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Ethnicity and complex identities in times of uncertainty: A configurational approach to study multiple self-positionings and their perceived recognition by others in social surveys

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« Ethnicity and complex identities in times of uncertainty: A configurational approach to study multiple self-positionings and their perceived recognition by others in social surveys »

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Abstract

Since the end of WWII, political scientists have noted that ethnicity is regularly the focus of violent conflicts. The present thesis proposes a conceptual framework explaining the contemporary political significance of ethnic identities. It is argued that current ethnic conflicts should be contextualized at two different historical scales. Within a larger time-frame, the rise and spread of the nation-state amidst collapsing empires politicized ethnicity by making it a criterion of political legitimacy. But this politicization doesn't occur in a gradual fashion. Within a shorter time-frame, specific moments of (violent) crises force individuals to act along ethnic cleavages and thereby crystalize them. Recent social psychological research shows that examining social identities requires us to acknowledge their complexity at three levels: they bear on multiple group memberships, are multidimensional, and are meta-representations. Using innovative survey methods, three empirical chapters build on these insights and examine individuals' self-positioning along multiple group cleavages during periods of (violent) political instability.

Chapter 3 examines, in the context of Africa, how periods of collective upheavals transform political norms by testing whether regional volatility (i.e. contextual change in the salience of ethnic identities) interacts with individuals' political attitude (authoritarian *vs* democrats) to predict their political participation. Chapter 4 introduces an innovative methodological proposal for the study of complex identity configurations in social surveys. Presented with a list of identity markers, respondents in post-war Sri-Lanka indicated which were the most important for themselves and others and, when important for themselves, rated them on items assessing modes of identification and categorization by ingroup and outgroup members. Staying in post-war Sri Lanka, chapter 5 examines how collective experiences of victimization shape group identities. Based on a representative survey and building on chapter 4's methodology, I extract a typology of identity configurations and test whether those centered around ethnicity stem from collective experiences of war and poverty.

Résumé

Depuis la Seconde Guerre mondiale, l'ethnicité a fréquemment été la raison de conflits violents. Cette thèse propose un cadre conceptuel expliquant la pertinence politique actuelle des identités ethniques. J'y argumente que les conflits ethniques doivent être contextualisés à deux échelles historiques distinctes. Dans le long terme, l'État-nation émergeant de l'effondrement des empires a politisé l'ethnicité comme critère de légitimité politique. Mais cette politisation n'est pas graduelle. A plus court terme, des périodes de crises (violentes) forcent les individus à agir selon des clivages ethniques et ainsi, les cristallisent. Les recherches psychosociales récentes montrent qu'étudier les identités sociales implique de reconnaître leur complexité à trois niveaux : elles portent sur de multiples appartenances groupales, sont multidimensionnelles et sont des méta-représentations. S'appuyant sur ces recherches et des méthodes de sondage innovantes, trois chapitres empiriques examinent l'auto-positionnement des individus vis-à-vis de clivages groupaux multiples pendant des périodes d'instabilité politique.

Le chapitre 3 examine, en Afrique, comment les périodes de bouleversements collectifs transforment les normes politiques en testant si la volatilité régionale (i.e. le changement contextuel de saillance des identités ethniques) interagit avec l'attitude politique des individus (autoritaire *vs* démocrates) pour prédire leur participation politique. Le chapitre 4 propose une méthodologie innovante pour étudier des configurations identitaires complexes par sondage : des répondants au Sri Lanka d'après-guerre ont indiqué, parmi une liste de marqueurs identitaires, les plus importants pour eux-mêmes et pour les autres et, quand importants pour eux-mêmes, les ont notés sur des items évaluant les modes d'identification et de catégorisation par les membres de l'endo- et de l'exo-groupe. Toujours au Sri Lanka d'après-guerre, le chapitre 5 extrait, sur base d'un sondage représentatif et de la méthodologie du chapitre 4, une typologie de configurations identitaires et teste si celles centrées sur l'ethnicité découlent d'expériences collectives de guerre et de pauvreté.

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Preface

At the dawn of the Second World War, it was permitted to envision a future clear of conflicts over differences between human groups. Such an optimistic outlook was made possible by the belief that the disaster of the war, and its culmination in the Holocaust, had its origin in a simple, if horrible, mistake. Racism was the problem, and the path forward was to show how wrong it was. In 1951, the UNESCO gathered a panel of experts precisely for this purpose. Together they wrote *The Race Concept* (Unesco, 1951/1952), a scientific manifesto for an anti-racist program which ambitioned to dismiss racism on scientific grounds and to establish an international consensus over its pernicious moral implications (Brattain, 2007; Hazard, 2012; Lentin, 2005). At the core of this project lay a reconceptualization of human differences. According to the statement, the logic that produces diversity between human groups is not biological but cultural. There is no innate difference of potential – and hence no hierarchy – between groups, only diverging histories leading to the development of different cultures. In order to capture this shift in terminology, the recommendation was to abandon the pernicious concept of 'race' and use the more benign notion of 'ethnic group' instead.

In a narrow sense, the goal that inspired the UNESCO's manifesto has been achieved. For racism virtually vanished both as a scientific theory (despite sporadic reappearances; Brattain, 2007; Gould, 1996) and as an *explicit* political doctrine. But the victory was only partial, for social scientists had yet to discover that the demise of racism wasn't a guarantee of peaceful coexistence and that the notion of ethnic groups was not all that benign after all. By the early 1960s, some anthropologists (e.g. Geertz, 1963) – based on their observations of freshly decolonized societies – began to stress that ethnicity seemed to have a peculiar potential to generate conflict in the context of modern states. Followed an important wave of critical reexamination of this concept that had been, until then, too often taken for granted (for reviews, see Calhoun, 1993; Eriksen, 2002; Hutchinson & Smith, 1996; Jenkins, 2008; Wimmer, 2008, 2013). From these debates mainly between anthropologists, interest in ethnic groups spread among other social sciences as it became clear that discourses about ethnic grievances were, with striking regularity and across the world, in the mouth of actors who resorted to armed violence to achieve political ends. This realization had been the impetus for a massive and eclectic literature on ethnic conflict and violence, spanning across the social

sciences (Brubaker & Laitin, 1998; Cederman et al., 2013; Elcheroth & Spini, 2011; Horowitz, 1985/2001; Wimmer, 2002, 2012). Ethnicity and, especially ethnic conflict, had become a major field of inquiry in the social sciences.

