Shaking the tyrant's bloody robe

An evolutionary perspective on ethnoreligious violence

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ABSTRACT. **Group violence, despite much study, remains enigmatic. Its forms are numerous, its proximate causes myriad, and the interrelation of its forms and proximate causes poorly understood. We review its evolution, including preadaptations and selected propensities, and its putative environmental and psychological triggers. We then reconsider one of its forms, ethnoreligious violence, in light of recent discoveries in the behavioral and brain sciences. We find ethnoreligious violence to be characterized by identity fusion and by manipulation of religious traditions, symbols, and systems. We conclude by examining the confluence of causes and characteristics before and during Yugoslavia's wars of disintegration.**

Key words: Collective violence, ethnic violence, identity fusion, intergroup conflict, religious system

When reproached for inspiring terror during the French Revolution, Maximilien de Robespierre reportedly responded that speaking against justified violence and sympathizing with the enemy was equivalent to tyranny itself. "The enemy" for Robespierre was a system that he, and all good Jacobins, saw as inherently tyrannical and responsible for historic injustices and with whose fallen figures the righteous and enlightened should not commiserate. Hence, to those who complained about terror by asserting the innocence of some of its victims, Robespierre metaphorically replied, "Stop shaking the tyrant's bloody robe in my face, or I will believe that you wish to put Rome in chains."[1]

Although they were made in the context of political revolution, Robespierre's remarks resemble the inciting speeches of ethnoreligious leaders who, in the context of social crises, use religious rhetoric to incite attacks on an entire group of people, combatants and non-combatants.[2] Like other inflammatory speakers, Robespierre relied on widely accepted ideals and beliefs to respond to the dynamic conditions of his times, to frame an emergent political struggle as a destined conflict, and to justify violence morally. Religion is often used for these purposes. Through shared beliefs and intense rituals, religion creates tight social bonds and apparent group homogeneity, which leaders or elites can manipulate alongside other behavioral propensities both to induce and intensify intergroup conflict. Moreover, leaders can exploit religion's ability to rouse individuals, and to unify people under a single banner through emotionally evocative and highly memorable symbols and myths.

Does this mean, then, as some suggest,[3,4] that religion is prone to instigating violence? From our 21st century standpoint, where news of religious violence dominates headlines, we may be tempted to say that it does. However, our judgment is likely biased in a number of ways by our secular environment. One such bias is the *myth of religious violence:* the belief that religion is the chief cause of the world's bloodshed.[5] As Armstrong observes, this myth is widely believed, but it is problematic on several fronts. For one thing it is mistaken about the causes of conflict. From the French Revolution to the catastrophic wars of the 20th century, many nation-states, secular communities, and sociopolitical movements—even state-making movements[6]—did not embrace religion but still brought about a great deal of bloodshed. Much of this violence, too, was imbued with historic animosities against an "other" that, under certain conditions, was expressed in acts of widespread, indiscriminate violence. In this sense, collective violence

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of the worst kind (e.g., massacres, mass rape, ethnic cleansings, and genocide) have ensued in different cultural systems whenever conditions for social unrest persist and leaders, even so-called enlightened ones, such as Robespierre, exploit human inclinations for violence and justify hostilities according to socially accepted ideals.

Most importantly, the myth of religious violence distorts religion itself by reducing it to a set of ideas that somehow brainwash would-be perpetrators. A more substantial view is that religion increases the lethality of violence[7] and decreases intragroup contestations over war[8,9] when combined with other conditions for intergroup conflict and collective violence. This phenomenon is particularly evident among certain ethnic communities that center or "fuse" their personal and group identity.[10] Religion is thus an effective proximate mechanism for violence and is more accurately described as a dynamically complex system that unites communities, strengthens ingroup cooperation, and offers individuals life-affirming rituals.[11] As such, religion can both inspire and sanctify conflicts, including acts of collective violence, by rendering bloodshed a sacred act or holy sacrifice. When this happens, the so-called tyrant's bloody robe—to echo Robespierre's words—is shaken by religious leaders and perpetrators for all to see, although not in the contestation of violence but rather its social and moral approval.

By way of example, it is unfortunately not very surprising for ethnic tensions to erupt into instances of mob violence that celebrate the bloodshed of a devalued outgroup. Apparently more shocking (perhaps because it is so contrary to most religious doctrine) is the direct orchestration of mob violence by religious leaders. Even avowed religious pacifists have provoked such violence in several communities around the world, most notably Myanmar, where Burmese Buddhists have led riots against Rohingya Muslims, an Indonesian ethnic minority.[12]

How do religions that inspire awe, joy, and love also inspire terror, fear, and animosity? We argue that an evolutionary perspective on intergroup conflict and the religious system[13] can shed light on this question and help to explain how religion incites ethnoreligious violence. Specifically, we argue against overly simplistic models of religion that posit that belief is the root cause of ethnoreligious violence and instead argue that recent advances in the life sciences point to a set of ultimate, proximate, and systemic causes that engender ethnoreligious violence.

Before doing so, we must first say a few words about ethnic identity. When discussing ethnic violence, it is not always clear how the identities of the ethnic persons involved are separable in terms of "ethnicity" and "religion." A people's ethnicity and religiosity (and way of life for that matter) are often analogous. We will therefore use the term *ethnoreligious* to describe communities whose ethnicity and religion are important to their identity and play a role in collective violence. To that end, we first deconstruct ethnic violence by showing that it is a form of intergroup conflict, comprised of evolved behavioral propensities. Afterward, we show that ethnic violence is not only a form of intergroup conflict but also collective violence. We argue that what distinguishes ethnoreligious violence from other cases of collective violence is the confluence of ethnicity, identity fusion, and religion. We then shift our discussion to the religious system's role in evoking violence by explaining how the constituents of that system provide ethnic groups with identity, coherence, and cooperation, and render violence with moral justification and emotional significance. Finally, we examine how leaders exploit both the behavioral propensities for intergroup conflict and the religious system to incite ethnoreligious violence in times of political crises, conflict, or war.

The evolution of intergroup conflict

Because "ethnic violence" spans different kinds of societies, hostilities, and cultural identities, it is notoriously difficult to define.[14] It can involve a nation-state and militarized army or involve nonstate groups and unconventional warfare.[15] Capturing the breadth and complexities of ethnic violence, Brubaker and Laitin provide a critical definition that we shall presume:

> Ethnic violence is violence perpetrated across ethnic lines, in which at least one party is not a state (or a representative of a state), and in which the putative ethnic difference is coded—by perpetrators, targets, influential third parties, or analysts—as having been integral rather than incidental to the violence, that is, in which the violence is coded as having been meaningfully oriented in some way to the different ethnicity of the target.[16]

Echoing this definition, scholars posit that there are three minimal requirements for ethnic violence: (1) the inculcation of an ethnoreligious identity,[17] (2) groups banding together to cooperate in and coordinate the

execution of violence,[18] and (3) indiscriminate violence against an outgroup that is widely legitimated among the ingroup.[19] We will later show that the religious system can engender these characteristics. But, for now, we wish to show that "ethnic violence" is a form of intergroup conflict that, in turn, is shaped by coalitional aggression, parochial altruism, and revenge, and these underlying behavioral propensities are adaptations (i.e., traits selected in ancestral environments).

