Making Sense of Ethnic Cleansing

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To try to make sense of ethnic cleansing, this article examines certain patterns in the relationships between borders drawn on the ground and markers internalized by people. The effects of increasing globalization are considered significant but, in the end, not as important as the withering away of ideology in a world which also decries conquest. Granted little room in which to maneuver, those who seek to protect or augment their property and status (and hence attain security) may have little choice but to engage in ethnic cleansing as a form of anticonquest.

According to the archeologist Lawrence Keeley, war is a human universal.[1] Though the causes of war have been endlessly debated, what war revolves around appears to be a universal too: security broadly construed.[2] Wars are fought to puncture or expand comfort zones, while what provides for a wide enough margin of comfort—whether sufficient territory, resources, power, prestige, or position—is itself a source for endless contention. What, after all, is "sufficient?" And who gets to determine this?

The ways in which sufficiency and security, and insufficiency and insecurity hook together, meanwhile, guarantee perpetual instability. Peace is never a sure thing; the potential for conflict always lurks.[3] Thus people everywhere invest some amount of energy in protecting themselves. They erect borders and maintain boundaries. However, borders and boundaries, by their nature, invite penetration. They suggest that something valuable is being guarded.

Still, we might wonder, to what extent will borders and boundaries continue to matter—as national economies globalize, regional and international organizations acquire enhanced clout, and the globe is treated, environmentally at least, as though it is smaller and smaller?

Given globalization, territorial boundaries seem increasingly irrelevant, while the resurgent phenomenon of ethnic conflict suggests that identities, determined somehow, matter more. The aim of this article is twofold: first, to sketch certain patterns in the relationships between borders drawn on the ground and markers

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internalized by people, and, second, to suggest that ethnic cleansing—conflict taken to an extreme—is a form of anticonquest, an unfortunate but *socio*-logical response to recent changes in our attitude toward subjugation.

Mobile People, Fuzzy Margins

Property requires security. We see this in all societies in which people own stealable goods. In fact, humans appear to operate according to a fairly simple rule of thumb: the more permanently they can guard property, the more property some (at least) seek to acquire. Taken together, permanence and property lead to socioeconomic differentiation, dividing societies into classes, or distinguishing societies, regions, and countries from one another. Differentiation sets up the perfect rubric for conflict. It becomes either an excuse or a reason to wrest control (and possessions) from others.[4]

While conditions determine just who inflicts what kind of damage on whom, people in most societies abide by rules which tell them who they can (or should) target, under what circumstances, and how much harm can be inflicted. Even stateless societies, which lack formal governments, have such codes.[5] Consider, for instance, pastoral nomads. Livestock-herders the world over invest heavily in social systems which release young men to herd and protect the group's communally-tended wealth. Animals are eminently stealable. Thus, young men do not just guard their fathers' herds, they also seek to build up their own by raiding others. This leads to continual, low-level warfare. Even so, young men never raid indiscriminately.

How, though, do they know whose herds to pilfer? No one stays put from one season to the next, since such people must move about the landscape seeking water and better grazing. Also, communal membership expands and contracts depending upon local environmental conditions. When there is abundant grazing, groups can afford to grow larger; during droughts and dry seasons, people split up into much smaller clusters.

Borders, as we usually conceive them, do not function very effectively without people being present to defend them. In this sense, territorial boundaries among nomads become meaningless. At the same time, pastoralists, who may run across competitors at any moment, have to have some method by which they can identify others from a safe distance as potential friends or likely foes.

Different attire helps. So do group-distinctive hair styles, different footwear, or anything which makes for a visual cue. Generally, nomads demarcate themselves. At closer range, facial scarification and tattoos serve as additional identifiers. And though some markers are more permanent than others, all help make visible socially constructed (*not* biological) differences. Whether facial tattoos run vertically, diagonally, or horizontally (as they do in the southern Sudan), or whether feathers are worn straight up or off to the side (as they were on the Great Plains), markers imply that people register their differences against one another, not in a vacuum.[6]

In other words, not only do people manufacture markers where no real distinctions exist, but they do so in contrast to the symbols others use. Or, to put this somewhat differently, where people are more alike than different in terms of visage, stature, and mode of livelihood, any large-scale differentiation has to be man-made.[7] Such differentiation is arbitrary yet agreed-upon. More significant still, no one has sat down to hammer out the rules. Instead, in a world where people travel across contiguous space (and not by air), agreements (and disagreements) emerge from cumulative mutual encounters.

Two hundred years ago, for instance, any Maasai or Crow Indian would have known the people among whom he had grown up, while beyond this network all strangers would have been equally knowable on two counts. First, to be moving through their areas at all meant that strangers were some kind of nomads too. And second, the universe of potential interactions was already well-defined. Groups were very well aware of who lived to their north, west, east, and south, how they dressed, how they walked, and what they were after, trade or plunder, when they ventured too near.

Raids, even more than trade, tied together people who shared the same fundamental values. We see this in the case of East Africans who still swipe cattle from one another, or Bedouins who rustle camels. Such violent reciprocity bespeaks a shared way of life. Raids are ongoing affiliative events.[7] The anthropologist H. H. Turney-High neatly points out the extent to which counting coup among Plains Indians bespoke an intimate understanding among "enemy" groups, thus hooking them all into an invisible interdependent system.[8] Such encounters demanded that there be just enough hostility felt toward a "them," but not so much expressed that any single incident ignited an all-out war. Otherwise, were one community to utterly wipe out its foes, the entire system of carefully calibrated tit-for-tat interactions on which personal prestige depended would crumble.[9]

But lest we think hit-and-run raids were just limited to nomads, evidence of similarly controlled confrontations exists in the tropical zones of New Guinea and the Amazon.[10] Shifting cultivators rarely if ever engaged in wars of complete annihilation. Rather, they raided to steal women or heads, or to wreak revenge.[11] Local-level security was certainly breached, but wholesale cultural destruction was disallowed. And shifting cultivators, even more than pastoralists, grew up knowing that on this side lived people they could trust but over in that direction resided potential enemies.[12]

Shortly we will draw a contrast between local-level enmity of this sort and ethnic enmity today. But first, what should we make of the fact that borders around villages, unlike those pastoralists wore, could be territorial?

