



# "Sacred Stones & Religious Nuts" Negotiating Ethnic Disputes Over Absolute Space

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**Interim Report**

**IR-03-007**

**“Sacred Stones & Religious Nuts”  
Negotiating Ethnic Disputes Over Absolute Space**

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**Approved by**

PIN Committee  
Processes of International Negotiations Project

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## **Abstract**

This study focuses on ethnopolitical secessionist conflicts where, for historic, symbolic or spiritual reasons, the disputed space cannot be divided into sub-units but still, because of a mutually hurting stalemate (the cost of continued violence exceeds the perceived cost of negotiation), cannot be resolved in any way other than through negotiations. The stakes in such conflicts are not just “indivisible,” but have become “absolute” in the perception of the parties. Territorial “absolutes” cannot be exchanged for something else (like security), paid off (by compensation), or substituted (by territory somewhere else). Parties in such disputes often have identical or extremely similar (but exclusive) interests concerning a territory that is so well defined that flexibility is impossible to introduce. Two of the most prominent examples of absolute territorial conflict are Kosovo and Israel/Palestine.

Sacredness is an integral part of territorial absolutes because the spiritual connection between the land and the identity of an ethnic group makes these conflicts different from most conflicts of secession or independence. When two ethnic groups have interlocking histories in a land that at least one side perceives as absolute, the dispute goes beyond the normal notions of self-determination or sovereignty. Whereas in most violent conflict situations, parties eventually reach a point where it is clear that continuing the conflict incurs higher costs than what would be lost through negotiation, conflicts over territorial absolutes seem to never reach this point. This can partly be explained by the fact that violence sometimes is sustained at low levels, enabling actors to keep refurbishing a dispute for generations. However, the argument put forth in this paper is that for many actors whose connection with a disputed territory is “absolute,” no cost, including death, is too high if compared to giving up any of the land to the enemy group. This study explores “territorial absolutes” conceptually in order to explain how absolute perceptions influence conflict management and negotiation.

## **Acknowledgments**

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## **About the Author**

Tova NORLEN of Sweden who is studying at the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies in Washington, DC, USA, participated in the Young Scientists' Summer Program in 2002, and was awarded the Peccei Scholarship for 2002. She was recognized for her work in the project on Processes of International Negotiations (PIN).



# “Sacred Stones & Religious Nuts” Negotiating Ethnic Disputes Over Absolute Space

Tova Norlen

## Introduction

One of the most striking realities for conflict management today is that we seem to be lacking the means to deal with some of the most protracted ethnic conflicts of our time. Typical for these conflicts is that they have strong ethno-political<sup>1</sup> characteristics *combined* with secessionist or irredentist claims.

They cannot be resolved because of the close relationship between ethnic identity of a group, and the symbolic and spiritual values connected to the issue at stake. A threat to these values leads to fears for group survival. However, although the presence of existential fears is enough to complicate the negotiation process, the focus here goes beyond those threats and looks at how the nature of the conflicting claims – as well as the dynamics created by this nature – complicates and debilitates the negotiation process. No negotiator, however skilful, can succeed if certain characteristics of an issue make the conflict non-negotiable. It is the combination of such non-negotiable issues with symbolic and spiritual values that makes the negotiation process so difficult.

Territorial claims in internal conflicts are seen as some of the most difficult questions to resolve in negotiation. Anatole Ayssi writes:

Claims for territory give rise to notoriously complicated conflicts. [...] Conflicts of this type contain all the pitfalls of civil wars and nearly none of their “better” qualities; at least as far as conflict negotiation and preventive diplomacy are concerned. They are highly intractable conflicts—lengthy and merciless wars without a front. Moreover, they are permeable to outside intervention. Because of this explosive combination of factors, these disputes are probably among the worst that preventive negotiations must confront.<sup>2</sup>

Of all ethnic conflicts, the most difficult type to resolve is that which involves stakes that are seen as “absolutes” in the eyes of the participants. What complicates the prospects for negotiation and bargaining in such conflicts is that the *absolute* nature of

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<sup>1</sup> *Ethnopolitical groups* are identity groups whose ethnicity has political consequences, See Gurr, *People versus States* (2000)

<sup>2</sup> Anatole Ayissi, “Territorial Conflicts: Claiming the Land,” in Zartman (ed.), *Preventive Negotiation: Avoiding Conflict Escalation* (2001), pp. 41-66

the stake is reinforced by a combination of additional powerful dimensions: *ethnicity*, *history* and *religion/symbolism*.<sup>3</sup>

The goal of the negotiation process is often to transform value-laden claims into interest-based problem solving. There are then different strategies to deal with the underlying issues of a conflict. In their book, *Negotiation in Social Conflict*, Dean Pruitt and Peter Carnevale explain how “win-win” solutions could be constructed by expanding the pie, exchanging concessions and solving the parties’ underlying concerns.<sup>4</sup> However, they acknowledge that in situations where both parties’ interests are identical, “win-win” solutions may just not be possible.<sup>5</sup> In conflicts over absolute space the parties often have an identical or extremely similar perception of what the conflict is about because it often concerns territory so well defined that no flexibility can be introduced, and histories (of the parties) so different that they can never be reconciled.<sup>6</sup> Territorial absolutes are inherently zero-sum and unless one side wins all, the other side is likely to keep fighting. They are pieces of land that you cannot purchase for any price, or perhaps even more succinctly, land that at all cost has to be denied the enemy.

Conflicts over *absolute* space are typically intra-state, fought between an ethnic group and a state, and over territory. Ethnic identity tends to act as the main mobilizing force for such conflicts, and the struggle is often closely related to existential questions of identity and survival. *Absolutes* concern a specific “breed” of indivisibles in conflict, where symbolic and spiritual elements have come into the equation, influencing the strength of the parties’ commitments and their tolerance for violence. While the 21<sup>st</sup> century is characterized by an increasingly high rate of ethnicity in international conflict, many of the protracted conflicts from the past century still remain unresolved. In a study of international crisis, Michael Brecher & Jonathan Wilkenfeld observed that crises incidents that involve ethnicity and threats to identity are often typically very violence-prone, while existing conflict management techniques to deal with them are often highly ineffective.<sup>7</sup> Such crises often precede the outbreak of conflict.

Ethnic conflict over *absolute* space is not likely to go away in the nearest future. They are created out of internal territorial disputes between states and ethnic groups, a type of dispute that has been on the rise in the international community since the 1960’s.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Ron Hassner points out that several dimensions add to the indivisibility of sacred land: the geographic dimension (inflexible and clearly defined boundaries); monolithic space (cannot be divided into subunits); spiritual (uniqueness – no material or spiritual substitute); historical. Ron Hassner, “Conflict over Space and the Indivisibility Conundrum,” *APSA* (2001); See also Kaufman, “Ethnic Violence, Symbolic Politics and the Security Dilemma,” *APSA* (2001).

<sup>4</sup> Dean Pruitt & Peter Carnevale, *Negotiation in Social Conflict* (1993), p. 36

<sup>5</sup> *ibid*, p. 40

<sup>6</sup> See Hassner, “Conflict over Sacred Space (2001)

<sup>7</sup> Brecher & Wilkenfeld, *A Study of Crisis* (2000), p. 133

<sup>8</sup> Daniel Byman, & Stephen Van Evera, “Why They Fight: Hypotheses on the Causes of Contemporary Deadly Conflict,” *Security Studies* 7, no. 3 (Spring 1998), p. 24: The authors claim that the war problem is now largely “synonymous” with the civil war problem: only 10% of all conflicts in the 1900’s were international. See also Roy Licklider, *Stopping the Killing – How Will Civil Wars*

Writing about internal ethnic conflict, Ayissi notes that “a close examination of the stakes, attitudes, and tactics for preventive diplomacy in situations involving territorial claims makes it clear that these conflicts are highly complicated confrontations for which preventive action remains, in large part unarmed.” Success in resolving territorial intrastate conflicts will not come, he says, “until much time has passed” and when the parochial memory of groups has been replaced by “objective reason.”<sup>9</sup> However, *absolute* conflicts over territory have often been created out of a conflictual past *in order* not to forget such “parochial memory.” For groups that grew out of the history of the conflict, giving up such memory would be equal to giving up one’s essential means of existence.

Each conflict is unique and even those that we categorize as *absolutes* have no standard solution. Scholars often question the utility of ethnicity as a concept for describing or analyzing such conflicts. It is used here not to indicate a “conflict type” but as an element that influences the dynamics of conflict, thus adding degrees of difficulty to the negotiation. The argument here is that the similarities and differences in the outcomes of intrastate ethnic conflicts is determined not so much by the characteristics of the group but by their *relationship* to the issue at stake; i.e. the special character of the territory and the extent to which people are willing to make sacrifices in order to have exclusive ownership over it.

The existence of elements such as fear, hostile myths, revived hatreds and memories of suffering should be seen as ordinal, rather than cardinal values. The more they are present the more will the conflict center on ethnicity and the worse and more intense violence tends to become.<sup>10</sup> This study explores the concept of *absolutes*, its attributes and characteristics as well as the dynamics created when absolutes interact with the requirements of conflict management and negotiation. Knowing more about absolutes will help us understand the complexity of the problems encountered when negotiating ethnopolitical territorial conflicts. The analysis of the attributes of the concept of absolute space, leads to three general propositions that will be operationalized and defined in future research by the author.

A study of territorial absolutes can make an important contribution to the conflict management and negotiation literature because even though conflicts over “sacred stones” (where religious or symbolic elements are closely intertwined with identity and territory) are few, almost all conflicts exhibit value-driven claims. Knowing more about the relationship between identity and space should thus be useful even for conflicts where the symbolic or spiritual dimension has not yet matured.

Section II of this article begins with a brief overview of the most general theories on ethnicity and ethnic conflict, looking at the classical explanations of *primordialism*, *international change*, *instrumentalism* and *constructivism*. A brief outline of the available explanations for the relationship between territory and ethnicity then follows.

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*End?* (1993), p. 7; David Rapoport “The Importance of Space in Violent Ethno-Religious Strife” (1996); Brecher & Wilkenfeld, *A Study of Crisis* (2000)

<sup>9</sup> Ayissi, “Territorial Conflicts” (2001), p. 63

<sup>10</sup> Stuart J Kaufman, *Modern Hatreds: The Symbolic Politics of Ethnic War* (2001), p. 36

Section III begins with a presentation of the main argument together with a closer look at absolute values, and briefly presents the extreme alternatives available for resolving or terminating conflicts over absolute space. A more moderate alternative, autonomy, is then presented as a possible instrument for managing or reducing these conflicts.

Absolutes are introduced to the negotiation process by looking at the dynamics created by absolutes in negotiation. The Nature of Absolutes is then discussed and summarized in three propositions about *territory and identity*; *collective suffering and resuscitated myths*; and *symbolism and religion*. Section IV concludes with some open questions for further research.

Alternative Explanations of Ethnicity

## Four Approaches to Ethnic Conflict

Out of all of the world's independent states, 82 percent contain two or more ethnic groups<sup>11</sup>. Yet, conflict only occurs in a few of these places. How can this be explained? The school one adopts for understanding the influence of identity issues in conflict has an impact on the understanding of ethnicity and conflict; of how ethnic identities are constructed and initiated; as well as of how violence is triggered. Moreover, it has direct implications for the solutions you propose as well as the range of possible prescriptive alternatives you are able to explore.

For the purpose of this study, four alternative explanations of the causes of ethnic conflict are presented: *primordialism*; *instrumentalism*; <sup>12</sup> *theories of international change* (modernization, globalization & relative deprivation theories); and *constructivism*. Others mentioned are the *symbolic politics* approach,<sup>13</sup> *institutional explanations*,<sup>14</sup> and *rational choice* theories<sup>15</sup>.

Dividing theoretical explanations into rigid categories is often a fruitless attempt. However, to the extent that it is done here it is important to remember that we are looking at ideal types, and that what we are describing is only “one leg of the elephant.”