Coalitional aggression

The evolutionary root or preadaptation for all forms of intergroup conflict is *coalitional aggression* the tendency to band together and attack conspecifics in outgroups.[20] Albeit a rare behavior among most mammals, systematic coalitional aggression is common to human and nonhuman primates, most notably chimpanzees.[21] Based on Darwinian accounts, small-scale coalitional aggression—which usually involves three to five males conducting a raid against a neighbor—was selected in the last common ancestor of chimpanzees and humans because it yielded access to natural resources and mating opportunities.[22] Studies of contemporary chimpanzees demonstrate that coalitional aggression indeed provides troops with resources for mating and parental investment.[23,24]

According to Tooby and Cosmides,[25] humans inherited inclinations for coalitional aggression during the evolutionary environment of adaptation (EEA), a timespan ranging from the Pleistocene to Neolithic epochs, wherein most human evolution took place and, arguably, extant traits were selected for hunter-gatherer conditions. During the EEA, human groups would have been selected against if they did not engage in coalitionary aggression. After all, occasional aggression against weaker neighbors would have been conducive to accessing resources, securing territories, and attracting mates.[26] As Johnson and MacKay show,[27] asymmetric raiding throughout human evolution was selected alongside a cognitive heuristic in humans for evaluating combat opportunities based on one's group-size and those of others. Hence, coalitionary aggression was not only selected during the EEA but also co-opted for opportunistic intergroup violence.

As a prevalent behavior, the threat of "predatory" outgroups would have acted as its own environmental pressure that selected for "defensive" coalitional aggression.[28] By the Neolithic epoch, dangerous outgroups became such a risk to human reproduction that coalitional aggression was reinforced and stabilized across human populations, leading to highly organized forms of intergroup conflict (i.e., structured bands or armies with weapon technologies for killing transgressors).[29,30] Just prior to this occurrence, a suite of behaviors was selected with propensities for coalitional aggression in order to satisfice possible outgroup threats. That is to say, the suite of behaviors was selected not to be triggered accurately per se (e.g., when threats were the case) but instead whenever the benefits of defending or accessing reproductively relevant resources (e.g., mates, food, safety) outweighed the costs of violence.[31,32] This point is relevant for our purposes because it entails that while humans are capable of a perpetual peace, we are prone to coalitional aggression and intergroup conflict when exposed to certain environmental conditions, as we address later.

Parochial altruism

Included in the suite of behaviors selected with coalitional aggression was *parochial altruism*, the preferential favoring of persons within one's ingroup above those of outgroups.[33] In *The Descent of Man*,[34] Darwin originally observed such a phenomenon, noting that altruistic behaviors are costly to humans when done indiscriminately but collectively beneficial when limited to one's kith and kin. Darwin further hypothesized that discriminatory selflessness, such as sacrificing oneself for one's group, would likewise benefit the collective since such "in-group love" or "degree of sympathy, fidelity, and courage" for the group would strengthen it, allowing the group itself to outcompete others.[35] Biologists have since provided evidence to support Darwin's case. When a group of people mutually directs its resources toward ingroup members, they collectively benefit from the emergence of strong reciprocation;[36] and groups of parochial altruists cooperate more than other groups, entailing the likelihood of group-selection.[37] The selectionist logic here is that groups of parochial altruists "out-cooperate" groups of indiscriminate altruists, whose resources diminish much quicker, and groups of parochialists, whose social relations and reciprocal ties are significantly weaker.[38] Further, when egalitarian group-norms, which emerge with strong reciprocity, successfully reinforce parochial altruism, the propensity becomes heightened and the group itself becomes more cooperative.[39]

Given the risk of predatory outgroups in ancestral environments, parochial altruism was also selected because it allowed groups to cooperatively defend against

coalitional threats.[40] Because affection for group members maximizes cooperation, the emotional mechanisms for kin altruism were likely co-opted with parochial altruism and therein extended to one's ingroup, augmenting cooperation. The adaptive value of parochial altruism is supported by the following robust set of evidence:

- Game theoretic simulations of parochial altruists repeatedly outcompete other simulated groups.[41,42]
- In economic games, as groups become more parochially altruistic, egalitarian group norms emerge, which allow groups to consistently outperform others.[43,44]
- Perceived attacks on ingroup symbolism evoke parochially altruistic behavior in controlled experiments.[45]
- Parochially altruistic groups are more cooperative and outcompete others.[46]
- Archaeological evidence of culturally demarcated communities during the Neolithic age suggests an increased frequency of parochial altruism.[47,48]

Such evidence also underscores a phenomenon that is apparent in virtually every community around the world. Humans are remarkably altruistic, more so than nonhuman primates, but that altruism is limited to one's kin and ingroup unless strongly enculturated otherwise.[49] Likewise, if inculcated, group loyalties can become remarkably strong, especially in environments of historic conflict or social crisis.

Revenge

As we will see, a dangerous propensity that coevolved with parochial altruism was revenge. McCullough defines *revenge* as the response to real or perceived transgressions by returning harm to the transgressor, whether he or she is within one's ingroup or outgroup.[50] Rather than classifying revenge as a psychological illness,[51] evolutionary psychologists consider revenge to be an adaptation to three intermittent problems faced by humans in the EEA: (1) deterrence of individuals or groups who aggressed from aggressing again; (2) prevention of aggressions from happening in the first place; and (3) punishment for ingroup members who violate egalitarian norms.[52] The idea is that revenge as retaliatory aggression precludes future transgressions, and revenge as altruistic punishment reinforces cooperation. Precluding transgressions and reinforcing cooperation by means of revenge are evident in studies of punishment and cooperation in primate troops,[53] game theoretical simulations,[54] economic games,[55,56] and traditional human societies.[57] Studies also show that revenge and its counterpart, *forgiveness*, are intimately linked to both kin and parochial altruism. Put simply, the more dangerous or unfamiliar the transgressor, the less likely it is that the victim will forgive and more likely that the victim will desire revenge.[58]

Although revenge was adaptive in ancestral environments where most strangers or outgroups represented potential threats, it is less adaptive today and often a "mismatch" to modern environments, where it is rather easily triggered by innocuous phenomena such as being cut off in traffic.[59] As an illustration, many perpetrators of interpersonal or collective violence describe their desire for revenge, which prompted their actions, to have been all-consuming and satisfying when quenched.[60] Brain imaging reveals that these subjective descriptions mirror objective cognitive functions. When someone experiences revenge, activity occurs in the nucleus accumbens and hypothalamus, which are responsible for reward and thirst, respectively. This configuration entails that revenge constrains human behavior much like an addiction and, when executed, quite literally feels like slaking one's thirst.[61] Further evidence that revenge was selected with coalitional aggression and parochial altruism is that revenge is markedly stronger when individuals (especially males) are in groups, as opposed to being alone.[62]