Violate the village's security zone and fighting would result, or violate it so fighting could result. Village boundaries basically doubled as tripwires.[13] Even more to the point, they amounted to lines in the sand. On either side, people could find exactly the same sorts of things. With no central treasury or even treasure, value pooled in "inalienable possessions" (e.g., women and heads), each of which had its own unique history and identity. Being movable (as well as removable) these objects of raids led to further raids. The fact that boundaries signaled differences of degree, not differences of kind, meant that here too there

was little sociological reason for raids to escalate beyond the occasional massacre.[14] As enraged as victims and survivors often were, conquest was hardly attractive (or viable). Single captives might be taken, and individuals enslaved, but there was no hierarchy in place capable of subjugating or making use of an entire people. Absorption made sense,[15] but wholesale extermination did not.

Permanence and Security

Now consider the difference permanence makes.[16] According to the military historian Robert O'Connell, war as we know it grew out of agriculture and "the plant trap."[17] O'Connell describes how a permanent dependence on crops locked humans into depending on a food source which, thanks to the vagaries of climate and disease, has never been dependable enough. Irrigation canals, food storage facilities, and other means that people invented to assist them in controlling nature only further committed humans to a place and a fixed social structure.

In O'Connell's analysis of the origins of "true war," agriculturalists (trapped by their investments) fought one another over food. Maybe. Or, they went to war with one another over labor. Regardless, what O'Connell's argument suggests in a broad sense is that the margins of safety which people fought for came to include gaining purchase over production. Either other people were captured and put to use planting, or they were killed and their land was seized.

Although O'Connell never makes the connection specifically, we can trace a direct link between the demands of permanency, the need for control, and conquest. Sedentarization completely reorients people's social relations.[18] This is documented time and again in the ethnographic literature. When people become attached (or restricted) to a place, the social order has time to harden. A hierarchy crystallizes, nodes of power emerge, and centralized command appears. Armies are one proof of this. Charles Tilly, William McNeill, and Bruce Porter describe the concomitant rise of states and militaries.[19] But sophisticated command and control structures likewise develop in prisons and concentration camps.

It seems too much of a truism to point out that, as power and permanency combine, hierarchies form and centers accrete. In some societies, centers are wherever elders gather; elsewhere, palaces represent fixed displays of status. Consider capitals. These cities, which are home to a state's seat of government as well as its head of state, represent unparalleled concentrations of authority. Sit atop the government, dominate the bureaucracy, impel others to labor, and we are now talking about the temptation to turn consolidated control into permanent power, all centered in a single (controllable) place. History makes clear that this is what those in authority often seek to do: secure their positions through time once they have captured them in space. If they can.

Space presents a considerable challenge. By definition, states rarely consist of single cities. From the top-down and outside-in they are instead containers.[20] They hold a myriad of people in a myriad of places. Thus, rulers have two options for control. They may choose either or both. First, they can erect well-guarded borders at the edges of their state, as well as all sorts of administrative

subcontainers within. Second, they can require everyone who moves around within the state to carry some form of identification.

From a ruler's point of view, maintaining physical control over the movement of people is a bureaucratic problem. However, when people then use the ways in which the state groups them to challenge the state from below, this presents rulers with potential political difficulties. In fact, it might well be argued that this is *the* challenge rulers face. People revolt regionally, or as Donald Horowitz suggests, they revolt because the state hierarchizes and stigmatizes them as members of a "them."[21]

Essentially, the state reifies identity as soon as it draws boundaries around its people, and then classifies individuals according to common attributes (e.g., place of domicile, language, race, religion, etc.). At the national level, states often try to plug everyone into a common identity—through use of a common language, the teaching of a common history, the telling of common myths, and so on.[22] In the literature, nationalism is consistently portrayed as a top-down, orchestrated, and organized activity. Schools, armies, even holidays are all vehicles for the promotion of nationalism. And, at subnational levels, ethnicity is created in much the same fashion. Solidarities are consciously reinforced among specific sets of people with the aim of convincing them that, thanks to their ethnicity (however this may be defined) they have more in common with one another than with people outside their ethnic group.

Increasingly, academics have accepted the idea that ethnicity and nationalism are the work of culture brokers and political elites. Traditions, themselves, are said to be manufactured.[23] For instance, it is now largely accepted among Africanists that tribalism is a recent invention.[24] Nevermind that many contemporary Kenyans will identify themselves by name and then tribe—for instance, "Hi. I'm Sam. I'm a Kamba by tribe." This is easy enough to explain away. Sam has simply internalized the rubric under which he, his parents, and probably his grandparents were ruled. As Mahmood Mamdani notes in a recent prize-winning work, "To be civilized, 'not as individuals but as communities,' to be subject to a process that one-sidedly opposed the community to the individual, and thereby encapsulated the individual in a set of relations defined and enforced by the state as communal and customary, indeed summed up 'the opportunity and the genius' of British colonialism in Africa."[25]

But Mamdani may overstate the case. According to the older anthropological literature, people did live in unquestionably self-governing groups. By purposely usurping political autonomy and undermining local economies, what colonial authorities did that was truly novel was to force peoples suddenly to compete in a common arena. Colonialism contained peoples within states.

Identity

Without question, the imposition of state boundaries altered the types of borders Africans (to stick with Mamdani's subject) were used to crossing, recrossing, and fighting over—closing some and opening others. Colonialism fixed people, as

well as their identities, tying them to specific locales. Markers, meanwhile, were in constant flux as people adopted new religions (Christianity and Islam), and new forms of dress, lifestyles, and customs. Though the physical limits demarcating the state were invisible—located in the hinterlands somewhere—state authority could be felt wherever there were officials, licenses, permits, even something so routine as addresses with which to deal. States not only introduced all sorts of things worth having, but government regulations ensured that individuals had to have these things, or else.

Beyond just interjecting new methods of control, as Mamdani remarks, states-as-containers also introduced new centers to control. During the run up to independence and thereafter, these became the things to fight over, not only because capitals, bureaucracies, and governments could be dominated, but because they demanded seizure by anyone seeking to prevent others from controlling them.

Again, to reiterate, there were thems, no matter what academics now claim. People were embedded in local communities prior to the imposition of states. They had to have been because they and we still are.

The human social order is constructed around our being born dependent and our being born to women. The fact of parentage is (or has been until recently) a human universal. Different societies may place different emphases on which kin are accorded more significance: mothers, fathers, mother's brothers. Descent may be traced patrilineally, matrilineally, or bilaterally. Families might be large and extended, nuclear, or even single-parent. But, regardless of the variations, every individual is the "child of." This identity is ascribed.

