup> Regarding the Armenian Genocide, Gerlach reports, "a number of observers held that local Muslim-Armenian relations were good and changed only under the circumstances, or never, and many credible sources testify to local opposition to the persecution and killing."<sup>114</sup> Mass killings in Bangladesh (then East Pakistan) in 1971 were superficially bound up with the struggle of Bengalis for independence from Pakistan – but again, prior polling does not reveal deep and long-standing identitarian cleavages behind the conflict. In a survey of East Bengali college students in 1964, only 29% even called themselves Bengalis, and 74% still identified as Pakistanis.<sup>115</sup> As one Bengali housewife stated after the violence of 1971: "I had never thought of people as Hindus or non-Bengalis or whatever, but all that had changed suddenly."<sup>116</sup>

This is an ideological change, induced through 'hypernationalist rhetoric', rumours of genocidal threats, hate speech, and other ideological productions that shift understandings of self- and other- identities. These dynamics, again, are not peculiar to ethnic or national identity. Fundamentally the same sorts of hate-encouraging rhetoric and disseminatory strategies were deployed to whip up anger against kulaks in the Soviet countryside under Stalin, against perceived representatives of the bourgeoisie and corrupt establishment in China under Mao or Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge, and against purported communists in mass killings in Indonesia in 1965-66.<sup>117</sup>

These mechanisms may not comprise an exhaustive set, but they define some of the major causal links between identity and violence. They should be underscored by two crucial points. Firstly, for the first four of the six mechanisms, identities cannot be constituted as primary drivers of violence – but they do shape its patterning and may intensify it, ease mobilisation for it, help expand the numbers who may participate, and/or expand its likely scope. They illustrate how

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<sup>111</sup> Leader Maynard, "Ideologies and Mass Violence," Ch.4; C.C. Aronsfeld, *The Text of the Holocaust: A Study of the Nazis' Extermination Propaganda, from 1919-1945* (Marblehead, MA: Micah Publications, 1985); Michael Burleigh, *The Third Reich: A New History* (London: Pan Books, 2001).

<sup>112</sup> For example: Goldhagen, *Worse Than War*, 211 or John Major as cited in Charles Tilly, *The Politics of Collective Violence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 95.

<sup>113</sup> Malešević, *Identity as ideology*, 176.

<sup>114</sup> Gerlach, *Extremely Violent Societies*, 115.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 125.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 175. See also: *ibid.*, 161.

<sup>117</sup> Lynne Viola, "The Second Coming: Class Enemies in the Soviet Countryside, 1927-1935," in *Stalinist terror: new perspectives*, eds. John Arch Getty and Roberta T. Manning (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Bellamy, *Massacres and Morality*, 237-259; Gerlach, *Extremely Violent Societies*, 22-47.

identity can be a crucial part of the ideological dynamics of violence, but in a facilitative or ancillary fashion and not as its principal cause. Even for the fifth and sixth mechanisms – victimhood and group hatred – identities can be a mere exacerbating or facilitative factor, and the degree to which they really lie ‘at the heart’ of the conflict is likely to be complex, and vary from individual to individual. This raises the second point – conflicts as a whole cannot simply be sorted into one or other of these six identitarian mechanisms. Violence is perpetrated by heterogeneous groups of individuals, who are not only likely to differ from one another in what role identity plays for them, but even as individuals act from a complex interweaving of different motives.<sup>118</sup> Studying the role of identity in individual conflicts has to occur within a theoretical framework orientated around such motivational diversity and complexity.

### III. Conclusion – Identity and Political Violence in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

This paper has demonstrated that the identitarian narrative as commonly articulated and reproduced is unsustainable, generating crude, inaccurate and conceptually and theoretically implausible understandings of contemporary political violence. But, as I have noted, the identitarian narrative gains its intuitive traction from some kernels of truth. In the long history of violent conflict, much has not changed, but the exact position of identity (and ideology more broadly) isn’t completely static. By recognising the problems with the identitarian narrative described in section I and working within the framework laid out in section II, it is possible to derive a much more plausible set of theoretical claims about what might be changing in the role of identity in the post-Cold War era and into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

Still, our initial answer should be ‘not much’. The causal mechanisms described in section II rest on fairly basic social and psychological dynamics that can be found across democratic and authoritarian regimes, throughout the world’s continents, and stretching back for much of recorded history. Frequently, various forms of the identitarian narrative suggest that globalisation is bringing identity to the fore in conflict by undermining traditional structures of identity, loyalty and political control.<sup>119</sup> But this seems to rest on a dubiously presentist perspective where the bright, easily visible and fine-grained changes of our own time make past transformations seem comparatively dull and glacial. But traditional structures are always under assault by various forces and agents of change, and it’s far from clear that the end of the Cold War and present ‘second wave’ of globalisation puts more pressure on established identities than accelerating European colonization in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, the first wave of globalisation in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries, or European breakdown, decolonization, and the spread of Cold War ideologies after the Second World War.

