

Nationalism, Ethnic Conflict, and Rationality

By Ashutosh Varshney

Why do we have so many ethnic partisans in the world ready to die as suicide bombers? Does a rational calculus lie beneath the nationalist pride and passions? Can it be discovered if only we apply our understanding of rationality more creatively? This article seeks to answer these questions by focusing on the nationalism of resistance. It argues that a focus on dignity, self-respect, and recognition, rather than a straightforward notion of self-interest, is a better prism for understanding ethnic and nationalist behavior, although self-interest is not entirely absent as a motivation in ethnic conflict. In the process of developing this argument, a distinction once made by Max Weber—between instrumental rationality and value rationality—is recovered and refined further.

No more arresting emblems of the modern culture of nationalism exist than cenotaphs and tombs of Unknown Soldiers. . . . They are either deliberately empty or no one knows who lies inside them. . . . The cultural significance of such monuments becomes even clearer if one tries to imagine, say, a Tomb of the Unknown Marxist or a cenotaph for fallen Liberals. Is a sense of absurdity avoidable? The reason is that neither Marxism nor Liberalism is much concerned with death and immortality. If the nationalist imagining is so concerned, this suggests a strong affinity with religious imaginings. . . .

—Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 1983

Are identities rational? Are identity-based conflicts? If one goes by the history of ideas, these questions have mostly been answered in the negative. Let me give two illustrations.

In a celebrated essay, Czech novelist Milan Kundera argues that science and novels were born together. Indeed, novels were made necessary by science, for “the more [man] advanced in [scientific and rational] knowledge, the less clearly could he see . . . his own self . . . and he plunged further into what . . . Heidegger called . . . ‘the forgetting of being.’”¹ Following this argument to its logical end, Kundera claims that the question of identity—Who am I?—belongs to the realm of *being*, not to the domain of *rationality*. The latter deals with the question, How do I get what I want? The two questions may sometimes be related—what I may be able to get may begin to define how I see myself and my goals—but they are not the same.

Kundera’s argument is about identity per se, not about national or ethnic identity. Is it that national identities are held for rational reasons? The customary answer is even more emphatically negative. Isaiah Berlin, arguably the foremost historian of ideas

of the past century, informs us that the notions of national identity and nationalism were born with the Counter-Enlightenment. As the French Enlightenment celebrated the triumph of rationality, emphasizing its universality and objectivity, a reaction took place, especially in German-speaking Europe. The Enlightenment intellectuals argued that “methods similar to those of Newtonian Physics . . . could be applied with equal success to the fields of ethics, politics and human relationships in general.”² Johann Gottfried von Herder, who would later be called a leading patron of the Counter-Enlightenment, disagreed: “Germans must be Germans and not third-rate Frenchmen; life lies in remaining steeped in one’s own language, tradition, local feeling; uniformity is death.”³ The reaction was both against “the deathly embrace of impersonal, scientific thought” and the French cultural hegemony of Europe.⁴ In a similar vein, Johann Gottlieb Fichte delivered his *Addresses to the German Nation*. It was 1808–1809; the Germans, spread among Prussia, Bavaria, Bohemia, and Silesia, were yet to be born as a nation under one political roof. Herder and Fichte, Berlin argues, were the ideational fathers of nationalism.⁵ Indeed, nationalism as an idea arose as a romantic revolt against the universalizing and rationalizing thrust of the Enlightenment.

Can the child of the Counter-Enlightenment be analyzed in an Enlightenment framework? Has rationality, after more than two centuries of progress since the Enlightenment, developed capacities to deal with human passions, emotions, and values in an illuminating manner? Is it that beneath the nationalist pride and passions lies a rational calculus, which can be discovered if only we apply our understanding of rationality more creatively?

Recovering a duality first proposed by Max Weber, I suggest that ethnic or national conflict is best conceptualized as a combination

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of “value rationality” and “instrumental rationality.” Both of these rationalities are expressions of goal-directed behavior, but their conceptions of costs widely diverge. Instrumental rationality entails a strict cost-benefit calculus with respect to goals, necessitating the abandonment or adjustment of goals if the costs of realizing them are too high. Value-rational behavior is produced by a conscious “ethical, aesthetic, religious or other” belief, “independently of its prospects of success.”⁶ Behavior, when driven by such values, can consciously embrace great personal sacrifices. Some spheres or goals of life are considered so valuable that they would not normally be up for sale or compromise, however costly the pursuit of their realization might be. The means to achieving these objectives might change, but the objectives themselves would not.

The term *value-rational* does not, of course, mean that the values expressed by such behavior are necessarily laudable. Indeed, the values in question may range from pure pride or prejudice (*vis-à-vis* some groups or belief systems) to goals such as dignity, self-respect, and commitment to a group or a set of ideals. Likewise, value-rational acts can range from long-run sacrifices for distant goals to violent expressions of prejudice or status.

Most of the time and in most places, ethnic or national mobilization cannot begin without value-rational microfoundations. For it to be instrumentally used by leaders, ethnicity must exist as a valued good for some. However, ethnic mobilization cannot proceed on value-rational grounds alone. Strategies are necessary; coalitions must be formed; the response of the adversary—the state, the opposed ethnic group, the in-group dissenters—must be anticipated. And many would join such mobilization, when it has acquired some momentum and chance of success, for entirely selfish reasons. The *origins* of ethnic mobilization are thus value-rational, and its *evolution* may contain a lot of strategic behavior.

To illustrate this argument in ample detail and for tractability, I shall restrict my analytical focus to only one kind of nationalist or ethnic behavior. A useful distinction is often made between the nationalism of exclusion and the nationalism of resistance.⁷ The idea, of course, is quite old. The nationalism of anticolonial movements was never comparable to the nationalism of Hitler.

In the nationalism of exclusion, a dominant group within a society—domestic or foreign—seeks to impose its own values on the various other groups within that society or seeks to exclude, sometimes violently, other ethnic groups from the portals of power. Typically, this takes the form of enforcing language, religion, or culture via control of the state, or excluding groups from power on the basis of ethnic characteristics only. In the nationalism of resistance, a dominated group opposes such a move and seeks to preserve its cultural identity and resist the hegemony and power of the dominant group.

I will argue that dignity and self-respect form the microfoundations of the latter kind of nationalism or ethnic behavior. Driven by such values, resisting nationalists are willing to endure very high costs—and for long periods of time. The cost-benefit calculus in such behavior does not work in a way that can be easily aligned with a standard account of instrumental rationality. Indeed, long time frames, a radical uncertainty of results, and the

serious possibility of high costs that usually accompany the nationalism of resistance make such an alignment extremely difficult.

As scholarly work proceeds further, the concept of value rationality will need greater unpacking. I take the first steps here by concentrating on only one kind of nationalism: the nationalism of resistance. I am certain that dignity and self-respect cannot be the microfoundations of all forms of ethnic or nationalist behavior. Pending later work, for example, it is reasonable to suppose that the nationalism of exclusion is driven substantially by hatred and/or deep-rooted condescension: Afrikaner nationalism in South Africa, the anti-Semitism of Hitler, and Hindu nationalism in India would be some examples. In what follows, the claim of dignity and self-respect applies only to the nationalism of resistance, not to the nationalism of exclusion.⁸

Terms and Distinctions

Let me start with definitions of the principal terms used here: *ethnicity*, *nation*, and *rationality*. Not having the same meaning for everyone, these terms need clarification.

Ethnicity is used in two different ways. In the narrower, popularly understood sense, ethnic groups are racial or linguistic groups. There is, however, a broader meaning as well. As Donald Horowitz suggests,⁹ all conflicts based on ascriptive (birth-based) group identities, real or imagined—race, language, religion, tribe, or caste—can be called ethnic. In this larger usage, ethnic conflicts can range from (1) the Protestant-Catholic conflict in Northern Ireland and the Hindu-Muslim conflict in India to (2) the black-white conflict in the United States and South Africa and the Malay-Chinese conflict in Malaysia, (3) the Quebecois problem in Canada and the Tamil-Sinhala conflict in Sri Lanka, and (4) Shia-Sunni troubles in Pakistan. In the narrower view, the first of these examples are religious, the second racial, the third linguistic, and the fourth sectarian. The term *ethnic* has customarily been used in the past for the second and third types of conflicts, not for the first and fourth.