No matter how many identifiers we add or shed, our parentage remains immutable. We see this most clearly in moments of true crisis. Too often, conflict lays bare just how permanent and primordial blood ties are. Nevermind how much we might like to think we can bury our origins under other markers—or hide the truth—government records or neighbors can easily undo us. Nazi Germany offers poignant proof of this. But so too do recent events in Bosnia and Rwanda.

When neighbors turn in neighbors, and former friends or in-laws give one another up, they do so not because they have checked off what they know about a person against a list of fungible "ethnic" attributes. Rather, they simply know this person. Local knowledge categorizes. The catch is that it does not do so according to the criteria that outsiders most often use to explain and understand how sorting and identifying is done.

Recently, Michael Ignatieff and Vamik Volkan have each puzzled over Freud's "narcissim of minor differences." Ignatieff believes "intolerant people are actively uninterested in learning about those they purport to despise," even when these others are their neighbors.[26] He sees ignorance feeding intolerance feeding off of narcissim, and blames all three for ethnic conflict. Volkan, more conventionally, considers the use-value of minor differences: having a "them" is critical to sustaining cohesion among an "us."[27]

However, each overlooks a central point. Ignatieff writes, "ethnicity is sometimes described as if it were skin, a fate that cannot be changed. In fact, what is essential about ethnicity is its plasticity. It is not a skin, but a mask, constantly repainted."[28] However, he conveniently ignores whoever it is donning the mask.[28] Somewhere beneath the metaphor (and the mask), he intimates, there is a person doing the repainting and changing. Could this be an unchangeable person? Not in Ignatieff's scheme, since to suggest any point of constancy at all would negate his underlying faith in the situational—and thus changeable—nature of identity.

In a different context but similar sense, Volkan implies that communities come together only when faced with some external threat; solidarity emerges only as people experience stress and anxiety in the face of something scary. He avoids any discussion of spiritual security, and never mentions the possibility that people engaging in activities and performing rituals together might experience a collective consciousness that creates (and recreates) their sense of themselves as "a people." In moments of "effervescence," as Emile Durkheim might remind us, who cares about an outside world?[29]

Volkan also ignores how more mundane insecurities can tie individuals together, how concerns over food, shelter, medical care, and who will provide these as people age, become ill, or are injured, create community. Yet, as Sir Henry Maine, Louis Henry Morgan, Max Weber and others pointed out a century ago, there are significant linkages between the ways in which people connect the spiritual, the moral, and the material. This is especially evident in societies which privilege status over contract. Families everywhere instill a sense of responsibility, mutual obligation, and loyalty. Extend families, and one way to map the definition of groups is to trace the outer limits of individuals' trust. The fewer connections, the thinner the mutual faith. Where ties of mutual obligation end, borders begin.

Competition and Insecurity

If only we were a bit more self-reflexive ethnic conflict might not seem quite so senseless as it is often made to seem. Ignatieff, for one, would have us recognize one another's humanity. Then, according to his logic, we would be less prone to view others as "Others." But perhaps we already know more about one another than he suggests. Anthropologists have long debated whether there is a psychic unity of mankind.[30] Those who presume there is believe we are more alike than unalike across cultures. Those who believe there is not can make easy sense of ethnic strife. However, there is also the possibility which Lawrence Keeley hints at: that conflict itself proves a psychic unity. He musters evidence to demonstrate that the fact that war has appeared virtually everywhere means we "share" war. Push Keeley's reasoning a bit further, and his finding also suggests that what impels us to war must be our recognition of one another's inhumanity. How else explain our preoccupation with security?

Indeed, beneath the ignorance that is often read into stereotyping, epithets, slurs, and other insults, which often act as the prelude to (if not catalyst for) conflict, we can catch glimpses of a coherent logic.[31] If we were to suspend our distaste long enough to consider the extent to which ethnic stereotypes

resonate, we might even concede that people know or learn just enough about those whom they denigrate and disparage to be able to wield stereotypes as incredibly effective weapons. Otherwise, if they had not gotten something correct, the stereotypes would not continue to work—or offend.

Significantly, it is the people in-between the "them" we are sure of and the "us" we know who prove most difficult to categorize. Or, to return to a much earlier example, in the southern Sudan Nuer and Dinka facial tattoos run in different directions. There are all sorts of historic reasons why Nuer and Dinka should not trust one another. Raids are one source for distrust, while which preceded the other (raids or distrust) is now beyond recall. The fact that Nuer and Dinka remain separated by a tautology is enough to keep mistrust alive. They can read this in an instant on one another's foreheads.

However, what happens when a Nuer runs across someone he can recognize as a fellow Nuer, but is not someone he already knows? Then, the significance of outer markings quickly fades. Both men must plumb one another for other, subtler sources of connection. To judge the extent to which the other is trustworthy, each must determine where the exact points of commonality lie. Ultimately this boils down to (or is built up from) who each is the "child of." It is in such cases that minor differences—differences of degree—hold far more meaning than outsiders can possibly realize. The ability to traffic in nuances is itself the most foolproof marker of where and to whom one belongs.

Without question, identity can be dressed up and granted many forms. We see and engage in different presentations of our selves on a daily basis. Yet, for all the choices we in the West appear to make about who we are, even we work back through these put-on layers to regard one another as the products of nature and/or nurture. And either is reducible, ultimately, to our particular genetic heritage, birth order, and environment—in short, family life, no matter how truncated or otherwise construed.

Ironically, the specifics of parentage may be invisible, yet they still amount to a universal petard. Everyone can be hoisted on them eventually, because all of us have parents—alive, dead, well-known, or unacknowledged.

Who one is the child of is the one possession humans everywhere always carry. Governmentless nomads, like the Nuer and Dinka, make the most of this and think about social order in terms of descent. Significantly, so do leaders who sit atop hierarchies. The ability to sooner or later determine who anyone is the child of explains why dynastic rulers throughout history have wiped out rivals to the throne, no matter how young, how unprepared, or how nonthreatening these potential claimants might be. It is their existence, even more than their potential, that rulers fear. This also makes sense of why, often, entire lineages have been erased. Rivals who you will never cease regarding as rivals pose a continual threat. Better to obliterate them now rather than have to worry about them later.

