

## Introduction

This book approaches history from two perspectives. Its main motivation follows from a reading of European history from the perspective of ethnicity. Perceived through this lens, European history in the twentieth century is one of far-reaching change and terrible violence. During this period, tens of millions of people became victims of deportations and massacres that targeted specific ethnic groups. In the process, numerous regions and cities that had for centuries hosted a multiethnic populace and a correspondingly multiethnic culture were irreversibly homogenized and fundamentally transformed.

The objective of this book is to understand the origins of ethnic cleansing by studying the European context.<sup>1</sup> To fulfill this goal, the study addresses several key questions: What are the conditions that ordinarily preclude ethnic cleansing? When and how are these conditions transformed? What, if any, is the role of territorial conflict and war in this process? Why are some regions and countries more prone to episodes of ethnic cleansing than others?

While the main motivation of the book follows from a reading of history through the ethnic lens, to answer the questions posed, this study also depends on a reading of history from the perspective of other social cleavages. From this angle, twentieth-century European history is marked by the increasing political salience of class as well as religious-secular cleavages. The rising influence of socialist parties, the shockwave that followed the Bolshevik Revolution, and the spread of religious-secular divisions from western and central Europe to the Ottoman Empire are all part of this process.

Incorporating this perspective to the analysis allows this study to address two key questions. The first of these questions is: what are the conditions that

<sup>1</sup> This study defines ethnic cleansing as wholesale deportations and/or killings that target ethnic groups. The following sections include a detailed discussion on the definition of the concept.

inhibit the emergence and political success of actors who desire to use ethnic cleansing? A robust preexisting tradition in comparative political science suggests that ethnicity, or for that matter all cleavages, should be studied within the context of others.<sup>2</sup> Particularly relevant for the topic at hand, these works highlight that competition between ethnicity and other cleavages has the potential to alleviate ethnic conflict. So far, this insight has been all but ignored by the literature on mass violence against ethnic groups. On the one hand, the theories that emphasize the role of ethnic conflict in multiethnic contexts depart from a far too simplistic model of the domestic political structure of these societies and, consequently, overpredict ethnic cleansing.<sup>3</sup> On the other, the theories that downplay the importance of ethnic conflict and emphasize the role of wartime security concerns treat potential domestic obstacles as a black box. Yet a theory of these obstacles is a necessary prerequisite to developing an understanding of just how international security concerns empower actors who support ethnic cleansing as well as why they do so in some contexts but not others.

The first central argument of this book is that nonethnic cleavages in multiethnic contexts such as those that relate to social classes or religious-secular divisions serve as barriers against ethnic cleansing. Briefly put, these divisions generate variation among the members of the politically dominant ethnic group in terms of how they want to treat the members of the other groups.<sup>4</sup> The existence of salient socioeconomic cleavages results in the emergence of factions within the dominant group that focus on nonethnic issues.<sup>5</sup> Given their focus, these actors not only cooperate with the members of other ethnic groups that share their ideological agenda but also often work with the nationalist members of these groups. As a result, in a multiethnic society with at least one salient nonethnic cleavage, typically there are some politically influential factions within the dominant ethnic group who would resist to a policy of ethnic cleansing. Put otherwise, the primary domestic obstacle against ethnic cleansing in multiethnic contexts is the existence of potent actors within the dominant ethnic groups who passively or actively oppose such a policy.

Approaching history from the socioeconomic perspective also addresses a second key question: what are the factors that weaken the conditions that ordinarily preclude ethnic cleansing? Most studies of ethnic cleansing, including those that highlight the importance of nationalism and ethnic conflict, invoke

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Dahrendorf (1959); Lipset (1959); Dahl 1956; Lipset and Rokkan (1969); Taylor and Rae (1969); Lijphart (1977); Chandra (2005); and Dunning and Harrison (2010).

<sup>3</sup> I use the term ethnic conflict to refer to societal disagreements based on ethnicity-related interests rather than violent conflict between ethnic groups.