Proponents of the broader usage do not find the narrower distinctions analytically helpful. They argue that the form these conflicts take—religious, racial, linguistic, tribal—does not change their intensity or relative intractability. The broader meaning of *ethnic* is now increasingly prevalent in the social sciences; I will use the term in this way.

Also, for the purposes of this paper, the terms *ethnicity* and *nation* can be used interchangeably. If the discussion were about why some ethnic conflicts remain bounded within the existing state boundaries while others gravitate toward independence, a distinction between the two terms would be essential. Ethnic groups, as we know, can live without a state of their own, making do with some cultural rights (e.g., use of mother tongue in schools) or affirmative action; but a nation means bringing ethnicity and statehood together.¹⁰ This distinction, however, is not necessary for our purposes here, because the discussion is about a whole class of conflicts, which are framed in terms of national identity or ethnicity.

What about our third key term, *rationality*? In its standard economic usage, the term refers to instrumental rationality, and it

has two meanings. First, it means consistency of choice: if I prefer A over B and B over C, then I must prefer A over C. The second meaning is identical with self-interest. Action is rational if it is aimed at realizing self-interest. If costs of an action outweigh benefits, self-interest will not be served; hence a cost-benefit calculus accompanies analysis based on self-interest.

In philosophical discussions, rationality refers to “reasoned assessment as the basis of action.”¹¹ Such an assessment can be based on self-interest but also on larger values. Self can be broadly defined in terms of group goals, national identity, religious values, aesthetic considerations, and so on. This larger view would also include what Weber called “value rationality.” In *Economy and Society*, Weber categorized social action into four types: instrumental-rational, value-rational, norm-oriented (based on conventions and traditions, without critical deliberation), and affective or impulsive (the expression of anger, envy, love, et cetera).

The alternatives to instrumentally rational behavior are thus not simply emotional or irrational behavior.¹² Of the four Weberian categories of human action, the first two are goal-directed, only one of which is instrumental-rational, whose unique feature is a strict cost-benefit calculus with respect to goals and means. Such calculus may lead not only to a change of means for the realization of goals, but also to an alteration of goals if the costs of attaining them are prohibitive. Value-rationality is distinguished by a continual pursuit of goals, even if the costs of realizing them are high; it shows a high degree of commitment.

Which of these categories of behavior is represented by the term *rational choice* often used in economics and political science? Almost without exception, it is instrumental rationality with which rational-choice theorists identify. They either do not speak of goals, concentrating instead on the means; or they assume that self-interest is the goal of human action. I will, therefore, use these two terms—*instrumental rationality* and *rational choice*—interchangeably in this paper. But I will not equate rationality with rational choice.

These distinctions have some important implications for a discussion of rationality. In a standard rational-choice account, there is considerable resistance to the idea that different motivations can underlie behavior in different spheres of life: that it may be perfectly rational for human beings to be instrumentally rational while buying a car, but value-rational while responding to questions of national liberation, school choice for children, affirmative action, or multiculturalism in universities.¹³ Moreover, rational choice also remains highly skeptical of the notion that individual action can be rooted in group interests, not self-interest. Value-rational behavior would not find identification with group interests irrational.

What else can we say about value-rationality? According to Weber, as already noted, value-rational behavior is pursued “independently of its prospects of success.”¹⁴ That notion, in my view, is best seen as an ideal type, or a pure case of value-rationality. Any reasonable notion of value-rational behavior cannot be insensitive to costs. A more realistic reformulation of Weber’s notion is required. In order to provide that, let me use the simple economic concept of elasticity.

From development microeconomics, we know that demand for food is relatively, not absolutely, insensitive to price—people must eat, however expensive food might become—whereas demand for TV sets and cars is remarkably sensitive to price, suggesting thereby low price elasticity of demand for the former and high elasticity for the latter. We can similarly argue that value-rational behavior is relatively inelastic with respect to costs. A fully inelastic behavior as in the Weberian ideal type—with value-rational behavior on the horizontal axis and cost/price on the vertical—would be represented by a flat line, but low-elasticity behavior would slope downward, like demand curves, although the slope would not be as steep, as in the case of highly elastic goods such as cars. In this economic analogy, value-rational behavior is more like the demand for food, and instrumental-rational behavior like the demand for cars and TV sets.¹⁵

There is no doubt that an instrumentally rational—or rational choice—understanding of human behavior has made remarkable progress over the years, extending into newer directions and fields. Behavior covered by such reasoning and models ranges from economic decision making of consumers and firms to nuclear politics, legislative and bureaucratic behavior, and political mobilization and ethics. Indeed, the list of topics to which rational-choice models have been applied continues to grow.¹⁶

In principle, one cannot object to pushing a mode of analysis to fields where it was not applied before. Indeed, several new insights in the world of knowledge are generated precisely this way. Much has been learned on political mobilization by exploring the idea that the self-interest of individuals and the interest of the group to which they belong are two different things: class conflict may therefore be more latent than overt.¹⁷ The prisoner’s dilemma game has taught us better than many other models that rationally behaving individuals may generate a macro outcome that is suboptimal for all. Similarly, how self-seeking political and bureaucratic behavior, as opposed to the selfish behavior of economic agents in competitive markets, can lead to a wasteful use of society’s economic resources and hamper economic growth is a problem where rational choice has been especially useful as an explanatory tool.¹⁸

The issue therefore is not whether rational-choice theories explain human behavior at all. More germane is the question of whether rational-choice theories are especially relevant to a specific class of problems and a particular realm of human behavior, and if so, in what ways that realm might be different from others.¹⁹ In this realm-specific spirit,²⁰ I ask whether and how far rational-choice theories can account for ethnic behavior and conflict, dominated as they often are by mass politics, not by the institutionalized forms of bureaucratic or legislative politics.²¹

The Big Gap: Where Do Ethnic Preferences Come From?

Before ethnic conflict can be explained, a rational-choice analyst is confronted with a twofold task: providing microfoundations of ethnic behavior and explaining ethnic mobilization. To begin with, one has to account for why individuals have, or develop, ethnic preferences. Can such preferences be explained instrumentally—i.e., as a means to a self-interested end (political power,

economic benefit, survival)? And since it would be instrumentally rational, given self-interest, for individuals to free ride, explaining ethnic mobilization requires specifying conditions under which it would not make sense for individuals to free ride and, in fact, it would be rational to join an ethnic movement or mobilization.

The standard rational-choice accounts assume that ethnicity can be seen instrumentally. They focus primarily on how leaders strategically manipulate ethnicity for the sake of power.²² This argument has an intuitive appeal because the behavior of many, if not all, political leaders can be cited in support.

If presented in this form, the instrumental-rational argument about ethnicity runs into a serious difficulty. The elite may indeed gain power by mobilizing ethnic identity without believing in it themselves, and could therefore behave instrumentally. But if the masses were only instrumental about ethnic identity, why would ethnicity be the basis for mobilization at all? Why do the leaders decide to mobilize ethnic passions in the first place? Why do they think that ethnicity, not the economic interests of the people, is the route to power? And if economic interests coincide with ethnicity, why choose ethnicity as opposed to economic interests for mobilization?

