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The Causes of Ethnic Conflicts

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Ethnic conflicts are not new phenomena. Such conflicts have existed all over the world for centuries, but in the last 20 years, after the fall of Communism, they are in the focus of public attention due to the war in Rwanda, the events in Eastern Europe, and the disintegration of the former Soviet Union.

The post-Cold War world showed signs of decline with respect to the power of states to maintain political stability. Since the two superpowers were no longer competing for sphere of influences in the world, Third World countries suffered primarily because they lost the support of their former patrons. What had once served as a stabilizing force was gone.

The resulting conflicts are violent, bringing suffering, death, destruction, and terrorism. They can escalate from local to regional areas. The casualties resulting from ethnic conflicts are often in hundreds of thousands as one ethnic group tries to eliminate another. The consequences can last generations.

This article discusses the most common causes that can trigger violent ethnic conflicts. The author uses as examples two countries: the former Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and Rwanda. Although the literature on this topic is quite large and politicians and scholars come with different interpretations, generally there is not only one cause for the conflict, but a combination of factors. This paper emphasizes the role of belligerent leaders in triggering the wars.

Many states are made up of numerous ethnic groups, defined as groups that share common heritage, interests, beliefs, historical experience, and cultural traits. An ethnic conflict is a conflict between two ethnic groups within a state, one dominant and one subordinate. Often the dominant group is the state and the subordinate one is challenging its legitimacy.

States do nation building by integrating their ethnic groups, usually through coercion. Sometimes, ethnic groups benefit from integration such as opportunities for better jobs. In this process, ethnic groups acquire a double identity; they don't lose their identity. If assimilation fails, then ethnic groups can be declared illegal (e.g. Kurds in Turkey or Turks in Bulgaria in the 1970s).¹ The state might resort to genocide of a group, deportation, or relocation, as has happened in Rwanda and Chechnya.²

¹ (Gevork 1999, 3)

² (ibid, 2-3)

There are different ways to eliminate an ethnic group. Genocide is massacre organized by the state with the goal to totally eliminate the members of a certain ethnic group. In the 20th century, the world witnessed the Holocaust and the genocide in Rwanda. Other forms of confrontation are less violent, such as cultural genocide, which is still used to destroy a group culturally. It involves the destruction of the churches, monuments, documents, and houses connected with the existence of a certain ethnic group. Ethnic cleansing is a combination of cultural genocide and forced relocation. In certain cases, ethnic cleansing is accompanied by genocide, as it was in Yugoslavia.³

Depending upon the relations between enemy groups, these kinds of conflicts can be categorized into ethnic conflicts in a collective setting, an individual setting, or an interpersonal setting. These categories do not establish rigid barriers. A conflict can start in one type of setting and shift to another one, depending on the given situation.

Collective ethnic conflicts are absolute and fixed. The bonds between the members of these ethnic groups are dogmatic. They fear contamination by another group and attempt to prevent any infiltration from outside. The Nazi Party or the Bolshevik Party acted as a group, and, if one member was injured, the whole group retaliated. Conflicts in such a setting are more likely to be involved in violence which does not end until one side is annihilated.⁴

Conflicts in an individual setting are relative, not absolute. Members of the group act as individuals. Their identities can switch among different political, cultural and religious entities. These types of conflicts are seldom violent.⁵

Interpersonal conflicts exist where there is no discipline and no definite authority, such as in the “frontier setting.” These identities are violent and criminal. This setting has a low level of organization and lack discipline. An example of this type of setting is Afghanistan and the situation in Rwanda during the beginning of the conflict.⁶

Many politicians explain the causes of the conflicts through “ancient hatreds,”⁷ feelings of hostility of one group towards another one based on past historical experience. Jens Rydgren, from Stockholm University, wrote an article which analyzes the formation of belligerent beliefs. According to the author, the past can influence the perception of the present. The argument is that people’s beliefs depend on whom they trust, and so most often they adopt the ideas of their own ethnic group using analogies to a current situation. Political elites can use analogies to attract supporters to their side. Rydgren also states that memories are simplified, and missing data are filled in with details that

³ (ibid, 4)

⁴ (Jowitt 2001, 28)

⁵ (ibid, 29)

⁶ (ibid, 30)

⁷ (Brown 1996, 3)

attempt to make sense of the present events. Memories will reflect common ideas in the group. There is also a tendency to glorify one's own past, and omit the events that would not fit a positive image. This process creates distortions that alter reality.