Conditions, proximate mechanisms, and collective violence

The propensities toward coalitional aggression, parochial altruism, and revenge were selected in ancestral environments because they ultimately contributed to reproductive success.[63,64,65] Since the EEA, the threat of outgroup "predation" has maintained these propensities[66] and coalitional aggression has culturally evolved into different forms of intergroup conflict,[67] rendering all human groups and communities capable of between group violence. Indeed, the three propensities we have discussed are evident to some degree across the spectrum of intergroup conflicts.[68] Hence, whether the propensities are adaptations or byproducts, scholars agree that they constitute the core suite of traits

that contribute to intergroup conflict and its ultimate function of promoting survival and reproduction in ancestral environments.[69]

This is not to say, however, that ethnic violence is adaptive or that evolution has precluded ethnic groups (or any human community) from living peacefully. As humans, we are all capable of changing our behavior and controlling evolutionary propensities, such as the desire for revenge, and thus not engaging in violence.[70] However, certain conditions tend to trigger the aforementioned propensities and make intergroup conflict more likely than not, and these conditions can manifest in ethnic and religious communities. In what follows, we examine those conditions in order to identify the proximate causes of intergroup conflict in general, and ethnoreligious violence in particular. In so doing, we show that ethnoreligious violence not only falls within the set of intergroup conflict but also a subset therein known as *collective violence*.

Environmental conditions

There are three primary conditions for intergroup conflict that stem from the discontinuity between individuals and groups (i.e., the fact that competition and certain domains of belief are markedly greater among groups than individuals).[71] First, when groups compete for valued material resources or social capital, specifically those resources that are limited or considered as having zero-sum fates, groups are likely to prejudice and discriminate against one another.[72] Between-group competition in general has been shown to evoke parochial altruism[73] and engender feelings of revenge whenever a group is thwarted from its targeted resource.[74] Besides being the central proximate cause of most wars,[75] resource competition among ethnic groups leads to socially constructed boundaries, ascribed differences, and sporadic intergroup conflict.[76] Wimmer, Cederman, and Min, for instance, provide a model of ethnic conflict showing that a 6% incursion on the resources of one ethnic group by another can increase the likelihood of violence by 25%. Along the same lines, the scramble for resources in ethnically diverse areas of the world after the Cold War could explain the surge in ethnic violence during the 1990s.[77] Second, when a group experiences relative deprivation (i.e., lacking the resources to which they are accustomed or socially value), members of that group experience feelings of social exclusion.[78] When this happens, leaders can influence communities toward social movements or intergroup conflict, such as riots, pogroms, and terrorism.[79] Third, beliefs that contribute to violence can provoke intergroup conflict whenever they become part of a group's worldview.[80] For example, violence may be spurred by feelings of superiority over a devalued outgroup,[81] outrage at being mistreated by an outgroup,[82] or a sense that an outgroup is threatening the ingroup.[83] Finally, collective paranoia can render groups susceptible to modes of violence that they would not otherwise support.[84]

Psychological mechanisms

Under normal circumstances, most humans are partially empathetic and strongly reluctant to harm conspecifics. However, the following three psychological mechanisms can override human empathy and trigger propensities for intergroup conflict:

- Xenophobia—the perception that a stranger or outgroup is strange or threatening:[85] Having the cognitive function to categorize, all humans naturally categorize people into "outgroups" or their "ingroup" according to hard-to-fake signals and ethnic markers.[86] Remarkably, humans experience the release of oxytocin when they see ingroup members or reminders thereof, but they do not have the same reaction with outgroups.[87] Cashdan argues that humans are inclined to avoid outgroups because doing so in ancestral environments reduced both coalitional threats and biological ones, such as pathogen exposure.[88] Gil-White hypothesizes that humans evolved a mental module for "living kinds" in order to identify species in the EEA, which often causes humans today to process ethnic groups as essentialized natural categories.[89]

- Dehumanization—the denial of another person's humaneness:[90] Neuroimaging studies by Harris and Fiske show that the medial frontal cortex, which is responsible for attributing mental states to others, is diminished when seeing dehumanized persons, that is, persons seen as having low levels of warmth and competence. When this reaction happens (e.g., through exposure to war propaganda or pornography), people no longer feel empathy for the dehumanized target and interact with him or her on a purely functional level, as if the target were an object.[91]

- Moral disengagement—separation of one's moral reactions from one's violent actions:[92] According

to Bandura,[93,94] moral disengagement occurs whenever an individual feels justified in violence or blames the victim (feelings that usually accompany revenge), diffuses responsibility by acting among a cohort, and ignores evidence of another's suffering. Zimbardo likewise shows that moral disengagement can result from the "power of the situation," wherein a person conforms to his or her group identity and the social dynamics of the social situation that appear to "permit" violence.[95] An additional point that will become relevant is that the strongest predictors for moral disengagement are being young, male, psychopathic, and/or being indoctrinated into a violence cadre (e.g., gang, paramilitary unit).

These mechanisms constitute the most basic cognitive mechanisms for intergroup conflict and psychological means by which groups come to accept the elimination of dangerous combatants.[96]

Collective violence

Because the aforementioned propensities, conditions, and mechanisms contribute to intergroup conflict, they consequentially contribute to ethnic violence.[97] However, ethnic violence in general, and ethnoreligious violence in particular, entails an additional set of distinct causes. Unlike intergroup conflict, where combatants are often distinguished from noncombatants, ethnic violence is characterized by attacks on entire groups of people. This kind of violence is known as *collective violence,* a form of intergroup conflict that not only singles out dangerous outgroup members or combatants but also involves attacks an entire group of people. In its exercised form, collective violence includes gang warfare, terrorism, rape as a weapon of war, ethnic cleansing, and genocide, all of which center on attacking a "collective."[98]

Such violence begins with an "ideology of antagonism" that promises a "better world" if only the group carries out violence against a devalued or demonized outgroup.[99,100] Framed in this way, antagonism toward an outgroup is likely to appeal to the neural sensitivity and need to reduce uncertainty and ambiguity during times of conflict.[101,102] Once in place, the ideology opens the door to what perpetrators see as justified violence, which they engage in sporadically to test the boundaries of local constraints and to gain social support.[103] Crucially, the next condition for collective violence is that leaders and elites countenance—and in most cases encourage—violence against the devalued group, and this factor alone can lead to widespread violence in societies where there is a strong authoritarian orientation.[104] Authorities in such societies tend to go unchallenged in their creation of violence cadres—that is, recruiting and indoctrinating young males who are inspired and authorized by leaders to organize attacks on outgroups.[105] These attacks can transform into mass killings whenever the ingroup experiences what they perceive as a "legitimate" grievance against the devalued outgroup, resulting in a remarkable phenomenon known as *accusation in a mirror.*[106] Having occurred in Nazi Germany, Rwanda, Yugoslavia, and Iran, accusation in a mirror arises when the would-be perpetrators accuse the soon-to-be victims of plotting aggression, which the former takes as legitimization to attack the latter in its entirety.[107] The legitimizing grievance is almost always based on a genuine social crisis experienced by the would-be perpetrators but construed by leaders as being the devalued outgroup's fault.[108] Thus, the most critical factor in the realization of collective violence is not the social crisis that, from an etic perspective, causes the group's violence, but rather the leaders and elites who take advantage of crises and orchestrate attacks. On this point, Staub explains "leaders and elites frequently intensify already existing hostility … they work to maintain differences between groups in power and status. They use propaganda to enhance devaluation of and fear of the other. They propagate destructive ideology and thereby offer 'higher ideals' in behalf of action against the other."[109] Admittedly, intergroup violence can certainly occur without leaders. However, without leadership, it is difficult to sustain outgroup hostilities, legitimate grievances, promote ideologies of antagonism, create violence cadres, unite people in an effort against outgroups, and make an accusation in a mirror.

