ORIGINS OF POLITICAL EXTREMISM

Political extremism is one of the most pernicious, destructive, and nihilistic forms of human expression. During the twentieth century, in excess of 100 million people had their lives taken from them as the result of extremist violence. In this wide-ranging book Manus I. Midlarsky suggests that ephemeral gains, together with mortality salience, form basic explanations for the origins of political extremism and constitute a theoretical framework that also explains later mass violence. Midlarsky applies his framework to multiple forms of political extremism, including the rise of Italian, Hungarian and Romanian fascism, Nazism, radical Islamism, and Soviet, Chinese, and Cambodian communism. Other applications include a rampaging military (Japan, Pakistan, Indonesia) and extreme nationalism in Serbia, Croatia, the Ottoman Empire, and Rwanda. Polish anti-Semitism after World War II and the rise of separatist violence in Sri Lanka are also examined.

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Mass Violence in the Twentieth Century and Beyond

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CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town,
Singapore, São Paulo, Delhi, Tokyo, Mexico City

Cambridge University Press
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 8RU, UK

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521700719

First published 2011

Printed in the United Kingdom at the University Press, Cambridge

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication data
Midlarsky, Manus I.
Origins of political extremism : mass violence in the twentieth century and beyond /
Manus I. Midlarsky.
p. cm.
ISBN 978-0-521-70071-9 (pbk.)
1. Radicalism. 2. Violence. 3. Political violence. I. Title.
HN49.R33M53 2011
303.609′04–dc22 2010051862

ISBN 978-0-521-87708-4 Hardback
ISBN 978-0-521-70071-9 Paperback

For Liz, as ever, a source of knowledge, love, and great comfort.
And for Aryeh, may he flourish.

Have you not done tormenting me with your accursed time! It's abominable! When! When! One day, is that not enough for you, one day like any other day, one day he went dumb, one day I went blind, one day we'll go deaf, one day we were born, one day we shall die, the same day, the same second, is that not enough for you? They give birth astride of a grave, the light gleams an instant, and then it's night once more.

– Pozzo, in Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*

The ultimate evil in the world is not war itself, but aggression.

– Amos Oz, accepting the Goethe Prize, Frankfurt, 2005

CONTENTS

FIGURES AND TABLES

Figures

Tables

PREFACE

Doing the research for and writing this book has been an adventure. Never did I suspect that I would be exploring in detail the early years of Stalin in Georgia and elsewhere in the Caucasus. Nor that I would find similarities between the attitudes toward Islam of an old Abkhazian Muslim in Batum (then in Russia on the Turkish border) who sheltered the young Stalin and certain Indian Muslim thinkers. Nor that data on Nazi perpetrators of genocide, or Romanian electoral data during the interwar period would prove to be so helpful. Nor that the outcome of the Crimean War and the experience of Turkish officers in Adrianople (today's Edirne) at the end of the Second Balkan War would help explain later extremist behavior towards the Armenians. Little-understood (at least in the West) events can be crucial in predicting later vastly disproportional consequences. And in one instance at least, these events led me to veer from my early confident treatment of communism as a separate path of extremism, quite distinct from fascism, to a realization that, despite differences detailed in this book, there exists a common etiological core.

At a more personal level, I was surprised to have two anomalies clarified, one of a more general nature, the other quite specific. First, after doing the research and writing it became clear to me why the Bible, despite its antiquity and fabular nature, is still, to my knowledge, the best-selling book in the world. Although the ephemeral gain was initially theorized entirely from secular sources, the more recent discovery that it had a sacral biblical counterpart in the story of Adam and Eve (Chapter 15) was a revelation. This fable of kindergarten lore actually is a metaphor for basic elements of the human condition that the compilers of the Hebrew Bible saw with great clarity.

The second anomaly concerns my surprise at the behavior of an otherwise very well-liked professor of mine years ago. Ivo Duchacek was a parliamentary member of a centrist party in Czechoslovakia before the war, escaping to England just before the Nazi occupation in 1939. Upon returning to Czechoslovakia immediately after the war, he was tasked with the responsibility of fairly applying criteria for the selection of citizens born of intermarriage within the Sudeten German community who could remain in the country and those who would be forced to leave. I recall (perhaps imperfectly) that a Czech patronymic would allow a person from mixed heritage to stay, while a German one would yield expulsion. Ivo,

whom I later befriended, described to the class his anguish at having to apply such a uniform standard to cases that often defied simple categorization.

At the time, I was nonplussed first that a Czech who had seen his country suffer greatly at the hands of the Germans could be so concerned about the fate of the betraying Sudeten Germans, and second that he, a Christian, could, not very long after the Holocaust, describe the difficulties of such a procedure to a likely hostile group of students, most of whom were Jewish. However, the finding in Chapter 13 that the Sudetens were the Germans *least* likely to perpetrate war crimes was fully in keeping with Ivo's reaction to his extraordinarily difficult task. Actually partaking in the process of selection must have yielded the gut feeling that, at bottom, the vast majority of these people were fundamentally decent, and did not deserve the painful expulsion that followed.

I am very grateful for the insightful comments of Sheri Berman, Margit Bussmann, Giovanni Capoccia, Claudio Cioffi-Revilla, Charles Doran, Daniel Geller, Ron Hassner, Patrick James, Jan Kubik, Yosef Lapid, Rose McDermott, Jens Meierhenrich, Cas Mudde, Irfan Nooruddin, Alexander Ochs, Robert Pape, Michael Rossi, Ionas Rus, and Ekkart Zimmermann.

As always, my editor at Cambridge University Press, John Haslam, has been a delight to work with. I am also grateful for the steadfast and extremely competent efforts over time of my secretaries, Shwetha Kashi, Sara Kasman, and Sara Tofighbakhsh. Needless to say, I am greatly indebted to the Back family for funding the Moses and Annuta Back Chair in international peace and conflict resolution at Rutgers, New Brunswick.