The result is that ethnic groups may feel resentment and fear at the same time, and when this happens, they will mobilize to protect themselves. The political elites use propaganda to demonize the enemy group and the connections between the two groups are cut gradually.⁸ These "ancient hatreds" provides an easily accepted explanation for some conflicts, but there are other factors that can lead to ethnic wars.

Michael Brown, the author of "Causes of Internal Conflict: An Overview," identifies four major causes of ethnic conflict: weak states, political issues, economic issues and cultural issues.⁹

Weak governments can create conditions favorable to the emergence of ethnic conflicts. Governments might become weak because of corruption, because foreign aid stopped, or because of incompetence. Other causes for weak states include criminal organizations such as drug cartels, epidemics, and a flood of immigrants and refugees.

The former Yugoslavia provides a good example where a weak government enabled the emergence of ethnic conflict. With the fall of the communist regime, individual groups suddenly had a security dilemma regarding their life in the future, since the protection from the center ceased to exist. Both those who were oppressed and those who were protected felt threatened. The oppressed demanded political rights and those who were protected were afraid to lose their status.

The fear for the future is expressed in the following statement:¹⁰

Those who lived peacefully together under a central government suddenly view each other with suspicion; but efforts to make one's group more secure by arming creates insecurity for others, who in turn arm, and in the end all are less secure.

A Serb describes the crisis like this:¹¹

Once the Yugoslav communist state began to split into its constituent national particles the key question soon became: will the local Croat policemen protect me if I am a Serb? Will I keep my job in the soap factory if my new boss is a Serb or a Muslim? The answer to this question was "no," because no state remained to enforce the old ethnic bargain.

⁸ (Rydgren 2007, 231)

⁹ (Brown 1996, 3-11)

¹⁰ (Oberschall 1996, 121)

¹¹ (ibid, 121)

The Serbs, Croats, and Muslims wanted a centralized state to guarantee their well-being. They were suspicious of each other. Under these circumstances, politicians who wanted to promote their own agenda pointed to other groups as a scapegoat for the unease. Hostility between groups intensified. This process makes ethnicity more salient, and the competition for political power becomes increasingly intense.

Prijedor, a district in Bosnia, modeled the formation of collective violence. It was a community composed of Serbs, Muslims, Croats and small numbers of other ethnic groups. During the communist regime, these people lived peacefully, with no discernible conflict amongst the ethnicities. The Serbs were not a minority, nor were they discriminated against. In 1991, the Muslim candidates won the election for the district. The Serbian party candidates came in second. The Muslim officials believed in power sharing, so they did not take all the important positions in the local government.

At that time, the federal government had an army and units of it were transferred to bases in Bosnia, under the leadership of the Bosnian Serbs. After the election, the Serbs organized a parallel government. They asked the Serbian people in Bosnia to hold a referendum to decide if they wanted to be part of Yugoslavia, or if they wanted to create a Greater Serbia. Eighty-five percent of the Bosnian Serbs voted for Greater Serbia.¹² A committee was set up to form an army. In April 1992, without any warning, the Serbs attacked Prijedor. Non-Serbs who were in leadership positions were arrested and later executed. Some others were taken to a prison where they were tortured until they confessed whatever their Serb interrogators wanted to hear.