Social psychology, however, stands as a remarkable exception to this trend. In stark contrast with related fields within the social sciences, social psychological research taking ethnicity as its central subject matter has been a rare occurrence (Zagefka, 2009; but see for instance LeVine & Campbell, 1972; Verkuyten, 2018a; Phinney, 1990). At first sight one is tempted to attribute such lack of attention to a lack of relevance. After all, there would be no reason to pay much attention to ethnicity if it was not, or only marginally, involved in the phenomena that social psychologists typically attend to. It takes only a crude look at the history of the discipline to see that the exact opposite is true. Most obviously perhaps, the murder of millions of Jews during the Holocaust – one of the most dramatic instances of ethnic-based violence in history – profoundly shaped social psychology as a discipline. The unspeakable atrocity of such an event, and the apparent impossibility to understand it, were the main impetus for some of the most influential social psychological works, such as those of Stanley Milgram, Philip Zimbardo, Theodor Adorno and Henri Tajfel (Reicher et al., 2008; for discussions of the role of the Holocaust in Tajfel's work, see Billig, 2002, 1996). A few decades after the Holocaust, massacres in Rwanda and in the former Yugoslavia were but two tragedies among others that ensured ethnic violence wouldn't become an out of date topic. There is now a substantial amount of work in the recent literature which explicitly stresses the need to understand how such extreme forms of ethnic violence were possible and how to avoid their (re-)emergence (e.g. Bilali et al., 2015; Glick, 2002; Littman & Paluck, 2015; Paluck & Green, 2009; Reicher et al., 2005, 2008; Staub, 2006).

There is another, though partly overlapping, class of phenomena which has further positioned ethnic categories at the core of social psychological topics. We can broadly gather these under the headings of intergroup discrimination and inequalities. The immediate post-World War II period saw a crucial political and normative shift against racism in Europe and the US (Brattain, 2007; Lentin, 2005; Pehrson & Leach, 2012), which notably paved the way for the Civil Right Movement's achievement of civic equality for African-Americans in the US. Such normative changes found an academic expression in the work of psychologists such as Klineberg (1944), Allport (1954b), and Clark (1953) who crucially participated in changing

social psychologists' approach to group inequalities. From a study of the alleged differences (*i.e.* 'inferiority') of members of historically disadvantaged groups psychologists moved to study of the prejudices and discrimination of the advantaged (Dixon et al., 2015; Reicher, 2007; Richards, 1997; Samelson, 1978). In the European context, a similar post-war ideological and scientific shift coincided with a massive increase of immigration and the entrenchment of inequalities between guest populations and new ethnic minorities (Pettigrew, 1998). In both cases, ethnic-based discrimination and inequality have been the main impetus for an impressive amount of research devoted to understanding discrimination's psychological underpinnings (e.g. Adorno et al., 1950; G. W. Allport, 1954b; Amodio et al., 2003; Dovidio et al., 2017; Dovidio & Gaertner, 2000; Gaertner & Dovidio, 1977; Kinder & Sears, 1981; Meertens & Pettigrew, 1997; Pettigrew & Meertens, 1995; Plant & Devine, 1998; Rokeach, 1960; Sears & Henry, 2003; Tajfel, 1981) and to the reaction of disadvantaged groups to social inequality, the most influential effort being Social Identity Theory (Tajfel, 1981; Tajfel & Turner, 1979/2001; Vaughan, 1978; see also Phinney, 1990).

It is therefore difficult to maintain that ethnicity is of marginal concern for social psychologists. In fact, it is arguable that the psychology of intergroup relations has been first and foremost an attempt to explain concrete cases of *ethnic* violence and inequality. But somehow, social psychologists have mostly failed to acknowledge the specificity of the phenomenon in their attempts to explain it. By entering the world of social psychological theories, the concrete social phenomenon of interethnic relations has lost its distinctive features which are relegated to the category of 'real world application'. Accordingly, the matter is not so much that ethnicity doesn't appear in the literature – it indeed does repeatedly –, but rather how it appears. Whether an operational definition in a research design or an example illustrating a more general theoretical point, ethnicity typically stands for something more general, a larger set of which it is just a token (Phinney, 1990; Zagefka, 2009). Others have made similar observations with regard to national (Billig, 1995; Gibson & Condor, 2009; Reicher & Hopkins, 2001) and racial categories (M. Wetherell & Potter, 1992), pointing out that social psychologists typically make the theoretical assumption that their idiosyncrasies are largely irrelevant to theorize group processes in general. Over and above its specificities, ethnicity – as race and nation – appears as a social category just like any other and, as such, isn't granted any separate treatment.

With this state of affairs comes a curious blind spot. Reviewing the treatment of ethnicity in social psychological literature, Zagefka (2009) observes rather provocatively that current social psychological theories have surprisingly little to say about why it is "considerably more common for people to kill members of a different ethnic group over some intergroup dispute than it is for people to kill members of a different tennis club" (p. 232). The tone might be polemical, but Zagefka put her finger on a fundamental problem. If theories of group processes are formulated in universal terms, they are not adapted to account for what is empirically specific to ethnic identities. The paradoxical upshot is that, if ethnic conflict and violence have so often been the impetus for social psychological research, the resulting theories are *in fine* unhelpful in clarifying why conflict and violence should be labeled 'ethnic' in the first place. Hence, it is hardly surprising that social psychological research stays at the margin of most integrative accounts of ethnic conflict (but see Brubaker, 2004; Horowitz, 1985/2001).

Since Zagefka's critical review, Verkuyten (2018a) made an important contribution, if only by systematically trying to create bridges between anthropological theories of ethnicity and psychological theories of group processes. But much like Zagefka did ten years before, Verkuyten (2018a) acknowledged in his conclusion that social-psychological research doesn't shed much light on the empirical connection between ethnicity and violence. And as he did so, he also advanced a further insight into what the problem is:

> [T]here is the question of to what extent social psychological theories are useful and adequate for understanding situations of fierce and violent ethnic conflicts, including ethnic cleansing and genocide. In the past decades, there have been several of these conflicts, and ethnic violence continues to be a distressing global phenomenon. Interethnic, but also interreligious, violence raises important issues and questions for social psychologists. In social psychological research as well as in this book, *the focus is on questions of ethnic identity and interethnic relations in relatively harmonious Western societies*. This research is important, but it is unclear to what extent it adds to our understanding of ethnic hatred and violence (pp. 235-236; emphasis added).