<sup>4</sup> Dominant ethnic groups are those groups that predominate in the state apparatus and hence possess the power to target the other groups with ethnic cleansing. The next chapter outlines the historical process that led to this distinction in Europe.

<sup>5</sup> Throughout this book, I use the term faction to refer to the competing blocks within ethnic groups. As will become evident in the following chapters, these factions are not always organized into political parties.

imagined or real security concerns during interstate wars or retributive emotions in the aftermath of wars as the proximate causes of ethnic cleansing.<sup>6</sup> Regardless of their specific logic and contribution, these arguments ignore the question of why wars result in the singling out of ethnic as opposed to other societal groups. To be sure, the duration and aftermath of wars in Europe coincide with the targeting of ethnic rather than other types of societal groups. Even the Soviet Union, which carried out ethnic as well as class-based deportations, used the former primarily during or right after wars and the latter in other periods.<sup>7</sup> Yet, as the saying goes, correlation is not causation. If we are to understand the roots of ethnic cleansing, we need to establish the theoretical link between the duration and aftermath of wars and the activation of specifically ethnic cleavages.

The second central argument of this book is that interstate territorial conflict tends to undermine the obstacles that prevent ethnic cleansing by raising the salience of ethnicity relative to other cleavages. Unlike categories such as class or religious-secular groups, ethnic groups are usually not repetitive across space. Thus, different states tend to include a different set of ethnic groups but roughly the same groups defined by other cleavages. For the same reason, the ethnic groups that emerge as politically dominant tend to be different in different states, whereas the politically dominant groups on other cleavage dimensions are usually the same.<sup>8</sup> As a result, territorial changes have a potentially profound impact on the political balance between ethnic groups that they usually do not have when it comes to other types of groups. Hence, when they take place, territorial conflicts strengthen the factions that are inclined to support ethnic cleansing as opposed to the factions that are inclined to disagree with such a policy. From this perspective, the coincidence between the duration and aftermath of wars and ethnic cleansing episodes is a by-product of the fact that wars, which are more often than not fought over territory, activate ethnic rather than nonethnic cleavages.

The rest of this chapter continues as follows. In the first section, I provide the conceptual and operational definition of ethnic cleansing that the rest of the study uses. In the second section, I outline the existing arguments on ethnic

<sup>6</sup> For arguments that highlight real or imagined security concerns, see Valentino (2004), Downes (2007), and Mann (2005). For arguments that highlight retributive emotions, see Petersen (2002) and Midlarsky (2005).

<sup>7</sup> For a detailed discussion of both class- and ethnicity-based deportations, see Snyder (2010) and Polian (2004). For cases of ethnic deportations, see Pohl (1999) and Bugai (1996). The bulk of the class-based violence in the Soviet Union took place between 1929 and 1934 when Stalin carried out his first 5-year plan. By contrast, most of the ethnic deportations were carried out during 1939–1944.

<sup>8</sup> These points are comparative rather than absolute assessments. As Chapter 1 discusses in detail, while these statements hold in general, there are cases in which different states have the same dominant ethnic group as well as cases in which different states have different dominant social classes.

cleansing, highlighting their contributions to our understanding of this phenomenon as well as their theoretical and empirical shortcomings. In the third section, I summarize my argument and the empirical findings of the book. In the last section, I provide a sketch of the book's organization.

#### CONCEPTUAL AND OPERATIONAL DEFINITION OF ETHNIC CLEANSING

This section offers a conceptual definition for ethnic cleansing and discusses the potential difficulties in converting this conceptual definition into an operational one. Three criteria are particularly important in developing a definition for ethnic cleansing: the perpetrator of violence, the target of violence, and the methods that the perpetrator uses to carry out the violence.