Anthony Oberschall, the author of the article “From Ethnic Cooperation to Violence and War in Yugoslavia,” explains the apprehension of the Serbs and other ethnic groups after the fall of communism. He argues that the transition to democracy was not an easy one. Some former communists wanted to remain in power but they faced challenges. To gain power, they resorted to ethno-nationalism.¹³

“Patriotic journalism” had an important role in the rise of populist nationalism.¹⁴ After the Communist regime fell, reporters wanted to present the news objectively. Some started to change the stories to favor their own ethnic group, which led the others to do the same out of fear of being accused of not demonstrating enough patriotism. Politicians used the media to promote their agenda, and many people believed the fabrications they read in the newspaper. They were exposed to hateful messages. There was no communication between the ethnic groups. This situation failed to provide for an accurate perspective of events. A media analyst stated the following: “In Serbia and

¹² (ibid, 123)

¹³ (ibid, 135)

¹⁴ (ibid, 135)

Croatia, TV fabricated and shamelessly circulated war crime stories...the same victim would be identified on Zagreb screens as a Croat and on Belgrade screens as a Serb.”¹⁵

A polarization occurred, as competition for economic and political positions intensified. Fear and hate dominated the mind of the people. Leaders, using peer pressure and all kinds of coercion, tried to persuade the moderates that they were fighting for their life, and that they were fighting to defend themselves. This is what Misha Glenny said about the political elites:¹⁶

Slobodan Milosovic and Franjo Tudjman successfully manipulated millions of people into joining, passively or actively, a crusade of nationalist violence in order to consolidate their position and further their political aims. To do this they required three instruments—a subservient bureaucracy, absolute pliant electronic media, and control over the legal system.

The Serb and then the Croat leaders first established unlimited administrative power in the areas they controlled; they softened up their public by emitting an endless stream of violent images on television; then they ensured that the legal system was turned on its head—the murder of certain groups was sanctioned by the state, and attempts to prevent murder were regarded at best with hostility and at worst as treasonable.

The media would emphasize and repeat certain beliefs to persuade the moderates to get involved in the fight. Some examples of the messages they delivered were:¹⁷

- “The enemy group acts in unison; children grow into adults, women give birth to future warriors, even old people stab you in the back.”
- “‘They’ massacred ‘us’ in the past and are about to do it again.”
- “Disable them before they strike, which is what they are about to do, despite appearances, because they are secretive and treacherous.”
- “Ordinary people and militias are justified in taking extreme measures because the authorities have not come to the defense of our people.”

Not only politicians were affected by nationalism, but scholars and representatives of the Orthodox Church got involved, too. Other ethnic groups such as Slovenes, Croats, and Bosnians reacted with their own nationalism to the Serbs. Populist nationalism spread quickly.

¹⁵ (ibid, 135)

¹⁶ (Glenny 2001, 159)

¹⁷ (Oberschall 1996, 143)

Lake and Rothchild in their article, "Containing Fear: The Origins and Management of Ethnic Conflict," summarized the situation:¹⁸

... intense ethnic conflict is most often caused by collective fears for the future
... and when central authority declines, groups become fearful for their
survival...state weakness... is a precondition for violent ethnic conflict to erupt.

Weakening of a state can be a consequence of external factors. During colonial times in Africa, countries were artificially carved into regions without regard for ethnic identity. Ethnic communities were partitioned across two or three different countries and were thus forced to live within other groups who were previously considered enemies. After the Cold War, foreign aid and commitment of the major superpowers decreased. This contributed to the economic decline. Other conditions that contributed to weakening of the states were incompetence, corruption of the governments, human rights violations, and famine. These combined to create conditions favorable to ethnic struggle.

Political factors are also important in explaining ethnic conflicts. In countries with democratic governments, people have equal representation in politics. Discrimination and exclusionary ideologies are not acceptable. In countries with authoritarian regimes, not all ethnic groups are treated similarly. When oppression and discrimination are used by the government against one group, there is little doubt that it will lead to internal conflict.

Violence is more likely to happen when the ethnic groups are ambitious for power and have strong ethnic identities. Opportunistic politicians take advantage of political instability and economic turmoil to divert attention from the real problems besetting the country.