In principle, a rational-choice resolution of these problems exists. Ethnicity can serve as a focal point, facilitating convergence of individual expectations, and hence can be useful as a mobilization strategy. The idea of focal points comes from Thomas Schelling's seminal treatment of the coordination problem in bargaining. In the famous Schelling example:

When a man loses his wife in a department store without any prior understanding on where to meet if they get separated, the chances are good that they will find each other. It is likely that each will think of some obvious place to meet, so obvious that each will be sure that the other is sure that it is obvious to both of them.²³

Schelling goes on to propose that without having an intrinsic value for the couple, the lost-and-found section of the department store could be one such place. It will, however, not be a focal point if there are too many lost-and-found sections in the store. A focal point is distinguished by its prominence or uniqueness: it has the instrumental power of facilitating the formation of mutually consistent expectations. Schelling then generalizes the principle:

Spontaneous revolt may reflect similar principles: when leaders can easily be destroyed, people may require some signal for their coordination, [which is] . . . so potent in its suggestions for action that everyone can be sure that everyone else reads the same signal with enough confidence to act on it, thus providing one another with immunity that goes with action in large numbers.²⁴

Ethnicity, in other words, can be viewed as one such focal point for mobilization; it is not valued for its own sake. Its mobilizational potential may be deployed by leaders to extract goods and services from the modern sector, or to establish their own power.

The idea of a focal point is not sufficient to explain ethnic mobilization, for it does not distinguish between different kinds of collective action and what their respective costs might be.

Ethnic *mobilization* for political action is not the same as ethnic *coordination* for economic and social activities. By providing a social occasion, festivals may indeed bring people together even if not everyone appreciates the ritual meaning of celebration or mourning; and by forming mutually converging trust, geographically spread ethnic kinsmen are also known to have supplied credit in long-distance trade without a prior explicit contract between trading partners.

The analogy of a focal point, however, cannot be extended to group action when the costs of participation for the masses are very high. By its very nature, ethnic mobilization in politics is group action not only in favor of one's group *but also against some other group*. More rights and power for my group often mean a diminution in the ability of some other group(s) to dictate terms, or a sharing of power and status between groups where no such sharing earlier existed; in the extreme cases, it may even entail the other group's displacement from power or status. Ethnicity in *intragroup* social or economic transactions is thus very different from ethnicity in *intergroup* political conflicts. The former illustrates the value of ethnicity as a focal point; the latter presents problems of a different order. When an individual provides credit to ethnic brethren without an explicit contract, incarceration, violence, injury, or death is not likely the cost he has to keep in mind.²⁵ But depending on how the adversarial group or the state reacts, such costs are not unlikely in ethnic or national conflicts.

Consider the famous 1930 Salt March in India. The British rulers monopolized the manufacture and retailing of salt. Seizing a symbol that even the illiterate masses could relate to, Mahatma Gandhi argued that the British insulted Indians by not letting them freely make and sell something as basic as salt in their own country and by levying a salt tax. He went on to lead a nonviolent mobilization against salt laws and was later arrested. Civil disobedience continued even after his arrest. An American journalist gave the following eyewitness account of the early phase of the movement:

The salt deposits were surrounded by ditches filled with water and guarded by four hundred native . . . police in khaki shorts and brown



Photo credit: Hulton-Deutsch Collection/CORBIS

Gandhi on the Salt March, 1930

turbans. Half a dozen British officials commanded them. The police carried . . . five-foot clubs tipped with steel. . . .

In complete silence, the Gandhi men drew up and halted a hundred yards from the stockade. A picked column advanced from the crowd, waded the ditches, and approached the barbed-wire stockade. . . . Police officials ordered the marchers to disperse. . . . The column silently ignored the warning and slowly walked forward. . . .

Suddenly, at a word of command, scores of . . . police rushed upon the advancing marchers and rained blows on their heads with their steel-shod clubs (*lathis*). Not one of the marchers even raised an arm to fend off the blows. They went down like tenpins. From where I stood I heard the sickening whacks of the clubs on unprotected skulls.

. . . In two or three minutes the ground was quilted with bodies. . . . Although every one knew that within a few minutes he would be beaten down, perhaps killed, I could detect no signs of wavering or fear. . . . The marchers simply walked forward until struck down. There were no outcries, only groans after they fell.

. . . I went back to the temporary hospital to examine the wounded. . . . I counted 320 injured, many still insensible with fractured skulls, others writhing in agony.²⁶

Other examples of this kind of resolve can also be cited. Consider the civil-rights movement of the United States in the 1960s. "In the Black community . . . going to jail was a badge of dishonor."²⁷ And what kind of jails are we talking about?

Freedom riders, by all accounts, had a miserable time in the jails. They were crowded into small, filthy cells, forced to sleep on concrete floors, fed unpalatable food, prevented from maintaining personal hygiene, intimidated, harassed, and sometimes beaten by unfriendly guards.²⁸

As if these were small discomforts for black civil-rights activists, we also have accounts of marches at night, even though "[u]nder cover of darkness, a violent response by the police or by local vigilantes was almost assured. When civil-rights activists conducted a night march in Marion, state troopers attacked and beat them after the street lamps were intentionally blacked out."²⁹

Finally, similar behavior can be noted in South Africa's history. A violent repression or a harsh jail sentence was a near certainty, once Nelson Mandela and his colleagues decided frontally to challenge the apartheid regime on behalf of Africans. In the end, Mandela himself and many of his colleagues were jailed in Robben Island. The harsh and grim prison conditions did not crush their spirit. The experience only clarified that—given the objective of racial equality—the resolve to fight the dominant group, the Afrikaners, would have to weather such suffering. Mandela wrote:

Robben Island was without question the harshest, most iron-fisted outpost in the South African penal system. . . . The warders were white and overwhelmingly Afrikaans-speaking, and they demanded a master-servant relationship. They ordered us to call them "*baas*," which we refused. The racial divide on Robben Island was absolute: there were no black warders and no white prisoners. . . . [J]ourneying to Robben Island was like going to another country. Its isolation made it not simply another prison, but a world of its own, far removed from the one we had come from. The high spirits with which we left

Pretoria had been snuffed out by its stern atmosphere; we were face to face with the realization that our life would be unredeemably grim. In Pretoria, we felt connected to our supporters and our families; on the island, we felt cut off and indeed we were. We had the consolation of being with each other, but that was the only consolation. My dismay was quickly replaced by a sense that a new and different fight had begun.³⁰

After 27 years on Robben Island, Mandela did walk to triumph and freedom; but in 1962, when he was jailed, there was a good chance he would end up dying there. It was a life sentence after all, and he knew it beforehand. The same was true of his many fellow prisoners, if not to the same degree.

These examples illustrate a simple point, widely understood by activists in such struggles. *Ex ante* possibility of violence or coercion almost always accompanies ethnic or national resistance. Mobilization for ethnic or national protest cannot thus be equated with solving problems of economic or social coordination through the ethnic bond. It is a special kind of collective action, for the costs of resistance or mobilization are often known to be high.

Although exact estimates are hard to produce, it is generally agreed that in this century, many more people have died for a nation or an ethnic group—presumed or actual—than for joining a supranational economic collectivity, such as the European Economic Community, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, or the North American Free Trade Agreement.³¹ Moreover, fighting for higher prices, subsidies, and wages, and for more jobs, does not necessarily generate as much passion and violence as does ethnic or nationalist mobilization. The masses have often been much more willing to come out on the street for ethnic issues than for economic ones.³² If they did not value ethnicity, why would they respond so passionately to ethnic appeals?

For something to be manipulated by a leader when death, injury, or incarceration is a clear possibility, it must be valued as a good by a critical mass of people, if not by all. A purely instrumental conception of ethnicity cannot explain why leaders mobilize ethnic or national identities at all. The point is analogous to Jon Elster's famous objection to an instrumental conception of norms: "Some argue that . . . norms . . . are tools of manipulation, used to dress up self-interest in a more acceptable garb. But this cannot be true. . . . If some people successfully exploit norms for self-interested purposes, it can only be because others are willing to let norms take precedence over self-interest."³³

Epistemological Comforts of Home?

In the first available rational-choice work on ethnic conflict, Alvin Rabushka and Kenneth Shepsle explicitly recognized that microfoundations of ethnic behavior were hard to provide in a strictly rational-choice framework. They argued:

[A] bothersome question remains. . . . Why . . . are conflicts in [plural] societies not organized along economic lines? Our answer is that politicians exert control over the definition of alternatives, often relying on ethnic appeals. But why this *particular* choice?