##### **The perpetrator**

The first conceptual question relates to the perpetrator that implements ethnic cleansing. In principle, the perpetrator could be the leaders of any organization that has the ability to exercise coercive power over a specific territory. The most typical organization that fulfills this criterion is obviously the state. However, from a conceptual perspective, if non-state actors such as militias or insurgent organizations acquire the ability to exercise coercive power over a given territory, they might also perpetrate ethnic cleansing. The problem is, from a practical standpoint, it is much harder to identify the limits of the territories that are controlled by non-state actors or have access to information on the list and size of ethnic groups in these territories. Thus, when operationalizing the concept in the empirical sections of the book, I only include cases in which an actor internationally acknowledged as a state is a primary perpetrator.

##### **The target**

The second and most essential characteristic of ethnic cleansing is that the intended target of violence is an ethnic group rather than individual members selected on some other criteria. Before exploring the potential empirical and theoretical implications of this characteristic, it is necessary to briefly clarify what I mean by an ethnic group. An ethnic group in this study is a group of people, who self-ascribe or are ascribed by others to a category defined by common descent.<sup>9</sup> Ethnic groups are distinct from smaller units such as clans or kinship groups as, like nations, they are “imagined communities” in the sense

<sup>9</sup> The idea of real or imagined common descent is put forward by most scholars of ethnicity ranging from Max Weber to Donald Horowitz (Weber 1978; Horowitz 1985). For a more detailed discussion, see Chandra (2006) and Hale (2004).

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that their members “will never know most of their fellow members, meet them, or even hear of them” (Anderson 1991, 6). In practice, these groups usually also coincide with the historical memory or actual existence of a linguistic category (Hale 2004; Chandra 2006). This definition inevitably invites the question of how one identifies categories of common descent perceived by people at a given point in time. Ideally, the answer to this question would come from surveys that analyze perceptions of people (Fearon 2003). Such a solution could be viable for studying a small number of groups in a limited number of countries. However, for studying a large number of groups in a cross-national setting, the practical difficulties for identifying past as well as contemporary ethnic groups are insurmountable. Thus, when testing the theory with cross-national data, this study uses written material such as history books, case studies of countries, and encyclopedias to identify the groups that were defined as ethnic in a given context and time.

How does one empirically capture events in which the intended target of violence is the ethnic group rather than individual members selected on other criteria? From the perspective of this definition, the *ideal-typical* case of ethnic cleansing would be one in which all members of a given ethnic group become targets of ethnic cleansing.<sup>10</sup> However, even if the goal of a policy is to target an ethnic group as a whole, the actual implementation of the policy would be unlikely to reach all the members of the target group.<sup>11</sup> The main challenge then is deciding whether the underlying goal of an observed process during which only part of an ethnic group is targeted actually aims at the wholesale elimination of the group.<sup>12</sup>

There are two ways to address this problem. The first is analyzing the statements of the leaders who use deportations and killings. This procedure is likely to be misleading as leaders might not declare their intended policy or might even actively deny it. The second solution for the problem, and the one that this study follows, is focusing on actual events rather than the declarations of leaders. From this perspective, cases in which the agents of a state or a non-state organization victimize substantial portion of an ethnic group that resides

<sup>10</sup> In theory, if a societal category such as class subsumes or completely overlaps with an ethnic group, the wholesale targeting of the ethnic group might be part of an attempt to victimize the other societal category. In this case, the intended target would not be the ethnic group. While such overlaps are a theoretical possibility, empirically this type of alignment is rare.

<sup>11</sup> States might not have the capacity to target all the members of the group or they might be forced to give concessions to other states that are recipients for the victimized ethnic group.

<sup>12</sup> The conceptualization and operationalization of “ethnic cleansing” as a group-level phenomenon distinguishes this concept from other types of mass violence such as “mass killings” or “civilian victimization during wars,” where the dependent variable is conceptualized as the absolute number of persons killed rather than the percentage of a given group. On mass killings, see Valentino, Huth, and Balch-Lindsay (2004); on civilian victimization, see Downes (2008) and Huth and Valentino (2007).

within their territory would count as ethnic cleansing.<sup>13</sup> To operationalize this line of thinking, one needs to set a threshold that specifies what percentage of a group needs to be targeted before one can reasonably assume that the goal was to victimize the entirety of the group. Admittedly, there is no theoretically foolproof way of setting such a threshold. The only solution is to pick a plausible one and vary it in the empirical analysis to make sure that the results are robust to different threshold specifications. This is indeed the path that the empirical section of the book takes.