Before colonial times, the Tutsi and the Hutu in Rwanda maintained a balanced social system. When the Belgians took over the country they destroyed the system to make the administration more efficient. The Belgians made the Tutsis overlords, creating deep inequality between the two groups. The Tutsis became a privileged group who received education, power, and prestige. Ironically, it was this group that started the anti-colonialism struggle. As a result of Tutsis' recalcitrance, the Belgians shifted their sympathy to the Hutus. Violence started between the Hutus and the Tutsis. After independence from Belgium in the 1960s, the government became mono-ethnic – all Hutus. Each person was required to have his ethnicity written on his identity card.

An economic crisis started in the 1980s. The population grew after independence by 2.5%, but foreign aid started to slow down.¹⁹ The price of coffee, a main product for export, also dropped, further contributing to economic decline.

¹⁸ Lake and Rothchild quoted in (ibid, 135)

¹⁹ (Prunier 2001, 114)

Hutus were fighting among themselves for resources. They resented the Tutsis who, because of their education, could still get better jobs, despite being kept out of the administration, politics, and army. When the international community pressured the Hutus to share the power with the Tutsis, the Hutus took this as proof that the Tutsis were favored by the international community. This further increased tension between the two groups. The Hutu mono-ethnic government took drastic measures to keep its position at any cost.

In 1990, Tutsi exiles from Uganda attacked Rwanda in an attempt to reclaim their position. There were fights between the two groups before but they did not constitute massacres. The Hutus were afraid that they might lose their jobs. They were afraid that the Tutsis would try to take revenge, because as one of the Hutus said: “We killed some of their parents and they will somehow come and try to reclaim their possessions and avenge old scores.”²⁰

The massacre that followed was well organized. Hutus were rewarded for killing Tutsis, and the nation’s media reinforced the belief that these enemies must be eliminated by all means.

This conflict had various dimensions. There was an economic dimension: the Hutus viewed themselves as persecuted economically. There was a political dimension: Political elites exploited grievances of the group and worked to mobilize the Hutus to achieve control of the country. There was the fear of revenge from the Tutsis who lost relatives in the fight with the Hutus.

Prof. James Fearon, from Stanford University, has argued that the main causes of ethnic conflict arise as matters of commitment. He said “...problem arises when two political communities find themselves without a third party that can guarantee agreements between them.”²¹

The war between the Serbs and the Croats further illustrates this argument. Before the Croats declared Croatia an independent state in 1991, the two ethnic groups lived in relative peace. As long as the country was a Tito dictatorship, ethnic antipathies were tamped down. After Tito, initially, they did not want to go to war, since they recognized the cost of it, and the danger that comes with war. Once the declaration of independence occurred, the war started. Serbs did not feel safe within a Croat state. Tudjman, the Croat leader, wanted to assure the Serbs that their rights would be respected, but his words were not backed by his actions.²² Serbs were fired from

²⁰ (ibid, 115)

²¹ (Fearon 1994, 2) See *Ethnic War as a Commitment Problem*, page 2.

²² (ibid, 119)

governmental jobs in administrative positions and the police. Croats used Nazi symbols, still fresh in the minds of those who had lived through the Nazi occupation. The lack of commitment was caused by a couple of factors. According to Fearon, the base of the Croat party was against giving equal rights to Serbs. Their views were supported by Croat emigrants, who were very nationalist. Another factor was the fact that the Croats were helped by Germany with weapons. They underestimated the determination of the Serbs to fight.²³ The fact that Germany recognized the independence of Croatia created a domino effect; Bosnia wanted to have a separate state, and the Serbs in Bosnia pushed for war to build a Serbian independent state.

In the two examples presented, the concept of ethnicity is very intense. The leaders of the opposing groups never tried to attract members of other ethnic groups. Toleration, or assimilation, was not acceptable. Extremist groups, on both sides, put pressure on their members to be active participants in the fight, not observers. They were constantly reminded that abandoning the fight would result in their own massacre.