This is why international criminal law places so much responsibility on leaders and elites in post hoc prosecutions of war crimes and crimes against humanity for the words, actions, and omissions of leaders in authoritarian societies or societies without a liberal media are central to collective violence.[110] Many scholars argue that collective violence cannot occur in liberal democracies because pluralism, diversity, and enforced political responsibilities prevent this type of violence from gaining widespread legitimization.[111] While that argument is true on a large scale for state actors, it is inaccurate on a small scale for leaders of communities, institutions, and platoons. Even in liberal democracies,

leaders have played a key role as instigators in cases of indiscriminate violence or mass killing (e.g., race riots or massacres, respectively).[112,113] As we stressed at the outset, collective violence can occur in any society where leaders or elites (religious or not) abuse their power and take advantage of social crises by exploiting the propensities, conditions, and mechanisms for intergroup conflict.

Collective violence, however, is itself a broad category that can refer to different social groups (militaries, police units, gangs, and so on) and thus to various kinds of group identities. What then distinguishes the collective violence of ethnic groups, in particular, from other types of collective violence? We argue that the distinction centers on the confluence of three additional factors: identity fusion, the religious system, and inciting speech.

Identity fusion

According to Swann and colleagues,[114] *identity fusion* is the strongest sense of identification that an individual can have with a group. In this case, one's personal identity and group identity are seen as being synonymous, and from which one shares a reciprocal existence. In other words, when a person is fused with a group, he or she feels strong and powerful whenever the group is strong and powerful—and when the group is threatened, so too is the individual. Once persons are fused in this way, the barrier between themselves and the group is blurred and the "self" and "group" become functionally equivalent. For this reason, the group begins to stand in place of the personal self. Swann and colleagues explain that, "for fused persons, group membership is intensely personal, for they feel that they care as much about the outcomes of the group as their own outcomes."[115] As a result, a fused person's level of devotion to the group is extraordinary and he or she develops an existential sense of acting on behalf of the group and even somehow surviving with it.

When identity fusion happens, fused individuals are willing to engage in extreme pro-group behaviors, such as killing others or taking one's own life as a sacrifice for the group. The impetus for these actions is usually a crisis or threat to the group and an accompanying sense of needing to demonstrate one's commitment to the group. A person's willingness to engage in extreme pro-group behaviors that are violent is likely influenced by exposure to political violence, involvement with the group during adolescence, and perceptions of the meaning and efficacy of exercising violence.[116] Once individuals see their personal identity as the group identity, challenges to the group motivate efforts to protect it as if it were the self and to convey such commitment through costly acts.[117,118,119]

For instance, identity-fused people in experiments involving trolley dilemmas are consistently more willing than non-fused individuals to sacrifice themselves for their own group.[120] These results shed light on ethnic conflicts where extreme acts are committed not by psychopathic or brainwashed individuals but rather by persons who are devoted to their group and see it as being threatened.[121] To illustrate, Whitehouse and colleagues found that identity-fused Libyans (i.e., those who saw their group, family, and personal identities as being equivalent) claimed they would be willing to sacrifice their lives for their local community more than non-fused Libyans.[122] These studies corroborate the hypothesis that persons are more likely to engage in extreme behaviors for their group if they are identity fused.

Of course, this discussion raises an important question. How is identity fusion different from group identification? Swann and colleagues suggest that group identification is a broad and flexible mental schema of the group that the individual can separate from his or her personal identity (e.g., one's current occupation is a type of group identification). In contrast, identity fusion consists of a salient and inflexible schema that the fused individual cannot separate from his or her core self; examples of such an identity schema include religion, ethnicity, or tribal affiliation.[123] Building on this point, we can also draw a crucial distinction between the broad set of collective violence and the subset of ethnic violence, respectively. On the one hand, a person who strongly identifies with his group can become depersonalized in extreme situations and commit collective violence under the guise of his group identity. For example, soldiers or police officers may become so imbued with their professional identity and unit that they do not question their own actions in extreme situations, wherein such individuals (often regrettably, afterward) commit collective violence by simply "following orders."[124,125] On the other hand, a person who is identity fused will willingly undertake extreme behaviors—and enthusiastically do so—to verify his or her identity and reinforce the strength of the group. An identity-fused person may, for instance, without coercion volunteer as a suicide bomber to verify (if not signal) group identity and commitments and to protect the "tribe" from coalitional threats.[126]

What is important here is that a chief characteristic of many ethnic groups is that they are not only group identified but also identity fused.[127] In fact, they tend to be fused in two ways that allow them to abstract their group identity from local contexts and respond to group threats posed anywhere. First, most ethnic groups are "locally fused" insofar as they identify themselves in the ethos of their local community and thus reify their self-identity through direct participation in local social practices. Second, ethnic groups can become "extendedly fused" by projecting their relational ties to members of their group who are not immediate, such as ancestors or members living elsewhere, but with whom the group remains devoted through contextual support.[128] Critically, for many ethnic groups, the social practices and contextual support that inculcate devotion are provided by the religious system, largely by means of ritual and shared religious beliefs. Whenever devotion is successfully instilled and identities are fused, any event that primes a fused person's social identity will activate their personal identity and vice versa.[129]

In sum, identity fusion helps to explain why ethnoreligious violence often becomes so extreme. At its simplest, extreme pro-group behaviors are the ultimate expression of one's self-verification and commitment to the group.[130] Indeed, post-hoc interviews with perpetrators of ethnic violence lend support to this observation. After the Rwandan genocide, Li interviewed genocidaires about their motivations for participating in collective violence and found that most engaged in indiscriminate murder because they were called upon *as Hutus* to do so.[131] Remarkably, many perpetrators acknowledged that their actions were immoral but, unlike individuals with group identification, they did not regret their actions and considered them necessary sacrifices to Hutu brethren who were everywhere threatened by Tutsis.[132] Interviews among military personnel of the Yugoslav wars echo Li's findings. Kiper, for instance, finds that Serbian excombatants who supported or engaged in collective violence during the break-up of Yugoslavia, such as the Vukovar siege, did so because, as they report, they are Serbs and both Serbia and Christian Orthodoxy were under threat.[133]

The religious system

What fuses an individual's personal and group identity? Moreover, what causes fused persons to undertake extreme acts of violence as opposed to (say) benevolence? To answer these questions, we now turn to the religious system. We show that contrary to the claims of some scholars,[134] religion is not the root cause of ethnoreligious violence but rather a tool for intergroup conflict that in certain circumstances can be (ab)used by ethnoreligious leaders and perpetrators to achieve their goals (e.g., the attainment of resources, redemption, or revenge). Thus, the religious system constitutes an additional and crucial proximate mechanism for intergroup conflict and collective violence.