### The method and permanence of victimization

The third important characteristic of ethnic cleansing is that it refers to cases in which populations are moved involuntarily and permanently. The involuntary nature of the act might, in some instances, be blurred in the sense that the leaders of the perpetrating organization might declare the policy to be voluntary while pressuring the groups to leave the territory under their control. At the operationalization stage, I categorize these types of events as ethnic cleansing only if the “pressure” in question includes persistent and frequent use of deportations and/or killings against the group and these actions are carried out by the regular army or forces primarily organized by a state. Ethnic cleansing also refers to a situation where the population movement is intended to be permanent at the time of its implementation. This criterion is particularly important for distinguishing ethnic cleansing from phenomena such as the temporary evacuation of border populations before or during wars.<sup>14</sup>

The final issue is the method used to remove ethnic groups from a specific territory. Perpetrators use a variety of methods including mass killings, expulsion of populations to other countries, compulsory population exchange agreements, and deportations within their own territory.<sup>15</sup> This study categorizes all the events that fulfill the criteria discussed earlier as an instance of ethnic cleansing regardless of the methods used. In other words, for the rest of this study, ethnic cleansing is any event in which an organization that has the capability to use coercion in a given territory permanently deports and/or kills a substantial part of an ethnic group that lives within their territory.<sup>16</sup> For

<sup>13</sup> For reasons already discussed, when operationalizing ethnic cleansing, I focus on cases in which the agents of a state rather than a non-state actor carry out the victimization.

<sup>14</sup> For example, France evacuated the border populations from Alsace-Lorraine and Saar before the Second World War (Boswell 1999). During temporary relocations, the removed populations continue to legally hold their immovable possessions in the territories they leave.

<sup>15</sup> According to this definition, “genocide” can be thought of as a subtype of ethnic cleansing in which the predominant method used by the perpetrator is killings.

<sup>16</sup> Populations are counted as residents of a state’s territory if *at least one* of the following conditions holds: (1) they already lived within the borders of the state at the time of independence; (2) they were incorporated into the territory of a state via annexation; (3) they have been accorded citizenship by the state. By contrast, populations that were from the beginning accepted

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reasons already discussed, in the empirical sections, the study takes into account cases in which the agents of an internationally recognized state are among the main perpetrators.

THEORETICAL AND EMPIRICAL EVALUATION OF THE LITERATURE

Broadly speaking, the existing arguments on the causes of ethnic cleansing can be divided into four theoretical categories: the explanations that focus on geostrategic goals, the explanations that concentrate on the internal dynamics of states, the arguments that emphasize the exogenous role of ethnic dislike, and finally, the explanations that treat ethnic dislike as important but endogenously generated.

**Geostrategic arguments**

The arguments in the first category suggest that ethnic cleansing is primarily a result of the geopolitical goals of states. The studies that rely on this logic do not necessarily focus exclusively on ethnic cleansing but rather on concepts such as civilian victimization, nation-building policies, and mass killings that either partially overlap with or encompass ethnic cleansing (Valentino 2004; Downes 2008; Mylonas 2013). Given the differences in their dependent variables and goals, it is suitable to summarize these arguments separately. Studying the causes of civilian victimization during wars, Downes (2008) argues that during wars of conquest or annexation, civilian victimization often takes the form of ethnic cleansing campaigns. In these situations, states turn to ethnic cleansing both to ensure that groups allied with the enemy would not open a second front behind frontlines and to avoid future rebellion by these groups. Focusing on the broader concept of nation-building policies, Mylonas (2013) argues that states turn to exclusionary strategies when they have revisionist goals themselves and a group in their territory receives support from an enemy state. Given this setup, ethnic cleansing becomes most likely during wars, which both create the potential that certain groups would become fifth columns and also shorten the time horizon of the leaders. Valentino (2004) focuses on yet another dependent variable – mass killings – and argues that one of the main causal mechanisms that leads to this outcome is that when losing wars, states target the populations that they deem to be aiding the enemy states (Valentino 2004, 69).<sup>17</sup>

These studies advance our understanding of the causes of ethnic cleansing in three ways. First, they provide a causal logic that might account for the

on a state's territory on an explicitly temporary basis (e.g., temporary workers/refugees/visitors/representatives of foreign governments) are not included in the definition.