. . . If . . . the ethnic issue were a facade foisted upon an electorate not receptive to those issues simply to suit the motives of strategically

advantaged politicians, then one might expect successful political recourse to be taken by the “losers.”

Although other issues may affect politics in plural societies, we assert the preeminence of ethnicity. We are not able to explain its genesis. A satisfactory explanation of this problem awaits two developments:

1. a formal explanation of the formation, development and endurance of values and preferences, and
2. a positive theory of political entrepreneurship.

. . . With these two developments, then we could more persuasively account for the preeminence of ethnicity in the plural society.³⁴

Three decades have passed since Rabushka and Shepsle wrote their book. Do we now have an “explanation of the formation, development and endurance of values” in a rational-choice framework?

In the most ambitious, sophisticated, and erudite rational-choice work on ethnic conflict so far, Russell Hardin takes up the challenge.³⁵ He seeks to provide such microfoundations and also use them to explain ethnic mobilization and conflict. His proposal is threefold. First, “self-interest can often be matched with group interest” instrumentally. Identification with the group may be beneficial for two reasons: because “those who identify strongly with the group may gain access to positions under the control of the group” and because “the group provides a relatively secure and comfortable environment.” The identity between individual and group interests, he argues, can only be “contingent,” not “inherent,” but it is enough to touch off ethnic mobilization. Second, explanation of ethnic mobilization can’t be reduced to the problem of collective action where it is rational to free ride, or to a prisoners’ dilemma where it is rational to defect. In ethnic mobilization, “[t]he central strategic problem is merely one of coordination.” So as long as others in the group are cooperating, it is rational for me to cooperate—for if all cooperate, the likelihood of the group gaining power (or group objectives) goes up tremendously. “[P]ower based in coordination is superadditive, it adds up to more than the sum of individual contributions to it.” Third, all one needs to keep the coordination game going is a “charismatic leader,” a “focus,” and a mechanism through which information about others cooperating is provided. “Coordination power is . . . a function of reinforcing expectations about the behavior of others.”³⁶

Hardin’s proposal entails serious difficulties. First, even if I believe in group goals, contingently or inherently, it is not clear why it is rational for me to cooperate when others cooperate with one another. For if they are cooperating, and if “coordination power” is “superadditive,” then my group is very likely to come to power anyway and it is rational for me to take a free ride—unless, of course, someone is monitoring my actions and the nonparticipants will be excluded from the rewards of the group’s victory. Alternatively, my conscience could act as a monitor, giving me a sense of guilt or shame for not participating in group action even though I believe that the group’s interests are my interests. Without these monitoring mechanisms, the situation does not have a unique optimum, but two optima: both free riding and participating could be rational. In a purely logical sense, Hardin’s proposal thus requires monitoring of individual actions: internally or by others. The former entails an individual who is

more intrinsic than instrumental with respect to ethnicity (her conscience is her problem); and the latter is easy in small groups but monumentally difficult in large groups, even when an institutionalized regulation of individual behavior is devised. If the group action concerns my caste or tribe in a village or even a town, I may rationally coordinate: everyone knows me and I can be monitored. But if the group action is about an imagined ethnic or national community—involving many villages, towns, and states—I can escape detection if I cheat. Lacking the intimacy of small groups, how does one monitor an ethnic group or a nationality? The Hardin proposal thus cannot be size independent. A nation is not an intimately knowable, face-to-face community. It is a large, imagined community.

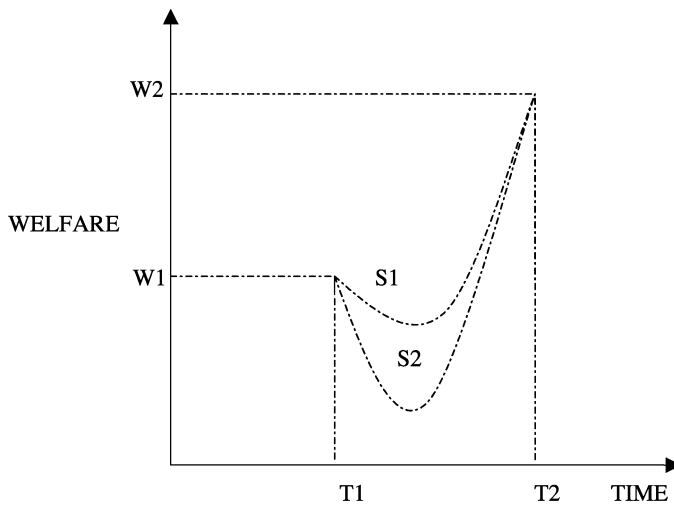
Second, why should ethnic or national mobilization be conceptualized as a coordination game, whereas other kinds of mobilization—such as peasant³⁷ or working-class mobilization³⁸—are more typical cases of collective action, crippled by free-rider problems? Must the group in question have some specific qualities that create “coordination” as the “central strategic problem,” preempting endemic free riding? Can we account for this difference in a rational-choice framework, or is some other theory required to establish the difference? If the latter question is chosen to explore why ethnic action is different from other group actions, then it is potentially damaging for rational-choice theories, for it may show that some kinds of preferences emerge in a nonrational framework.

Hardin has one such proposal about ethnicity: that it may provide “epistemological comforts of home” or, put alternatively, security of environment. This solution only re-states the problem. Why does “ethnicity” provide a home? Why can’t a trade union or a political party? The Communist experiment was, *inter alia*, premised upon the belief that the party would supplant the false consciousness of ethnicity and nation. After decades of trying, that experiment failed, and ethnicity has re-emerged—frighteningly so in several places. Once we believe that ethnicity can provide a home better than other groups can, we also accept that in a basic sense, the microfoundations of ethnicity are psychological, not rational.³⁹

Thus, whether or not I think that my interests and my group’s interests are different, the fundamental puzzle for instrumental rationality remains as follows: why should I, behaving in a purely instrumental-rational way, participate in group action before it is reasonably clear to me that the group is likely to win? Consider the structure of the problem diagrammatically (see Figure 1). At time T1, when my group is not in power, my personal welfare is at a low level (W1); I expect that at time T2, when my group is in power, my welfare will rise to W2. The problem simply is that at time T1, I don’t know *ex ante* how far away T2 is, and I also don’t know how big the costs in the meantime will be. Depending on what the adversaries do, the sacrifice required could be low (looking like S1) or high (S2). It is not rational for me to join at time T1; I should let others join and when the movement or mobilization is already substantial and very likely close to T2, it will be rational for me to participate.⁴⁰

To sum up, the microfoundations of the *origins* of ethnic mobilization are different from those that obtain once mobilization

Figure 1



has already acquired a considerable following, success, and visibility. To explain why ethnicity is privileged by leaders as a mobilization strategy, we must therefore look elsewhere. To make greater sense of the supply side of the story, we perhaps need an analysis of the demand side as well.

Alternative Microfoundations

A search for alternatives must start with answering two questions: Why can't instrumental rationality in and of itself suffice as a basis for human motivation? (What, for example, is the role of culture or religion in human life?) And how and why does culture or religion become a source of group conflict? Once we answer these questions, the microfoundations of the nationalism of resistance will become clear. My purpose is to show that noninstrumental considerations are highly important in the nationalism of resistance, laced as they are with notions of self-respect and dignity, not with a narrowly defined self-interest.

Why culture or religion?

Either instrumental rationality, as already stated, is a concept about the means and not about the ends, or the self-interest is assumed to be the end of human action. In any case, a serious problem arises requiring a discussion of ends.