### ***Incurable Conflict***

The primordialist – or the “ancient hatreds” – argument offers a simple and inexpensive explanation for ethnic conflict: simple, because since it sees conflict as inevitably flowing from ethnic differences, this in itself is the successful end of the analysis; inexpensive (for third parties) because if ethnic identities are “ineffable” and “fixed”, conflict becomes conveniently “incurable.”<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Monica Duffy Toft, “Indivisible Territory and Ethnic War” (2001), p.1

<sup>12</sup> Donald Rothchild & David Lake “Ethnic Fears and Global Engagement: The International Spread and Management of Ethnic Conflict” (1996)

<sup>13</sup> Stuart J Kaufman, *Modern Hatreds* (2001)

<sup>14</sup> Deborah Crawford, “The Causes of Cultural Conflict,” Ch. One, Crawford & Lippschutz (eds.) *The Myth of “Ethnic Conflict”* (1998)

<sup>15</sup> Stuart J Kaufman, *Modern Hatreds* (2001)

<sup>16</sup> See Lake & Rothchild, “Ethnic Fears ” (1996)

Clifford Geertz, an early promoter of the primordial perspective, explains primordial attachments as stemming from the “givens” of social existence, especially your kin.<sup>17</sup> The “givenness” that stems from being born into a particular religious community, language or dialect, and social context, make those sentiments “ineffable.” Thus, primordial ties are seen as *a priori*, natural, “incorrigible” and to some extent even spiritual.<sup>18</sup> The fact that they have “overpowering, coerciveness in and of themselves”<sup>19</sup> also makes them binding. The result is that primordial perspectives fail to take into account variations or changes in conflict over time and space, why some ethnic groups are conflictual but not others, as well as the formation of new identities and ethnicities.<sup>20</sup>

However, while the primordial perspective may be inefficient as a basis for analysis, we still cannot ignore what Hutchinson and Anthony Smith call the “primordial qualities and mass sentiments” that many people attribute to their origin, descent or ancestral territory.<sup>21</sup> It is not *what is* but what people *perceive as is* that influences their attitudes and behavior.<sup>22</sup> In defense of the primordial perspective, Pierre van den Berghe writes that even socially constructed myths have to be “believed in” in order to be powerful. This, he claims, can only happen if those myths are based on substantial measures of “biological truth” as a result of common descent and history.<sup>23</sup>

### ***Ethnicity As “Social Capital”***

Ronald Lippchutz writes that there was “no compelling reason why Yugoslavia should fall apart along ethnic lines,” other than the ethnic names of the republics and the federal system of regional resource allocation.<sup>24</sup> *Instrumentalists* see ethnicity and religion as political tools operating no different today than did democracy and Communism during the cold war;<sup>25</sup> i.e., it is a label or set of symbolic ties that is used for political advantage by individuals and groups.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Clifford Geertz, “Primordial Ties,” in Hutchinson & Smith (eds.), *Ethnicity* (1996), p. 42

<sup>18</sup> Manning Nash, “The Core Elements of Ethnicity” in Hutchinson & Smith, *Ethnicity* (1996), p. 25: Nash describes primordial attachments as “blood, substance, and deity;” See also Walker Connor, “Beyond Reason: The Nature of the Ethnonational Bond,” in Hutchinson & Smith, *Ethnicity* (1996), p. 71; see Michael Ignatieff, *The Warrior’s Honor* (1997), p.6

<sup>19</sup> Gary Goertz & Paul F Diehl, *Territorial Changes and International Conflict* (1992), pp. 41-42

<sup>20</sup> See Hutchinson & Smith, *Ethnicity* (1996), p. 32; Lake & Rothchild, “Ethnic Fears” (1996), p. 2

<sup>21</sup> Hutchinson & Smith, *Ethnicity* (1996), p. 32

<sup>22</sup> Walker Connor, “Beyond Reason...” (1996), p. 71

<sup>23</sup> Pierre van Den Berghe, “Does Race Matter?” in Hutchinson & Smith, *Ethnicity* (1996), p. 58

<sup>24</sup> Lippschutz, “Seeking a State of One’s Own: An Analytical Framework for Assessing Ethnic and Sectarian Conflicts,” Crawford & Lippschutz, *The Myth of “Ethnic Conflict”* (1998), p. 37

<sup>25</sup> *ibid* (1998), p. 43

<sup>26</sup> See Lake & Rothchild, “Ethnic Fears...” (1996), p. 4

There are several strands within the “instrumentalist” approach, most notably the institutional framework, elite-manipulation theories, or elite rivalry arguments<sup>27</sup>. While their explanations vary, they tend to view ethnicity as a characteristic that is essentially indistinguishable from other types of affiliations; kinship is seen as “social capital” that can be used to acquire power and wealth in situations where rules and institutions have broken down.<sup>28</sup>

The critique against the instrumentalist approach centers especially on the aspect of ethnicity and its relation to “ascription” or choice. In his book *From Voting to Violence*, Jack Snyder notes that although Milosevic used nationalism to his own ends, the character of ethnic nationalism created was such that loyalty to the state for the individual was partly forced.<sup>29</sup> Ethnic identity therefore cannot be completely chosen (which is what many instrumentalists would argue) – most people are born and socialized into an ethnic context from which they cannot completely detach themselves. However, neither is it biological or genetic, as sometimes seems to be the view of the primordialists.

### **“World Disorder”**

The International change perspective moves the level of analysis to the international system, claiming that changes in the international power balance or system of norms have direct repercussions also on the regional and local level. It is commonly claimed that the collapse of Communism led to a new generation of ethnic, irredentist, and secessionist wars.<sup>30</sup> However, there is no new “world disorder,” write Daniel Byman and Stephen van Evera, in response to the common observation that the post-Cold War period brought a new generation of wars to the forefront of international politics. The authors admit that the collapse of “empires”, such as the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia initially led to a number of conflicts. But in real terms the number of total conflicts has fallen to below 1989 figures.<sup>31</sup> Instead they claim that the difference can be found in the

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<sup>27</sup> Institutionalists may not agree that they fit into this category (See Crawford). For the elite rivalry argument see Gagnon, “Spiraling to Ethnic War” (1996), p. 109

<sup>28</sup> Lippschutz, “Seeking a State of One’s Own” (1998), p. 39; Rajat Ganguli & Ray Taras, *Understanding Ethnic Conflict: The International Dimension* (2002), p. 28

<sup>29</sup> Jack Snyder, *From Voting to Violence: Democratization and Nationalist Conflict*, (2000), p. 181; see also Toft, “Indivisible Territory and Ethnic War” (2001), p. 2

<sup>30</sup> Rajat Ganguli, & Ray Taras, *Understanding Ethnic Conflict* (2002), p.28; Crawford & Lippschutz, *The Myth of “Ethnic Conflict”* (1998), p. 8; Byman & van Evera, “Why They Fight...” (1998) p. 1-2; Mary Kaldor, *New & Old Wars* (1999), p. 5-6

<sup>31</sup> They claim that whereas 17 states experienced civil war in 1989, only 11 did so in 1996. International conflict has almost vanished, and out of those conflicts that were ongoing in 1989-1996, 26/37 were recurring or constant, i.e., had causes that originated in pre-1989 events. See Byman & van Evera (1998), p. 2, 22

causes of conflict, which have shifted from superpower rivalry to communal hegemonism and state weakness.<sup>32</sup>

Many authors of the *international change* perspective argue that the change in nature of wars and conflict is due to processes that began much earlier than the Communist collapse, such as globalization, modernization, and relative deprivation.<sup>33</sup> One argument is that sub-national groups, who feel unrepresented within their present political entity, will feel even more underrepresented if that entity becomes usurped into a yet larger framework.

### ***Fear Of The Future Lived Through The Past.***

David Lake & Donald Rothchild describe the constructivist framework as the bridge between primordialism and instrumentalism. Whereas ethnicity is seen as a primarily social phenomenon, a person's identity still remains beyond the choice or control of each individual.<sup>34</sup> As a group begins to fear for their existence, they act "rationally" to fend for its own survival, often leading to unwanted and highly irrational outcomes.<sup>35</sup> Lake and Rothchild write:

As groups begin to fear for their physical safety, a series of dangerous and difficult to resolve strategic dilemmas arise that contain within them the potential for tremendous violence. As information failures, problems of credible commitment, and the security dilemma take hold, the state is weakened, groups become fearful, and conflict becomes likely. Ethnic activists and political entrepreneurs, operating within groups, reinforce these fears of physical insecurity and polarize the society. Political memories and myths and emotions also magnify these fears, driving groups further apart.<sup>36</sup>

Many scholars who take this approach focus on explaining the conditions under which such "ethnic security dilemmas" can occur.<sup>37</sup> In her book, *Committing to Peace*,

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<sup>32</sup> Byman & van Evera mention seven causes for conflict since WWII: collapse of post-Second World War empires; lack of regime legitimacy; state weakness; communal hegemonism; revolutionary ideology; aristocratic intransigence; superpower proxy wars.

<sup>33</sup> For globalization, see Mary Kaldor, *New & Old Wars* (1999). For discussions on modernization, relative deprivation and economic decline, see Toft, "Indivisible Territory..." (2001), p. 2; Ron Lippschutz, "Seeking a State of One's Own" (1998), p. 4, 12; Beverly Crawford, "The Causes of Cultural Conflict" (1998); Susan Woodward, *Balkan Tragedy: Chaos and Dissolution after the Cold War* (1995); Jack Snyder, *From Voting to Violence* (2000)

<sup>34</sup> Lake & Rothchild, "Ethnic Fears..." (1996), p. 4

<sup>35</sup> Walter attempts to explain this "mysterious pattern:" why rebels and leaders act in ways that appear to be self-defeating—rejecting settlement, returning to fruitless wars, fighting enormously costly battles? Are they irrational or is their range of rational choice limited by structural constraints?

<sup>36</sup> Lake & Rothchild, "Ethnic Fears..." (1996), p. 2

<sup>37</sup> Barry Posen, "The Security Dilemma and Ethnic Conflict" *Survival*, Vol. 35, No. 1, (spring 1993); Snyder & Jervis, "Civil War and the Security Dilemma," in Walter & Snyder (eds.), *Civil Wars, Insecurity and Intervention* (1999); Stephen Saideman, "Is the Pandora's Box Half-Empty or Half-Full?" (2001), p. 8. Another interesting discussion is the relationship between state collapse and the

Barbara Walter notes that some of the most fear-producing events in this aspect are government breakdown and collapse; isolation of a minority group within a larger ethnic community; a political power-balance shift from one group to the other; shifts in economic resources; and demobilization.<sup>38</sup>

The constructivist framework is useful for this study because it can explain how identities are created and how violence is triggered.<sup>39</sup> However, what makes it less useful for investigating absolutes is that it lacks an explanation of the relationship between ethnicity and territorial space.

## Understanding Ethnicity & Territory

One author who writes about the relationship between ethnicity and territorial space is Monica Duffy Toft. According to Toft, violence follows from two conditions: a minority claim for secession, and a perception by the state that the territory in question is indivisible. In order for compromise to be possible in such conflicts at least one of these conditions must be absent.<sup>40</sup> The key to predicting and understanding ethnic violence according to Toft, is thus the relationship that the different actors — ethnic groups and states — have with the disputed territory, and especially how two actors view control over the same piece of ground as indivisible:

For ethnic groups territory is invariably tied to the group's identity. Control over territory means a secure identity. For states, control over territory is directly linked to their physical survival. Where both ethnic groups and states calculate that they need to control the same piece of territory to guarantee their survival, a violent clash is likely to result.<sup>41</sup>

Hence, whereas variations in settlement patterns explain variations in group capacity and legitimacy, which in turn predict variations in the likelihood that a group will risk violence to gain sovereignty, for the state the key question is whether the secession of one group will set a precedent for other groups, spurring a domino effect of secessions.<sup>42</sup>

What is missing from Toft's explanation however is the possibility that the state (as well as the ethnic group) may have "homeland" claims on the disputed territory, and not just "precedence concerns." In the most noticeable *absolute* conflicts like Kosovo and Israel,

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security dilemma. Figueiro & Weingast ask if "state collapse" causes the security dilemma or if the security dilemma gives rise to state collapse. See Figueiredo & Weingast, "The Rationality of Fear: Political Opportunism and Ethnic Conflict" (1997), p. 1

<sup>38</sup> Walter & Snyder, *Civil Wars, Insecurity and Intervention* (1999), Ch. 2

<sup>39</sup> See Rothchild & Wermester, "Third Party Incentives and the Phases of Conflict Prevention," Wermester & Sriram (eds.), *From Promise to Practice: Strengthening UN Capacities for the Prevention of Violent Conflict* (forthcoming)

<sup>40</sup> Toft, "indivisible Territory..." (2001), p. 5

<sup>41</sup> *ibid*, p. 3

<sup>42</sup> *ibid*, p. 15-17



the state (and the ethnic group that comprises it) has more than precedence-setting concerns; it also has absolute and exclusivist demands. In these disputes conflicting demands on the territory have come about as a result of conquests and war that have created large refugee populations with memories of collective suffering. Although the pattern is unique in each individual conflict, combatants tend to be surrounded by patrons and partisans (often neighboring “kin” states). This makes it difficult at times to determine whether a conflict is internal or international. This has been the pattern in Northern Ireland, Israel-Palestine and Kashmir.<sup>43</sup>

The type of identity that we are concerned with here is that which is essentially intertwined with a sense of territorial belonging and shared ancestry. Ethnicity is seen here as different from the more generic concept of identity in the sense that “ethnies” can neither exist nor arise other than in relation to a specific territorial space (however distant).<sup>44</sup> In his book *Nations Against States*, Gidon Gottlieb defines ethnic or national groups in such territorial terms when he writes that ethnic groups are “those collective entities in which prominent political spokesmen and personalities voice their claims in terms of independence; of self-determination or minority rights, of autonomy, or of secession.”<sup>45</sup>

Many western scholars argue that ethnicity should be treated as just another type of “identity” (like gender, political affiliation, religion etc.). However, it is important to point out that whereas “western” identity may be possible to step out of, the type of identity that is experienced by people in an ethnic conflict is quite different and much more salient. This can be explained partly by the proximity of ethnic groups within a small space, but even more by the significance of a specific territorial origin to the identity of a group, as a function of having defended it from “intruders” in the past. The role of territory becomes an important component in the formation of national identities, through the symbolic aspects of a homeland and the way in which metaphysical and historical manifestations of territory contribute to feelings of territorial belonging.<sup>46</sup>

But how can we account for these myths and metaphysical manifestations? Rejecting the more primordial elements of the ancient hatreds explanation, Stuart Kaufman focuses on the historical aspect in inter-group relationships, and especially on how myths and symbols are recycled and modified according to the needs of the contemporary context. Most “ancient hatreds,” claims Kaufman, are thus *new* constructs that are based on historic events that may be both real and mythical. These constructs,

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<sup>43</sup> Kosovo is not mentioned here because although recognizing “kinship,” the Albanian state has not taken an active role in representing the Kosovo Albanians.