Economic issues have the potential to increase tension between groups. High unemployment, inflation, competition for resources, influx of immigrants, and discriminatory policies towards one particular group provide conditions for violent conflicts. Both Rwanda and former Yugoslavia faced economic crises that led to a general decline in the standard of living and high unemployment.

Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union after the fall of communism are further examples where economic crises led to instability. The transition from a central planned economy to a market economy was very traumatic for the people of these countries. They faced hyper-inflation, high unemployment, and competition for resources. These economic reforms led to cuts in subsidies from the state and welfare services. Susan Woodward, the author of "Intervention in Civil Wars: Bosnia and Herzegovina," stated that the decline of quality of life in Eastern Europe started earlier, in the 1970s.

She argues that:²⁴

...this growing sense of material insecurity, that there was no sign of relief, occurred in the context of international change and domestic and political reform that also pulled the rug from under the mechanisms by which social peace had been guaranteed in the country since World War II.

The economic crisis creates instability, but also provides an opportunity for politicians to use ethnic hatred under the pretext that they are working for the benefit of the group they represent.

²³ (ibid, 119)

²⁴ (Blagovic 2009, 20)

Global debt can also contribute to the emergence of ethnic conflicts. A debt crisis occurs when a government cannot pay external debts. The loans acquired by the governments of poor countries are intended to provide basic needs for the citizens. However, because this money is often used inappropriately and external factors (such as oil prices, high interest rates, decline in export prices and volume) reduce income, countries can end up in a position where they are unable to pay off these loans. This leads to budget deficits; they are then forced to choose between paying off the loan, thus failing to provide basic needs to its citizens, or default on the loan. To prevent the country from defaulting on the loan, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) introduces measures called “structural adjustments” which, in fact, represent a cut in aid involving diminished food supply, layoffs, and cuts in government spending.²⁵

The consequences of debt and budget deficits are a decline in the standard of living, which is followed, many times, by political instability and violence. Elite politicians can use this crisis and ethnic conflict to identify a scapegoat for government mismanagement.

Globalization is a controversial topic. Some supporters point to the increased flow of goods, development of new markets and the spread of democracy in the world as being positive consequences of globalization. Others, such as Amy Chua, a Yale professor, argue that free markets and democracy do not cure hatred and violence, but it is exactly these two concepts that can lead to violent ethnic conflicts.²⁶

Globalization can force relocation of workers, unemployment, uncertainty, and a disrupted life. It can also contribute to inequality among people. Workers in industrialized countries are in competition with low-wage workers in the other countries.

Amy Chua exposes the disturbing consequences of globalization. She refers to the “market dominant minorities”—ethnic minorities that dominate certain markets.²⁷ They concentrate huge wealth while the majority increases its political power through such social media as the Internet, U-Tube, and Facebook. This majority could be easily manipulated against the wealthy ethnic minority by politicians.

Anti-Americanism, in many parts of the world, is a result of global markets. American culture is perceived as a dominant force which works against established traditions, with more and more people excluded from the economic elite. The people will turn anti-American. This feeling was obvious after the attack of September 11 when many people rejoiced around the globe. A student from Vietnam interviewed after the event said:

²⁵ (Ferraro Vincent 1994, 339)

²⁶ (Chua 2006, 488)

²⁷ (ibid, 488)

“America deserves this because of all the suffering it has caused humankind.”²⁸ In Nepal, a well-known commentator stated:

Those men who carried out the plane bombings... chose specific targets. The World Trade Center was the High Temple of capitalism. It housed thousands of highly paid financial workers who were seen as soldiers fighting an economic war that forces 80% of mankind to live in poverty. The bombers did not see them as innocent civilians. They felt the workers were directly responsible for the suffering of millions... We should never rejoice in the death and suffering of other people even if they are our enemies. But America should not ignore the widespread hatred that is felt against it.²⁹

Osama bin Laden issued a statement after September 11 saying that the victims of the attack were “killers, who abused the blood, honor, and sanctuaries of Muslims.”³⁰

Much of the hatred for Americans is based on envy and frustration as well. Many feel frustrated that they cannot live a prosperous life, that they have no opportunity to better their lives. This is very well explained in an Internet issue of a Brazilian magazine:

My theory regarding the reactions of Brazilians and, in fact, of people in many other third world countries, is that those reactions are a mixture of envy and frustration. These are countries that failed to move forward in economic development.