Self-interest can certainly give us our immediate or intermediate ends, but can it also provide the ultimate ends or values? Indeed, if seen as a foundation of human life or as its ultimate goal, self-interest can promote, to paraphrase Hobbes, loneliness, nastiness, brutishness. It is not clear that any regulatory framework designed by human ingenuity can fully check the many acts of nastiness if self-interest is turned into a supreme value. For this reason, as well as for intrinsic moral or cultural reasons, human beings cannot live without notions of right and wrong, without notions that can guide them about how to relate to family, community, and loved ones.⁴¹

Religion—not rationality or its most monumental expression, science—is traditionally considered to provide such values. Albert Einstein argued forcefully:

For the scientific method can teach us nothing beyond how facts are related to, and conditioned by, each other. . . . Yet it is equally clear that knowledge of what *is* does not open the door directly to what *should be*. . . . Objective knowledge provides us with powerful instruments for the achievement of certain ends, but the ultimate goal itself and the longing to reach it must come from another source. . . . Here we face, therefore, the limits of the purely rational conception of our existence. . . .

To make clear these fundamental ends and valuations, and to set them fast in the emotional life of the individual, seems to me precisely the most important function which religion has to perform in the social life of man. . . .⁴²

Einstein's reasoning may also help us understand why some of the most distinguished scientists of the century have been greatly religious. Seen this way, rationality and religion belong to two different realms of human experience—the former having little to do with the ends of life.⁴³ For those uninspired by religion and some of its excesses, culture—a set of institutions and normative practices we live by, some coming from ethnic or national traditions—has been a source of such values. Culture replaces religion in the agnostic or unbelieving homes.

A rational-choice scholar may retort that culture does not exist on its own; it is a creation of individuals. What appears as an inheritance today was created by individual acts in the past, making it possible for analysts to explain the existence of culture instrumentally. In a fundamental sense, this view cannot be correct. Culture may indeed have been created by individuals, but each individual engaged in such creation was also acting in relation to an inherited set of practices. In order for an individual to create, affirm, deny, or innovate a set of cultural practices—and a good deal of that happens in everyday life—there has to be a pre-existing set of normative practices in the framework of which the creation, affirmation, denial, or innovation acquires meaning. A sentence or word has no meaning until a language exists. Cultural choices are thus different from buying a car or a house on the one hand and forming political strategies to defeat adversaries for political office on the other. Rational-choice theories may be more applicable to marginal decisions, less to decisions about how people choose fundamental values.⁴⁴

Another clarification is necessary. Placing emphasis on a pre-existing or inherited culture to explain ethnic behavior is sometimes seen as an endorsement of the "primordial" view of ethnicity. According to this view, ethnicity is an ascriptive given, existing for centuries and therefore stronger than modern or rational forms of human motivation or institutional designs. Man, argues a leading exponent of the primordial view, is an ethnic being, or a "national, not a rational animal."⁴⁵

The sense in which my account of alternative microfoundations relies on culture must be distinguished from the primordial view. Volition in the realm of culture and identity is indeed possible. Culture, ethnicity, and the nation can be—and are—often "constructed." Peasants were turned into Frenchmen in France;⁴⁶ in 1789 more than 50 percent of Frenchmen did not speak French at all, and "only 12–13 percent spoke it correctly."⁴⁷ Over a period of roughly a century and a half, a British identity was created out of the English, Scottish, and Welsh

identities.⁴⁸ “We have made Italy,” said Massimo d’Azeglio in a legendary statement; “now we have to make Italians.” Only 2.5 percent of the population spoke Italian as an everyday language at the time of the Italian Unification.⁴⁹ And as for identities at a level lower than the nation, some smaller castes in India, responding to the imperatives of an evolving political democracy, came together in a process of fusion to form larger castes changing established cultural patterns and divisions of centuries thereby, while others went through a process of fission.⁵⁰ All of these identities were constructed, but the point to note is that they were not constructed on a clean slate. The acts of creation, innovation, or denial drew their rationale, negative or positive, from an existing set of values. Culture, in this sense, is *embedded* in our life; it *preexists* as a framework of meaning, within which human deliberation and rationality operate. It is not just a privately underprovided public good, but an “irreducibly social good.”⁵¹

Why is culture or religion a source of conflict?

If culture and religion provide values, how can they lead to conflict? A simple answer would be that there are many such cultures and many religions, and their central tendencies clash. However, as far as the nationalism of resistance is concerned, the issue is not cultural or religious diversity per se, but a relationship of dominance, subordination, and differential worth that often gets historically built into many group relations, if not all.

Structurally speaking, groups in a society can be ranked or unranked.⁵² The hierarchical nature of the former is manifestly clear: slavery in the United States and black-white relations in South Africa during apartheid are among the best known examples. Similarly, in the Hindu caste system, the “lower” castes constitute an overwhelming majority but the tiny “upper” castes have enjoyed ritual superiority and most of the power until recently.

However, sometimes even if groups are structurally unranked—in that a legal or deeply embedded ritual hierarchy does not mark their interrelationship—domination or subordination could be discursive.⁵³ Some groups may argue that they are the “sons of the soil,” hence deserving of greater political, economic, or cultural privileges.⁵⁴ In Malaysia, the Malays make this claim vis-à-vis the Chinese and the Indians; in Sri Lanka, many Sinhalese do so with respect to the Tamils; Hindu nationalists in India would like the Hindus to have a higher status than the Muslims; and the followers of Le Pen would give more privileges to French Europeans than to the North African immigrants in France. Those who came earlier to a land have often argued that they are more entitled to political privileges or to a preeminent place in the national culture than those who came later.

By itself, of course, a structural or discursive hierarchy does not engender ethnic or group conflict. Indeed, many from the disadvantaged groups may opt for what M.N. Srinivas called “Sanskritization”—i.e., the attempt on the part of the ritually subordinate Hindu castes to follow the life-styles of the upper castes.⁵⁵ Elsewhere, Antonio Gramsci spoke of “hegemony” to describe how the subaltern may share the world view of the rich and the powerful.⁵⁶ Those ascriptively placed lower on the social

scale may accept their inferior status as given. A hierarchy based on birth can exist without causing group conflict.

We need, therefore, to ask a historical question: when did human beings begin to question the idea of an ascriptive group hierarchy? In a work that has attracted wide attention, Charles Taylor has made two compelling arguments.⁵⁷ First, in premodern times, one’s identity—as in, Who am I, and where am I coming from?—was given or fixed by one’s place in the hierarchical social structure. It was not negotiated. The rise of modernity has led to an increasing decay of traditional social hierarchies—ideationally and/or structurally. As a result, for the first time in history a new individual motivation has arisen: a self-awareness of *dignity*. One does not take one’s “station” as inevitable. Second, the pursuit of dignity and self-respect is not monological, but dialogical. The “dialogue” takes place in a social context. Hermits may define dignity monologically, but the more general pursuits of dignity require recognition from society. This is especially so because society is not a random collection of individuals; rather, it comes with a historical inheritance of perceptions and misperceptions. Our identity as modern human beings

is partly shaped by recognition or its absence, often by the *misrecognition* of others, and so a person or groups of people can suffer real damage, real distortion, if the people or society around them mirror back to them a confining, demeaning, or contemptible picture of themselves. Nonrecognition or misrecognition can inflict harm, can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted, and reduced mode of being.⁵⁸

Thus, even if structural group hierarchy is absent, a discursive hierarchy, laced with “confining, demeaning, or contemptible” pictures for some groups, may well exist. Crude illiberal prejudice or hatred is, of course, an obvious source for such views. But the problem is much more complex. It is worth recalling that until this century, even well-meaning liberals believed in group-based notions of civility and barbarism. In one of the founding texts of liberalism, John Stuart Mill argued:

Nobody can suppose that it is not beneficial to a Breton, or a Basque of the French Navarre, to be brought into the current of ideas and feelings of a highly civilized and cultivated people—to be a member of the French nationality . . . than to sulk on his own rocks, the half-savage relic of past times, revolving in his own little mental orbit, without participation or interest in the general movement of the world. The same remark applies to the Welshman or the Scottish Highlander, as members of the British nation.⁵⁹

In the modern world, thus, two different notions of dignity and worth have often been at odds: one stemming from the culturally inherited conceptions of groups as better or worse, and another arising out of a decline of social hierarchies and the rise of equality. The latter seeks to undermine the former by challenging the inherited structure or discourse of group hierarchy.