<sup>44</sup> See Stephen Iwan Griffiths, *Nationalism and Ethnic Conflict*, SIPRI Research Report No. 5 (Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 10-14; Viva Ona Bartkus, *The Dynamic of Secession* (1999), p. 20

<sup>45</sup> Gidon Gottlieb, *Nation Against State* (1993), p. xii; see also Stephen Iwan Griffiths, (*ibid*) and Bartkus, (*ibid*)

<sup>46</sup> Some authors stress the importance of group size, capabilities or settlement patterns: See Coakely, *The Territorial Management of Ethnic Conflict* (1993); Toft, “Indivisible Territory and Ethnic War” (2001). Others, such as Goertz & Diehl (in Walter 2001) look at the value or importance of territory to the claimants. Also see Paul F Diehl, *A Roadmap to War: Territorial Dimensions of International Conflict* (1999), p. 3, 4; Hutchinson & Smith, *Ethnicity* (1996); Kliot & Waterman (1983), p. 115, 120; Margaret Moore, *National Self-determination and Secession* (1998), p. 2

according to Kaufman's "symbolic politics" approach, determine the relationship between groups and the likelihood of violent conflict.<sup>47</sup> The idea of ethnic symbolism combines the logic of the ancient hatreds, manipulative elites, and stories of economic rivalry. Kaufman writes that three elements are needed for mobilization to take place: while manipulative elites use ethnicity as tools to gain support and solidarity, such campaigns will have little effect on the targeted population unless there is a real and perceived conflict of interest at work as well as mythically based feelings of hostility that can be tapped into. Without a perceived conflict of interest, people have no reason to mobilize. Without "emotional commitment based on hostile feeling" they lack incentive to do so, and without leadership they are often incapable of organizing themselves collectively.<sup>48</sup> Ethnic wars differ, explains Kaufman, in the extent to which each of these factors is primarily to blame:

In some cases, prejudice and hostility are so strong that they result in violence almost as soon as the opportunity arises. In these cases of mass-led violence, theories about ancient hatreds seem particularly appropriate. In other cases it is incumbent leaders who play on ethnic prejudice to provoke hostility and violence. Such cases of elite-led violence seem more explicable in terms of manipulative leaders. Either way, war results from a process in which extremist politics and insecurity mutually reinforce each other in an escalatory spiral.<sup>49</sup>

Prejudiced symbolic politics and insecurity, he explains, feed each other: "Modern" hatreds feed into the security dilemma, which then gives rise to hostility and violence. As history is turned into symbolism, spiritual commemorations and myths of martyrdom, people are led to do, what in the eyes of onlookers are "irrational" things.<sup>50</sup> The tragic element, writes Kaufman, is that "the groups are spurred by their mythologies to define their security in mutually incompatible ways when more modest definitions on both sides would permit mutual security instead of a spiral of insecurity and violence."<sup>51</sup>

The Symbolic Politics framework is useful when trying to understand how territorial absolutes emerge and how conflict over absolute space can be triggered as well as how it becomes so indivisible. An ethnic security dilemma arises when groups who claim the same territory, treat it as mutually exclusive. In cases where groups fight to dominate their own self-identified homeland, these myths become even stronger, making the prospects for successful negotiations even worse:

Outside observers usually argue in such cases that a compromise is possible, but that is the tragedy of the ethnic security dilemma: the parties cannot agree to

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<sup>47</sup> Kaufman, *Modern Hatreds* (2002)

<sup>48</sup> *ibid*, p. 12

<sup>49</sup> *ibid*, p. 12-13

<sup>50</sup> In contrast to the traditional security dilemma where parties prefer not to fight, in Kaufman's ethnic security dilemma the sides are openly hostile and perfectly willing to fight. See Kaufman, *Modern Hatreds* (2002), p. 34; see also Jedlicki about the Polish-Ukrainian relationship: Jerzy Jedlicki, "Historical Memory as a Source of Conflict in Eastern Europe" *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 32 (1999)

<sup>51</sup> Kaufman, *Modern Hatreds* (2002), p. 36

compromise because their security needs are defined by their national myths—and defined so that security for one side automatically means insecurity for the other. In short, it is not uncertainty but hostile myths that allow ethnic entrepreneurs to justify violence against a rival group.<sup>52</sup>

Two things are important as we look closer at *absolutes* in negotiation and conflict management: First, whereas ethnicity and communal attachments can be stronger for some ethnic groups than for others the difference in these sentiments stems not from variations in “primordial ties” or “backwardness,” but from the extent to which groups have been subjected to continuous threats and conflict throughout their history (compare for example Serbs with Swedes). Salient “territorial ethnicity” is seen here as the result of hostility and suffering endured collectively when defending their “homeland” over generations. Proximity of groups is thus not enough for conflict over a territorial *absolute* to emerge if, as Kaufman explains, the threat to the territory is coming from an ethnic group other than the one from which the threat emanated in the past.<sup>53</sup>

Second, (and in reverse of the previous argument) the difficulty to resolve *territorial absolutes* through negotiation can partly be attributed to the fact that it usually involves at least two *very proximate* groups who are fighting over a very small piece of territory. In most societies that experience conflict with territorial *absolutes*, ethnic groups live very close together, as in Belfast, where only the street names tell the difference. Any option for the resolution of the conflict other than sharing – which is declared out of the question by the parties – would require the permanent exclusion of one the parties to that land. This is the dilemma created by *territorial absolutes* for negotiation.

## Analysis

### A. Argument

Conflicts over absolute space are zero-sum by definition, as the claim of one party is often made in terms of the exclusion of the other.<sup>54</sup> *Absolute* issues often evade successful negotiation because any acknowledgment of the other party’s claim or agreement to settle the question of ownership in favor of the opponent becomes existential, equivalent to the renouncing of one’s own identity.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Kaufman, “Ethnic Violence, Symbolic Politics, and the Security Dilemma” (2001), p. 7

<sup>53</sup> See Kaufman, *Modern Hatreds* (2002)

<sup>54</sup> Ron Hassner writes that two parameters distinguish sacred (absolute) space in relation to other space: first, the centrality of the place in a group’s spiritual landscape; and second, exclusivity, the measure of the degree to which access to the sacred space and behavior within it are circumscribed, monitored and sanctioned—thereby also separating members from non-members: See Hassner, “Conflict over Sacred Space” (2001)

<sup>55</sup> Toft, “Indivisible Territory...” (2001), p. 3; territory is invariably tied to a group’s identity and the key to predicting ethnic violence is how the different actors—ethnic groups and states—view territory.

Disputed land becomes transformed into an “infinitely intangible” space that no longer makes sense in pieces or parts, but only in its entirety. Because of the close connection between *the absolute* and ethnic, religious and/or symbolic identity, such spaces take on nearly divine character, insulating them from partition into sub-units that could allow for bargaining and compromise.<sup>56</sup> Paul Diehl writes:

While divisible aspects may open up the basis for compromise and territorial division, symbolic and religious attachment to land does not allow for compromise, in which case the conflict becomes more protracted and violent.<sup>57</sup>

The argument made here is that the extreme difficulty encountered in the negotiation of ethnopolitical conflicts over territory can partly be explained by the degree to which the contestants perceive the disputed space in *absolute* terms. For the purpose of this study an *absolute* can be defined as a disputed space that, through myths, symbols and/or spiritual practice or beliefs, has become so intrinsic to the identity of a group that it can only be treated as an indivisible “whole.”

The meaning of an *absolute* stake draws on, but goes beyond, the normally used notion of an “indivisible.”<sup>58</sup> *Indivisibility* implies the end point on a continuum of varying degrees of “divisibility.” If the right formula can be reached by substitution or exchange, a degree of divisibility may be added and introduced into the negotiations, making settlement possible.

Absolutes stakes however, are not fungible: they cannot be exchanged for something else (like security)<sup>59</sup>, paid off by outside parties (compensation), or substituted for (by territory somewhere else).<sup>60</sup>

When neither one of the parties is willing to make territorial concessions anywhere close to the magnitude required by the other side, negotiations may seem like a waste of time. Experiments with democratic or participatory proceedings or power sharing are unlikely to work in a situation where parties regard sharing as out of the question.<sup>61</sup>

Gary Goertz and Paul Diehl suggest that the resolution of territorial disputes with high relational importance (meaning high emotional attachments) needs more than a division of land area into equal pieces:

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<sup>56</sup> See Anthony D. Smith, “Chosen Peoples,” Hutchinson & Smith, *Ethnicity*, (1996), pp. 189-196; Crawford, “The Causes of Cultural Conflict” (1998); Hassner, “Conflict over Sacred Space...” (2001), p. 46

<sup>57</sup> Diehl, *A Roadmap to War* (1999), p. 16

<sup>58</sup> Indivisibility or intangibility is also referred to as “exclusivity” in territorial disputes. Groups see themselves as the exclusive owners to a territory and all other groups are seen as usurpers.

<sup>59</sup> As in the case of the Security for land offered to Israel in the 1978 Camp David agreement over Sinai.

<sup>60</sup> See Hassner “Conflict over Sacred Space...” (2001)

<sup>61</sup> Jedlicki, “Historical Memory...” (1999), p. 19; see Snyder, *From Voting to Violence* (2000); Byman & Van Evera, “Why They Fight...” (1998), p. 48

It may be that security interests can be satisfied without a territorial change. Yet it also may be that the interests of the protagonists are incompatible such that any division of the disputed land will be unacceptable to one side or the other.<sup>62</sup>

## 1. *Absolutes in Morality*

We often talk about *absolutes* in relation to morality or value and in its most general usage it is simply understood as something that cannot be compromised. According to the Oxford Companion to Philosophy, *the absolute* is defined in the following terms:

That which has an unconditioned existence, not conditioned by, relative to, or dependent on anything else. [...]the whole of things, conceived as unitary, as spiritual, as self-knowing (at least in part via the human mind), and as rationally intelligible, as finite things, considered individually, are not.<sup>63</sup>

*Moral absolutism* is related to a deontological position in ethics, which takes the view that certain kinds of actions are intrinsically right or wrong regardless of their consequences. However, whereas a deontological position may accept that even intrinsically wrongful acts may at times be necessary in order to prevent certain circumstances, *absolutism* would reject such a claim and hold that “wrongness” can never be overridden by any consideration of the consequences. The absolutist position also often corresponds to common traditional religious values with roots in the Ten Commandments.<sup>64</sup>

Two points stand out from this discussion, as they relate to territorial absolutes. First, we are reminded that an absolute value is a matter of *perception* and may therefore vary from one individual to the other, and from one negotiating party to the other. However, for individuals with strong convictions of *absolutes*, the convictions are transformed into reality by the manner in which they govern and constrain attitudes and behaviors. In a negotiation situation, these constraints play into the process, influencing decision-making, bargaining, and the range of possible alternatives relevant to the outcome.<sup>65</sup>

Second, the philosophy debate also seems to indicate that any question with high enough stakes could potentially be made “absolute” (or non-negotiable) in the perception of the negotiators. Hence, according to this view, the “substance” of the absolute value is irrelevant to the essence of an “absolute.” This would imply that territorial absolutes should be no more difficult to resolve through negotiations than any other issue that has taken on absolute value for the parties.

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<sup>62</sup> Goertz & Diehl, *Territorial Changes and International Conflict* (1992), p. 132

<sup>63</sup> The Oxford Companion to Philosophy, Oxford University Press 1995, also at <http://www.xrefer.com>, 7/12/02

<sup>64</sup> Take the discussion between Jesus and the Pharisees over whether or not you could rescue your donkey from a pit on Shabbat. The Pharisees hold on to the absolutist view that no work can be performed during Shabbat regardless of the circumstances, whereas Jesus’ answer is consequentialist in nature, in that it depends on the circumstances.

<sup>65</sup> See Tim Hicks, “Another Look at Identity-Based Conflict: The Roots of Conflict in the Psychology of Consciousness” *Negotiation Journal* (2001)

But are “absolutes” just another way of explaining “high stakes,” or can the specific characteristics of a territorial *absolute* determine the success or failure of negotiations? There is far too little emphasis on *absolute* phenomena in the negotiation literature to be able to draw any significant conclusions. However, understanding *absolutes* better requires better knowledge about the structural context of conflict where absolutes emerge, and the special dynamics created by ethnic territorial conflict.

### ***Resolving Absolutes – A Paradox***

So how could these conflicts be dealt with? The international community is clearly faced with both normative and practical challenges: normatively we want to protect ethnic minorities from encroachment by the state; practically, not every ethnic community is fit to be a state.<sup>66</sup>

Since the 1960’s, when the concept of self-determination was invented, the international relations debate has increasingly gone from a *realpolitik* focus on power and capabilities, to a ‘moral-politik’ focus on international conventions and norms.<sup>67</sup> However, in spite of this development, we still need new flexible solutions to resolve some of the most difficult and protracted conflicts of our time. Unfortunately it is also conspicuously void of ideas about how such solutions should be found.<sup>68</sup> On the one hand the sovereignty norm in international law protects states from disintegration. On the other hand, the self-determination norm and the principle of democracy and political participation, often support claims for independence from certain ethnic groups or nations.