An complex adaptive system

Besides being a fuzzy category, the term *religion* connotes a static set of beliefs that fails to capture the complexity of local practices and lived religious traditions.[135] We therefore take a complex adaptive systems approach to the phenomenon and analyze religion not as a collection of beliefs and doctrines but rather as a dynamic complex that we refer to as the *religious system*.[136] This system consists of behavioral, emotional, and cognitive adaptations, as well as constituent elements that have co-evolved throughout human history to support extensive human cooperation and coordination, allowing individuals and communities to adapt to varying environments. Like other adaptive systems (e.g., ant colonies, stock markets, or the human immune system), the religious system consists of recurrent constituents that facilitate interactions between structured units; in the case of the religious system, the structured units are individuals and their environment. Sosis argues that religious systems typically maintain eight core constituents: authority, meaning, moral obligation, myth, ritual, the sacred, supernatural agents, and taboo.[137] By engaging in these constituents, adherents establish trust, promote cooperation, and organize and coordinate their community.[138] Also, because these constituents are universal but flexible enough to adjust to a group and its environment, they together make an adaptive complex. In other words, constituents are socially inherited but change and self-organize within communities to respond to changing environmental pressures. In terms of dynamic systems, the constituents are microstructures that coevolved and perpetually network together for the survivability of the macrostructure, which, in this case, is the religious community that adapts to dynamic social, political, and economic conditions.[139]

As discussed elsewhere, the dynamics of the religious system can be summarized in functional terms.[140,141,142] First, the system's energy is human action that is motivated by religious concepts, which are both generated

and constrained by evolved cognitive modules (e.g., theory of mind, hypersensitive agency detection, and others) and by naturally selected human behavioral propensities (e.g., costly signaling, reciprocal altruism, and so forth).[143] Second, by participating in religious rituals, adherents reinforce the meanings of religious concepts, signal group commitments, and "naturalize" social conventions.[144,145] Third, by adhering to social conventions, adherents engender a shared ethos and contribute to the cooperation and social coordination of the group. Finally, the manner in which adherents cooperate and coordinate is the system's output, from which adherents experience environmental feedback (either positive or negative) in the form of survival, reproduction, and health and well-being.

Collective action, cooperation, and coordination

Alcorta and Sosis propose that the religious system emerged incrementally from early hominid rituals and was selected because its constituent parts, which co-evolved and coalesced through human evolution, together contributed to extending human cooperation, maximizing resource extraction, and benefiting individual fitness.[146] Three constituents in particular—communal rituals, the sacred, and rites of passage—have regularly provided human groups with adaptive benefits by means of fostering communal trust and thereby promoting ingroup coordination. While those three constituents continue to provide adaptive benefits to religious communities, they are no longer restricted to religions but occur among secular groups where similar ("quasi-religious") functions promote the same ends.[147] Let us look at each of these three constituents in turn.

Communal rituals. When a community undertakes a ritual together, it can promote ingroup trust and overcome collective action problems.[148] Communal rituals do so by imposing costs on group members in the form of extraordinary acts such that only persons who are truly committed to the group would undertake them. Costs include the physical demands of the ritual itself as well as the accompanying confessional beliefs (expected declarations or expressions), badges (religious attire), and bans (taboos) that go along with it.[149] By engaging in these demands, group members not only pay the costs for group membership but also signal their commitments to the group. Because the demands are "hard to fake," they serve as effective means of communicating group commitments.[150] Hence, when done effectively and collectively, rituals can function like a public stage for conveying group loyalties, developing intragroup trust, and thus overcoming collective action problems.[151]

Achieving collective action by means of communal ritual has a threefold significance for ethnoreligious groups. First, many scholars suggest that religious ritual is effective in war because its very promotion of collective action may have evolved in the face of security threats posed by predatory outgroups in ancestral environments.[152] Moreover, for early humans inhabiting the changing environments of the EEA, the ability to create cohesive and cooperative male-based units would have provided an adaptive advantage to groups faced with coalitional threats.[153] Second, the need for rituals and communal trust account for the group acceptance of extreme behaviors. When the benefits of ethnoreligious group membership increase—for instance, if the group is in a resource-competitive region, crisis environment, or intergroup conflict—then both membership costs and the collective demand for extreme acts on behalf of the group will rise. Third, the demand for collective action explains why ritual often accompanies intergroup conflict—by increasing the costs of membership in times of crisis, such as wars, groups provide a means to convey trust and coordinate collectively.[154] Taken together, ritual remains an important mechanism for allowing ethnoreligious groups to band together and respond to the dynamic conditions of their environment; however, it is liable to incite extreme pro-group behaviors and the collective execution of violence.

The sacred. For those who identity with an ethnoreligious group, the sacred and profane renders objects, events, and symbols with highly emotional significance.[155] Here again, ritual plays an important part. Ritual not only identifies what is sacred but also creates it, and therein lies one of its greatest powers.[156] The example of holy water is especially telling. As noted by Alcorta and Sosis,[157] holy water is not intrinsically holy but rather transformed and sanctified through ritual, where the views of adherents are changed toward it. In short, by participating in rituals involving holy water, adherents develop a new cognitive schema about the substance and emotional reactions to it; the water is thereafter seen as being sanctified and, when encountered, evokes strong positive emotions. Likewise, if holy water is misused, adherents experience strong negative emotions and view those who mishandle it with repugnance.

In the same way, the sacred is a powerful source of motivation for ethnoreligious groups when it comes to land, which, albeit universally valued, becomes a source of aggression when religion alters collective perceptions about the costs and benefits of defending a territory.[158,159] Through rituals and myths, ethnoreligious groups come to see their lands as being holy. When transgressed by outgroups, sacred lands are therefore defended at all costs because transgressions upon them are not only seen as direct threats but also as repugnant acts.