The question of microfoundations—where ethnic or national preferences come from in the nationalism of resistance—can now be more precisely phrased. What are the implications of a historically and culturally structured notion of ascriptive hierarchy for

the individual-group interaction in modern times? How does an individual feel group relations?

An individual may end up defining a core of her identity in terms of her group because she is defined as such by society, a definition over whose origins she has no control but one whose reordering will not take place unless efforts are made to compel society to change its recognition. The question is not simply one of waiting for others to launch the effort and taking a free ride. The individual would like to participate in the effort because she can't live a "reduced mode of being": she would feel less of a human being, or not able to respect herself, if she did not participate. Her self-respect, her dignity, is involved.

An account of the microfoundations of ethnic or national resistance thus requires sensitivity to historically inherited attitudes and power relations among many groups, if not all. By starting with individuals and not the cultural or historical inheritances and power relations within which individuals may be embedded, a typical rational-choice account misses much of what motivates ethnic or nationalist behavior. In the process, it is unable to account for some of the most important and persistent phenomena noted by students of ethnicity. Why, for example, do the minorities typically feel the group identity much more strongly than do the dominant groups? People, whether from the dominant or the subordinate group, are mere individuals in a purely instrumental framework. When Isaiah Berlin said that Jews tend to "have longer memories," that "they are aware of a longer continuity as a community than any other which has survived," and "geography" is what they historically lacked,⁶⁰ he was making a statement about his community that was incomprehensible in purely instrumental terms. Why keep memories? Why should geography matter? Why not change identity, instead of finding geography to match history? Structured patterns of dominance and subordination and a history of suffering have customarily shaped answers to these questions, not pure instrumental rationality.

Value Rationality and Ethnic Mobilization

The explanation above explores only the microfoundations of ethnic resistance. It does not account for ethnic mobilization. How are the microfoundations and ethnic mobilization related? Three mechanisms can be specified.

First, a critical mass of individuals having a strong group identification is all that one needs to explain the origins of ethnic mobilization; strong identification of all with the group is not necessary. Value-rational microfoundations thus overcome the principal difficulty faced by a purely instrumental explanation, which was unable to explain the origins of ethnic mobilization.

Second, depending on how the dominant groups and the state respond to the critical mass, mobilization itself can be identity-forming for those who did not initially participate in it. Hegemony may give way to an assertion of self-respect. In 1919, when thousands of Indians (in defiance of a prohibition on political meetings) organized a protest meeting in Amritsar, India, and a British general ordered a massacre to implement the law, a turning point was reached in India's national movement.⁶¹ The massacre changed Gandhi, convincing him that India's self-respect

was not possible until the British left; it changed Nehru from a man who was "more British than the British" to one "homespun" and capable of making the transition from a life of privilege and luxury to one of personal sacrifice for the sake of a nation. Indeed, so many Indians experienced the self-awareness of dignity that after the Amritsar massacre it became possible to launch a nationwide civil-disobedience movement.

Similarly, the American civil-rights movement in the 1960s formed the assertive identity of a large number of African Americans: "While the students in their neat suits and demure dresses sat-in, marched, demonstrated, sang and prayed, the police, the sheriff's deputies and the Klan responded to nonviolence with violence, meeting the doves of peace with the police dogs of war."⁶² Elsewhere, barely a few years after the formation of Pakistan, the East Pakistanis realized that their *linguistic* identity was at stake in a nation they joined for *religious* reasons. They were told that Urdu, the language of Muslim migrants from India, would be the language of the new nation, even though East Pakistanis, constituting a majority of the country, spoke Bengali. A cultural cleavage within the new nation was thus born, giving room to politics and mobilization based on a linguistic identity. As this politics unfolded, the identity of the silent bystanders was also formed.

Third, as is implicit above, a conflict cannot take place unless we also factor in the behavior of the dominant groups. The dominant groups typically have three options: defend preexisting privileges, with no adjustments made; incorporate the elite of the disadvantaged groups in the power structure; or renegotiate privilege, accepting some notion of fairness. To defend preexisting privileges is a case of prejudice; to incorporate the elite, one of selective cooptation; to renegotiate privilege, one of fairness. In no case, including the last, is conflict ruled out.

A defense of privilege or prejudice clearly spells trouble, once the ideological hegemony of group hierarchy is broken and a middle class capable of organizing the group develops among the previously disadvantaged. Examples are legion. Depending on the nature of the political system, such conflict may be relatively peaceful or violent. If the political system allows the freedom to organize, ethnic mobilization may dominate democratic politics but conflict may also be politically resolved and violence overcome. However, if the political system is repressive, ethnic conflict may remain hidden or may not emerge in a routine way (erupting violently, for instance, when the state is weak).

Selective cooptation may work if the elites so incorporated continue to hold sway over the masses and are not outbid by alternative leaders refusing to be co-opted. It may defuse ethnic conflict or even resolve it through what Arend Lijphart calls a consociational system.⁶³ Outbidding, however, is not uncommon in ethnic conflicts. Consociationalism works under well-specified institutional conditions.⁶⁴

Most interestingly, however, conflict can occur even when the leaders of the dominant group renegotiate privilege. The problem simply is that the question of what constitutes fairness has no uniquely acceptable answer. Why should the members of this generation pay for the inequities of the past, in which they did not directly participate? How much should they pay, if they must? For how long? Multiple answers exist; the outcomes are

politically determined. On affirmative action, such struggles are universal.

Three Kinds of Ethnic and Nationalistic Behavior

Central to the alternative account I have presented above are notions of hierarchy, dignity, and recognition. Goal-oriented thinking exists in this alternative account, but it is defined with respect to the values so specified, not independently of these values. This conception of strategic behavior is different from the one in which ethnicity itself is seen as a means to an end. If we combine the two notions of rationality discussed above, we get three different kinds of ethnic and nationalistic behavior, which we should distinguish from one another.

The pure case of value rationality

Martyrdom—suicide bombing, in these times—is the pure form of value-rational behavior. In such cases, no cost (including death) is considered too high by an ethnic partisan. If aimed at enhancing group prospects, to kill may be a form of instrumental behavior—and likewise, being killed may result from someone else behaving instrumentally. But to die is not instrumentally rational for an individual, for whatever its benefits to the group, the martyr will not be there to see his dreams fulfilled. Such martyrdom, however, can be instrumentally beneficial for the group, for it can touch off strong emotions, raising the level of group consciousness. Indeed, collective martyrdom or martyrdom of an important leader of the group can be a tipping point in group consciousness and mobilization.⁶⁵

It is possible to argue that religious martyrdom is, in fact, individually rational, for the motivations of the martyr extend to life after death. Most religions have a notion of afterlife. This-worldly martyrdom can pave the way for other-worldly glory. But ethnic or national martyrdom, as opposed to religious martyrdom, has no such notion of afterlife. Its aim is collective benefit, pure and simple. Sri Lanka's Tamil Tigers repeatedly produced suicide bombers to increase group cohesion and to target "enemies." In a number of national, or freedom, movements in the developing world, there were many examples of men seeking martyrdom or taking the risk of death.

Given the significance of death in nationalism, martyrdom can also be instrumentally used by some—not, of course, by those who die. Ethnic partisans are known to have killed important figures of their own communities—so as to put the blame of death on the adversary and engineer in-group cohesion. This use of martyrdom is instrumental-rational and must be distinguished from the behavior of those seeking martyrdom. The latter is value-rational.

The pure case of instrumental rationality

From an individual perspective, the instrumental benefits of participating in nationalist mobilization are obvious only under two strict conditions: when nationalists are already close to capturing power and much can be gained (or losses cut) by joining the bandwagon, and when law and order have broken down, ethnic animosities have soured group relations, and even neighbors—of long standing but belonging to a different ethnic group—can't be trust-

ed, creating a "security dilemma" for individuals and making preemptive violence against neighbors of a different ethnic group an exercise in personal security.⁶⁶ Most ethnic conflicts do not reach this last Hobbesian state of nature. It was typical of the former Yugoslavia in recent times; of massacres in Rwanda; and of the border states of India, especially Punjab, during the country's partition in 1947.