The most popular solutions for ethnopolitical secessionist conflict are power-sharing systems, or various forms of devolutions of power. Bringing political decisions closer to the people may in fact help in those cases where minority groups are facing discrimination or exclusion by the majority. However, combatants in disputes over absolute space would often much rather die than share even an inch of their sacred land with the enemy. Thus, the argument made here is that most of these prescriptions are unsuitable for intra-state conflict over territory, especially when the dispute concerns space seen as *absolute*, that the parties are unwilling to share.

In conflicts over territorial absolutes, the stronger party technically has four “extreme” alternatives with regard to the termination of the conflict. First, it can strive to achieve assimilation of the ethnic minority into the dominant culture. Second, it can carry out ethnic transfer so as to clear the disputed land from members of the other group. Third, it can attempt genocide—either real or symbolic—to simply eradicate the other. Finally, it can allow secession (either out of weakness or compassion) and the creation of an independent state. Whereas assimilation is unlikely to work in a situation where identity can be considered “part of the stake,” transfer has a poor record despite some claims to the contrary,<sup>69</sup> and secession—if carried out—will most likely be stymied by the side

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<sup>66</sup> See Gottlieb, *Nation Against State* (1993), p. 2

<sup>67</sup> David Rappoport, “The Importance of Space...” (1996), p. 8

<sup>68</sup> Ruth Lapidot, *Autonomy* (1997); Ayissi, “Territorial Conflicts...” (2001)

<sup>69</sup> See Chaim Kaufmann, “When all else fails: Ethnic Population Transfers and Partitions in the Twentieth Century” (1998); Nicholas Sambanis, *Partition As a Solution to Ethnic War: An Empirical*

that loses in the deal. Further, these extreme solutions would only be possible if one side had *all* the power and the other side had *none* - but this is rarely ever the case. Even if one of these alternatives were carried out “successfully,” chances are that the suffering inflicted would generate new myths of martyrdom that could justify the next cycle of revenge.

Thus, although the combatants would certainly prefer total victory and the “eradication” of the enemy, findings show that internal territorial conflicts seldom end in either outright victory or defeat. Rather they tend to become protracted struggles that either continue to linger for years, or they are eventually resolved through some form of compromise.<sup>70</sup> Zartman has shown that such conflicts are amenable to negotiated solutions when the parties find themselves in a hurting stalemate, where the costs of continuing the violence exceeds the potential gains from entering into negotiations.<sup>71</sup> Since neither side is in the position to win through an escalation of hostilities, negotiating becomes the only way out and compromise becomes necessary. In this case, the only alternative that can offer something to both sides while not depriving either of symbolic ownership of the land is some form of asymmetric devolution, such as political autonomy.<sup>72</sup>

The paradox however, is that autonomy is often claimed to be an unstable alternative for secessionist conflicts and sometimes considered only as a trajectory towards future independence.<sup>73</sup> While some scholars claim that all negotiated autonomies will ultimately lead to independence in the long run; others explain the tendency for states to “usurp” autonomous regions as soon as the opportunity presents itself.<sup>74</sup> This happens because such autonomy is often neither preferred, nor welcomed by either the ethnic

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*Critique of The Theoretical Literature* (1999); Rhada Kumar, “The Troubled History of Partition” *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 76, no 1. Whereas Chaim Kaufmann argues that transfer has prevented major war on an international level in several well-known cases such as between Pakistan and India, between Israel and the Arab states, and between Ireland and the UK, Kumar and Sambanis argue against this claim. The result of those transfers was the development of severe protracted conflicts with absolute characteristics. The Kashmir, Israeli-Palestinian and Northern Ireland conflicts are all the direct result of the “transfers” (including refugee flows) that took place during a major war. See also Daniel Byman, “Divided They Stand: Lessons about Partition from Iraq and Lebanon,” *Security Studies*, (Autumn) vol. 7, no. 1, pp. 1-29

<sup>70</sup> Barbara Walter, *Committing to Peace: The Successful Settlement of Civil Wars*, (2002); Toft, “Indivisible Territory...” (2001), p. 41

<sup>71</sup> Zartman, *Ripe for Resolution* (1989)

<sup>72</sup> *Asymmetric devolution* is described by Coakley as “territorial asymmetric distributions of power in which the center permanently cedes power to the sub-state level.” Autonomy would give territorial sovereignty to the ethnic group while still not denying the state the ownership and control. See Coakley *The Territorial Management of Ethnic Conflict* (1993), p. 18

<sup>73</sup> See Rothchild & Lake, “Territorial Decentralization and Civil War Settlement,” (forthcoming), p. 2, 17, 24; Svante Cornell, “Autonomy as a Source of Conflict: Caucasian Conflict in Theoretical Perspective” (2002); Hassner, “Conflict over Sacred Space” (2001); Gottlieb, *Nations Against State* (1993), p. 32, 46; Kaufman, “Ethnic Violence...” (2001)

<sup>74</sup> Hurst Hannum, *Autonomy Sovereignty and Self-Determination* (1996)

group or the state. It is born out of a costly stalemate, and only out of their failure to gain what in their perception is “rightfully theirs.”

Despite its weaknesses however, autonomy lies somewhere in the middle between the three extremes of assimilation, transfer or secession, three alternatives that seem “doomed” in territorial absolute conflict, as they solve the problem only to the satisfaction of one side. Hence, autonomy may perhaps be the only way that conflicts over absolute space can be managed, in the absence of the ability to determine the “final status” of such disputed land.

An advocate for autonomy solutions, Ruth Lapidot, explains that autonomy agreements are granted in cases where self-determination is not an option, and where minority rights or guarantees of equality are not satisfactory.<sup>75</sup> According to this view autonomy should be the perfect solution for handling conflicts over absolute space. However, the question concerns not only whether autonomy should be granted or not, but also what type of autonomy that is appropriate in each case.<sup>76</sup> Even in the case of disputed land, Lapidot contends that personal and functional autonomy, with no territorial attributes, can do the job.<sup>77</sup> But functional powers are not likely to work if parties are fighting and dying for control over a very specific, delineated piece of territory, such as in Kosovo, Israel, or Northern Ireland. The failure of the implementation of the Oslo agreement showed that it is highly unlikely that an ethnic group in an absolute territorial dispute will accept administrative and political freedoms without a clear link to the territory in which they reside.

It is clear that a political autonomy regime can only be effective in managing absolute space if it comes about through a mutually acceptable negotiated agreement. However, while studies have shown that combatants with territorial goals are no less likely to initiate negotiations than the parties in non-territorial conflicts, they have also found that they are much less successful in reaching a mutually acceptable settlement. Suspecting that the factors that influence parties to come to the negotiation table may be quite different from those factors that influence success or failure of negotiations, Barbara Walter found that intra-state combatants with territorial goals were 20 percent less likely to reach a mutually acceptable settlement than those with non-territorial goals.<sup>78</sup> Hence, this decreases the chances for mutually acceptable autonomy arrangements to ever come about.

Walter, who had initially hypothesized that territorial stakes should be easier to manage than non-territorial stakes, is surprised by this finding. One explanation, she suggests, could be that past failures to negotiate have pushed the combatants to inflate their territorial claims and push for separation. The argument made here however, is the reverse: in negotiations over space perceived as *absolute* by the combatants, it is the nature of the disputed land and the exclusivist goals of the combatants in relation to it, that make negotiations so difficult. The complex dynamics created in such negotiations

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<sup>75</sup> Lapidot, *Autonomy* (1997)

<sup>76</sup> See Yash Ghai, “Autonomy as a Strategy for Diffusing Conflict,” in Druckman & Stern (eds.), *International Conflict Resolution after the Cold War* (2000)

<sup>77</sup> Lapidot, *Autonomy* (1997)

<sup>78</sup> Walter, *Committing to Peace* (2002), p. 82



seem to present mediators with a “worst case scenario” in terms of finding final solutions that are acceptable to both sides.

## **Negotiating Absolutes**

In conflicts over absolute space the parties negotiate *only* because they are stuck. If the stronger side had all the power, the conflict could have been “resolved.”<sup>79</sup> The parties are locked into a mutually hurting stalemate where the costs of continuing the conflict are higher than talking and thus, negotiation becomes the only option. What the parties in such a situation often forget is that if you cannot take something by force you have to purchase it, and what you do in negotiations is in fact determining the price.<sup>80</sup> However, since absolutes cannot be purchased at any price (in the perception of the participants), deadlock often becomes protracted, devastating and rigid.

## **2. “Absolute” Dynamics**

The parties in internal territorial conflicts are typically an ethnic group and a state, naturally tilting the military balance of power substantially in the direction of the state. Yet, states in such situations are rarely able to completely crush their opposition. The weaker party’s strength is derived from the fact that it is able to deliver enough pain to the stronger party to make the situation more costly than the potential gains that could be gained (by the stronger party) from negotiating. The weaker party’s relative strength can be drawn from several sources, including the methods and means used for the struggle; the strength of their commitment; the legal and moral opinions of the international community, and the power gained from participating in negotiation.

In spite of having less military capacity, the weaker side can often make the largest, most effective, and most well equipped armies practically defenseless.<sup>81</sup> Whereas a state typically uses conventional warfare, such as tanks and helicopters, rebels frequently use more unconventional means, such as guerrilla tactics and civilian dress. At the beginning of the first Palestinian *Intifada* in 1987-88, this was exactly the dilemma facing the Israeli Defense Forces. Like most powerful armies, the Israelis were not trained in “mob control” or policing when they were confronted by little boys throwing mostly nothing but rocks. The resulting media coverage of Israeli brutalities was part of a planned strategy of the West Bank Palestinian leadership until more militant factions gained control over the uprising.

Another source of power for the weak can be their willingness to suffer and their symbolic commitment to the land. This has sometimes been explained by the “homeland” theory by scholars, which posits that the side that is fighting for their

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<sup>79</sup> This situation can be illustrated by a story about a Russian farmer who was granted a wish by God. However, said God, whatever would be granted to the farmer, would also be granted – but in the double – to his worst enemy. “Then,” said the farmer, “cut out my left eye.” (Compliments to Paul Meertz, PIN-IIASA/Clingendael Institute.)

<sup>80</sup> Zartman, “Initiatives in Negotiation,” Conference, SAIS April 24<sup>th</sup>

<sup>81</sup> The Vietnam War serves as one of the most revealing example where a strong army has not been able to crush their much weaker counterpart.

“home turf” or ‘ancestral land’ will accept much higher sacrifices, than those for whom the land is more distant, physically or emotionally.<sup>82</sup> Palestinian suicide bombers or Japanese Kamikaze pilots are examples of such commitment.

A third source of power can be found in internationally accepted norms and practice. Ethnic groups such as the Palestinians can evoke international opinions communicated through the United Nations (Resolutions 223 and 338), or through declarations of the international legal community. Regionally concentrated ethnic groups often invoke the “majority principle,” the right to self-determination and political participation, rights of indigenous peoples, or other norms of the international community that may favor their claim.

By negotiating, states foreclose the military option and thereby relinquish an important part of their power to the weaker party, essentially “admitting” that they cannot win. The paradox in negotiations is that the weak are allowed to confront the strong and still gain something from the talks that should not be possible if weakness and strength were all that mattered.<sup>83</sup> When entering negotiations an ethnic group (whose claim the state often does not recognize), will have veto power over any agreement that does not please them, as well as the power to provoke a conflict or encounter. Other dynamics that influence the positional commitment of negotiators are the perceived value of the stake; the degree of freedom or accountability of the negotiator;<sup>84</sup> the support of the domestic constituency; and the toughness dilemma.

Because the *absolute* territorial conflict is between an ethnic group and a state there is a risk that the state will attempt to dominate negotiations from its position of strength and as the official sovereign “owner” of the disputed territory. Too much strength on the part of the stronger side can lead to an imposed agreement that will either not be accepted by the weaker side or will fail during its implementation. Within the negotiation setting this is described as the “toughness dilemma,” and it is a consequence of the veto power that the weaker side has over the final outcome.<sup>85</sup> In ongoing negotiations over the implementation of autonomy agreements, the logic of the toughness dilemma will continue to directly affect the prospects for successfully managing conflicts over absolute space.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Goertz and Diehl found that states are likely to be tougher when defending a territory that is part of their “homeland.” See Goertz & Diehl, *Territorial Changes and International Conflict* (1992), p. 88

<sup>83</sup> Zartman & Berman, *The practical Negotiator* (1982)

<sup>84</sup> Negotiators tend to make high demands and few concessions if they believe that their constituents are anxious to win. Accountability – which is the extent to which the negotiators can be rewarded or punished by their constituents for their performance – has shown to slow concession making and enhance contentious behavior. Logically, negotiators higher up on the decision-making ladder or those who are elected are more likely to be more flexible. See Pruitt & Carnevale, *Negotiation in Social Conflict* (1993), pp. 56

<sup>85</sup> The “toughness dilemma,” refers to the observation that when parties play tough they increase their chances of getting an agreement closer to their position, while simultaneously decreasing their chances of getting any agreement at all. See Zartman, *Preventive Negotiation* (2001), p. 10-11; See Pruitt & Carnevale, (*ibid*), p. 47

<sup>86</sup> The talks that paralleled the implementation of the Oslo Agreement provide an example of a situation where the weaker side felt powerless in determining its course.