Sacred emotions can also be applied to violence itself. When combined with beliefs about supernatural agents and the afterlife, rituals can sanctify violent causes and portray the sacrifice of group members and killing of enemies as holy endeavors.[160] This kind of legitimization tends to be powerful in violence cadres where young men are indoctrinated with justifications for violence.[161] Through the use of intense rituals (e.g., boot camp), individuals can be transformed socially into warriors, instilled with feelings of *communitas* for compatriots,[162,163] and motivated by sacred values and moral imperatives, for which they are willing to give their lives.[164]

Rites of passage. Rites of passage, such as boot camp or coming of age ceremonies, are notably important for ethnoreligious groups insofar as they mark important transitions in life stages and instill group members with a collective identity.[165] It is here that group identification and identity fusion take place. While the former involves a ceremony of sorts that declares the person's new social role, the latter involves intense rituals—typically during adolescence—that reshape the individual's sense of self and inculcate him or her with ethnoreligious identity. Through rites of passage (and warrior cults therein),[166] young initiates learn what constitutes the sacred and acquire associations with group symbols whose meanings are embodied through grueling trials (most rites involve such activities as mutilation, sacrifice, or torture). Occurring during adolescence when brain cortices and nuclei are still developing, rites of passage quite literally reshape the brain and influence individuals when they are most sensitive to social ideals and able to acquire a deep sense of personal identity.[167,168] Importantly, violent initiations create identity fusion "bands of brothers" and prime initiates to respond aggressively to threats against group symbols.[169] This identity fusion is significant for ethnoreligious communities experiencing chronic warfare because rites of passage during such periods of time turn violent. For instance, Turner reported that among the Ndembu of Zambia, a culture he studied to understand rites of passage, there was a close connection between social conflict and the intensity of their rituals and rites of initiation.[170] Likewise, scholars working in communities prone to terrorism note that children acquire a deep sense of group identity and collective commitments through rites of passage and, by adolescence, many are already prepared for martyrdom.[171]

Frames, justifications, and rewards

As a complex adaptive system that is comprised of multiple constituents, the religious system can also facilitate organized violence in at least three other ways. First, religious beliefs can indeed be used to translate local political conflicts into cosmic struggles.[172] To illustrate, Atwill observes that in China conflicts between the Hui and Han are often portrayed as religious battles with cosmic significance despite the fact that "the fighting is inextricably tied to nonreligious issues of majority-minority discord, friction over limited resources, and ethno-cultural differences."[173] Second, afterlife beliefs and rituals can be used to instill mental schemas of spiritual and eternal rewards for participating in violence. When this happens, intergroup conflicts can become especially dangerous because spiritual rewards for violence extend the time horizons of conflict from one that can be settled within a generation to a cosmic struggle that is to be settled in divine time.[174] Along these lines, Sidel shows that conflicts between Muslims and Christians in Indonesia became noticeably more violent in the first decade of the 21st century—transitioning from riots to outright attacks of Muslims against Christians such as pogroms and suicide bombings—after the arrival of Salafi Islam and the greater emphasis thereafter on eternal rewards for engaging in or enduring violence.[175] Third, the myths, taboos, and moral obligations of the religious system can be used to morally justify intergroup conflict.[176] While religions wrestle with the moral ambiguities of the human community, they offer a moral framework that is often dichotomous, dividing the world into moral versus immoral and righteous versus evil. This framework usually serves as a means for communities to grapple seriously with what is morally right; however, in times of war, it can be used to portray the violence of one's ingroup as moral and righteous and that of one's enemy as immoral and evil. Thus, using religion to dichotomize communities is likely an outcome of the human need to use religion to avoid moral ambiguity in

war, rather than the necessary outcome of religion per se. Given these modes of facilitating conflict, the religious system can serve as a "natural security system"[177] that not only legitimates widespread violence but also renders it as an extension of the religion itself. As a result, the cause and legitimacy of conflicts are prone to be questioned less in ethnoreligious societies than in pluralistic societies.[178]

Leadership and inciting speech

Perhaps the most central mechanism that turns the religious system toward collective violence is leadership or, more precisely, inciting speeches made by leaders. This can occur within the religious system by local religious authorities or political leaders—many of whom may not even be religious but exploit the system's constituents and religious fervor to encourage violence.[179] To illustrate, we turn briefly to the Yugoslav wars, which function as a good case study for examining the three main ways in which leaders incite ethnoreligious conflict by exploiting the religious system and with it the proximate and ultimate causes of collective violence and intergroup conflict, respectively. In doing so, we also attempt to bring together the various elements we have discussed throughout this article and how they contributed to conflicts during the break-up of Yugoslavia.

The breakup of Yugoslavia

After decades of political unity and economic stability under the benevolent dictator Josip Broz Tito, Yugoslavia and its six republics and two autonomous provinces drifted steadily toward "break-up" in the 1980s, after Tito's death and the subsequent emergence of several systemic crises. These crises included the following:

- A power vacuum and dysfunctional presidential system that followed Tito's death in 1980, when the eight leaders of the republics and autonomous provinces attempted to share power by holding a rotational year-long presidency.[180]
- The collapse of the Yugoslav economy due to the unsustainability of its socialistic programs, massive foreign debt, and the "quiet revolution" promoted by intervening Western powers (namely, the United States under Reagan's administration), which sought to integrate Yugoslavia into the emerging market-oriented economies of Eastern Europe.[181]
- The sudden demise of the Eastern bloc and the end of the Cold War, which diminished Yugoslavia's strategic political importance, weakened Yugoslavia's international trade relations, and exposed the failings and transgressions of communist leaders within Yugoslavia.[182]
- The rise of nationalistic sentiments in Serbia led by the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts and former communists, such as Slobodan Milosevic, whose political rhetoric and actions toward minorities and non-Serbs inflamed ethnic tensions and prompted the rise of nationalistic parties in other republics and autonomous provinces.[183]
- Milosevic's so-called antibureaucratic revolution in which nationalistic Serbs undertook street protests against the allegedly corrupt governing structures and non-Serbian politicians of Vojvodina, Kosovo, and Montenegro until such leaders were removed, replaced by Milosevic's representatives, thus increasing the political power of Serbia in Yugoslavia.[184]

All of these factors brought Yugoslavia to the brink of collapse, but one factor in particular made the break-up virtually inevitable: The 1974 Yugoslav Constitution, which was the fourth and last constitution of Yugoslavia, granted the republics and provinces the right to self-determination.[185] Hence, when the crises of the 1980s occurred, many of the republics and provinces sought independence.

However, it was the combination of self-determination, resource competition, and unresolved historical animosities between the former republics that led to conflict.[186] In particular, as Yugoslavia's economy deteriorated in the 1970s, the wealthy northern republics of Slovenia and Croatia began to provide for the poorer southern republics and provinces, such as Serbia and Kosovo, respectively. By the 1980s, Serbia was attempting to dominate Yugoslavia by exercising control over Slovenia's and Croatia's resources. In so doing, Serbia became an increasing threat as it garnered more and more power through Milosevic's antibureaucratic revolution and exercised control of Yugoslavia's general infrastructure, such as the Yugoslav National Army, which threatened to use force to control the republics.[187] In turn, Slovenia and Croatia threatened to separate by force, and that possibility conjured up worries among Serbs about the fate of Serbian minorities in Croatia.[188] During World War

II, Croatia had been home to a brutal military regime that sought independence by force, and this regime attempted to create a "pure" Croatia by expelling or murdering thousands of Serbs. (It is worth noting that Serb Chetniks and Bosnian Muslims also committed crimes against one another during World War II). For the Serbs, the revived Croatian independence movement in the 1980s thus appeared to be another potential threat to Serbian identity, and these worries came to a boiling point with the mounting crises of the late 1980s, making collective violence a very possible outcome.