Not only do social psychologists formulate theories in universal terms but, Verkuyten adds, they do so almost exclusively on the basis of observations made in relatively harmonious

contexts. But one could take issue with the term 'relatively harmonious' to pinpoint the specificity of Western societies. To take a currently salient example, the recent murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis (Hill et al., 2020) and the wave of protests that it triggered under the slogan "Black Lives Matter" illustrates that 'harmony' – even qualified as relative – might not be the most accurate defining feature of US society. An arguably more accurate specificity of Western societies is their *political stability*, in the sense of government's political control over its territories having not faced any serious violent challenge for a long period of time. Such stability is partly ensured by the strong infrastructural capabilities of Western states (see Fearon & Laitin, 2003), which creates a huge power asymmetry between the state and potential armed challengers of existing political rule.

The observation that social psychological research on ethnic relations is almost exclusively realized in such politically stable contexts is equally true for the social-psychological literature on peace and conflict in general. Vollhardt and Bilali (2008) reviewed the content of the leading social psychology journals and concluded that studies in Europe or North America amounted to 83 % of the research on the topic and that 69 % of all studies were based on University students samples. Taken together, these general features of social psychological research make its relevance directly depend on the assumption that group processes stem from the same psychological mechanisms independently of the social and political context (see Elcheroth et al., 2019). Pushed to its limit, this assumption would imply that social psychological mechanisms observed on an American university campus can be transferred to explain behavior in the midst a war zone.

A central thesis that I will be defending throughout the present work is a direct challenge to this assumption. More specifically, I will argue that social and political upheavals, and especially violent ones, fundamentally change the way individuals act upon group cleavages and thereby, qualitatively transform the nature of groups at the aggregated level (Elcheroth & Reicher, 2017). Building a group psychology based on this insight, it will argue, helps to transcend some of the fundamental debates on the relation between ethnicity, conflict and violence in the social sciences. Thus, the main purpose of the empirical chapters will be to examine how individuals understand their collective – and notably ethnic – identities in contexts that are going through, or recently went through, major societal transitions.

But before going into further details, it is worth saying a few words of context for the reader to situate where I am speaking from. First, the arguments made in this thesis have been heavily informed by the Sri Lankan context. One of the primary reasons for this focus is that Sri Lanka was torn by a 30 years-long civil war opposing the Sri Lankan government to insurgents, mostly the Liberation Tigers of Tamil *Ealam* (LTTE), making ethno-nationalist claims. The war ended relatively recently, in 2009, when the Sri Lankan government defeated the LTTE. That this thesis is mainly informed by the Sri Lankan case is true in the most classic empirical sense: two studies (presented on chapter 4 and 5) among the three that form the empirical part of this thesis are based on surveys conducted in Sri Lanka. But it is also true in a broader sense. The theoretical argument that I develop about the origin of ethnic nationalism has been deeply influenced by my reading of Sri Lanka's colonial history in general, and of the history behind Buddhist revivalism in particular.

This brings me to the second, and crucial, element of context. I was born and lived most of my life in Brussels, Belgium, and worked on this thesis mostly from Lausanne, in Switzerland. Hence, I put it lightly when I say that I am not in a privileged position to talk about Sri Lanka. And this fact has, at times, put me in a quite uncomfortable position. The most awkward moment was in September 2017, when I found myself presenting findings about identity configurations in Sri Lanka to a mainly Sri Lankan audience at the ICES, in Colombo. I felt deeply illegitimate at that moment, and this feeling has been a great source of concern until today. For one thing, it certainly forced me to spend more time and effort in researching Sri Lanka's history than I would have otherwise. But, more importantly, worrying about my legitimacy to talk about Sri Lanka gradually came to nourish another kind of concern, which moved the focus from the context to the topic of my research. For if I didn't feel legitimate talking about Sri Lanka, why would I be any more comfortable talking about ethno-nationalism and ethnic violence? After all, I've lived my formative years in Brussels, arguably one of the most cosmopolitan environment one can think of, and a place where you don't learn much about nationalism except that it is good taste to regard it with condescendence and disdain. The more I thought about it, the more I came to see the problem, not as one of legitimacy to talk about certain things, but as a tension between the universal and the particular. And the entire argument of this thesis is based on an attempt to solve this tension: it is assumed that experiences which seem inherently particular can be described in universal terms, but only

given the right dosage of contextualization. And first presenting a detailed European example – that of German ethno-nationalism (see section 1.1.5) – serves an important rhetorical purpose in this regard. Its aim is to convince the reader that, given a proper contextualization, the emergence of German ethnic nationalism is not only intelligible, but also similar in key respects to a case as *a priori* different as Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism.

Finally, this research has been part of the *Pluralistic Memories Project* (PMP), an international consortium of researchers mostly based in Burundi, Sri Lanka, Palestine and Switzerland. Key aims of the PMP have been to collect and archive testimonies about war experiences, and to study the role of conflict memories in shaping current intergroup relations in war-torn societies. The reader might thus be surprised to discover that conflict memories are largely absent from the empirical studies presented here (except in chapter 4). But it is worth noting that memories of past conflicts, and collective memory more generally, play an important role in the following pages. On the one hand, the theoretical argument presented is certainly an invitation for more research on how remembrance of past experiences of victimization shape ethno-national identities today. And if anything, the argument suggests that, if peaceful coexistence is the goal, a little bit more forgetting might prove beneficial (see Rieff, 2016). There is, on the other hand, a less obvious role given to collective memory in this thesis. When reviewing the social psychological literature on intergroup relations (in chapter 2), I put a significant amount of effort digging into the history of ideas in the discipline. My reason to do so, and it is a key argument I make throughout that chapter, is that various concepts, theories and general tendencies currently central in the discipline are direct legacies of political conflicts specific to the history of US. I further argue that there are several blind spots that can be overcome only by reflexively acknowledging this legacy. Thus, in that case, I believe a little bit more remembering might prove really beneficial.

Chapter 1

Ethnicity and conflict in the social sciences

1.1 Ethnicity, conflict and violence

In 1970, the political scientist Ted Gurr published a book which had no smaller ambition than to elaborate a general theory of political violence. *Why men rebel* – as the title went – intended its object of inquiry to be "all collective attacks within a political community against the political regime, its actors - including competing political groups as well as incumbents - or its policies" (Gurr, 1970, pp. 3–4). Consistent with the broad scope implied by this definition, Gurr used the general term "dissidents" to refer to challengers to the *status quo*. The dissidents that populated Gurr's book include such various figures as peasants from Andalusia, Mexico and Tanzania, Cuban and Russian workers, Nazi party members as well as urban rioters in the 1960s US and eighteen-century revolutionary France. But behind the kaleidoscopic diversity, the logic of Gurr's account – which explains violence based on frustrated aspirations – more often than not delineated actors based on their social class.