Still, though the impetus to rid oneself of competition may be borne of the state (which, as container, also offers a center to control), the systematic eradication of entire communities is not new. In Deuteronomy, God instructed the Israelites to 'utterly destroy' the Hittites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites, and the Jebusites (20:17). The history of the Jewish people themselves, meanwhile, then came to be comprised of episodes of captivity, expulsion, dispersal, and pogrom but not complete eradication until the 1930s. This is noteworthy because if we agree with Gerard Prunier that "the systematic *organization* of the killing and the attempt at completely erasing the targeted group" began with the willful decimation of American Indian *tribes* (in the mid to late 1800s),[32] we can note that, around this time, for the first time in history, the world was also filling with states.[33] No habitable territory was left unclaimed even if vast tracts remained unexplored.

A world full of states and state-controlled colonies has meant two things, particularly since the globe has grown more crowded since all territory became state-held. First, there is less and less empty, unspoken-for space into which to neatly exile, drive, or displace large groups of people.[34] Second, at the same time, as centers and borders have increasingly come to define states, certain sets of individuals who control the levers of government and armed force possess the means for exerting unprecedented levels of centralized control. Not only can they single others out as members of groups, but genocide can be planned and executed.[35] In other words, the more inescapable the state system has proved to be—with no uncontrolled spaces into which peoples can escape or maneuver—the more zero-sum and zero-tolerant the competition within states has had to become.[36]

The Construction of Menace: Identity as a Possession

In the arena of political competition it is practically axiomatic that individuals group themselves or they find themselves grouped by others, or both, regardless of governmental form. Certainly, the U.S. model of democracy demands the formation of interest groups by citizens. But so too do parliamentary governments. Witness parties as well as factions. In democratic systems, individuals self-organize to seek the best possible representation of their needs and preferences. Totalitarian states by constrast, organize individuals from the top-down: linguistically, ethnically, professionally, by neighborhood, or cell.

Thanks to industrialization, urbanization, integration into a market economy, and other effects of modernization, individuals come together and fall back apart according to employment demands. People from different backgrounds and with different home bases, also mingle in towns, cities, and especially capitals—the loci of power. Contractual relations govern much of what we do. Accordingly, everything about our daily lives would seem to be situational. Few of us live with the people we work with, work with the people we make purchases from, or make purchases from the people we live with. Structurally, and quite consciously, a whole series of separations have been built into what we refer to as our lives. The situational nature of how we present ourselves—as employees, consumers, family members, friends—and to whom, is especially attenuated in the urban West, where individuals regularly change schools, jobs, and domiciles. But flux now occurs everywhere. Money ensures this. So does a global division of labor.

At first glance, the mobility that money buys individuals might be mistaken for creating a sort of nomadism. Certainly, how we identify one another, according to dress, accent, food preferences, and other subtle indicators of belonging, is not so different from how nomads do. But nomads, in contrast to the rest of us, are not locked into containers. The property they depend on is not tied to place. Their division of labor does not keep them permanently dependent on others who sit somewhere above or below them in a hierarchically arranged web of connections. Also, by wearing specific sets of markers, pastoralists display the outer edges of their trust on their persons. We do not.

Unlike pastoralists (who purposefully mark themselves alike), we send mixed signals, eschewing uniforms whenever possible in order to make ourselves look like others to whom we have no real ties. In fact, a whole series of disconnects exist between our style and our identity, the most revealing of which is that citizens in many parts of the world are required to carry national ID cards. On the one hand, if people were not so nomadic there would be no reason for them to have to carry modes of identification in their wallets. On the other, the fact that they are required to carry these in their wallets means that the state is unable to trust the "identity" individuals wear.

This is significant because it means identity is something the state treats as inherent and immutable though at the same time we are encouraged, through the marketplace, to fashion our identities ourselves. For instance, I can be a Virginian, a welder, an Irish-American, a Republican, and a homosexual all at the same time. Each of these identities hooks me into different groups, some of which might overlap, and others of which do not. To any of these groups I can pledge greater or lesser allegiance, depending upon my audience. Were I a Maasai, though, my loyalties would be nested—in the exact same order as every other Maasai's, which means any Maasai would know how to find out exactly who I am, and would then be able to predict a whole range of things about me. My intent would be presumed and my behavior anticipated. Actually, we would both be gauging one another according to the same formulae.

No such clearcut formulae exist where people pick and choose their identities as we in the U.S., for instance, do. Here there is no single overriding marker that we could all agree is paramount. For some Americans race is all-important, but for many others class makes for our most significant differences. Or there is religion. Or region. One could construct an entire unprioritizable list. This turns out to be fortunate because, so long as we can mix and match affinities and affiliations, gain entry, and reap rewards based on self-identity, self-presentation, and self-promotion, the illusion that we choose which identities to privilege works. It also helps that the credos we use to promote the salience of choice—"we are what we make of ourselves" and "anything is possible"—spur growth. As the pie expands, so do the numbers of identities from among which we can pick.

Shrink the pie, and the illusion that we are free to construct our own lives disappears. In times of crisis, people find themselves with little choice but to turn to those whom they know they can trust to assist them and theirs. As I have

argued elsewhere, this means relying on family as far as family and trust will extend.[37]

Now consider cases in which the state, consciously or not, sponsors uncertainty. So long as the state retains control over the population, people may well be trapped in circumstances that do not allow them to pick and choose among their differences, move apart, and go their separate ways in peace. Property ownership alone renders this difficult on the small scale. The same can be said for state borders, which preclude easy flight and resettlement on the large scale. Worse, because group separations occur within the confines of the state, people, once trapped, wind up grouped and stacked, with some better positioned than others.

Inevitably, those at the top of the heap in any system are linked together via all sorts of connections. This is worth noting because, no matter how tempting it may be to lump together those who seem unduly privileged according to what appear to be their racial, linguistic, religious, regional, or mythico-historical commonalities, ethnic identity is hardly an all-purpose badge. Flashing one's skin color or accent does not earn one automatic entree. Only knowing someone with power, or with access to those in power, will gain one the kind of status others cannot hope to match.

As subtle as the distinctions may be between being related and being a close relative, and between being akin and being kin, these differences count for everything among those regarded as elites. Yet, it is precisely such distinctions which are lost as soon as outsiders begin to key in on shared least common denominators, and as soon as those with no access or limited access decide that what looks like an exclusive ethnic group from below and without must be an all-inclusive ethnic group within.