## Questions Regarding Absolutes

In order to understand the complexity of negotiating absolute space a look at the mechanisms of values and perceptions that accompany each conflict is required. There are still some very basic questions about *absolutes* that need to be answered, such as:

- ❑ Can absolutes negotiated?
- ❑ If so, what is the nature of the process?
- ❑ What are the dynamics that make absolutes so difficult to resolve?
- ❑ How does sacred space emerge, and for what reasons?
- ❑ Can a territorial absolute be changed into a divisible space?

These (and many more) questions have yet to be answered about sacred space, absolute territorial conflict and ethnicity. Below three dimensions are analyzed in order to understand the influence of territorial *absolutes* on the negotiation process.

*First*, the interplay between territory and identity; how values affect stakes and how identity combined with territory leads to existential questions about group survival.

*Second*, the legacies of collective suffering and revived myths; how present fears play a role in reviving old hatreds, which in turn gives rise to violence and atrocities, and how memories of past events creates a problem for the negotiation process.

*Third*, the role of symbolism and religion in creating the indivisibility of *absolute* space; the cultivation of ethnic election and its consequences, and the role of “false righteousness” in creating stereotypes about “self” and the “other.”

## The Nature of Absolutes

### 3. Territory and Identity

In most cases the difficulty inherent in negotiating certain issues is not fixed, but depends on the stakes attached to it by the parties. Stakes can be described as “those things that matter to the parties—costs and benefits that each [party] faces as a particular issue is handled early rather than later.”<sup>87</sup> Stakes determine the *value* of things and set the terms of trade. The value determines the “nature of the stake,” whether it is *integrative* or *distributive*; *divisible* or *indivisible*, *tangible* or *intangible*. Values are “ostensibly true” — thus, also the subject of perceptions.<sup>88</sup>

During negotiations, the most immediate challenge facing third parties and mediators is to get the contenders to move from a perception of the stakes in terms of *value*, to an understanding of it in terms of *interests*. Since interests are rarely identical, positive sum outcomes can be created where the interests of both sides are taken into account. In other words, negotiation seeks to move the parties from a zero-sum perception of the stakes to a positive-sum or integrative approach, by reframing issues, using side-

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<sup>87</sup> Zartman, *Preventive Negotiation* (2001), p. 7

<sup>88</sup> *ibid*

payments, or re-evaluating interests (ranking issues). Zartman has called this a move from “value-claiming” to “value-creating”, or from “competing claims” to “joint gains.”<sup>89</sup> By *reframing* the issue in terms of joint gains or shared problems, parties can come to see their needs and interests as compatible. By using *side-payments or compensation*, mediators or third parties can compensate parties for losses by providing something else making up for that loss, such as security or land somewhere else. The *re-evaluation of interests* refers to looking at the underlying issue to see the needs behind a claim, to see whether those needs could be met in some other way.

However, these transformations assume that all stakes can be either re-evaluated or paid off, that interests are never completely identical, that cooperative strategies work once employed, and that parties who have suffered heavy losses will still be open for compromise. From our earlier observation of *absolutes* we know that they are often “infinitely” zero-sum, therefore clearly lacking this flexibility. Dean Pruitt & Peter Carnevale explain that such situations, where win-win solutions are useless, can occur if the underlying concerns of both parties are completely identical.<sup>90</sup>

Besides the actual (or perceived) value, the substance of an issue might also determine its nature, or divisibility, which in turn influences its prospects for being resolved through negotiation. Roy Licklider notes that the nature of issues is important, but that its impact on the outcome is still largely unclear.<sup>91</sup> Some issues may have a predetermined nature that might influence the outcome, such as being tangible or intangible, abstract and symbolic or hard and concrete. Traditionally issues were often described as either “hard” or “soft.”<sup>92</sup> Whereas hard issues were those that concerned military power and security, soft issues were those that wouldn’t “kill” (at least not in the short-term), such as social or economic issues. The level of negotiation difficulty was partly attributed to the value of the stakes, but could also be closely related to the immediate risks that the parties might face should they not reach an agreement.

By itself, and in relation to interstate conflict, territory is known as the single most prominent issue that escalates disputes to the point of war, thus a “hard” stake. Territorial disputes have also shown to be much more escalatory, more violent, and more likely to experience military responses than non-territorial disputes.<sup>93</sup> Further, intrastate conflicts over territory are not likely to be resolved through either force or persuasion, and will more often end in a cease-fire or stalemate than in victory or a lasting peace settlement.<sup>94</sup> Compared to non-ethnic intra-state conflicts, Nicholas

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<sup>89</sup> Dupont & Faure (ch. 3), in Kremenyuk (ed.), *International Negotiation* (1991), p. 42

<sup>90</sup> Pruitt & Carnevale, *Negotiation in Social Conflict* (1993), p. 40

<sup>91</sup> Licklider, *Stopping the Killing* (1993), p. 14

<sup>92</sup> Ayissi describes these as hard, soft, and semi-soft. Ayissi, “Territorial Conflicts...” (2001), p. 47

<sup>93</sup> See Paul Huth, *Standing Your Ground* (1996); Goertz & Diehl *Territorial Changes and International Conflict* (1992); Diehl, *A Roadmap to War* (1999), p.120; Berkowitch, “Theory and Practice in International Mediation” (2002). Brecher & Wilkenfeldt, *A Study of Crisis* (2000), p. 163

<sup>94</sup> See Toft “Indivisible Territory...” (2001), p. 41

Sambanis found that ethnopolitical intrastate conflicts are more enduring and reach higher levels of violence, i.e., they are more difficult to resolve through negotiations.<sup>95</sup>

However, other findings relating to inter-state territorial conflicts, show that territory is often easy to negotiate compared to other issues, due to its tangible and divisible nature.<sup>96</sup> This paradox reveals that territorial issues may “act” much more divisibly in inter-state conflicts than when they appear in an internal or an inter-ethnic context where stakes and values are apparently higher. Writing that identity conflicts over land are somehow in a “grey-zone between soft and hard,” Ayissi confirms this ambiguous nature.<sup>97</sup> He explains the difficulty to be determined by the *intensity* of the claiming groups’ parochial feelings, the density of committed power and engagement, contextual factors (such as external support), and the degree to which identity is intertwined with threats to security and prosperity.<sup>98</sup>

### *a. Intrinsic or Relational Value of Space*

Goertz & Diehl write that territory can have two types of values to parties: intrinsic value related to its resources, or relational value, connected to its meaning “in the eyes of the beholder.”<sup>99</sup> This, they claim can explain why the value of a given piece of territory can vary according to the perceptions of the different groups or states involved in a dispute. Whereas *intrinsic* importance refers to material assets or resources that are present regardless of whose perspective is taken into account, *relational* importance refers to its functional or immaterial aspects such as centrality, or “homeland.”<sup>100</sup> The relational value is made up of characteristics that can differ widely between different states or groups. Thus, when these values clash over the same territory it is likely to result in high levels of violence.<sup>101</sup>

In addition to a territory’s centrality, the relational value is determined through three further dimensions. First, the ethnic composition of the population may give states reasons to see a territory as highly valuable and as a result place claims on neighboring states in which their kin resides.<sup>102</sup> Second, and related to ethnic considerations, the history of a land may have enormous value for a state or a group, a dimension that is often reinforced by aspects of cultural practices and religious traditions.<sup>103</sup> A third dimension

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<sup>95</sup> Sambanis, “Do Ethnic Conflicts and Non-ethnic conflicts have the same causes?” *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Volume 45, Number 3, (2001)

<sup>96</sup> See Harvey Starr & Dale Thomas, “The Nature of Borders and Conflict: Revisiting Hypotheses on Territory and War” (2001); See also Huth, *Standing Your Ground* (1996)

<sup>97</sup> Ayissi, “Territorial Conflicts...” (2001), p. 49

<sup>98</sup> *ibid*

<sup>99</sup> Goertz & Diehl, *Territorial Changes* (1992), p. 14

<sup>100</sup> *ibid*. p. 14-15.

<sup>101</sup> *ibid*, p. 92

<sup>102</sup> *ibid*, p. 19

<sup>103</sup> For example for the Protestants in Northern Ireland, the yearly Marches of Orange through Catholic neighborhoods reminds them of past glories. The authors note that historic claims are common in territorial disputes but that they are rarely given any weight in international law.

of relational value is what Goertz & Diehl call the “territorial importance.” They explain that beyond the intrinsic value of territory there seems to be idiosyncratic and sometimes irrational benefits that are derived just from owning a particular piece of land.<sup>104</sup> A prime example of a failure to take such idiosyncratic value into account, they say, was the division of Palestine after the Second World War, which consequently resulted in catastrophe.

But what causes groups to mobilize to claim these values? Some scholars argue that the extent to which an ethnic group makes territorial demands on the state is related to the absolute size of the group and to the pattern of territorial distribution and settlement patterns of the group itself. Coakley claims that a group’s territorial claims become stronger as (1) the group increases as a proportion of the population of its territory and (2) the proportion of the total membership of the group within this territory increases.<sup>105</sup>

Many scholars would try to show that territory is only a symbolic aspect of conflict; a result of other more “serious” underlying conditions. Claims to territory, they argue, may come about because of a sense of relative deprivation, political discrimination or other grievances against the center of power. However, a striking observation in relation to conflict over *absolute* space is that this explanation can be turned on its head: It seems that a conflict over territorial absolute is the direct result of a conflicting claim to the same land – not primarily defined in terms of its resources. Thus, the ensuing relationship between the parties is constructed on the basis of how they view each other as competitors to the same strip of territory. Typically, as a result of one party dominating the other, – such as the Serbs have done in Kosovo, or the British have done in Northern Ireland – political discrimination and grievances follow.

### *b. Identity and Survival*

Similar to territory, identity issues in communal conflicts also show some ambiguous findings regarding its nature. Barbara Walter claims that contrary to common assumptions, identity has *not* proved to be more difficult than other issues to resolve through negotiations.<sup>106</sup> While ethnicity may be considered simple to accommodate by itself (when the issue concerns minority rights and cultural guarantees), the struggle tends to become one of survival when it is closely connected to a homeland or space. Toft argues that intra-state conflicts over territory are invariably ethnic and that the stakes therefore are raised for both parties; whereas for the rebels the struggle becomes existential, for the government, it becomes a fear of precedent setting as well as a fear of damage to the sovereignty of the state. While these fears are not likely to diminish with the outbreak of violence, the death of kin would also intensify an ethnic group’s attachment to, and determination to free, their homeland.

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<sup>104</sup> It is possible that the inherent value of an area is sometimes not fully clear to a state that thus may regard their benefits from owning the land as more valuable than its intrinsic importance. Goertz & Diehl, *Territorial Changes...* (1992), p. 132

<sup>105</sup> See Coakley, *The Territorial Management of Ethnic Conflict* (1993); Toft, “Indivisible Territory...” (2001)

<sup>106</sup> See Walter, *Committing to Peace* (2002); See Licklider, *Stopping the Killing* (1993)

Invariably, it seems to be the relationship between territory and ethnicity that can help explain why combatants are willing to spill blood over disputed territory that may have relatively little material value compared to the costs of fighting.<sup>107</sup> But even if this may help us understand how territorial *absolutes* are constructed, it does not tell us anything about how they should be negotiated. Unfortunately, accounts about such negotiation are few and not too promising. In his article called “Self and Space: Negotiating a Future from the Past,” William Zartman talks about two now familiar types of relations that influence the negotiation process: whether the issue is perceived in distributive or zero-sum terms, or in integrative or positive-sum terms. While distributive notions invite solutions that sustain the zero-sum nature of the conflict, integrative solutions are created to “expand, penetrate and overlap” without doing so at the expense of the other.<sup>108</sup> Unfortunately for the prospects of resolving absolutes, he also notes that territory is traditionally and “archetypically” zero-sum in nature, as a result of old notions of bounded ownership over space. Zartman also explains how definitions of self and space (or identity and territory) can go from being “soft” to being “hard,” defined in zero-sum terms. This change comes especially when it runs into “the Other,” – the identities and spaces of one’s neighbors.<sup>109</sup> Although such a transformation does not happen overnight, the experience of the exploding hatred in the Balkans in the 1990s tells us that it can happen very quickly, and that when it does, it is deadly. A much slower but nevertheless powerful transformation took place among the Palestinian population in the old British Mandate of Palestine, as European Jews began to arrive and settle in that territory. Transformations such as these beg the question whether such processes could be reversed.

If people can be changed through socialization, it would imply that strong feelings of ethnicity are “context bound” and not only place-bound. Ethnicity (or identity) is important for conflicts in that it influences *how* a conflict is fought, the level of violence tolerated by the parties, and the degree of difficulty entailed in managing or resolving it.<sup>110</sup> In order for a combination of territory and ethnicity to lead to conflict however, there has to be a history of ethnic rivalry or collective suffering that, when recalled, feed the myths that justify violence against the “Other.”

### *c. Proposition 1*

- ✓ The more territory is understood in terms of identity and ethnicity, the more difficult it is to negotiate.