Some twenty years later, Gurr sensibly changed the focus of his inquiry. A change he made explicit as he chose to title his 1993 article with an evocative paraphrase of his early book's title: *Why minorities rebel* (Gurr, 1993b). Just like in his previous work, Gurr was interested in uncovering mechanisms that led groups to resort to violence against the state or, more specifically, to distinguish predictors of (non-violent) protests from those of (violent) rebellions. True to his ambitious penchant, Gurr's analysis was based on a colossal collective effort – the *Minorities At Risks* project (see Gurr, 1993a) – of gathering worldwide data on 227 "non-state communal groups that were politically salient or active at some time between 1945 and 1989" (Gurr, 1993b, p. 163). But the 'dissidents' had lost their kaleidoscopic diversity; the inquiry had been narrowed down to 'minorities' or 'communal groups'.

Gurr's case is in fact emblematic of a larger trend in the study of political violence. Compared with scholarship preceding the late 1980s which, if anything, emphasized class-based grievances or mobilization (e.g. Davies, 1962; Gurr, 1970; Scott, 1977; Skocpol, 1979; Tilly, 1978), more recent work increasingly focused on 'ethnic' or 'ethno-nationalist' violence. This "ethnic turn" (Brubaker & Laitin, 1998) in the political violence literature is sometimes

interpreted as a reaction to the shocking violence that torn Rwanda and the Former Yugoslavia in the early 1990s (e.g. Cederman & Vogt, 2017). But it would be more accurate to say that such shocking instances only accelerated an acknowledgement that was already under way by tainting it with a sense of urgency. In 1985, Horowitz already warned that the expectations that ethnic cleavages would simply dissolve through state-building activities were no longer tenable; he further listed some 30 cases of particularly violent ethnic strife to back up his point (Horowitz, 1985/2001, p. 3). Similarly, Gurr (1993b) justified his choice to focus on 'communal groups' by arguing that they had been "major actors in national and international politics *throughout the twentieth century*. The international system has been repeatedly reshaped by the claims of emergent nations to statehood and sovereignty" (p. 161, emphasis added).

The current literature on ethnic conflict and violence spans across several disciplines – political science, sociology, anthropology, history and, to a certain extent, psychology – and relies on various methodological practices, ranging from ethnographic case studies to large-N statistical analyses of worldwide and historical data. It would therefore not come as a surprise if the accounts and theories were similarly diverse. I will however argue that there is an underlying coherence that emerges from this eclectic literature. I will proceed by extricating three oppositions, or axes, which together organize most accounts of ethnic violence. The first axis – opposing bottom-up to top-down explanations – typically organizes accounts derived from case studies of ethnic violence. The second one is prominent in the political science literature based on Large-*N* quantitative analyses and distinguishes grievances- from opportunities- based explanations of ethnic violence. The last axis – which opposes primordialist to constructivist theories of ethnicity – originates as a strong organizing principle in the anthropological literature on ethnicity (and historical literature on nationalism).

1.1.1   Axis 1: Bottom-up versus top-down

The bottom-up/top-down opposition is particularly manifest among the various explanations of the two most infamous recent instances of ethnic violence, the 1994 genocide in Rwanda and the violent dissolution of the Former Yugoslavia. In the Rwandan context, the first class of explanations emphasizes more or less deeply engrained and ancient intergroup hatred as the direct cause of genocide. Most dramatically perhaps, Uvin (1997) argues that genocide was the materialization of an "old, racialized prejudice" which, although 'dormant'

for a long time, became "radicalized as a result of a number of conjunctural factors" (p. 91; *i.e.* economic and political crises). Many authors similarly identified the direct cause of genocidal violence in the hatred of Hutu perpetrators, but emphasized that the source of this hatred is to be found in the racist ideology that German and Belgian colonizers disseminated and institutionalized (Mamdani, 2002; Melvern, 2004; Prunier, 1998; K. R. White, 2009).

On the top-down side, accounts emphasize the mechanisms of mobilization, social pressures and conformity by which elites and extremist groups drove people to kill. In this vein, Des Forges (1999) documents how authorities diverted a traditional form of community service (*Umuganda*) – a long-standing and widely observed cultural artefact in Rwanda since the colonial period – in order to first make participation to anti-Tutsi propaganda activities mandatory, and then to regiment the population into participating to the killing. Fujii (2004) describes how Hutu extremists skillfully took advantage of the climate of uncertainty that followed the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) invasion in 1990 to make genocidal violence appear as a defensive and legitimate course of action. She particularly stresses the determining role of broadcasts from the *Radio Télévision des Milles Collines* which literally "turned the genocidal message into popular entertainment". Virulent anti-Tutsi songs were, for instance, played "10 to 15 times a day so that listeners could not help but learn them by heart" (p. 104). Based on geographical data locating the residence of perpetrators, bystanders and victims during the genocide in the Rwandan Tare sector (former Maraba *commune*), McDoom (2013) found that the likelihood of participation in the genocide was positively associated the relative concentration of killers in the neighborhood and household. He concluded that genocidal violence was partially mobilized through social influence operating at the level of local ties (see also Fujii, 2008). Finally, Bhavnani (2006) pointed out that punishment, sometimes extremely violent, was a widespread practice by which extremists elements compelled reluctant Hutu to participate in the killings (e.g., Forges, 1999). He assessed the weight of this observation in an agent-based model, and his results suggested that strong punishments are indeed a requirement for a violence-promoting (or violence-preventing) norm to emerge within an ethnic group.

With regard to violence in the former Yugoslavia, the bottom-up variety finds a paradigmatic example in the account Petersen (2002) derives from his theory of ethnic violence. For him, ethno-nationalist violence was driven by mass emotional responses to

political developments. In a nutshell, Petersen argues that structural political changes (*i.e.* collapse or weakening of the political center, regime change) implies a corresponding reconfiguration of objective relations between ethnic groups. Whether members of an ethnic group will resort to violence, he argues, straightforwardly depends on their group's position in this new configuration because of the emotional implications of such position. Violence erupts because the structural change either threatens the group's safety, diminishes relative group status or remove constraints to violence (toward a group hated for historical reasons) and hence respectively triggers fear, resentment or 'awakens' ancient hatreds amongst group members. This reasoning enables him to argue, for instance, that if Bosnian Croats and Serbs attacked Bosnian Muslims after the collapse of the Yugoslav Federation, it is because they resented becoming minorities within the new Bosnian state.