Appearances are damning. The problem that then arises, when people are fit together according to perceived (rather than achieved) traits, is that dispossessing such groups requires removing everyone who shares these traits, whether they share specific privileges or not. Because securing the future often demands the permanent disposal of rivals, it may not be enough to simply dissolve in-group ties, and particularly not when ties amount to genealogical links. Rather, too often, dispossessing a group which is defined by inherited identity means, ultimately, having to dispossess people of life.

This seems one way to arrive at ethnic cleansing. But we must also remember that endemic insecurity is hardly new. People have been coping with social insecurity since the first woman gave birth to the first child (or, arguably, since the first man attempted to keep the first woman to himself). Likewise, insecurity as catalyst has always caused people to regroup. States do present one wrinkle: people cannot regroup and proclaim their autonomy without threatening the state. And something that is new is that the world is now full of states. Increasingly over the past fifty years the world community has made much of state sovereignty. From a late twentieth century point of view, empires appear a thing of the past; states are the sovereign containers and zero-sum environments in which individuals live. At the same time, deadly ethnic massacres have increased

in number. We might well wonder whether there is an explanation lurking below the surface of this correlation.

Why Now?: The End of Ideology and a Post-Conquest World

One explanation commonly offered these days for new world disorder is that with the end of the Cold War old ethnic antagonisms are simply being resumed. Perhaps, if the stakes for conflict today are the same as they were prior to the iron curtain falling. But it is not clear that they are. As David Turton notes in his introduction to a recent collection of papers on war and ethnicity, "the so-called 'deep freeze' explanation of internal war in Eastern Europe (i.e., the post-Cold War thawing of ethnic sentiment and nationalist xenophobia which had been frozen under communism) is thoroughly a-historical, since it ignores the impact of massive economic and political changes that had taken place in these countries since World War II."[38] There is ample evidence of differential development; for example, consider the two Germanies.

But that is hardly all. In the wake of World War II, many countries were in the throes of liberating themselves from colonial rule. Others were still struggling to adapt to independence from one another and from dysfunctional, but once overarching, Ottoman and Hapsburg empires. Thus, coinciding with the rise of East-West tensions, which marked the onset of the Cold War, came the emergence and consolidation of dozens of new states and the splintering of allegiances and authority in numerous places. On the one hand, this sudden profusion of potential clients granted the U.S.A., U.S.S.R., and China, among other powers, a series of test cases for determining whose ideology, capitalism or communism, was more attractive and whose politico-economic system, democracy or state socialism, was superior. On the other, competition among the superpowers also ensured a steady flow of support to the heads of these new states.

As these new rulers sought to secure themselves the most lucrative possible deals, they busily played the superpowers against one another. The nonaligned movement offers a particularly brilliant example of how this was done on the grand scale, with Third World leaders cozying up to leaders in the Second World, and leaders of the First World "having" to then lure them away. India, the former Yugoslavia, and countless other countries benefited from such maneuvering, as leaders who committed themselves to the West, or to Marx, or to Mao, could count on superpower largesse to keep their otherwise insolvent governments afloat. Siad Barre of Somalia and Mobutu Sese Sekou of the former Zaire were two especially long-lived beneficiaries of such policies.

But it was not just dictators who used aid to their advantage. Aid bought the U.S.A. and U.S.S.R., as well as China, France, Israel, and other lesser powers, a stake in all sorts of regional conflicts in Southeast Asia, southern Africa, and Central America. Nor did donors limit their assistance to dictators only. The superpowers demonstrated a lively interest also in opposition movements within states. In fact, overlaying the map of who was supporting which ruler and where

was another map of who then armed and aided his critics. Such support and counter-support clearly allowed the superpowers to wage battles by proxy.

Anticommunists fought communists. Communists themselves were divided into different camps, with some espousing Marxist views and others Maoist. Tellingly, few externally supported conflicts were ever referred to in ethnic terms. Instead, the insurgencies, revolutions, and civil wars which occurred during the four decades between the rise and fall of the Berlin Wall bore strictly ideological labels. Nor was this just a matter of employing euphemisms to camouflage parochial disputes. Individuals from different backgrounds, different regions, with different local attachments, were always encouraged to join the struggle. With hindsight, the reasons for this seem clear. The U.S.A. and U.S.S.R. each had a vested interest in tying together as many people as they could.[39] Lending the movements they supported as broad an ideological base as possible not only afforded the superpowers an automatic rationale for supporting the sides they did, but also allowed each to castigate the other in sweeping, stirring terms.

Since 1989, though, ideology on anything like this Cold War, supralocal scale has withered. Opposition movements and insurgents must rely instead on their near-abroads for support. With only one surviving superpower, struggles do not hold the broad external appeal they once did. And while regional assistance has always been forthcoming, it was packaged quite differently when both the U.S.A. and U.S.S.R. were calling the shots. With the end of a clearly divided bipolar world, new meanings now have to be read into the fact that often it is members of particular groups who are willing to back rebels across their borders, as some Zambians have long been willing to do for Jonas Savimbi and UNITA in Angola, as some Ugandans and Rwandans did for Laurent Kabila's army in the former Zaire (now Congo), or as Croats in Croatia have done for Croats in Bosnia.

Family ties and all sorts of debts and obligations have long connected and divided people across state lines.[40] What we should wonder is did the ideological guise under which the Cold War was waged simply recolor and recast local identities, and allow people to plug into far larger security nets? Or did ideology motivate people in different ways to attain different goals? Superpower agendas clearly lent conflicts a political, not an ethnic spin. But no longer. With no such agendas, with limited aid and largesse, it would seem that the content as well as the character of conflict has shrunk and intensified. But perhaps there is also something else at work.

In the historic past, as Robert O'Connell points out, insecurity rode into town as four horsemen, clearly menacing and recognizably apocalyptic.[41] Only one of the scourges that could cost people everything was at all reversible. That was war. Aggressors had to recognize that they might well become the attacked one day unless subjugation was total and complete. Vengeance alone guaranteed reprisal. Conquest thus demanded thorough control over the subject population. Enslavement was one option. Colonization was another. Or these methods might be employed in tandem.