<sup>17</sup> Valentino (2004) also provides several other causal paths that might result in mass killings, some of which fall under the other theoretical categories discussed later.

wholesale targeting of ethnic groups without necessarily invoking preexisting interethnic animosity. This type of theoretical move is particularly important as micro-level studies of contexts that have experienced ethnic cleansing such as Rwanda and Bosnia-Herzegovina have failed to find evidence for high levels of interethnic animosity that preceded these events (Bringa 1995; Straus 2006). Second, by offering an argument that links security concerns during wars to ethnic cleansing campaigns, these studies provide a potential explanation for the timing of ethnic cleansing. Finally, their arguments also improve upon the long-existing literature that explains ethnic policies of states by referring to triangular configurations between host states, ethnic minorities, and homelands (i.e., states in which the minority in the host state is a majority).<sup>18</sup> In particular, the studies in question significantly widen the empirical reach of the triangular configuration argument by expanding their logic to all groups that receive support from outside states.

Beyond these contributions, the geostrategic arguments have two shortcomings. First, they assume rather than explain the link between fifth columns and ethnicity. More specifically, these studies do not offer a theory of why states choose to recruit ethnic groups as opposed to classes or other societal groups as fifth columns. The anecdotal evidence from major wars supports the idea that when states aim to permanently annex a given territory, they primarily collaborate with ethnic groups, whereas when they intend to occupy a territory temporarily, they tend to work with other types of political groups (Deak 2000). However, we lack an answer to the question of why this is the case. As Chapter 1 shows, accounting for this link is a crucial step in understanding the causes of ethnic cleansing.

Second, geostrategic studies make the implicit or explicit assumption that ethnic policies are determined by foreign rather than domestic policy considerations. All these arguments in one way or another suggest that states use ethnic cleansing when they surmise that certain ethnic groups will interfere with their goal of conquering or preserving territory. According to the logic of these arguments, this situation leads to ethnic cleansing particularly during wars as it is only then that the benefits of ethnic cleansing escalate enough to surpass the opportunity costs of such a policy. This focus on the international level is problematic for two reasons.

First, without bringing in domestic political concerns, these arguments actually have a difficult time linking wartime security considerations to ethnic cleansing. In a hypothetical world, where the leaders are solely motivated by international policy goals such as annexing or preserving territory, the opportunity cost of ethnic cleansing would be the potential investments in alternative means of achieving these goals such as improving the training and weapons

<sup>18</sup> For a classical account of the triangular approach, see Weiner (1971). For other examples, see Brubaker (1996) and Saideman and Ayres (2008).



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available to the military. Like the desire to avoid fifth columns, these goals gain immediate importance during wartime. In other words, not only the benefits but also the opportunity costs of ethnic cleansing would be higher during wartime compared to peacetime. By implication in a world where foreign policy goals are the only relevant ones, ethnic cleansing should not occur more frequently during war compared to peacetime. Thus, to link war to ethnic cleansing, the geostrategic arguments need to theoretically focus on domestic policy concerns as barriers against ethnic cleansing and provide an account of how wars impact these barriers.

Second, in its pure form, the strategic logic cannot explain the cases of ethnic cleansing that occur after one side clearly wins a war, which actually amount to more than half of the cases that occurred in twentieth-century Europe. Prominent examples for such cases include the deportation of Germans from central Europe, the Greek-Turkish exchange in 1923 as well as numerous groups that the Soviet Union targeted after Germany pulled out of its territory during World War II. One way to avoid this problem would be to suggest that what happens during wars shapes the priorities of the dominant groups and their perceptions about the nondominant groups. This argument, however, requires one to first specify which actors within the dominant group held different views before the war and why. In other words, once again geostrategic arguments demand a more systematic understanding of the domestic obstacles against ethnic cleansing.