Among proponents of top-down explanations, Stoessinger (2010) traces the successive wars in the former Yugoslavia back to the ascension to power of Slobodan Milosevic, "Europe's last dictator" (p. 137), in Serbia. Milosevic, Stoessinger argues, attempted to gain political control of the Yugoslav Federation by stirring ethno-nationalist hatreds among Serbs outside his formal constituency, *i.e.* first in the autonomous regions of Kosovo and Vojvodina and then in the republics of Montenegro, Slovenia, Croatia and Bosnia. The wars, in Stoessinger's account, essentially resulted from Serb nationalism and attempts at hegemony in the Federation, on the one hand, and the reactive nationalism of Croats and Bosnian Muslims to the threat that it posed, on the other. Serb nationalism was, in turn, mobilized to serve the ambition of a single man, Slobodan Milosevic, who accomplished such mobilization by playing on more or less ancient ethnic rivalries. While agreeing on the key role played by Milosevic along with other members of conservative elite in Serbia and Croatia, Gagnon (2006) argues that the wars were not so much the result of a mobilization of the population as part of a strategy designed to *demobilize* opposition to those conservative elites. Central to Gagnon's argument is that "mobilizing people around issues of culture and identity requires more than simply appealing to history and symbols, or declaring a threat in ethnic terms" (p. 178). It is precisely because 'playing the ethnic card' was not sufficient to secure the populations' support that conservative elites purposefully organized violence along ethno-national lines. Consistent with this view, Gagnon shows that violence was not spontaneous but quasi-systematically imported by state-controlled armed forces within communities, often those

with "the highest pre-war levels of positive coexistence" (p. 179). Similarly, De Graaff (2005) documents how the Serb paramilitary groups perpetrating most atrocities – often mistakenly believed to act autonomously – were in fact getting direct orders from Belgrade. Penic and colleagues provide evidence that this demobilization strategy was particularly efficient in Croatia. During post-war public debates, conservative elites constructed criticism toward Tudjman's regime as national betrayal, thus effectively making it impossible to be both critical of the regime and a patriot (Penic, Elcheroth, & Reicher, 2016). In another study (Penic et al., 2014), they found that local areas' economic deprivation was related to higher ethnic resentment among individuals (measured as assignment of collective guilt to the ethnic 'other') and that this relationship was mediated by lower individuals' support for the opposition party (i.e. the Social Democratic Party). This pattern – which is coherent with a successful deflection of the population's socio-economic protests against the regime in place into ethnic antagonisms – was found only in Croatia.

1.1.2   Axis 2: Grievances versus opportunism

When Gurr published *Why Men Rebel* (1970; see also Davies, 1962), his account stressed that people whose aspirations were frustrated (a phenomenon he called 'relative deprivation'; see Runciman (1966)) were more likely to engage in violent challenges to the *status quo*. Tilly (1978) argued that such explanations give too much importance to grievances when, in fact, much more determinant are the structural conditions which define rebels' opportunities, resources and organization. This debate between grievances- and opportunities-based explanations of violence found a new life as ethnic conflicts became the center of attention in Large-*N* studies. While Gurr's (1993a, 1993b) analyses of the Minorities At Risk data clearly integrated both types of explanations, the wave of studies that directly followed him tended to favor opportunity-based explanations by explicitly pitting them against grievance- based approaches. According to their framework, ethnic grievances are at best not crucial and, at worst, a simple ideological smoke-screen for greedy and opportunistic rebel leaders. Collier and Hoeffler (2004) formulated one of the most influential of such accounts. Using data covering civil wars between 1960 and 1999, these authors found that their proxies for group-based grievances (*e.g.* ethnic fractionalization, Gini coefficient of economic inequality) were much poorer predictors of civil war onset compared to proxies of

financial incentives (*e.g.* lootable resources), resources (*e.g.* diaspora) and rebellion cost. They explained such findings by arguing that group-based grievances are virtually everywhere and therefore cannot distinguish cases where violence breaks out from where it doesn't. What makes the difference is the greed of rebel leaders, when met with the proper incentives and opportunities. The dominant opportunity-based explanations is, however, Fearon and Laitin's (2003) weak state argument (see Cederman & Vogt, 2017). Simply put, civil wars are more likely in weak states because "insurgents are better able to survive and prosper if the government and military they oppose is relatively weak" (p. 80).

After Gurr's early attempt at integration, grievance-based explanations have thus been somewhat eclipsed by the opportunism framework. However, some authors advanced several reasons why group-based grievances shouldn't be so easily dismissed. First, explanations of political violence exclusively in terms of opportunism blatantly contradict qualitative case studies were protests against political exclusion and economic inequality seem to play a key role in the escalation of the conflict (Sambanis, 2004; see also Horowitz, 1985/2001). In Sri Lanka for instance, 20 years of policies consistently discriminating the Tamil-speaking minorities from the mid-1950s onwards triggered many waves of peaceful protests among Tamils. As these protests often faced violent repression – notably in the form of ethnic pogroms – Tamil contestation would turn violent in the 1970s with the formation of armed rebel groups among the youth (DeVotta, 2004). Similarly, it would appear rather odd to claim that the extreme inequality produced by the Apartheid regime in South Africa is irrelevant to explain why the African National Congress resorted to armed struggle (see Ellis, 2011). Second, there are good reasons to believe that the apparent absence of predictive power of ethnic grievances proxies actually reflects questionable methodological practices. With regard to socio-economic grievances, Østby (2008) pointed out that typically used proxies (*e.g.* Gini index) for group-based inequality are in fact not group-based at all since they capture income disparities between individuals independently of group (ethnic) cleavages. Claiming, on that basis, that inequalities between groups are unrelated to violence onset is therefore overhasty (see also F. Stewart, 2008). Even more questionable is the widespread use of ethnic fractionalization and ethnic polarization indices as proxies of ethnic grievances (e.g., Collier & Hoeffler, 2004; Reynal-Querol & Montalvo, 2005; Sambanis, 2001). The fractionalization index measures the probability that two randomly chosen individuals belong to different ethnic

groups and thus reflects ethnic heterogeneity, while the polarization index weighs for the relative size of each group and thus measures how far a context is from being polarized into two large ethnic groups. Both indices, however, effectively treat ethnicity as a descriptive and objective characteristic of individuals and thus take it as a given that the latter subjectively recognize the importance of their ethnic identity. Indeed, if ethnic diversity or polarization are indicators of ethnic grievances, this necessarily implies that people care enough about ethnic differences to frame political contentions in those terms. This assumption is highly problematic, however, since the relevance of ethnic groups for individuals can strongly vary across time (Eifert, Miguel, & Posner, 2010) and space (Bhavnani & Miodownik, 2009) within the same country. For instance, agent-based simulations indicate that the relationship between ethnic polarization and conflict outbreak could plausibly be moderated the relevance of ethnicity, when the relevance of ethnicity is treated as a variable rather than a constant (Bhavnani & Miodownik, 2009).