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<sup>107</sup> Toft, “Indivisible Territory...” (2001), p. 42

<sup>108</sup> Zartman, “Self and Space,” in Ciprut (ed.), *The Art of the Feud* (2002), p. 86

<sup>109</sup> *ibid*

<sup>110</sup> It is important to note that ethnicity by itself does not lead to conflict even if it should be connected with a specific “homeland territory.” Ethnicity can lead to political action given that it has *collective consequences* for a group in its relation to another group or state

## **Collective Suffering and Resuscitated Myths**

What complicates ethnic conflicts over territory is that the parties do not only have conflicting views about the ownership of a piece of territory but also an extremely hostile relationship. Latent memories of former persecution and suffering at the hands of the other help motivate the present strife through the activation of negative enemy stereotypes:

[S]oon the worst recollections of old enmity will overshadow the experience of peaceful everyday life. The symbol industry starts working full steam: one must rename streets, change flags and anthems, write proper schoolbooks, destroy some monuments and erect new ones, imitate old uniforms, restate historical myths: in brief, shape the nation's memory, language, sentiments and dreams. Dubravka Ugresic calls this kind of revolution a "terror of oblivion" associated with "a terror of recollection" (Ugresic, 1998)<sup>111</sup>

Although the above paragraph referred specifically to Northern Ireland and the former Yugoslavia, the terror of hate campaigns and stereotypes seem all too familiar. Negotiation tries to work away at these problems, but as long as the parties see the disputed territory in *absolute* and exclusivist terms, they will have little incentive to decrease their hostility.

The exclusivist attachment and control over the space where one's national identity was formed helps define the lines between "self" and the "other,"<sup>112</sup> effectively preventing the concept of bi-national, or democratic entities, and the notion of shared space.<sup>113</sup> Fears, as well as the resulting hostility, rise as a result of symbolic events that revive the myths that appeal to ethnic stereotypes.<sup>114</sup> Minor events, like the publication of the Serbian "Historians' Memorandum,"<sup>115</sup> are defined as mortal threats to group survival, ancient disasters are reflected in current threats, and violent methods are promoted as the only way to save a group from catastrophe.<sup>116</sup>

A number of scholars who study group rationalist behavior have found it odd that ordinary people can be led to carry out such *horrendous* atrocities in those contexts.<sup>117</sup> Some would claim that they are in the interest of the people who commit them. However, Kaufman writes that the explanation is based more on psychological factors than on logic. Some people will naturally react extremely strongly to the impetus of ethnic symbolism, especially when created for that purpose. However, argues Kaufman, this can still not explain how dismemberment and torture can become morally

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<sup>111</sup> Jedlicki, "Historical Memory" (1999), p. 229

<sup>112</sup> Diehl, *A Road Map to War* (1999), (quoting Taylor 94 & Johnston 95), p. 16

<sup>113</sup> *ibid*, p. 15

<sup>114</sup> See Kaufman, *Modern Hatreds* (2002)

<sup>115</sup> This was a document written by a group of intellectuals in Serbia that helped "unleash" Serbian nationalist rhetoric. See Woodward, *Balkan Tragedy* (1995), p.

<sup>116</sup> Kaufman, *Modern Hatreds* (2002), p. 37

<sup>117</sup> Ganguly & Taras, *Understanding Ethnic Conflict* (2002), p. 4



acceptable.<sup>118</sup> Atrocities, he says, have to be based on two components in people's minds: First, a *mythical* belief that the opponent is engaging in similar atrocities, and second, the *normative* view that retaliatory atrocities are morally acceptable. Typically ethnic violence is always defined defensively, by the claim that the other group is trying to take something that is "rightfully ours." Atrocities therefore have to be justified by the claim that committing them is a legitimate way to defend what is "rightfully ours."<sup>119</sup>

What activates these hatreds and under what circumstances does history remain dormant? Past events are crucial say some scholars, in activating old myths that then play into contemporary nationalist rhetoric.<sup>120</sup> Under such circumstances, ethnic categories are rigid and in order to belong to a group members often feel that they have to do more than just refrain from voicing their opposition to the nationalist campaign. If you don't participate in the struggle your loyalties may be questioned – as has recently been the case for the shrinking minority of Christians among the Palestinian population.<sup>121</sup>

### *a. Revived Hatreds*

Jerzy Jedlicki, writing about the Polish-Ukrainian historic enmity notes that motives and arguments drawn from history play an important, if not crucial role in most ethnic or nationalist conflict. There seem to be two ways, he notes, in which a vivid historical memory "fans the flame" of current animosities:<sup>122</sup>

1. Through process of sanctification of some historical events that transforms their dates, places, actors and relics into powerful symbols, and the stories into undying myths.
2. A memory of collective wrongs and losses suffered in the past from another nation, but also awareness, even if dim, of one's own nation's responsibility for wrongs done to other peoples, burden the present conflict with strong resentments and make it appear to be either a historical repetition, or a historical redress.

The fear of victimization and its reinforcement through the recollection of past suffering often leaves the individual citizen with very few political choices. Jack Snyder writes that in Serbia the elites promoted chauvinistic nationalism for their own self-interest,

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<sup>118</sup> Atrocities, says Kaufman are not logically useful: they add little to the threat of murder and they are costly and counterproductive, especially in relation to outside sympathizers. Kaufman, *Modern Hatreds* (2002), p. 38

<sup>119</sup> *ibid*

<sup>120</sup> See Kaufman, (2001); Jedlicki, "Historical memory..." (1999)

<sup>121</sup> During the first intifada the small Christian minority took the lead in organizing the non-violent uprising, originally accompanied with meetings and contacts with peace groups from Israel. In the second intifada – which has strong Islamic overtones – they take almost no part, since they cannot identify with the struggle.

<sup>122</sup> Jedlicki, "Historical memory..." (1999), p. 226

when they needed mass support to protect their rule.<sup>123</sup> Instrumentalist, or “elite manipulation” theories partly explain the process that feeds campaigns of nationalist mobilization. The main motivation behind such campaigns, they claim, can often be found in a leader’s struggle to preserve personal power. Ethnic entrepreneurs thus use nationalism as a tool to turn their “personal need” (or greed) into “collective need,” which then becomes instruments of action and solidarity.<sup>124</sup> Often elites begin a spiral of nationalist rhetoric, and once it takes off, they become trapped in it and are forced to act out the ideology that they have promoted in order not to lose credibility.<sup>125</sup> This was the case in Serbia, where nationalism forced loyalty to the state. In the absence of a strong state and in the face of institutional collapse, it provided legitimacy to the leaders while at the same time exempting them from political accountability. Most people were led to believe that nationalism would serve their interests, because only people who shared nationalist ideals were allowed into the decision-making process. Thus, the sources of differing opinions were few or manipulated.<sup>126</sup>

Related to this is the notion of “ethnic outbidding,” a process by which competing elites tap nationalist hostilities by their efforts to “round up” their constituents. Latent nationalism and symbolic politics are then easily revived along ethnic lines. Whether such “outbidding” works depends on the extent to which nationalism is a credible alternative and thus ready to be exploited. V.P Gagnon tries to show that there was not a strong base for nationalism before the outbreak of the war in Yugoslavia. Had ethnicity been latent or “ready” in Serbia claims Gagnon, the leaders would not have had to appeal to terrible injustices beyond the direct experience of the audience, but simply to *just cause*.<sup>127</sup> Rather, she argues, ethnic rhetoric was forced, and it was only one means to gain solidarity in the midst of other political and economic problems.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> Snyder, *From Voting to Violence* (2000), p.181

<sup>124</sup> Zartman writes that if *Greed* can mask itself as general (*Need*) or specific collective grievances (*Creed*), the more it can attract a following and hide its personal power-nature. Greed is not oriented toward solutions or problem solving, but toward private gain and the continuation of conflict, which is also the basis for the leaders’ support. See Zartman, “Mediation in Ethnic Conflicts” (2000), p.7

<sup>125</sup> See Zlatko Isakovic, “Diplomacy and the Conflict in Kosovo” (1999)

<sup>126</sup> Serbs actually only had two choices in choosing how to invest their loyalties. Their first option was to trust Milosevic (their own leader) who warned that the Croats had resurrected their Nazi forces (Ustashe) and were now murdering innocent Croatian Serbs. The second option was to choose to disbelieve Milosevic, recognizing him as a thug and liar who was out to destroy the peace process, but meanwhile hoping that the portrayal of Tujman as an aggressor was exaggerated. In this light, although the choice was between “pest and cholera,” Serbian logic was quite rational. Milosevic represented their best chance against aggressive Croatia. See Figuero and Weingast, “The Rationality of Fear” (1997)

<sup>127</sup> It is true that Serbs in Croatia were, to some extent, discriminated against. Rather than addressing such concerns however, the leaders appealed to historic events where Serbs were victimized by Ottomans or Croats, and placed them within the framework of the more recent and current events. See V.P. Gagnon, “Ethnic Conflict as Demobilizer: The Case of Serbia” (1996)

<sup>128</sup> *ibid*

Another explanation for the revival of hatreds is the ethnic security dilemma. As one ethnic group tends to its own security by mobilizing, it also increases the uncertainty for other groups. When another group responds by taking its own measures for defense, an arms race is set in motion and mutual suspicion begins to spiral. Whereas some authors claim that ethnic security dilemmas only lead to violence in those cases where there is already a history of bloodshed and hatred, “rational actor” contenders claim that the hatred leading to violence is created – regardless of previous conditions – by the ethnic security dilemma. Kaufman claims that serious violence occurs only when three conditions obtain: when ethnic myths justify predatory goals, when conditions justify fears of extinction, and when leaders take the opportunity to stoke mass hostility, mobilize followers on a chauvinist platform and create a security dilemma.<sup>129</sup>

Clearly, history does matter for determining the extent to which nationalism can be used as a tool in contemporary politics. Recollections of past suffering are needed to stir up the hatred required for carrying out ethnic violence and atrocities. Unquestionably, says Steven Majstorovic, the historic dimension makes such conflicts much more difficult to resolve than should the definable interests of only the present generation be at stake. He writes:

This past has been invented, imagined, constructed, remembered, and reconstructed by ethnic elites and nationalists in an ongoing process that combines history and contemporary events for the preservation of national identity. In short, this past is a sort of geological project in which historical layers and sediments are chosen for particular exploitation by ethnic entrepreneurs.<sup>130</sup>

The problem for negotiation is that myths are always “somewhat true.” Thus, they cannot always be ignored.

### *b. On Forgetting Memory*

If one of the parties fighting for a territorial *absolute* should manage to win a total victory (by ethnic cleansing, transfer, assimilation or independence), chances are that such an outcome would only create new memories of collective suffering that could be used at the next opportunity for revenge. Goertz & Diehl found that almost 40 percent of the parties to a territorial dispute meet in a militarized dispute within 30 years of their first encounter.<sup>131</sup>

Sentimental attachment to a motherland often becomes stronger for those ethnic groups that at some point have been forcefully exiled from their place of origin. *Absolute* space often becomes more than just a memory – in fact, for many groups it comes to represent either the “Garden of Eden” or the “center of the universe,” thus essential not only to

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<sup>129</sup> Kaufman tests his theory of symbolic politics against the results of an article by Fearon and Laitin, and shows that for the cases Rwanda and Sudan, the security dilemma is preceded by incompatible values and predation, rather than just pure uncertainty. See Stuart Kaufman, “Ethnic Violence...” (2001); See also Fearon & Laitin, “Explaining Interethnic Cooperation” (1996).

<sup>130</sup> Majstorovic, “Autonomy of the Sacred” in Safran & Maiz (eds.), *Identity and territorial Autonomy in Plural Societies* (1999), p. 171

<sup>131</sup> Goertz & Diehl, *Territorial Changes...* (1992), pp. 123-4

their identity but also to their faith. Again, the most poignant examples are Israel and Kosovo,<sup>132</sup> but there are also “lesser” varieties, such as the Protestants of Northern Ireland, and the Boer population of South Africa. Although we would like to think that reconciliation is always possible, it comes as no surprise that some authors suggest that we are dealing with “wired” trauma<sup>133</sup>

The assumption in conflict management is often that in order to solve the present battle we first need to settle the underlying problem. In conflicts over territorial *absolutes*, the tendency however is often the reverse: the more we can ignore the past, the easier it will be to solve the present battle. A conflict may emerge as a direct result of discriminatory or repressive politics but the longer the conflict goes on, the more likely it is that participants will seek meaning and justification for the conflict from their past. However, history (as we know from the earlier discussion on myths) is not objective, and thus it can be constructed almost upon demand;<sup>134</sup> injustices suffering under the hands of other states or other groups can easily be attributed to the present enemy and used as a justification for “defensive” atrocities.<sup>135</sup>

Analysts and practitioners may have perfectly viable alternatives for peacefully resolving the present conflict, but this is not going to help if part of a society sees itself as fighting a religious war where suicide bombing is considered a legitimate form of struggle. There are different ways in which memories, trauma, collective suffering and the urge for revenge can be dealt with. Three approaches are briefly discussed here: restorative justice; the work of memory; and “oblivion.”