Significantly, neither practice is available to countries today.[42] The international community will not countenance the wholesale subjugation of another

country's population. China is arguably among the last countries to have successfully conquered new territory, and that was in the 1950s.[43] The Chinese, however, would argue that Tibet has always belonged in their sphere of interest. Also, Tibetans, while perhaps not free, have not been forced to labor exclusively for China. And, as with the West Bank and Gaza (or the Golan Heights and southern Lebanon), it remains to be seen how long this modern "conquest" of Tibet lasts.[44]

In this sense, the onset of the Cold War marked a true watershed. Without question the Japanese and Germans engaged in wholesale conquests during World War II, substituting their rule for that of sovereign governments and forcing entire communities to labor unwillingly on their behalf. The Soviet Union expanded in the decade immediately following the Second World War, but under a revolutionary battle plan which cleverly disguised conquest as liberation. Also, Soviet expansion could be explained away as a Soviet desire to ensure Russians' future security in light of first Napoleon's invasion, and then Hitler's.

Still, liberation not conquest became the rallying cry after World War II. Certainly this is how the Arabs would describe their attacks on Israel. Such rhetoric also fit the Korean and Vietnam Wars which, at worst, might be construed as wars of ideological takeover, since the areas being contested were not new to either side and the aim was never the overt subjugation of "foreign" populations. Instead, the goal was absorption or reabsorption of kin. Ditto the irredentist war that tested the strength of territorial sovereignty in Africa—the Ogaden War between Somalia and Ethiopia.

While former colonial powers, like Britain and France in the Middle East and Indochina and the superpowers in Vietnam and the Ogaden, directly manipulated events just short of overt involvement, or (as in the case of Korea) just short of outright conquest, the aim was never permanent, direct control. Border disputes continue to fester around the world in Latin America, Africa, and Asia, but there have been strikingly few large land grabs. In fact, both the Falklands War and the Gulf War demonstrate the lengths that Britain, the U.S. and other countries have been willing to go recently to punish would-be territorial transgressors.

The sanctity which the international community accords national sovereignty has also proved a double-edged sword. In sharp contrast to its firm stand on territorial integrity, the world community has been far less sure just what to do when human rights are violated within a country's borders. As has often been said recently, the absence of a clear policy in this regard is one reason ethnic cleansing can occur.[45] But also, the ban on being able to openly subjugate a foreign population sends a clear anticonquest signal. Better to first unpopulate the territory—through intimidation, terror, and murder. Then, once it is empty, move in, spread out, rebuild.

Anticonquest, it turns out, is precisely what ethnic cleansing achieves. In addition to forcibly homogenizing populations, ethnically-aimed violence helps depopulate towns and farmland alike, providing more space and opening new land and opportunities to those on the side of the aggressors, whether they directly participate in the violence or not.

Anticonquest

The irony is that, if slavery, servitude, or even colonialism were allowed, ethnic cleansing would not have to occur. To put this more succinctly, if people could be put to use they would not have to be regarded as of no use.

Without getting into a moral debate about which of these evils is really lesser—wholesale slaughter or wholesale subjugation—it seems worth acknowledging just how few clear rules currently exist beyond seemingly universal disapprobation of anything that smacks of cross-border invasions or exploitative control of foreign nationals.

As P. H. Liotta has recently noted, "our culture of war differs from the 18th century (Clausewitzian) tradition of European powers who sought *possession of territory for comparative advantage*."[46] According to Liotta, the U.S. and other powers today have to learn to achieve control over chaos and ambiguity in order to retain an edge, since chaos and ambiguity are the weapons of choice for those who could never otherwise win via conventional means. Territory no longer rates. But something else Liotta's article suggests is that the strategic use of doubt to prevent easy solutions and clean wins could only have emerged because conquest—and total victory—is no longer countenanced. If we cast back through time we can detect the hardening of this post-World War/post-colonial trend, whereby certain thresholds have been set: aggression should never be too naked; responses should never be too brutal; and ends are better negotiated than won outright.

The Gulf War drove this home. But we can clearly see this, too, in the West's response to ethnic strife: negotiate with warlords; create safe havens (not safety); and never shoot before you have been aimed at. In fact, Western and United Nations reactions to events in Somalia, Central Africa, and the former Yugoslavia have been nothing if not ambivalent. Such ambivalence can only be reassuring to those who support, or at least benefit from, ethnic cleansing; they will not be punished in anything like a vengeful, eye-for-an-eye fashion.

At the moment, the world lacks a supranational organization capable of preventing war. What we have instead are organizations that can react to war. At the same time, no one seems to have the will either to be or to tolerate a world policeman. Usually the excuse proffered is that no country can afford the rolé (or, at least that is the rhetoric one hears in the U.S.). But surely there would be some countries well worth the effort to control (for instance, diamond-rich Sierra Leone or gem-laden Sri Lanka). "Control," however, smacks too much of colonialism or worse.

This anticonquest mood is what those who are being cleansed are up against. It is also what has led to their being victims.

Conclusions

Meanwhile, we can only speculate about what the future holds for those countries that have not yet experienced modern violence of the ethnic sort. Much of the current literature suggests that globalization will continue to erode state borders.

Certainly, information travels ever-faster and dollars increasingly tie markets together as those who control the flow of capital continue to chase new pools of cheap labor wherever these can be found or made. Some predict that this will only harden differences between the North and South, or civilizations, while others point to growing gaps between rich and poor in all countries.[47] However, as important as is this debate over whom globalization will marginalize and whom it will reward, we might do well to remember also that the security which complex capitalism buys may be far less solid than we suppose. It is only made of money.

Money is a funny substance. No matter how tangible humans have made it look and feel, it has no intrinsic worth or value. It cannot be eaten (like livestock) or lived in (like skins). It cannot multiply on its own. In fact, there is nothing currency can do without our agreeing that it should do that thing. Yet, we have become so dependent on money that we would be hard-pressed to exist as anything but nomads without it.

Or think of it this way: at bottom, the paper ownership of anything requires tremendous trust. Yet, one of the reasons we own at all is because we do not trust, or always agree with others. We are rarely on intimate terms with the people with whom we transact. One of the great ironies of the modern world is that the people who we come to know best (family members, colleagues, friends) are not the people from whom we generally purchase the necessities of life: food, shelter, and clothing. Hence, it makes sense that we should seek to possess and control whatever it is we need, outright.