Combining value rationality and instrumental rationality

This is the category where a lot of ethnic conflict belongs. The concept of rationality here can mean two things: seeing ethnicity as a means to a self-interested end, or else selecting appropriate means to realize *group goals* or choosing between competing group goals. Enough has already been said about the first; why might the second be necessary?

The fact that my identity gets tied up with my group does not mean that I accept as right everything that the group (i.e., its leadership on behalf of the group) does. I may have a different version of group objectives and may even try to convince my group that my version is right. My *identity* may be tied up with my group, but my *views* may not be. Such intra-ethnic clashes on what is valuable and what means are appropriate to achieve those goals allow for a great deal of volition, intragroup strategizing, and struggle. Indeed, if I have leadership ambition, I may even try to retrieve my group's history purposively to show that I am historically more authentic than are my adversaries in the group, while both my adversaries and I seek group betterment. Selective retrieval of tradition is a standard strategy in nationalist struggles.

Alternatively, people may try to change the form of protest. Sometimes, this means moving from nonviolent to violent means; at other times, it simply entails exploring alternative nonviolent strategies, as seen in the Indian freedom movement, of which the Salt March was a component, and in the American civil-rights movement. In many nationalist conflicts, however, even when the ends are noble, the means are not. Violence is often used as an instrument for ethnic ends. Our moral objections to violence notwithstanding, it is undeniable that from the perspective of ethnic and national partisans, violence can represent a combination of value rationality and instrumental rationality.

When asked by psychologist Sudhir Kakar why they killed members of the other community, the wrestlers involved in communal violence in the Indian city of Hyderabad argued that they were defending the *quam* (nation). They stopped killing, they said, when they had killed more than the wrestlers of the other community had killed. Indeed, after giving them tests to check lies, falsehood, and dissimulation, Kakar had to conclude—much to his emotional dismay but true to his professional craft—that in psychological terms, the killers were "warriors," not "murderers."⁶⁷

Much of the dynamics and intensity of ethnic conflict cannot be explained unless we understand how decisions are made about which sections of the population—women, children, and old people or the able-bodied men—are the targets of violence; whether festivals and celebrations are disrupted; whether sacralized monuments and places of worship are attacked; whether automatic weapons are used by a few or small weapons by a lot, although each method may kill as many people. We are in a world

Table 1

	Pure Value-Rational	Pure Instrumental-Rational	Value- and Instrumental-Rational
Leaders	yes	yes	yes
Masses	yes	yes	yes
OUTCOME	origins yes; sustenance no	origins no; sustenance possible	origins yes; sustenance yes

where considerable planning often goes into the timing, type, and targets of violence, for symbolic violence is often central to ethnic conflict. Much, if not all, of this strategic behavior is based on the group goals that ethnic or national partisans have. It will be hard to prove that nationalists make such decisions on purely self-interested grounds, without linking their strategies to the interests of the group they seek to represent.

Table 1 summarizes the argument so far. The pure case of value rationality may account for the origins of ethnic mobilization but not for its sustenance; the pure case of instrumental rationality cannot explain why ethnic mobilization commences, although it may begin to explain behavior once mobilization has reached a critical point; and the combination of value and instrumental rationality can explain both why ethnic mobilization begins and how it is sustained.

Conclusions: Pluralizing Microfoundations

Three conclusions follow. First, rational-choice theories are unable to answer some of the fundamental questions in the study of ethnicity and nationalism. They almost wholly concentrate on why leaders manipulate ethnicity or national feelings, ignoring questions without which we can't understand mobilization for ethnic or national resistance: Why do the masses join ethnic and national movements when the costs of participation are almost certain to be high? And why do minorities so often feel the group identity more intensely than do majorities? To answer these questions, one has to pluralize the concept of rationality. A distinction between value rationality and instrumental rationality, as proposed by Weber, will be a good starting point. The former concept is considerably less sensitive to the notion of costs of behavior than the latter. Some goals—national liberation, racial equality, ethnic self-respect—may be deemed so precious that high costs, quite common in movements of resistance, are not sufficient to deter a dogged pursuit of such objectives. The goals are often not up for negotiation and barter; the means deployed to realize them may well be.

However—and this is the second conclusion—once ethnic preferences are in place and mobilization has reached a critical mass, raising prospects of success, one can use the rational-choice methods to understand why many people join ethnic or national movements. The approach works best when ethnicity is assumed to exist, not if one were to analyze where ethnic preferences come from.

Finally, the Weberian idea of value rationality, while of generic significance in analyzing ethnic or nationalist behavior, also

requires a great deal of unpacking. A search for dignity and recognition may well define the motivation underlying the nationalism of resistance, but other forms of nationalistic behavior—such as those witnessed in the nationalism of exclusion or when majority groups develop a minority complex—may be

undergirded by motivations other than dignity and self-respect. A pluralism of microfoundations is quite likely to be found as we move further along this path of inquiry.

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Notes

- 1 Kundera 1986, 3–4.
- 2 Berlin 1982, 1.
- 3 Ibid, 13.
- 4 The exchange was, of course, not entirely polite. Herder called Voltaire a “senile child.” He also wrote a vehement poem (cited in Kedourie 1993, 53):

And You German alone, returning from abroad,
Wouldst greet your mother in French?
O spew it out, before your door
Spew out the ugly slime of the Seine
Speak German, O you German.
- 5 Kedourie agrees. See Kedourie 1993, especially chapters 3 and 4.
- 6 Weber 1978, volume 1, 24–5.
- 7 For a recent statement of this distinction, see Feinberg 1997, 69–73.
- 8 Of course, all nationalisms, including the nationalism of resistance, are to some extent exclusionary. Without the notion of “us” and “them,” nationalism does not work. However, despite not being entirely devoid of exclusion, nationalism of resistance tends to define community in a more inclusive way than does the nationalism of exclusion. For future analysis, the most difficult category—and a category different from the above two—is going to be “majorities feeling like a minority” (the Sinhalese in Sri Lanka until the 1970s; the Malays in Malaysia until the 1970s; the Pribumi in Indonesia even today). The microfoundations driving such behavior are complex, requiring painstaking investigation. It is through cumulative steps that we will be able to develop an alternative theory of where ethnic preferences come from. For some thoughtful psychological probings, see Horowitz 2001 and Peterson 2002.
- 9 Horowitz 1984, 41–54.
- 10 Gellner 1983, 1.
- 11 Sen 1982, 105. To sample the variety associated with rationality in philosophical discussions, also see Nozick 1983, especially the chapter entitled “Instrumental Rationality and Its Limits,” 133–81; Putnam 1981, especially the chapter “Two Conceptions of Rationality”; and Davidson 1963.
- 12 Mention should also be made of the concept of rationality in psychology, sometimes called “bounded rationality.” See Tversky and Kahneman 1990a; Tversky and Kahneman 1990b; and Simon 1986.
- 13 On whether the same instrumental rationality is applicable to spheres beyond commercial behavior, see not only Sen 1982 (cited above), but also Coase 1978 and Buchanan 1995.
- 14 Also see Almond 1991.
- 15 Some of the leading scholars of rationality would not entirely approve of such an analogy. Amartya Sen, while writing about behavior based on commitment as opposed to self-interest, draws a distinction between preferences and *metapreferences*. The former concept is basically what Paul Samuelson called “revealed preference,” representing choices evident in market behavior, such as when we buy cars or footwear; the latter speaks of the larger psychological and cultural processes that undergird the actually observed market choices. See the discussion in Sen 1973, as well as Sen 1982; also see Hirschman 1985. Strictly for the purposes of this paper, although not more generally, this criticism can basically be viewed as a dispute over appropriate analogies. Whether or not value-rationality can be seen as a deeper set of metapreferences generating observed choices in behavior, the basic claim that it is different from instrumental rationality is not undermined by an argument about metapreferences.
- 16 For overviews of rational-choice models of politics, see Alt and Shepsle 1990; Green and Shapiro 1994; Monroe 1991; and Booth et al. 1993.
- 17 Olson 1965.
- 18 Bates 1981.
- 19 Critiques emerging from *within* the rational-choice paradigm are very helpful in understanding the limits of rational-choice theories. Among the most thoughtful self-critiques are Jon Elster 1989 and Michael Taylor 1993. Elster’s argument is that rational-choice theory is inapplicable in the following situations: (1) when multiple optima exist, (2) when the choice set has incommensurable options, (3) when no reliable probability estimates can be made, subjectively or objectively, because of insufficient evidence, and (4) when it is not even clear how much