A recent wave of studies has directly addressed such shortcomings using the Ethnic Power Relations (EPR) dataset, which documents all politically relevant ethnic groups around the world from 1945 to 2001 as well as their respective access to state power (see Cederman et al., 2010; Vogt et al., 2015). Thus Cederman and his team (2010) found that ethnic groups excluded from, or underrepresented in, state power were more prone to resort to armed violence (see also Wimmer et al., 2009; Wucherpfennig et al., 2016). In addition to political exclusion, horizontal economic inequalities – measured via ethnic groups' settlement areas – also appears to predict violent outbreaks; such that both relatively deprived and relatively advantaged ethnic groups are more likely to take arms (Cederman et al., 2011). The overall conclusion that emerges from this latter group of studies, much in the integrative spirit of Gurr (1993a, 1993b), is that it is rather futile to oppose grievances and opportunities as irreconcilable principles of explanation.

1.1.3 Axis 3: Primordialism versus constructivism (or instrumentalism)

The opposition between primordialism and constructivism is not specific to theories of political violence, but rather originates as a debate structuring the anthropological literature on ethnicity. This debate is quite complex, encompassing a multiplicity of more or less subtle theoretical arguments (see Eriksen, 2002; Hutchinson & Smith, 1996; Jenkins, 2008); but a

good starting point to understand the gist of it is to pit some relatively recent contributions against the longstanding legacy of the late enlightenment philosopher Johann Gottfried Herder (see Wimmer, 2009, 2013, Chapter 2). Herder (1784–1791/1966) claimed that there is a natural and self-evident way to classify humans into 'peoples', as the latter form coherent and clear-cut social units. Contrary to typical eighteenth-century classifications based on 'racial' traits or degree of civilizational achievement (see Hudson, 1996), Herder differentiated 'peoples' by closely anticipating the modern notion of culture. All humans, Herder says, share a universal capacity for culture or cultivation (*Bildung*), and each 'people' expresses this underlying capacity in his own peculiar way, making it manifest in such things as his language, literature and folk traditions (for an extended discussion of Herder's views, see Muthu, 2009, Chapter 6). From there, Herder endowed his peoples with three important and interrelated features. First, each people is delineated by a unique, shared and coherent culture, most clearly manifest in its language. Second, each people is bound together by an acute consciousness of its common culture, history and fate; what we would nowadays call a shared sense of identity. And third, each people forms a highly cohesive community, bound together by close or 'organic' ties of solidarity.

It is Clifford Geertz (1963/1973), however, who put the matter in a form and at a time that made it ripe for controversy. And indeed the time was that of massive decolonization during the 1960s. As Geertz saw it, the establishment of independent modern state institutions in freshly decolonized societies quasi-systematically revealed a major obstacle to political integration. As new states were being created, people seemed to cling to traditional allegiances instead of unconditionally embracing a civic allegiance to the new nation-state. In Nigeria, perhaps the most complex case discussed by Geertz, the period surrounding independence from British colonial rule was everything but one of national unity: as independence got closer, the central political problem was to manage the growing tensions between ethno-regional groups. This concern crystalized into political institutions after independence, as negotiations settled for a federal state encompassing (and managing relations between) three highly autonomous regions (Northern, Western, and Eastern), each dominated by an ethnic group (the Hausa, the Yoruba and the Ibo, respectively). These dominant ethno-regional groups were in a sense modern entities born from colonial modernization but, Geertz argue, they in fact emerged from the re-grouping of tribal

communities of traditional Nigeria; a re-scaling of traditional identities as it were (see also Horowitz, 1985/2001, pp. 66–68). And the situation was further complexified by the existence of many smaller groups who were reluctant to see themselves as either Hausa, Yoruba, or Ibo. The upshot was a highly volatile political climate, which would turn violent less than a decade after independence.

In the stubbornness of these "primordial ties" – typically based on quasi-kinship, 'race', region, religion and/or custom – Geertz saw something as natural and obvious as the inherent solidarity and shared sense of identity that characterized Herder's 'peoples'. Such ties are so powerful, Geertz argues, because they originate in what people consider to be the 'givens' of existence: "the givenness that stems from being born into a particular religious community, speaking a particular language, or even a dialect of a language, and following particular social practices" (Geertz, 1963/1973, p. 259; see also Shils, 1957). This leads him to the curious conclusion that the importance of primordial ties is somehow self-explanatory or even "ineffable": "One is bound to one's kinsman, one's neighbor, one's fellow believer, *ipso facto*; as the result not merely of personal affection, practical necessity, common interest, or incurred obligation, but at least in great part by virtue of some unaccountable absolute import attributed to the very tie itself" (Geertz, 1963/1973, p. 259; for a critical discussion of this notion, see Eller & Coughlan, 1993). Thus Geertz not only defined ethnicity *à la* Herder but further argued that such a view provided a meaningful interpretation of the decolonization process. New post-colonial states almost systematically failed to create national unity because such unity depends on an artificial civic membership, which arbitrarily puts together people irrespective of their traditional, or primordial, affiliations. In the face of such demands for civic/national allegiance, people naturally react by emphasizing their 'primordial' ties and hence coalesce into ethnic blocks.

Geerzt and Herder's views – which are often referred to as *primordialist* – faced challenges that revolutionized anthropologists' approach to ethnicity. The most famous came with the publication of *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries,* a collection of essays led by Fredrik Barth (Barth, 1969/1998). Both Herder's peoples and Geertz's primordial ties implied that objective cultural commonalities and differences delineate ethnic groups. Cultural traits and practices, in this view, work as objective criteria that distinguishes members of different ethnic groups and as a 'glue' that self-evidently binds people together and gives them a shared sense

of ethnic identity. Barth and colleagues presented a series of ethnographic case studies that directly challenged this assumption. They showed, as Barth (1969/1998, p. 14) famously put it, that within poly-ethnic social systems there is "no simple one-to-one relationship between ethnic units and cultural similarities and differences". What they observed was rather a continuum of cultural variation, and ethnic distinctions defined certain points of the continuum as *boundaries* in a manner that seems all but arbitrary to the external observer. Barth, for instance, observed striking cultural diversity between various communities who self-identified as Pathan in Northern Pakistan, which "objectively seem[ed] to be of an order of magnitude comparable to that between any such community and neighbouring non-Pathan groups" (p. 119). Pathan identity was distinctive, however, because both insiders and outsiders *subjectively recognized* a combination of markers – or cultural attributes (*e.g.*, adhesion to Islam, Pashto language, hospitality to outsiders, display of autonomy through participation in political councils) – as criteria for membership to the Pathan ethnic group and as basis on which a Pathan's worth is measured. When objective circumstances made it difficult to live up to the Pathan standard – as when a Pathan is forced to become client to a member of the neighboring Baluch group following loss of land and thereby can't display his political autonomy – individuals could cross the ethnic boundary by changing their identification. These observations showed that ethnic groups are not self-evidently defined by shared culture. Rather, people actively mark and maintain ethnic distinctions, in a way that has little to do with the landscape of objective cultural similarities and differences. It follows that social scientists should not assume ethnic groups to be natural categories defined by a common culture, but should rather try to figure out the social processes by which ethnic distinctions are created, enforced and maintained: "the critical focus of investigation from this point of view becomes the ethnic *boundary* that defines the group, not the cultural stuff that it encloses" (Barth, 1969/1998, p. 15 original emphasis).