But what Kaldor’s new wars thesis, in particular, may get right is that these past changes generally involved the centralisation of military, political, ideological and economic power – in the European empires, Soviet and American led Cold War blocs, or nation-state regimes.<sup>120</sup> By contrast, the present wave of globalisation – largely because it occurs in a context where outright territorial annexation has been delegitimised and even weak or non-existent states are legally reified as bearers of sovereignty – has a critical fragmenting quality to it in many parts of the world (though not all – indeed economic globalisation and technological advancement may

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<sup>118</sup> Sanín and Wood, “Ideology in civil war,” 218; Chirot and McCauley, *Why Not Kill Them All?*, 20-44; Michael Mann, *The Dark Side of Democracy: Explaining Ethnic Cleansing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 26-9; Ervin Staub, *The Roots of Evil* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 38-43; Dutton, *The Psychology of Genocide*, 115-122; Scott Straus, “The Order of Genocide: The Dynamics of Genocide in Rwanda,” *Genocide Studies and Prevention* 2, no. 3 (2007): 261; Lars Waldorf, “Ordinariness and Orders: Explaining popular participation in the Rwandan Genocide,” *Genocide Studies and Prevention* 2, no. 3 (2007): 267; Michael Mann, “Were the Perpetrators of Genocide ‘Ordinary Men’ or ‘Real Nazis’? Results from Fifteen Hundred Biographies,” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 14, no. 3 (2000): 332-3 & 357-8; Kalyvas, “Ontology of Political Violence,” 476 & 483.

<sup>119</sup> Kaldor, *New and Old Wars*, 3rd ed., 3-14; Malešević, *Sociology of War and Violence*, 315-19.

<sup>120</sup> See also: Michael Mann, *The sources of social power*, 4 vols., vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

strengthen the world's major powers and their governments).<sup>121</sup> In the context of erosive pressures on the state, the power of centralised ideological producers is undermined, increasing the utility of identity as mobilising co-ordinates and obligation hierarchies, and increasing the number of actors who are able and willing to get in on the mobilising game.

Again, there's no principle reason why these identities need to be the sort of ethnic, national or religious identities the identitarian narrative emphasises. But the two variables that I have suggested may determine which identities are likely to be chosen to justify violence (first, the prominence and resonance of available identities, and second, the ideological interests of leaders) can explain why ethnic, national and religious identities appear to be in the ascendant. The end of the Cold War, rather than imbuing such identities with new strength, removed the advantages of competing capitalist-communist labels in their role as mobilising co-ordinates, targeting categories, virtue systems, obligation hierarchies, sources of victimhood and objects of group hatred, for several reasons.<sup>122</sup> Many users of these labels never were deeply committed to the fuller ideologies they were associated with in the first place – but in a bipolar world the capacity of these labels to mobilise external support from the superpowers was immense. And for those who *were* sincere believers (and there were many) the collapse of the Soviet Union vastly undermined the optimism and credibility of those sympathetic to communism, and eroded the resonance of capitalist-communist divides in a world where this conflict seemed so visibly finished.

'Ideological differences' have not disappeared. Aside from the fact that all identity is ideological, visible and deep ideological divergences exist between major powers in the modern world: between secular liberalism and political Islam, between the approach of states beholden to the 'Washington consensus' and those of the 'Global South'; or between cosmopolitan humanitarians/'liberal crusaders'/advocates of the responsibility to protect, and nationalists/sovereignists/authoritarian regimes. These ideological divides are frequently emblemised in identities – so we hear of clashes between 'Western' and 'Asian' values, the 'West' and 'Islam', or the 'first' and 'third' worlds. But this use of identities as simple heuristic devices that embody thick ideological and cultural differences is nothing new – again, communist and capitalist were also easy identitarian labels that subsumed deeper and more complex political worldviews.

Different identities do shape violence differently, but the relevant variables are not just about the ethnic or non-ethnic nature of the identity in question. Kaufmann suggests a distinction between ideological identities (which he views as 'soft' – i.e. easily changeable), religious identities (harder to change) and ethnicity (the hardest of all),<sup>123</sup> the implication being that ethnic identities lead to the most vicious and intractable conflicts. This is one reasonable inference, all other things being equal, but the rigidity of identities is not the only thing which shapes their violence-intensifying capacity. The sheer size of groups matters, and in a nonlinear manner. There are good reasons to believe that very small and rather large group labels can be particularly dangerous – the former because they are so vulnerable,<sup>124</sup> the latter because they are more likely to span political borders, occupy patchworks of territories, and form a very expansive category of potential targets for violence (though *extremely* large groups might generate some deterrent effect for violence against them). Highly elastic identities (i.e. those with very unclear criteria) can also be extremely dangerous, since they encourage perpetrators to 'cast the net widely', and give huge freedom for both top-level and local organisers of violence to use such labels to eliminate whoever they choose.

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<sup>121</sup> Rogers Brubaker and David D. Laitin, "Ethnic and Nationalist Violence," *Annual Review of Sociology* 24 (1998): 424; Peter Evans, "The Eclipse of the State? Reflections on Stateness in an Era of Globalization," *World Politics* 50, no. 1 (1997); Susan Strange, "The Defective State," *Daedalus* 124, no. 2 (1995).

<sup>122</sup> Brubaker and Laitin, "Ethnic and Nationalist Violence," 424-5.

<sup>123</sup> Kaufmann, "Possible and Impossible Solutions," 141.

<sup>124</sup> See also: Krain, "State-Sponsored Mass Murder," 353.

For all these variables (malleability, size, elasticity) there are not fixed answers for ethnicity, nationality, religion or any other sort of identity. Similarly, the content of identities – including their specific virtue systems, obligation hierarchies, and victimhood or group hatred narratives – is also highly variant. Globalisation may have increased the gap between important political identities and states, the collapse of the cold war may have decreased the dominance of capitalist-communist identities and somewhat increased religious, civilizational, ethnic or regional identities. But above all else, these changes have resulted in the multiplication of available identities and those different centres of power who seek to deploy them. In this context, there is no use for totalising narratives about identity. Our efforts to build knowledge of the role of identity in violence in the modern world require a more attuned mapping of the particular sorts of identity and the dominant identitarian mechanisms through which they are being used in individual conflicts. It requires attention to the content of identities, to causal complexity, and to equifinality in moving from identity to violence. Above all, it requires the integrated analysis of identity and ideology.

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