But this also creates a catch. The more we own, the more we seek control over anything and everything that might affect our property, and this both literally and figuratively marks and holds our place. As Pierre Bourdieu notes, the elision between what we own and who we are creates distinctions, while these result in and depend on our staying linked.[48] But this linkage is not just in terms of classes. For instance, the more permanent we make our environment, whether we are talking dams and levees or sewer lines and septic tanks, the less control over all parts of it any one group of us can exert. We consequently find ourselves with less and less autonomy, and our increasing interdependence means that we have never-ending reasons to fear what others do and how this might affect us. Or, if we reconsider this from only a slightly different angle, the more our security depends on what others might do, the more likely we are to want to control what they do. Nuclear warheads represent an extreme example of this need to achieve maximum control given nuclear weapons' out-of-control potential. But how to save songbirds in the rainforest thousands of miles away is no less fraught with difficulty.

Today when, arguably, we have little control over problems elsewhere that can still hurt us here, the challenge we face is how to recalibrate our security. How do we stay in control without exerting control?

On a global level, small-scale, essentially peer pressure methods of control—rumor, gossip, witchcraft, shame, and guilt—hardly work. Not only is the world too big for such face-to-face social pressure to be effective, but also we are

hardly peers. Ideally, we might wish we could regard others as our equals. But in reality, in terms of living conditions, level of education, even health, we are more dissimilar than similar. This is so even within most states.

Of course, within states control is not achieved via rumor, gossip, witchcraft, shame, or guilt. Instead, there are armed forces, police forces, courts, bureaucracies, and levels of government, all hierarchically arranged. Hierarchy represents order. Order is control.

Colonialism, for instance, was predicated on maintaining order via hierarchy; superior "us" governed inferior "them." Cold War imperialism was devoted to working out an order, with determining which superpower would reign supreme. And ethnic cleansing, not surprisingly, is also about orderliness, with the removal of unwanted elements, if not bodily then as bodies.

The sad fact is that most of us need hierarchy to live by. Some forms of organization are clearly better than others. But even were we to dissolve every border drawn on the ground, changing what seems to be the order of things today, billions of us would still be stuck. Permanence traps us. All the more reason, then, to wonder: do permanence and hierarchy have to group us in such fixed ways?

Notes

1. Lawrence Keeley, *War Before Civilization* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

2. For instance, on the issue of territorial security see John Vasquez, *The War Puzzle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. ?. On the issue of "psychic" security see Donald Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985).

3. Much has been made of the work involved in maintaining peace. However, for a particularly eloquent and convincing argument alluding to peace as an ideal conceptualized through war, and the threat of war being the steadier state, see Donald Tuzin, "The Specter of Peace in Unlikely Places: Concept and Paradox in the Anthropology of Peace," in *A Natural History of Peace*, ed. Thomas Gregor (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1996).

4. The scarcity of organized conflict among foragers is usually attributed to scale. But it just as likely has to do with foragers owning fewer possessions, and living according to an ethos which condemns possessiveness.

5. For instance, E. E. Evans-Pritchard comments that, among the Nuer of the southern Sudan, men who belong to the same village or camp are supposed to fight with clubs only, since, presumably, they are also relatives. On the other hand, when a fight starts between persons of different villages, spears are allowed. See *The Nuer* (1940; reprint, New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), p. 151.

6. Ian Hodder makes precisely this point in *Symbols in Action* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

7. See, for instance, John Ewers, *The Blackfeet: Raiders on the Northwestern Plains* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1958).

8. H. H. Turney-High, *Primitive War: Its Practice and Concepts*, 2nd ed, (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1991/1949), p. 147.

9. A point also made by S.P. Reyna in "A Mode of Domination Approach to Organized Violence," in *Studying War: Anthropological Perspectives*, ed. S. P. Reyna and R.E. Downs (Langhorne, PA: Gordon and Breach, 1994), p. 42, and by Kionel Tiger and Robin Fox in *The Imperial Animal* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publisher, 1998 [1991]), p. 214.

10. See, for instance, Roger Keesing's introduction in *Rituals of Manhood: Male Initiation in Papua New Guinea* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982).

11. For a recent review of headhunting and the importance of taking heads for emotional, ritual, and political purposes, see Janet Hoskins, ed., *Headhunting and the Social Imagination in Southeast Asia* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996).

12. Raiding for women not only implies a connection, but also makes for one, and may even help explain why enemies (in these circumstances) look much more alike then unalike.

13. Michael Barkun makes a similar point, describing borders between states as tripwires. He adds, "As the touching points, borders define interactions, whether these are peaceful or hostile." See Barkun's *Law Without Sanctions: Order in Primitive Societies and the World Community* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968), p. 56.

14. See Keeley, *War Before Civilization*, pp. 65–69. Robert O'Connell, meanwhile, draws an extremely provocative distinction between intraspecific, largely symmetrical conflict, which we would expect to see between similar societies, and predatory combat, in which one society attempts to subsume or obliterate another. See O'Connell, *Of Arms and Men: A History of War, Weapons, and Aggression* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).

15. For a very thorough examination of the mechanics of this in northern Kenya (for example), see Gunther Schlee, *Identities on the Move: Clanship and Pastoralism in Northern Kenya* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989).

16. Turney-High considers the difference social organization makes. Reyna considers the difference centralization makes. O'Connell, in *Of Arms and Men*, considers the difference property makes. But none takes into account permanence as a factor.

17. Robert O'Connell, *Ride of the Second Horseman: The Birth and Death of War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

18. See, for instance, Peter J. Wilson, *The Domestication of the Human Species* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988).

19. William McNeill, *The Pursuit of Power* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982); Charles Tilly, *Coercion, Capital, and European States, A.D. 990–1990* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990); Bruce Porter, *War and the Rise of the State: The Military Foundations of Modern Politics* (New York: The Free Press, 1994).

20. Anthony Giddens describes the state as a container in *The Nation State and Violence* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987).

21. In Donald Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*.

22. These points have been made by (among others) Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, rev. ed. (London: Verso 1991); Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983); and E. J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

23. E. J. Hobsbawm and T. Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

24. To quote from Mahmood Mamdani in *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996): "The important point [of indirect rule] was to ensure that the parameters of this state

authority corresponded with that of the native community, the tribe, and then to rule through it. Between culture and territory, the former must define the parameters of decentralized rule: the boundaries of culture would mark the parameters of territorial administration. This is why to install a state apparatus among communities whose lives had never before been shaped by one was literally to invent tribes!" (p. 79)

25. *Citizen and Subject*, p. 51.