How so? Recall that human beings have been selected to satisfice potential coalitional threats by being parochially altruistic and having propensities for revenge. The former expressed itself in the late Yugoslav era as reactionary politics and ethnic nationalism—the combined belief that the republics would indeed break-up into respective nations and that the interests of each nation would be paramount to the well-being of its people, who were defined by their ethnicity, shared language, faith, or ancestry.[189,190,191] Revenge became a popular motif among ethno-nationalists, who talked incessantly about "retaliation" for historic crimes or future transgressions; this commentary served to express ingroup loyalties, deter repeat transgressions, and intimidate disloyal ingroup members and ethno-nationalistic minorities.[192] Such aggressive motifs became especially appealing to ethnic communities as the economy collapsed and people experienced relative deprivation and feelings of both social exclusion and fear about their future. In these conditions, the climate was ripe for leaders who wished to exploit popular sentiments, foment popular support for war, and use violence cadres to orchestrate collective violence.

To examine this case study further, we now turn to the work of thee legal scholars associated with the International Criminal Tribunal for Yugoslavia (ICTY), Susan Benesch, Anthony Oberschall, and Predrag Dojcinovic. These scholars not only agree about the basic causes of collective violence during the Yugoslav wars but also the key role that leaders played in fomenting group hatreds and contributing to ethnoreligious conflicts therein.

Exploiting histories of conflicts

Benesch argues that two preconditions enable leaders to incite collective violence: a historical context of ethnoreligious conflict, and a rapidly changing social environment characterized by economic insecurity.[193] During the break-up of Yugoslavia, the history of ethnoreligious wars disposed the respective ethnic communities to become collectively paranoid of one another once separation seemed inevitable.[194] This was especially the case in Serbia where the media, after Milosevic's media purge and control over the press, became replete with threats of Serbian minorities becoming victims of genocide in Kosovo and Croatia. Moreover, Serbian media entertained notions of revenge against Kosovo Albanians for driving Serbs from their holy land, revenge against Bosnian Muslims for the crimes committed by the Ottoman Turks, and revenge against Croatians for the Ustaše regime.[195] The fear of genocidal violence and vindication for historic crimes created collective support for war and compelled many people to turn to their religion, where they often encountered activist clergy who defended the war and encouraged participation. A similar pattern emerged in Croatia and Bosnian as the republics separated and moved toward war.[196] Wilmer comments that support for war and paranoia emerged because Catholics, Christian Orthodox, and Muslims were mutually afraid of being victimized by former enemies.[197] Instead of dispelling these fears, religious leaders on all sides of the break-up exploited peoples' paranoia and exacerbated underlying feelings of xenophobia, parochial altruism, and revenge.

For instance, one of the most influential religious proclamations came from Serbian Orthodox Patriarch Pavle, who claimed at the onset of the break-up of Yugoslavia that Orthodox Serbs were again going to be targeted for extermination by a Vatican-Tehran-fundamentalist plot.[198] Such proclamations engendered widespread fear and arguably prepared would-be combatants for moral disengagement. After all, believing they were being targeted by an international conspiracy of Catholics and Muslims, combatants would be afraid of other ethnic groups and see them with low warmth or even moral blame. Recall that these are the very psychological conditions that contribute to collective violence in environments of resource competition and relative deprivation. In many ethnographic interviews conducted by Kiper (unpublished data), Serbs commented about the growing collective paranoia that became pervasive in the last days of Yugoslavia and onset of the Yugoslav wars.

Capitalizing on such paranoia, Serbian leaders, such as Vojislav Šešelj, promoted "defensive" military strikes in the name of the Orthodox Christian religion and characterized attacks first on Croatians and then on Bosnian Muslims as revenge against "Ustaši" and Bosnian "Turks," respectively (i.e., terms that signified Serbia's

historic religious enemies). Leaders like Šešelj used Serbia's mythic past to frame Serbian coalitional aggression as a righteous if not holy defense against the alleged "Ustaši" and "Turkish" enemies, who once again threatened the sacred people, faith, and lands of Serbia. In so doing, Šešelj, like so many leaders in war, exploited the human propensities for parochial altruism and revenge.

For Benesch,[199] the preconditions for collective violence were exacerbated by the deepening economic insecurities in the 1990s and by heightened relative deprivation, which prompted the separating republics to compete even further for resources by extending the borders of their nation and expelling minorities. In Serbia, leaders attempted to maximize the territory of the state of "Yugoslavia," but to gain popular support, they did not disclose that Serb forces were engaged in ethnic cleansings. Instead, they declared that Serbia was reclaiming the former lands of the Orthodox Serbian Empire marked by the Карлобаг-Огулин-Карловац-Вировитица otherwise known as "Greater Serbia."[200] Soon thereafter, the rhetoric of "defending Yugoslavia" would give way to "protecting Serbian minorities in a Greater Serbia," which euphemized the militaristic quest for an expansive Serbian territory.

Media control and violence cadres

Oberschall's expert report on nationalistic war propaganda to the ICTY identifies two social factors that sustained and exacerbated collective violence throughout the Yugoslav wars. First, through an impoverished marketplace of ideas and controlled media, an ideology of antagonism was delivered to the Serbian public in a stream of hate speech that created the conditions in which even the "ordinary man" accepted collective violence. For Oberschall, the most persuasive speeches were those made by political and religious leaders that consisted of the following elements: dehumanized portrayals of the outgroup; false reports about Serbian heroism and the enemy's atrocities; appeals to ingroup loyalty; and religiously framed violence. Oberschall found that these elements were identifiable in nearly every one of Šešelj's speeches during the break-up of Yugoslavia.[201] In fact, in many places where Šešelj spoke, collective violence ensued thereafter, such as the ethnic cleansings of Hrtkovci (see Case No. IT-03-67). In such places, Šešelj advanced an ideology of antagonism wherein Serbia would be better, safer, and stronger without Croatian Catholics or Bosnian Muslims. Recall that these kinds of ideologies become critical to sustained collective violence insofar as they justify violence against the targeted outgroup. The Serbian media also contributed to an ideology of antagonism by yielding false news reports that amounted to accusation in a mirror. For instance, the Serbian attack on Vukovar was portrayed as the liberation of Serbs who were, allegedly, being massacred by Croatians; in reality, it was the Serbs who massacred many Croatians after Vukovar's fall. Likewise, many Serbian news reports claimed that Serbian forces were in Bosnia to protect Serbs from genocidal and fanatical Muslims when, in fact, some of those Serbian forces would carry out genocide against Muslims in Srebrenica.[202]

According to Oberschall, the second social factor that sustained and contributed to collective violence was the creation of violence cadres, namely, reserve police units or paramilitaries.[203] As the chief perpetrators of ethnoreligious violence, violence cadres were organized and armed by neighboring police or state security forces. Designed, in theory, to defend Serbia, these cadres actually terrorized entire populations of non-Serbs. Such terrorism was often carried out on religious grounds. Oberschall shows that political leaders, such as Šešelj, created violence cadres, initiated volunteers, and indoctrinated them with (1) myths that glorified violence, (2) religious justifications for conflict, and (3) dehumanized views of "enemies."[204] Remarkably, Orthodox religious leaders accompanied violence cadres into the field, overseeing daily communal rituals and blessing fighters and weapons before battles.[205,206] As a result, fighters seem to have become identity fused and thus more willing to undertake extreme actions, such as ethnic cleansings, to "protect" Serbs and achieve a "Greater Serbia." Recall that frequent religious ritual in violence cadres would have reinforced collective meanings, allowed fighters to signal group commitments, and naturalized the practices of their violence cadres. By framing collective violence as a religious war to defend Serbs, fighters would have come to see their local struggle as a cosmic one.