**Internal dynamics of states: political ambitions of elites and regime type**

Another set of arguments that deal with ethnic cleansing focus on the internal dynamics of states. Some of these studies contend that during periods of economic or political upheaval, leaders target certain ethnic groups in order to aggrandize their political standing and/or to achieve their ideological aims (Staub 1990; de Figueiredo and Weingast 1999; Gagnon 2004; Valentino 2004; Glaeser 2005). Others emphasize the potential impact of regime type on different types of mass violence such as civilian victimization during wars or “democides” (Rummel 1995; Huth and Valentino 2007).

The studies that focus on the political ambitions and manipulative power of elites can be divided into two types. The first operates under the assumption that leaders merely seek to stay in or increase their power rather than achieving ideological goals. These studies suggest that leaders who want to stay in power mobilize ethnic cleavages when they face political competition from a reformist opposition (de Figueiredo, and Weingast 1999; Gagnon 2004). In an effort to break the reformist coalition, the incumbent leader depicts certain minority groups as a threat to the rest of the society.

A second type of study starts from the assumption that leaders themselves actually have ideological goals and they use ethnic cleansing to achieve these goals. For example, Rae (2002) argues that early modern European states used

violence against specific groups in order to engender a sense of collective identity in the rest of the population. Valentino (2004) suggests that one of the main causal mechanisms that accounts for specifically ethnic mass killings is the existence of elites with extreme racist or nationalist ideologies (Valentino 2004, 152). Another well-known argument in this category is the scapegoat thesis, which contends that during extreme crises leaders come to believe that certain groups are to blame for their misfortunes (Staub 1990).

These arguments provide a refreshing look at the domestic dimension of the process that leads to ethnic cleansing. Nevertheless, they also display several problems. First, the studies that assume that leaders are merely trying to boost their political power cannot really account for ethnic cleansing. These arguments do not clarify the conditions under which “ethnic” rather than some other type of cleavage works better when it comes to breaking the reformist opposition. In addition, they fail to explain why selfish leaders would utilize a comprehensive policy such as ethnic cleansing instead of milder forms of violence such as public protests or limited pogroms that would keep the ethnicity issue on the agenda but would fall short of eliminating the “ethnic” weapon against the reformist opposition. One can, of course, argue that once these leaders incite lower levels of violence, they generate spirals of violence or security dilemmas that eventually turn to ethnic cleansing. But this answer still begs the question of why and when leaders lose control.

Second, the arguments that emphasize the role of ideologically driven leaders have their own specific problems. At its face value, the idea that ideologically driven leaders are the prime cause of ethnic cleansing seems highly reasonable. Yet the argument itself inevitably leads to the question of how such leaders come to power. This question is especially important given that, as the following chapters demonstrate, the leaders of dominant groups in multiethnic contexts exhibit fairly heterogeneous preferences in terms of how they want to treat the nondominant ethnic groups. Thus, in order to avoid being tautological, these arguments need to be supplemented with a theory of the process through which leaders ideologically bent on ethnic cleansing manage to overcome their rivals.

Third, regardless of their assumptions about the leaders, these studies do not provide a convincing account of why the general public actually believes the leaders that depict the ethnic-others as dangerous or undesirable. The existing arguments provide two types of answers to this question. The first has to do with information asymmetry between the leaders and the followers. The logic of this argument stands on the supposition that the general public is unwilling or unable to pay the cost of checking if the leaders are lying (de Figueiredo and Weingast 1999; Glaeser 2005). This assumption, however, is highly questionable. In many societies that experienced ethnic cleansing such as Bosnia or Rwanda, people from different ethnic groups lived side by side or in neighboring villages and interacted on a daily basis. In others such as Nazi Germany, the groups that were singled out were not only highly assimilated into the society