Restorative justice refers here to a number of methods dealing with compensation, retribution or punishment. The Hague tribunals for the conflict in former Yugoslavia and the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission are examples of structures set up to deal with past suffering. Whereas restorative justice can play a tremendous role for reconciliation in some conflicts, many scholars suggest that the search for truth together with justice may be in conflict with the purpose of reconciliation.<sup>136</sup> “Scratching the wounds” of the past, reminds Michael Ignatieff, could be the beginning of a new war. In places such as former Yugoslavia he says, there is no chance that hostile parties will recognize the same truth, so one should not set one’s hopes in the healing properties of truth.<sup>137</sup> The past, he writes, is not a sacred text that has been

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<sup>132</sup> For 2000 years, the Jewish Diaspora has been proclaiming “Next year in Jerusalem,” and since 1389, the Serbs all over Serbia have celebrated the valiant story of (the defeat of) King Lazar in the Battle of Kosovo.

<sup>133</sup> Sandole, “Virulent Ethnocentrism: A Major Challenge for Transformational Conflict Resolution and Peacebuilding in the Post-Cold War Era” *The Global Review of Ethnopolitics*, Vol. 1, no. 4 (2002)

<sup>134</sup> Groups who do not share a very cohesive or united identity may recollect either a “glorious” or a tragic history when faced with other, more unified, groups. Such was the case for the Kosovo Albanians, who began researching their ties to the ancient Illyrians, or for the Palestinians, who have often claimed that they are the descendents of the Canaanites.

<sup>135</sup> For instance, seeing the Palestinian/Israeli conflict as an ancient battle between Isaac and Ishmael gives extremists and hardliners a stronger reason to sabotage peace.

<sup>136</sup> See Ignatieff, *The Warrior’s Honor* (1997), pp. 168-190; See also Neil J. Kritz, *Transitional Justice—How Emerging Democracies Reckon with Former Regimes* (1995)

<sup>137</sup> Ignatieff (1996) quoted in Jedlicki, “Historical Memory...” (1999), p. 231

“stolen and vandalized and that can be repaired and returned to some well-lit glass case in some grand public rotunda.” All that a truth commissions can achieve is to reduce the number of lies that circulate unchallenged.<sup>138</sup>

Another approach is called “the work of memory,” and it refers to a conscious joint effort by well-trusted leaders to shape divergent and hostile memories into a common framework that can let different perspectives coexist almost as if on different sides of the same coin. There are some success stories that can illustrate this process, most notably the French-German reconciliation.<sup>139</sup> However, the ‘work of memory’ does not happen within the period of a presidential term but rather has to be shaped over many generations. Moreover, it is also conditional on exceptional leaders that can sustain and reinforce the process.<sup>140</sup>

The third suggestion, “oblivion” is perhaps the most simple but the least viable option. Writing about Kosovo Noel Marcus suggests that the conflict could be resolved if only the Serbians simply let go of Kosovo and decided collectively to forget or change their national myths by convincing themselves that they are either outdated or erroneous.<sup>141</sup> But once events have become a massive national trauma, forgetting them would be counter to a group’s moral responsibility and the sentiments of collective “self-righteousness” that feed on such memories. Further, identity and solidarity are often dependent on conflict. Zartman writes that collective identity needs the protection and assertion that comes from feelings of separation and superiority. This is achieved by conflict, and conflict is the way to obtain the solidarity necessary for effective action. As a result, normal cost-benefit calculations on which negotiation behavior should be based no longer work.<sup>142</sup>

Because myths do not need “factual corroboration in order to reproduce themselves,” they are not likely to be amenable to contradictory evidence. Rather, myths are sustained by the inner world – by paranoia, longing and desire – and they can only be undone when there is a need for them go away, not when they are refuted by evidence from the outer world.<sup>143</sup> Hence, for places like Kosovo, Bosnia, Kashmir, Tibet, Israel and Northern Ireland it may just not be possible to find solutions that are both “just” and feasible, since whatever is a crime for one side is always a glorious past for the other.<sup>144</sup> The hope, says Majstorovic, is in the cooling of emotions, which requires “forgetting” at least the *importance* of memory. “Alzheimer,” he continues, would be useful in the case of Kosovo, where each generation reshapes the “historical” clay of memory, thus

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<sup>138</sup> Ignatieff, *The Warrior’s Honor* (1997), p. 173

<sup>139</sup> French-German relations went from hereditary enmity to determined friendship over the course of 25 years, mainly because of personal initiatives by French President Charles de Gaulle and the German Chancellor, Konrad Adenauer. See Valerie Rosoux, “Memory and International Negotiation: Constraint and Instrument?” (2002)

<sup>140</sup> *ibid*

<sup>141</sup> Noel Malcolm, *Kosovo – A Short History* (1999)

<sup>142</sup> Zartman, “Self and Space” (2000), p. 11

<sup>143</sup> Ignatieff, *A Warrior’s Honor* (1997), p. 176

<sup>144</sup> See Jedlicki, “Historical Memory...” (1999)

constraining the alternatives for subsequent political elites. Because in the case of Kosovo he says, the shape of the historical clay limits the choices for peace and compromise.<sup>145</sup>

*c. Proposition 2*

- ✓ The more "collective suffering" added to a conflict, the more difficult it will be to negotiate.

**Symbolism and Religion**

Conflict over absolute space is fought over "tangible" stakes that have taken on "intangible" characteristics. Hence, in conflicts where ethnicity and territory have become closely connected, and where ethnicity has become highly charged with historic and symbolic or religious elements, agreeing to settle the question of final ownership over land in favor of the opponent becomes an existential question, equivalent to giving up one's own identity and religion:<sup>146</sup>

Sacred places are not plots of land to be partitioned by diplomats according to political priorities, no matter how good their intentions. They may, for considerable segments of the population, entail meaning that is absolute, irreplaceable and indivisible. Nor are disputes over sacred space a thing of the past. The costs of mismanaging disputes over sacred space in the 21<sup>st</sup> century will be substantial and measured in human lives.<sup>147</sup>

David Rapoport substantiates this prediction when he writes that most internal wars since 1945 have been ethno-religious<sup>148</sup> and that this proportion keeps rising, as does their length. Ethno-religious wars are especially savage and intractable writes Rapoport, because identity questions command our deepest emotions, and space and identity are so closely connected that entire lands often appear sacred.<sup>149</sup>

What gives space symbolic or spiritual value? If values are what determine stakes, they should closely correlate with the indivisibility or symbolic and spiritual attribute of issues. Values often rise with time, suggesting that the longer the duration of a conflict,

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<sup>145</sup> Majstorovic, "Autonomy of the Sacred..." (2000), p. 172

<sup>146</sup> See Hoyt S. Alverson, "The Roots of Time: A Comment on Utilitarian and Primordial Sentiments in Ethnic Identification," in Raymond Hall, *Ethnic Autonomy Comparative Dynamics* (1979), pp. 13-17

<sup>147</sup> Hassner, "Conflict over Sacred Space..." (2001), p. 48

<sup>148</sup> In contrast to most civil wars, the aim of ethno-religious wars is usually not to control a state's entire space although some ethno-religious struggles, like in Rwanda and Burundi, have this feature. Much more often however, they seek to redraw state boundaries, and to create a new sovereign state; *Irredenta* demands, (union with a related group) are made 1/3 as often. See Rapoport, "The Importance of Space ..." (1996)

<sup>149</sup> Internal wars today persist six times longer than they did a century ago. See David Rapoport, "The Importance of Space..." (1996), p. 1

the more has been invested in the conflict so the higher the values at stake. Looking specifically at incidents of crises in internal conflicts, Brecher & Wilkenfeld found that the more protracted a conflict, the more likely it is to be characterized by a perceived threat to more basic values. The central feature of most protracted conflict, they write, is a deep, abiding clash over multiple values, whether between ideologies, civilizations, or belief systems.<sup>150</sup> However, just because a stake has high value, it does not automatically become *absolute*; it also has to be perceived as infinitely zero-sum, which is true for the sacred and symbolic.

We would expect an *absolute* to become zero-sum because it is connected to questions of identity, existence and survival. The relationship between ethnicity and threat to values is presented in the table below. Brecher & Wilkenfeld found that ethnicity-related crises differed from non-ethnicity related crises with respect to the most serious of all threats as perceived by crisis actors, in that two types of threats especially stood out. These were the threat to *existence* or *grave damage* and the threat to *territory*. Whereas ethnicity-related protracted crises (PCs) showed a 26 percent threat to existence and of grave damage, this number was only 11 percent for non-PC ethnicity-related crises and 15 percent for non-ethnic conflict cases. Similarly, territorial threats accounted for 60 percent of all ethnicity-related crises, regardless of whether or not the crisis occurred within a protracted conflict. This was more than twice the proportion of non-ethnicity crises, which were at 24 percent.<sup>151</sup> The findings are summarized in the table below:

Table1: Ethnicity, Protracted Conflict, and Threat to Values

	Low Threat		Political		Territory		Influence		Grave Damage		Existence		TOTAL	
Ethnic PC	3	5%	4	7%	36	59%	2	3%	8	13%	8	13%	61	19%
Ethnic non-PC	4	7%	9	16%	35	61%	3	5%	1	2%	5	9%	57	17%
Non-ethnic	19	9%	78	37%	51	24%	31	15%	18	9%	13	6%	210	64%
TOTAL	26	8%	91	28%	122	37%	36	11%	27	8%	26	8%	328	100%

$\chi^2 = 62.13, p = .00$  Source: Brecher & Wilkenfeld, *A Study of Crisis*, (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press), 2000, p.127

Writing specifically about how “sacred” space accrues its value, Hassner explains that four conditions are important for making space non-negotiable and zero-sum:

- 1) Parties must compete over an item, the target of their dispute.

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<sup>150</sup> Brecher & Wilkenfeld, *A Study of Crisis* (2000), p. 160; While each specific crisis within an ongoing protracted conflict might focus on a limited goal or issue, the authors found that it was invariably linked to the enduring values in conflict over a prolonged period. By contrast, threatened values in other crises are specific to the issue in immediate dispute, without the psychological baggage of ongoing conflict. Thus, crises within a protracted conflict tend to involve more basic values.

<sup>151</sup> *ibid*, p.29

- 2) Parties must mean precisely the same thing when they refer to the target they are competing over. If there is no perfect overlap of their perceptions then it is, at least in part, divisible.
- 3) Parties must agree that the target cannot be parceled-out or subdivided without significantly diminishing its subjective value.
- 4) Parties must agree that the target is not fungible, that it cannot be substituted for or exchanged for something of equal value.

“Sacred” space, he says, has to fulfill at least the last three dimensions: whereas the first dimension – the geographic – suggests clearly defined and inflexible boundaries, the second, the geometric dimension, “exhibits monolithic space that cannot be subdivided.” Third, the spiritual dimension represents the uniqueness of the site for which no material or spiritual substitute is available. Each of these dimensions says Hassner are necessary and together create what he calls an “invisibility conundrum.”<sup>152</sup> He adds a fourth dimension, the historical dimension, which he says explains why these indivisible spaces are so dispute prone.

Jerzy Jedlicki similarly writes that conventional solutions to multi-ethnic or deeply divided societies may not work for societies fighting over historic, symbolic or sacred land. The problem he explains, is the “sacralization” of the “lieux de memoire,” effectively blocking such outcomes — because whereas interests can be mediated, sacred things cannot.<sup>153</sup> Jerusalem and Kosovo are the most typical of such places, he writes. It is said that Kosovo is so sacred and inherent to the Serbian national consciousness that giving it up to the Albanians would be seen as a sacrilege, a betrayal and a dreadful humiliation.<sup>154</sup> Further, the repetition of clashes throughout history has played a role in increasing the Serbian “spiritual” investment in Kosovo, inflating their sense of belonging to the land.

Writing about the life cycle of religion and ethnic identity – its emergence and revival – and the interconnectedness between the two, James Kurth explains that there are two main trends in this revival.<sup>155</sup> First, religious identity can emerge from a totally ethnic one. Second, ethnic revival happens in a totally religious community (this he calls “secularization”). Each religion claims Kurth, have shaped three different kinds of secularizations, and through these framework they continue to shape norms and values of those communities.<sup>156</sup> Kurth writes:

In some cases the religious seems to have “departed” completely from the secular and only the material seems to remain. However, even then fainter versions of the original religious authority and community linger with distinct conceptions of secular authority and community, and also distinct ideas about politics and economics. Thus, even when an ethnic community has become completely secularized, it will still hold secular conceptions that bear the imprint of (and are

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<sup>152</sup> Hassner, “Conflict over Sacred Space” (2001), p. 15

<sup>153</sup> Jedlicki, “Historical Memory...” (1999), p. 230

<sup>154</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>155</sup> James Kurth, “Religion and Ethnic Conflict” (2001), p. 284

<sup>156</sup> *ibid*



analogous to) earlier religious one and are different from the conceptions held by other secularized ethnic communities.<sup>157</sup>

Ethnic conflict, says Kurth, may be a sign of the failure of secularization; that the past and present are intertwined in an unconscious web of normative attributes, resembling Weber's picture of the protestant ethnics. Such an explanation sheds a light on the apparent increase in both religion and ethnicity in the world today. However, the implication might be that even if religion and ethnicity went away, conflict might not.