Even though Americans are always the first to arrive with help at a scene of a disaster anywhere in the world, that is not what people think about when they think of the United States. They just want to live the way Americans live without realizing that the Americans worked hard to get to where they are and still work hard, and do things the right way to stay there. The dubious nature of the human mind makes these people feel good when the so-called all mighty is brought down because they somehow irrationally believe that that would make everybody equal.³¹

Another interesting interpretation is offered by the Turkish writer Orhan Pamuk:

Today, an ordinary citizen of a poor, undemocratic Muslim country, or a civil servant in a third world country, or in a former socialist republic struggling to make ends meet, is aware of how insubstantial is his share of the world’s wealth; he knows that he lives under the conditions that are much harsher and more devastating than those of the “Westerners” and that he is condemned to a much shorter life. At the same time, however, he senses in the corner of his mind that his poverty is to some considerable degree the fault of his own folly and inadequacy, or those of his father

²⁸ (Chua 2005, 246)

²⁹ (Ibid, 147)

³⁰ (Ibid, 156)

³¹ (Ibid, 149)

and grandfather. The Western world is scarcely aware of this overwhelming feeling of humiliation that is experienced by most of the world population.³²

The desire for homogenization of the world is a trend that can tear apart old cultures. While some world corporations are amassing huge wealth, small businesses around the world are swept away. The backlash against this is the violence of the majority that will be directed to eliminate the dominant elite. Croatia in former Yugoslavia and Rwanda prove the point. The prosperous elite was attacked by the majority incited by the leaders who used populism as a uniting concept.

Michael Mousseau also analyzed the effects of globalization and the polarization that occurs due to trade. He contrasted two types of societies: the clientalist society and societies based on market economies. High-income countries developed market economies. In these societies, people shared common liberal values. In market economies, strangers and even enemies can cooperate based on some legal agreements. This type of market has “liberal values of individualism, universalism, tolerance, and equity.”³³ Trust is based on a legal contract, not on friendship.

In clientalist societies, cooperation is based on friendship and it takes place within a certain group. They perceive those in the market economies as outsiders, therefore not trustworthy. They are enemies. They appear greedy, since they seem to be interested in material gains only. When these clientalist societies begin to break down, the people in the developing countries resent the Western societies, including America. Under these circumstances, leaders in the clientalist society rally the people by appealing to an anti-market ideology. Cultural isolationism, combined with economic problems, can lead to conflicts between societies in the developing countries and those associated with the market economy, the West.

Professor Fred W. Riggs also analyzed the causes and the consequences of globalization and described the emergence of two different types of nations: the existing states that created themselves by assimilation or destruction of the elements that do not fit in and communities that want to be recognized as nations but don't have a state.³⁴ The first type encourages state nationalism and the second type promotes ethnic nationalism. This process of increased nationalism has been accelerated by the fall of Communism and the intensification of globalization in the post Cold War period. The wave of migrations that is a consequence of globalization has dispersed people all over the world. Many of them are not assimilated and they feel marginalized in the countries they have adopted. These minority groups mobilize and express their demands while the established societies reject their demands.