- evidence should be collected before such judgments can be made.
- 20 For some reflections of the domain specificity of rational-choice arguments, see Munck 2001.
- 21 Morris Fiorina, a rational-choice scholar of American politics, accepts that elite and mass politics have very different implications for a rational-choice analysis: "Rational Choice Models are most useful where stakes are high and numbers low. . . . Thus in works on mass behavior I utilize minimalist notions of rationality . . . whereas in works on elites I assume a higher order of rationality." Fiorina 1995, 88.
- 22 There are two kinds of works on instrumental conceptions of ethnicity. The works that follow the rational-choice method self-consciously include Rabushka and Shepsle 1972, Hardin 1995, and Hechter 2000. The idea of the instrumental use of ethnicity, however, goes beyond the rational-choice literature. It is implicit in much of the literature on ethnic conflict. See, e.g., Brass 1975 and Bates 1974. Sometimes, Gellner 1983 is also seen as a major instrumental text. Gellner's basic argument is that industrialization led to nationalism in history. The "low" oral cultures, he argues, could not have produced the standardization necessary to run an industrial economy; only "high" cultures with standardized modes of communication could have. I read Gellner more as a functionalist than as an instrumentalist. For a clear statement of differences between functionalism and rational choice, see Elster 1982.
- 23 Schelling 1963, 54.
- 24 Ibid, 74.
- 25 Unless, of course, the Mafia is involved in the transaction.
- 26 Miller 1994, 250–3. This is not to say that demonstrations do not often dissolve in the face of coercion. That, however, is less surprising than the fact that so many ethnic movements persist despite coercion.
- 27 Raines 1977, 56.
- 28 Chong 1991, 85.
- 29 Ibid, 25–6.
- 30 Mandela 1994, 387.
- 31 Gurr 1993 makes a statistical attempt.
- 32 For how economic and ethnic mobilizations can dramatically vary, see Varshney 1995 and 2002.
- 33 Elster 1989, 118.
- 34 Rabushka and Shepsle 1972, 64–5. Emphasis in the original.
- 35 As Hardin 1995 was published, another collection of essays addressing this problem came out. See Breton et al. 1995. The opening lines of this book are worth noting: "The literature on nationalism is enormous. Economists, historians, philosophers, political scientists, sociologists and other scholars as well as lay observers and commentators have all brought their particular skills and methods to bear on the phenomenon which, it would be easy to argue, has dominated human affairs for a good part of the nineteenth century and throughout the twentieth. The contribution of what we may call the rational choice paradigm has, however, not been large"(ix).
- 36 Hardin 1995, 5, 36–70.
- 37 Popkin 1979.
- 38 Przeworski 1985.
- 39 Hardin's approach is abstract and philosophical. In a more empirical vein, there is also Laitin 1998 on the formation of a new identity, "the Russian-Speaking Populations," in four republics of the former Soviet Union: Kazakhstan, Estonia, Latvia, and Ukraine. In theory, this work could have answered the question posed above: how do people develop, or maintain, ethnic or national preferences, especially when the costs of expressing those preferences are *ex ante* so high? Laitin's empirical approach, however, allows him to focus only on the formation of new and pragmatic identities of (primarily) Russians in areas where conflict did not take place. There is little variation on the dependent variable. As such, the empirical materials of Laitin are unable to answer questions raised above about the nationalism of resistance. Had Laitin's focus included the Chechens, we would have learned much empirically about the source of nationalistic preferences even in the face of high-cost conditions.
- 40 Indeed, even close to time T2, as argued earlier, so long as the benefits of group power are nonexcludable, I should not join for I will get the benefits anyway. Thus, time T2 also has a problem of indeterminacy, requiring ethnic leaders to set up mechanisms to ensure that benefits are distributed according to participation. For the sake of parsimony, however, let us assume that instrumental rationality at time T2 means participation.
- 41 This, of course, raises the question of whether "rational ethics" can exist and whether it can be embedded in society. See Sen 1992 and Harsanyi 1976.
- 42 Einstein 1982, 41–2. Also see Kolakowski 1990, especially "Modernity on Endless Trial" and "The Revenge of the Sacred in Secular Culture."
- 43 The conflict, Einstein adds, begins when rationality claims it can pronounce authoritatively upon the ends of human life and religion claims that it can explain empirical relationships.
- 44 Laitin 1986, 148–9, makes a roughly similar argument: "Rational choice [theory] . . . is a theory of marginal decisions. It cannot tell us if ultimately butter is better than guns; it can tell us that at a certain point the production of a small number of guns will cost us a whole lot of butter and at that point it is probably irrational to produce more guns. Within a political structure, individuals constantly make marginal decisions. Neo-Benthamite theories can give us a grasp on how individual political actors are likely to make choices within that structure. Microeconomic theory cannot, however, handle long-term and non-marginal decisions. When market structures are themselves threatened, and people must decide whether to work within the new structure or hold on to the

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- old—without an opportunity for a marginal decision—microeconomic theory is not applicable.” Also see Elster 1989, 40.
- 45 Connor 1994. The primordial view is often associated with Geertz and Connor. See Geertz 1963. This view was fashionable in the 1960s. In the 1970s, the “instrumental” view arose as a reaction to the primordial view. For a review of the debate, see Young 1983.
- 46 Weber 1976.
- 47 Hobsbawm 1990, 61.
- 48 Colley 1992.
- 49 Hobsbawm 1990, 60.
- 50 Rudolph and Rudolph 1967.
- 51 Taylor 1995.
- 52 Horowitz 1984, 22–36.
- 53 The implication here, it should be clarified, is not that ethnic groups are always ranked, either structurally or discursively. Many *unranked* ethnic relationships in both senses can, and do, exist. The Jews, Irish, and Italians today have an unranked relationship with the WASPs in the United States; that was not true in the late nineteenth century. The relationship of the Parsis and Sikhs with the majority Hindu community in twentieth-century India is unranked, unlike India’s caste system, which continues to be discursively, if not legally, ranked, although its ranking is being vigorously challenged in current politics. Another interesting example of a ranked relationship turning unranked comes from South Africa. The English and Afrikaners today are unranked with respect to each other, although right until the early decades of this century, the relationship was ranked. For how this happened, see Marx 1998.
- 54 Weiner 1978.
- 55 Srinivas 1966.
- 56 Gramsci 1971.
- 57 See Taylor 1994. Taylor is not only a leading political philosopher of our times, but also a political activist dealing with the politics of nationalism in Quebec. For his Quebec-focused writings, see Taylor 1993.
- 58 Taylor 1994, 25.
- 59 Mill 1990, 385–6.
- 60 Berlin 1982, 252.
- 61 The massacre was ordered in a walled park that had only one opening to the road, serving both as an exit and as an entrance. The general brought his forces in, closed the exit-cum-entrance, and ordered his troops to shoot unarmed men and women assembled for a peaceful protest meeting. The crowd could not leave the park, even as the bullets rained in.
- 62 Tarrow 1998, 130.
- 63 Lijphart 1977.
- 64 Horowitz 1987.
- 65 The significance of death in nationalism is brought out forcefully by Anderson 1983. The epigraph to this paper, focusing on the idea of the tomb of unknown soldiers, captures one of the basic ideas.
- 66 Posen 1993.
- 67 Kakar 1996.