26. Michael Ignatieff, *The Warrior's Honor: Ethnic War and the Modern Conscience* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 1998), p. 53.

27. Vamik Volkan, *Bloodlines: From Ethnic Pride to Ethnic Terrorism* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1998), p. 108.

28. *The Warrior's Honor*, p. 56.

29. Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (1912 reprint; New York: The Free Press, 1965).

30. Generally this notion is attributed to Edward Tylor writing in *The Origins of Culture* (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1970 [1871]). However, Marvin Harris suggests an eighteenth century origin in *The Rise of Anthropological Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968), p. 15.

31. I elaborate on the relationship between rumors and internally consistent logics in "Somalia: The Structure of Dissolution" in *The African State at a Critical Juncture*, ed. Leonardo Villalon and Phillip Huxtable (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1997). I would submit that stereotypes are similarly constructed.

32. Gerard Prunier, *The Rwanda Crisis: History of a Genocide* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), p. 238. Although Prunier does not analyze the American Indian genocide, the argument can be made that while Indians were removed from the east by whatever means available early on in U.S. history, the U.S. government did not make a concerted military effort to wipe out tribes until the post-Civil War era, when the westward thrust of the railroads and the discovery of gold in the Black Hills demanded a permanent solution to the Indian problem.

33. As Joseph Tainter comments in *The Collapse of Complex Societies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), "the world today is full. That is to say, it is filled by complex societies; these occupy every sector of the globe, except the most desolate. This is a new factor in human history . . ." (p. 213). Tainter does not specifically discuss states, but any glance at a globe makes clear that countries occupy or lay claim to all corners of the globe.

34. Worse, populations of dispossesed refugees then park themselves just the other side of their home state's borders, where they are aided and abetted by all sorts of international organizations in planning their eventual return. The phenomenon of refugee camps is itself a by-product of states, their sovereignty, and control.

35. Likewise, centralized decisions can be made not to absorb refugees.

36. The irony is that, throughout much of human history, conquerors found it relatively easy to wipe out a village, or clean out a region, and with what, by current standards, have to be considered fairly rudimentary weapons. Yet today, with incredibly sophisticated weapons, deliberately wiping out an entire people has become increasingly impossible. The Nazis, no matter how final they intended their "Final Solution" to be, could never have eliminated world Jewry. The diaspora precluded this. Similarly, no matter how committed certain Hutu or Tutsi might be to killing off all members of the other group, Hutu and Tutsi can be found in considerable numbers throughout central Africa as well as scattered elsewhere in the world. Completion would be an impossible task. Therefore, just on the face of it, ethnic cleansing seems completely irrational. Yet, from the perspective of those

threatened with long-term instability, there may well be an inexorable logic to what local genocides will potentially achieve: breathing (if not breeding) space.

37. See "Democratisation and Ethnic Conflict: The Kin Connection", *Nations and Nationalism* 3 (1997): 273–289. Meanwhile, whether we no longer make more of our familial links because we do not need them, or whether we do not need them because we do not make more of them is hard to say.

38. David Turton, ed., *War and Ethnicity: Global Connections and Local Violence* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 1997), p. 38.

39. Of course, throughout the Cold War China was also a player.

40. See, for instance, Rogers Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

41. In *Ride of the Second Horseman*.

42. David Rapoport also notes that conquests "virtually disappeared from the international scene" after World War II in "The Importance of Space in Violent Ethno-Religious Strife," Institute on Global Conflict and Cooperation Policy Paper #21, 1996, p. 19. So, too, does Sharon Korman in *The Right of Conquest: The Acquisition of Territory by Force in International Law and Practice* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996).

43. Other cases cited by Rapoport and by Korman are India's 1961 takeover of Goa from the Portuguese and Indonesia's 1975 annexation of East Timor, also from the Portuguese. In these two cases, however, there was a substitution of foreign rulership and not the sudden imposition of foreign rule.

44. Of course, Israel's capture of "occupied territories" and expansion of its borders was in response to attacks from without. China can hardly make a similar claim. Nonetheless, the case of Israel may be instructive. Without being able to employ fully the classic techniques of conquest—enslavement, colonization, and the *advertised* destruction of entire communities—the Israelis have not succeeded in neutralizing a hostile population. Certainly, West Bank settlements are not designed to help integrate nearby Arab populations and thus cannot be considered part of any imperial colonization effort.

45. For instance, see Klaus Jurgen Gantzel, "War in the Post-World War II World: Some Empirical Trends and a Theoretical Approach" in *War and Ethnicity*, ed. David Turton.

46. Peter Liotta, "A Strategy of Chaos," *Strategic Review* (Spring 1998), p. 25.

47. See Samuel Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), and James Kurth, "The *Real* Clash," *The National Interest* 37 (1994): 3–15.

48. Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984).

Examining the "Authoritarian Advantage" in Southeast Asian Development in the Wake of Asian Economic Failures

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Many scholars have argued that authoritarian regimes possess an advantage over more democratic ones in launching and promoting economic development. The benefit and indeed the existence of this putative "authoritarian advantage" began to be doubted by scholars in the mid '90s, and the ongoing Asian economic crisis provides more evidence for doubt. This paper assesses the argument and considers new evidence from the crisis. It finds significant reason to abandon the notion of an "authoritarian advantage," particularly because authoritarian states have shown themselves poor at providing accountability and transparency in financial affairs.

In the 1960s, '70s and '80s, the governments of Indonesia, Singapore, Malaysia and other industrializing counties of Southeast Asia defended the strict controls they imposed on their societies, declaring that these authoritarian measures were essential aids to development. They banned independent labor unions, interest groups and professional organizations, controlled the press, expelled, imprisoned or otherwise silenced political adversaries, arranged electoral processes to create single-party-dominant states and rendered their judiciaries compliant to political authorities.[1]

Admirers of the "Asian Way"

Some scholars endorsed many of these measures as useful and productive, hypothesizing that there exists an "authoritarian advantage," particularly in the early stages of economic development. Samuel Huntington has argued that authoritarian[2] regimes are more capable of rational, consistent, and responsible decision making than democratic ones, and that a participatory democracy affords special interest groups the power to block, delay or hinder changes that might be beneficial to the economic growth of the entire society. In addition, Huntington argues, democratic regimes face more political constraints than authoritarian ones in imposing taxes or extracting high levels of savings through such devices as compulsory pension plans.[3]

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