Another important challenge to primordialist theories of ethnicity was Moerman's (1965) influential paper on ethnic identification in Northern Thailand. The title of his paper, *Who are the Lue?*, refers to the difficulties Moerman encountered when trying to circumscribe the distinctive traits of the Lue ethnic group, which was the focus of his study. Anticipating observations from Barth and colleagues, Moerman couldn't find any obvious cultural traits shared by all Lue communities while also distinguishing them from neighboring groups. When

asked what defines a Lue, accounts from various self-identified Lue communities seemed to be tailored to answer the demands of their particular situation; that is, they emphasized certain traits (*e.g.*, specific dialect or dress) as "emblems" (p. 1219) that differentiated them from locally relevant groups in order to prove that the Lue are a distinct people, even though the exact same trait could seem aberrant to another Lue community at a different location. What defined a Lue, Moerman argued, was more an identification with the label than any cultural traits, which served only to validate the identification in a *post hoc* and situation-sensitive fashion: "Someone is a Lue by virtue of believing and calling himself Lue and of acting in ways that validate his Lueness" (Moerman, 1965, p. 1222).

But it was not only cultural traits that Moerman found to be endorsed situationally. He observed that Thai people from the Ban Ping area could generally be classified using at least five different ethnic labels referring to groups organized into hierarchically-nested categories. Thus, depending on the situation and "the level of contrast the speaker thinks appropriate" (p. 1224), the same speaker could choose to use a label that include other communities in his or her ethnic group, or on the contrary excludes them from it. As Moerman noted, this nested structure could be used as a political tool, since emphasizing ethnic antagonisms at one level of inclusion could serve to unite lower-level categories into a common ethnic block. More generally, subsequent authors (Brubaker, 2004; Jenkins, 2008; Lyman & Douglass, 1973; Okamura, 1981) identified the same nested structure of ethnic categories in various other contexts and emphasized its potential for creating disagreement over which ethnic distinction should be politically relevant.

Overall, Moerman's and especially Barth and colleagues' contributions encouraged a general shift away from primordialist understandings of ethnicity in the anthropological literature (Eriksen, 2002; Wimmer, 2013). Their analysis of ethnicity, respectively referred to as 'situationalism' and 'instrumentalism', indicated that ethnic distinctions are somewhat arbitrary and conventional constructions, which individuals navigate and use in a pragmatic and calculated fashion to achieve situationally-defined aims[1].

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[1] A related debate exists in the historical literature on nationalism and nation-state formation. It opposes 'perennialist' theories (e.g., Connor, 2004; Smith, 1991, 2013) of nationalism to 'modernist' ones (e.g., Anderson, 1983/2006; Gellner, 1983/2008; Mann, 1993; Wimmer, 2002, 2012). The first, perennialist, explanations are coherent with primordialism in that they postulate – along Herder's lines – nations to originate in long-standing ethnic groups and nationalism in the primordial attachment of individuals to this ethnically-defined nation. On

1.1.4   Minding the gap: why should ethnicity matter?

That seemingly irreconcilable, but equally compelling, binary oppositions should systematically emerge from such a large and eclectic literature surely deserves some attention. To begin with, if both sides of a debate are supported by substantial evidence and at the same time seem mutually exclusive, there is a good chance that the premises of the debate are somehow misguided. And this situation clearly characterizes the three axes we discussed in the previous sections, even though recent contributions have attempted to transcend these debates (Axis 1: Elcheroth & Reicher, 2017; Luft, 2015; Axis 2: Buhaug et al., 2020; Cederman et al., 2010; Axis 3: Wimmer, 2013). In fact, I argue that there is a common logic that pervades the three debates and polarizes them into dichotomous oppositions. To see this, consider how these three axes appear to depend on each other in practice; such that the position on one axis typically assumes a position on another. Thus, bottom-up accounts of ethnic violence (Axis 1) only make sense granted that ethnic group membership is not only meaningful, but also deeply important, to the majority of people (a primordialist position on Axis 3). They also give a prominent motivational role to group-based grievances and hence would hardly accommodate a purely opportunities-based theory (Axis 2).

Let's, for a moment, take this apparent coherence seriously and combine the three axes into one dichotomous opposition between two models of approaches violence (see Table 1). The first approach defines ethnic violence as a bottom-up process originating in mass grievances or deprivations among ethnic groups and assumes a large majority of people to deeply care about their ethnic identity, enough to resort to violence for this allegiance. Approach 2, on the other hand, doesn't assume that ethnic identity spontaneously inspires any special attachment among the masses. Hence, if violence is to occur along ethnic lines, ethnic loyalties have to be mobilized in a top-down fashion, typically by greedy and opportunistic elites. Arguably, what underlies the apparent coherence of these two approaches and the apparent incompatibility between them is the psychology of the masses that they imply. Approach 1 suggests that a large portion of people are spontaneously xenophobic and that this natural tendency can easily be turned into aggressive militancy by objective circumstances, such as inequalities or more or less ancient grievances. Approach 2,

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the other hand, modernist explanations variously argue that nations are recent constructions, originating in the dramatic social changes of modern history.

on the contrary, starts from the premise that such spontaneous tendency for xenophobia doesn't exist in most people. As a result, it explains ethnic violence by implying that individuals readily conforms to social pressures and influences. In short, the first approach implies that individuals are xenophobic and the active part of the process while the other approach implies that they are suggestible and passible vehicles.