#### a. *Ethnic Election*

Most of the hypotheses from which ethnic survival is said to depart are objective, focusing mostly on political, economic or ecological factors.<sup>158</sup> However, it is important to remember that some of the most pervasive ethnic groups throughout history have survived without political autonomy or a homeland of their own, and even without a common language. Smith notes that the most "successful" ethnic groups are those who have managed to cultivate a "myth of ethnic election:" the "creation and dissemination" by specialists of the belief that they are a chosen people.<sup>159</sup> Ethnic election, writes Smith, is more than ethnocentrism or a cultivated sense of uniqueness through myths, values and tradition, in that it also comes with moral obligations. In order to qualify as the "elect" members often have to fulfill certain observances required for those who are "sacred" or "sanctified." Ethnic election does not automatically lead to conflict with other groups. However, in cases where prophetic visions are connected to irredentist claims problems often become apparent.

Hassner claims that the forcefulness and the volatility of sacred land can be attributed to the historic competition over a space through the branching of religions into sectarian groups.<sup>160</sup> Thus, we would expect the worst conflicts over "sacred" space to occur in places that serve as a religious "source" for more than one religious tradition, where those religions have grown out of each other. However, while this description fits with Jerusalem, it cannot be said to be true about Kosovo. Although the Albanians may have some spiritual connection with the land because they lived there for generations, there has never been a spiritual/elective element in the sense that the land is said to be the source of their religion.

The historic/sectarian thesis works better when explaining the bickering of the monks over pieces of floor in the Holy Sepulcher than in the larger conflict framework. The main reason being that ethnic conflicts over territorial *absolutes* are neither primarily over religion nor over ethnicity; they are political conflicts over the control of territory, albeit with strong ethnic and religious characteristics. Looking at Kosovo and the

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<sup>157</sup> *ibid*, p. 285

<sup>158</sup> For instance, a history of political autonomy, or leadership qualities; possession and location of homelands, their location, extent and population; presence of material resources, facilities and skills for supporting a community; networks of communication, including customs, language and symbolic codes. See A. Smith, "Chosen People" in Hutchinson & Smith, *Ethnicity* (1996)

<sup>159</sup> Smith, "Chosen People" (1996)

<sup>160</sup> Hassner, "Conflict over Sacred Space" (2001), p. 18

Middle East, both cases have experienced recurring historic sequences of territorial conquest and redemption. In old Jerusalem one can see the layers of the conquerors literally staked out in cross sections of buried ground. This is an example of what Hassner calls the “layering of sacred space” – the product of successive conquests and syncretism (you incorporate other religions into your own). The challenge for contemporary conflict management is to be neutral as to the relative importance of each of these layers without ignoring the importance of history.

Current-day Israel presents a fascinating example where the religious and historic meaning of space has been used as a political tool to ingrain the connection between the identity and the land in the population.<sup>161</sup> A “fast forward” version of such “making of space” could be observed in 1982 in the Sinai town of Yamit, as it was to be turned over to Egypt as a result of the Begin-Sadat Agreement. Despite the fact that Yamit or Sinai is not part of the Jewish “promised land” and is not mentioned in the Bible, it soon took on symbolic and religious meaning for the residents as they connected it with the “myths” of Israel: that land has to be kept for security reasons, and that they as residents are bound to the task, as it is described in the Bible, of conquering the desert and making it bloom.<sup>162</sup>

Ethnic election with a connection to land is a fascinating attribute of only a few groups throughout human history, the Jewish people being perhaps the strongest example. By appealing to myths, the residents of Yamit were hoping to “inoculate” the land against Israeli withdrawal, i.e., make it “sacred” and therefore also *absolute*, so that it could not be given up at any cost. Other people whose stories resemble that of Israel are the Serbs, the Boers in South Africa, the Protestants in Northern Ireland and the Hopi Indians of Arizona.

### *b. Perceptive Righteousness*

Does Serbia have a “right” to Kosovo because of its religious beliefs? Religious beliefs have to do with truth, and truth is never one-dimensional. The problem can be called “perceptive justice” – the connection between sacred space, identity, and historical myths – that transforms one’s own claims to the land to what is right, good, true, or real, while simultaneously transforming “enemy” claims to what is false, evil, bad or fabricated. Ethnic groups can have parallel histories but “reversed truths;” myths and legends of one side often appear in the stories of the enemy as well, only with the parts of heroes and martyrs reversed. Tim Hicks writes that many conflicts that are or appear to be rooted in tangible sources are often “floating on an undercurrent of identity and reality-perception issues.”<sup>163</sup>

Michael Ignatieff writes that the key obstacle for reconciliation in such cases is the desire among ethnic groups for revenge. Revenge, he claims, is given moral legitimacy as a ritual form of respect for a community’s dead, essentially taking up their cause.

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<sup>161</sup> For fascinating stories about how a custom of hiking and camping activities (Tiyyolim) has been used to connect young Israelis with the land, see Meron Benvenisti, *Sacred Landscapes – The Buried History of the Holy Land Since 1948* (2000); Also see Baruch Kimmerling, *Zionism and Territory* (1983)

<sup>162</sup> Nurit Kliot & Stanley Waterman (eds.) *Pluralism and Political Geography* (1983), p. 175

<sup>163</sup> Hicks, “Another Look at Identity-Based Conflict” (2001), p. 38-39

Reconciliation is difficult when it has to compete with such violence, which is seen as a perfectly moral and ethical alternative.<sup>164</sup> But could it be that secularization and the “loss” of this false justice, as well as the need to face up to responsibility also play a role in stirring people’s resentments? Sardamov writes that it seems like Serbs had become a “comfortable” people who had lost their status as valiant heroes and martyrs, and “succumbed” to the reality of events. Bitterness and resentment over national humiliation and the loss of self-respect seems to be a powerful incentive for ethnocentrism and religious fanaticism.<sup>165</sup> Writing about the Serbian “Mandate of History,” Ivelin Sardamov explains how the Serbian focus on nationalism and victimization from a historical and cultural perspective as well as the use of rehearsal to arouse this “cult” among younger generations, have increased their feeling of superiority among the South-Slav people and made them “assured” of the righteousness of their cause.<sup>166</sup>

The biggest hurdle that such “false righteousness” presents for negotiations comes when the “elect” becomes chauvinist. While portraying the members of another group in as bad a light as possible, their human traits and virtues are either forgotten or turned into faults. In extreme cases of chauvinist nationalism the members of the other group is proclaimed to be inhuman, satanic beings. Writing about Kosovo, Zlatko Isakovic writes that “demonization” is what starts off the spiral of fear, prejudice, violence, and atrocities. Nurturing group narcissism, he says, is quite cheap compared to raising people’s standard of living.<sup>167</sup>

Political leaders sometimes press for total victory in a conflict since a continuation of violence is in their interest as it allows them to ride on nationalist sentiments to stay in power, and gives them time to create facts on the ground. For such leaders cooperative or peaceful moves of the other side are seen as threats, since it puts the enemy in a good light, appearing to be willing to compromise. This is when ethnic stereotypes, “perceptive righteousness” and symbolic or religious truth come in handy. Referring to past victimhood, reviving myths of prejudice and making categorical statements about the other side are common strategies used by the stronger side, while at the same time provoking violent reactions from the weaker party. Punishment can then be used as a form of escalation, creating a new “fresh” round of conflict, while blaming it on the weaker side.

### *c. Proposition 3*

- ✓ The more territory is associated with symbolism and religion, the more difficult it is to negotiate

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<sup>164</sup> Ignatieff, *A Warrior's Honor* (1997), p. 188

<sup>165</sup> This is somewhat similar to the Muslim struggle to regain the status that was taken from them with the retreat of their glorious civilization.

<sup>166</sup> See Sardamov, “Mandate of History” (1996)

<sup>167</sup> See Zlatko Isakovic, “Diplomacy and the Conflict in Kosovo” (1999)

## Conclusion

If a conflict involves a perceived or unconsciously experienced threat to identity, religion, or any other largely ascriptive criteria, our reaction should be to develop mechanisms that enable us to understand the nature of the threat in order to be able to resolve the conflict more effectively. Notions of sacred space tied with ethnic identity are often forgotten in the negotiation literature, and instead other issues or conditions are claimed to more accurately reflect the underlying grievances. However, negotiators and participants will be unable to make good decisions in the midst of incompatibilities if the underlying source of the conflict is ignored or avoided.

It seems like the talent of compromise is characteristically missing from parties who are involved in negotiations over territorial *absolutes*. We often hear the argument that we need to change negative perceptions, hatreds, distrust, and prejudice, in order to teach the parties to “get along” so that they can handle their own disputes in the future. However, in some conflicts parties just *will not* cooperate, because they have no desire to do so. More likely, they even have a secret desire to get rid of the other side completely.<sup>168</sup> Hence, ethnic protracted conflicts are unlikely to be resolved by simply applying some “love and forgiveness;” they will require new structures and detailed contracts that go beyond gentlemen’s agreements, and that require investments after, rather than prior to, a political settlement. Perhaps, as Ignatieff suggests, in the end the only thing that the parties can truly share is the mourning of the dead through the shared inheritance of the “democracy of death.”<sup>169</sup>

From the analysis of *territorial absolutes* we know only a little about how “sacred stones” are created – that it happens over a long period of time, and from multiple and complex conditions. It is a result of the protractedness of conflict and the “layering” of history; the myths of martyrdom and memories of collective suffering; the self-justification and glorification and the need for revenge; the resentment and humiliation that grows from constant reminders of past responsibility for wrongs; and because my God is better than your God... Yet, we don’t know the exact process by which such transformations take place, the speed at which they happen or the warning signals that precede them. Unfortunately, it seems as if territorial *absolutes* can be created much more easily than they can be resolved.

As indicated in the beginning of this study, there are no standard solutions. However, knowing more about identity and its connection to territory, as well as the myths and prejudices that lead to atrocities, may help us look deeper into such conflicts to study the cause and effect of such relationships, rather than just labeling them “irrational.” Kaufman suggests that the reason why some ethnic conflicts erupt in violence while not others, has to do with already pre-conceived understandings of the motivations of the enemy, that result in repeated hostile interactions between two parties over time. Knowing this is imperative for preventing such destructive cycles from being created in the future.

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<sup>168</sup> The Israeli author Meron Benvenisti, recalls the exhilaration initially expressed by Israeli leaders when in 1948 the land had been “swept clean” (although accidentally) as if in preparation for their arrival. See Benvenisti, *Sacred Landscapes* (2000), Ch. 3

<sup>169</sup> Ignatieff, *A Warrior’s Honor* (1997), p. 190

However, as Kaufman also suggests, it is “modern” hatreds rather than ancient myths that lies at the core of conflicts when they break out. Parties do not lie in wait for the next opportunity to strike back at their old enemy. Rather it is a plethora of current conditions – political, social, economic and cultural – that cause former enemies to look around for the most likely scapegoat for their problems. As a conflict becomes violent with the intensity that only ethnicity seems to be able to produce, new stakes are added to the old ones, old settlements are declared invalid, and demands are inflated out of proportion. Zartman notes that ethnic groups often develop demands that are unacceptable to the state because they often have little to offer except for an end to violence. Such were the situations of Eritrea and Kosovo, where the ethnic group presented claims that were simply outrageous to the Ethiopians and the Serbians.<sup>170</sup> Similarly, the Palestinians, who have lost what is “rightfully theirs” and therefore already have a negative account, are demanding to be compensated for losses without giving anything in return.

The discussion about *absolutes* has given us some valuable insights into the difficulty of negotiating conflicts over sacred or symbolic space, while still not giving us any clear answers to how absolutes could be successfully resolved. However, rather than wait to intervene until the parties have exhausted themselves militarily, third parties can carefully act to push the parties closer to “ripeness,” which is the subjective perception that continuing the conflict is more costly than the potential benefits to be gained in negotiations. Steven Majstorovic, suggests that whether in Kosovo, Timor, or Tibet, the real issue is between nation-state sovereignty versus autonomy for “compact minorities.” But what kind of autonomy? The least worst approach he claims, would be to give both parties most of what they really want and get the international community to realize that all states cannot be completely sovereign.<sup>171</sup> Whether such autonomy exists remains outside of the scope of this study, but what is clear is that the international community has to take a more proactive role in dealing with these conflicts, while still being sensitive to the possibility that outside intervention can sometimes be more destructive than useful.<sup>172</sup>

Is negotiation over absolutes a waste of time? There are definitely examples of success, but there are simultaneously many cases where success has been short lived. It may be that the nature of the negotiation process has to focus much more on *managing* rather than resolving absolutes, while investing in political and economic development, “peace” education and the rebuilding of war-torn societies. The difficulty in negotiating conflicts over *absolute* space thus comes from the close relationship between territory and identity, where territory is imbued with spiritual and symbolic meaning. In addition to the physical safety of a group, threats to territory are also threats to identity and religion. Myths and memory are essential for keeping territorial *absolutes* “non-negotiable” and false justification and ethnic stereotypes easily justify pre-emptive

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<sup>170</sup> Zartman, “Mediation in Ethnic Conflict” (2000), p. 8

<sup>171</sup> Steven Majstorovic “Autonomy of the Sacred” (2000), p. 183; See also Michael Murphy, “Reconstructing Citizenship: Self-Determination in a Post-National Era” (2001)

<sup>172</sup> See Ivo Daalder, “Fear and Loathing in the Former Yugoslavia” in Brown (ed.) *The International Dimensions of International Conflict* (1996)

“self-defense,” especially when leaders take the opportunity to play the nationalistic card.

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