Religiously framed hate speech

Dojčinović claims that ethnoreligious violence was incited by two kinds of propagandistic speeches. The first were those that framed Serbia's military engagements as unresolved ethnoreligious conflicts.[207] While religious leaders, such as Patriach Pavle, accomplished this framing at the local level, political leaders, such as Milosević, did so at the state level. For example, in his

infamous "rallies of truth," Milosević assembled thousands of Serbs in Kosovo, the country's holiest land, and delivered rousing speeches for defending Serbia. In his "Gazimestan speech,"[208] Milosević told half a million Serbs that they should defend their holy lands just as their forebears had done at the Battle of Kosovo. Thereafter, Milosević and others often spoke of defending not "Kosovo" but Косово и Метохија, which signified the central holy land of Serbia. Consequentially, the Orthodox religious system in Serbia replaced the unifying system of socialism at the break-up of Yugoslavia, and leaders used the religious system in war to conventionalize and reinforce justifications for collective violence. In response to Serbian ethnic nationalism, leaders in Croatia as well as Bosnia and Herzegovina used religion in a similar manner, justifying the wars on religious grounds.

The second type of propagandistic speeches identified by Dojčinović were inciting speeches. For instance, the Serbian Metropolitan Nikolaj, the highest-ranking Christian Orthodox official in Bosnian, delivered a public speech on Easter Sunday of 1993, where he called on Orthodox people to follow Karadžić and Mladić in their fight against the "Turks" (i.e., Bosnian Muslims). After Nikolaj's speech, Karadžić commented that the conflict in Bosnia would be resolved if Muslims converted to Orthodoxy or departed.[209] Perhaps unsurprisingly, violence cadres massacred Muslims shortly afterward in Markale and Srebrenica. On the day prior to the Srebrenica massacre, General Ratko Mladić said to his forces with religious exuberance: "On the eve of one more great Serbian holiday, we present this town to the Orthodox people of Serbia. After the rebellion of its Turkish governor, the moment has finally come for us to take revenge on the Turks here" (Case No. IT-02-54-T). Over the next several days 8,000 Serbian violence cadres rounded up and murdered non-combatant Bosniaks.

Similarly, prior to the Serbian assault on Vukovar, a town that was once characterized by interreligious life, Šešelj called on gathered Serb military units, violence cadres, and volunteers to kill all of the Ustaše tyrants—Catholic Croatian Nazis. He ended his speech, by saying that "Not one Ustaša can leave Vukovar alive!"[210] There were, of course, no Nazis in Vukovar, which the Serbs leveled, but rather Croatian Catholics, most of whom were unarmed civilians. Despite numerous massacres perpetrated by the Serb forces, Orthodox Serbs supported the siege of Vukovar as if it were a religious battle against the evils of Croatian Nazism, which is exactly how religious and political leaders portrayed it.[211] Thus, when Vukovar fell, images of the bloodied streets were celebrated as evidence of a victory for Serbia and Christian Orthodoxy alike.

Conclusion

One would be hard pressed to say that Serbian Orthodoxy is a violent religion today—for it is not. However, during the break-up of Yugoslavia, leaders used ethnoreligious rhetoric and imagery to convince individuals that their ethnic neighbors were tyrants, who differed little from "evil" historic enemies, such as the Nazis, and as such should be eliminated. A similar use of ethnoreligious rhetoric in many Croatian paramilitaries and Mujahedeen fighters in Bosnia emerged throughout the Yugoslav wars. However, Catholicism in Croatia and Islam in Bosnia and Herzegovina are also neither inherently violent nor likely to be the central cause of conflict in the region, even though leaders in all countries of the former Yugoslavia still use religious rhetoric from time to time to foment discord. Regardless of what may happen in the Balkans in the future, the case of the former Yugoslavia is one example among many that illustrates the important role of religious identity in facilitating ethnoreligious conflict.

In this article, we have provided a synthesis and analysis of recent discoveries in the behavioral and brain sciences regarding the various causes of ethnoreligious violence. We explored the evolution of intergroup conflict, including its preadaptations and selected propensities, specifically coalitional aggression, parochial altruism, and revenge. We also elucidated the environmental conditions, including resource competition and relative deprivation, and the psychological conditions—xenophobia, dehumanization, and moral disengagement—that contribute to collective violence. Our analysis identified a distinct set of causes that often precipitate collective violence and showed that ethnoreligious violence is a kind of collective violence that often involves identity fusion and the manipulation of the religious system. As we described for the Yugoslav wars, when combined with the inciting speeches of leaders, identity fusion and the religious system can bring about devastating instances of collective violence.

We believe that our approach to religion as an adaptive system is a particularly important contribution to understanding ethnoreligious violence. First, viewing religion as an adaptive system helps us understand

religion's powerful motivational influence and ability to comprehensively shape lives and worldviews. Second, approaching religion as a system also helps explain the dynamic interrelationship between ethnicity and religion. This point is important because Western scholars often view religion through a Christian lens and thus fail to appreciate the strong connections between religion and ethnicity. Many religious systems throughout the world are inherently tied to an ethnic identity. However, while Christianity sometimes gets deeply linked to ethnicity, as in Serbia, Christianity (like Islam) often remains independent of ethnic identity, as it is in the United States. Finally, understanding religions as adaptive systems reminds us that religions are not comprised of abstract ideas but rather consist of interacting engaged lives that can and do influence sociopolitical contexts.

In conclusion, our synthetic evolutionary perspective on ethnoreligious violence highlights how our evolutionary legacy can shed light on contemporary social dynamics that are otherwise puzzling. We encourage further evolutionary analyses in this area. We suspect that ethnographic work in regions troubled by ethnoreligious violence, while difficult, would be particularly fruitful. Computer models and simulations of ethnoreligious conflict are similarly underrepresented in the literature, and these methods offer less risky but equally promising avenues for research. It is our hope that analyzing the underlying evolutionary roots of ethnoreligious violence will lead to effective strategies that can identify and diffuse potential conflicts before they turn violent.

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