³² (Ibid, 149)

³³ (Mousseau 2002, 11)

³⁴ (Riggs, 41)

Western Europe attracted people looking for a better life from all over the world. The war in Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as the fall of communism in Eastern Europe, increased the number of immigrants. The euphoria in the West at the end of the Cold War disappeared, and it was replaced by fear and rejection of immigrants. Immediately after the fall of communism, about five million people from Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union left their own countries for the West.³⁵

France has a large population of immigrants from southern Europe and northern Africa. The North Africans are mostly Muslims. Many French feel hostility towards the Muslims who seemed to have little desire to integrate. Conflicts arise over the construction of mosques, work relationships, claims for welfare, and religious symbols in schools. A new anti-foreign movement has emerged and gained considerable support.

The French model of citizenship is based on assimilation and secularism. To become citizens, immigrants must adjust to French culture. They must embrace it. However, even after they get citizenship, they are still viewed as “immigrants.” Many people of the host country complain that the immigrants do not want to integrate and that they expect the natives to accommodate them.

When ethnicity becomes a component of group identity, it can be easily manipulated by political leaders who are trying to build and consolidate their power base. This can lead to ethnic nationalism, which is different from civic nationalism. In his article, “Causes of Ethnic Conflict,” Jack Snyder explains the difference between ethnic and civic nationalism:³⁶

“Civic nationalism normally appears in well-institutionalized democracies. Ethnic nationalism, in contrast, appears spontaneously when an institutional vacuum occurs. By its nature nationalism based on equal and universal citizenship rights within a territory depends on a supporting framework of laws to guarantee those rights as well as effective institutions to allow citizens to give voice to their views. Ethnic nationalism depends not on institutions but on culture. Therefore ethnic nationalism is the default option; it predominates when institutions collapse, when existing institutions are not fulfilling people’s basic needs and when alternative structures are not readily available.”

In France, in 1989, three Muslim girls in high school were expelled for wearing headscarves. This triggered a nationwide controversy involving issues such as the principle of secularism in schools, integration of the immigrants, and multiculturalism. The French expect from immigrants assimilation, meaning rejection of other cultural identity that is different from French. The far right politicians complained about the

³⁵ (Heinz Fassman 1994, 534)

³⁶ Jack Snyder as quoted in (Brown 1996, 8)

Islamization of France. Far left politicians felt that secularism in schools was under attack. They were joined by teachers who spoke about Muslim students who refused to attend gym classes, philosophy, and other subjects on religious grounds. Feminists expressed their protest against oppression of women by Islamic fundamentalism.³⁷

Muslims, although many opposed the wearing of headscarves, viewed this conflict as a proof of French racism and xenophobia. They felt that the right to be different was dead in France. A law was passed to ban the headscarf in schools, but the conflict did not stop. It expanded to include other issues regarding the immigrants and the integrity of French culture. Politicians will exploit any aspect of the conflict that might suit their agenda. As a result, France and other countries in Europe have passed increasingly restrictive laws regarding immigration.

Not all multi-national countries end up destroying one or two ethnic groups. Countries such as Switzerland and Canada use different methods to achieve equality: democracy, such as power sharing; greater autonomy for certain regions; and veto power for all communities. This sort of environment encourages people to learn to live together, despite diversity.³⁸ Governments in democratic states will take all necessary steps to avoid discrimination. However, accommodation does not guarantee political stability or prevent secession. For example, Czechoslovakia separated into two republics.³⁹

In conclusion, ethnic conflict is not the result of diversity. Poverty and fear for the future provides a fertile ground for ethnic conflict. Politicians (from the far left and the far right) use scare tactics to achieve their personal goals. They are the true instigators. They will try through all means, including propaganda in the media, to rally people to their cause and to polarize the nation. As their message succeeds, tension increases between groups, communication between the groups fails, and fear dominates the minds of the people. Taken to an extreme, morality does not apply any more to society. People may begin to react with the belief that self-defense is justified and this requires annihilating the other group first. Violence, cruelty and inhumane acts are accepted. That is the beginning of genocide.

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³⁷ (Ross 2007, 206)

³⁸ (Smith 2004, 6)

³⁹ (Gevork 1999, 8)

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