Table 1: Two approaches to ethnic violence and their implied psychology

	Approach 1	Approach 2
Axis 1: Process	Bottom-up	Top-down
Axis 2: Key motivated actor	Deprived masses	Opportunistic leaders
Axis 3: Individual-group relation	Primordial	Socially constructed
Implied mass psychology	Chauvinist/militant/ aggressive (active)	Obedient/conformist/ suggestive (passive)

Importantly, the purpose of the dichotomous scheme presented in Table 1 is not to claim that *all* the relevant literature neatly falls within one or the other side of the dichotomy. And it is informative to consider cases that seem to transcend Table 1's binary scheme. A recent trend in the political science literature has been to plea for disaggregation of armed conflict's (and especially civil wars') studies. A pioneer in this regard is Kalyvas (2003, 2006), who argued that civil wars are characterized by a disjunction between center and periphery: that is, actions and identities at the local level can be more related to local concerns, power struggles and conflicts than to the "master cleavage" supposedly driving the war. Kalyvas provides a wealth of examples of violence motivated by pre-existing feuds between families, villages or clans but wrapped-up with the predominant narrative of the war produced at the center. Hence, according to this view, political (ethnic) violence can be a bottom-up process – *i.e.* driven by local actors who recruit central elites as external muscles – while ethnic cleavages are used in an opportunistic and calculated fashion to serve private ends. Such war-

time behavior of disaggregated actors, Kalyvas argues, is better made sense of through the process of *alliance* than that of cleavage: peripheral actors can seek alliance with central elites by ostensibly aligning their actions on the master cleavage. There is also evidence that, reciprocally, ideological displays of decentralized actors (*i.e.* militias) are used by state elites as cues as to whether to ally with them (Staniland, 2015). Analyzing strategic alliances sought by decentralized actors further helps to explain otherwise puzzling behavior. A notable case is "ethnic defection" (Kalyvas, 2008a), *i.e.* when a protagonist in an ostensibly ethnic conflict side against their co-ethnics. For instance, during the Algerian insurgency against the French colonizers, a number of Algerian groups (which became known as *harkis*) sided with the French against the FLN, sometimes out of revenge against violence perpetrated by the latter (Roux, 1991). Similarly, during the civil war in Sri Lanka, a Tamil faction led by colonel Karuna split from the LTTE and sided with the Sri Lankan government because internal politics within the LTTE endangered Karuna's life (Staniland, 2012). Also in line with this logic of disaggregated analysis, Christia (2012) argues that initial parties during multiparty civil wars should be regarded as conglomerates of relatively autonomous subgroups rather than unitary actors (*e.g.* ethnic groups). These conglomerates can thus split and form new alliances in the course of the war, irrespective of the identities that supposedly drive the conflict. She found evidence in Afghanistan and Bosnia-Herzegovina that alliance formation between armed subgroups was entirely driven by power and tactical considerations: maximizing the chances of being on the winning side and maximizing their share of post-war political power. Identity-based cleavages (ethnic or otherwise) proved to be only *post hoc* justifications of alliances shifts and entirely irrelevant to explain them.[2]

Overall, such analyses of the "microdynamics of civil war" (Kalyvas, 2008b) subvert our dichotomy by theorizing how bottom-up explanations of violence can be perfectly compatible with an opportunism-based and constructivist analyses of ethnic violence. I would argue, however, that they are actually applying the exact same dichotomy at a more disaggregated level of analysis. Thus, what changes is that central elites (*e.g.*, state politicians, military leaders) typically emphasized in the macro-level literature are now replaced by leaders of

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[2] "Group and subgroup elites spend plenty of time talking about the reasons they are allied with this group and not that one, or why they are loyal to this group and not the other, and these purported reasons are generally based on shared identity of one form or another. Hopefully, the theory and empirics of this book have shown this talk for what it is: talk. In reality, there appears to be no alliance that is impossible because of identity differences" (Christia, 2012, p. 240).

more decentralized political or organizational units (*e.g.*, militias, clans, villages). But apart from this change in analytical scale, these analyses essentially consist in endorsing Approach 2 and contesting the assumptions underlying Approach 1 (for a similar argument, see Cederman et al., 2013, Chapter 2): mass ethnic grievances and primordialist attachments tend to be dismissed as irrelevant in favor of local opportunistic leaders who instrumentalize ethnic cleavages to drag their local constituency in the conflict.

If these two approaches organize academic debates on ethnic conflict and violence, it is important to note that they carry stakes that are more than purely descriptive because they mingle with the discourse of conflict protagonists. This point was well illustrated in an exchange (mentionned by Tambiah (1986)) that closely followed the 1983 ethnic riots in Sri Lanka, which were the deadliest in the country's history and are generally considered the turning point that marked the beginning of the civil war. Less than a year after the riots, the New York Times published an article (Stevens, 1984) reporting violent incidents that further worsened relations between Sinhalese and Tamils in the Island. Two days later Gananath Obeyesekere (1984), a Sri Lankan and Sinhalese anthropologist, replied in a letter to the editor which started as follows:

> In an otherwise excellent news article, ''Recent Fighting in Sri Lanka Dims Hope for Ethnic Peace'' (April 22), you state: ''The Sinhalese and Tamils are divided not only by religion, but by ethnic background: the Sinhalese are of Aryan stock, the Tamils are of darker-skinned Dravidian extraction.'' This racist nonsense is part of the current mythology of middle-class Sinhalese.

Obeyesekere then went on to describe the origins of this myth and to demonstrate its incompatibility with historical facts. In doing so, his concern was not mere accuracy. In the description he was contesting, he saw not only 'nonsense', but 'racist nonsense'. What was meant in the original article as a mere background description of the groups involved in the conflict also happened to be used by elements of the Sri Lankan society as part of a justification for discrimination and violence. And indeed, definitions of ethnicity in terms of common ancestry are quasi-systematically mobilized by ethno-nationalist militants across the world to justify their political agenda (Connor, 1993; Horowitz, 1985/2001). Thus, by contesting the myth of Sinhalese and Tamils different ancestries, Obeyesekere was not only

contesting a descriptive statement about ethnic groups, but also the foundation of a political stance.

This episode encapsulates a general model of how debates around ethnic violence tend to unfold as well as an explanation of the persistent opposition between the two approaches in Table 1. The assumptions in Approach 1 tend to appear first in the market of ideas, simply because the actors themselves – or more accurately, the most militant and loudest voices among them – make use of a similar model to justify and bolster their struggle. Ethno-nationalist thinkers, activists and leaders have all the reasons to describe their ethnic group as a primordial community sharing a common kinship, history and/or fate, to wrap their cause with the moral legitimacy of the struggle against injustice, and to present themselves as the mere vehicle of their group's aspirations (Fearon & Laitin, 2000). Hence, explanations of violence along these lines are intuitively compelling and indeed extremely popular amongst the general public in their most caricatured and inflated forms (e.g. Huntington, 1993; Kaplan, 1993). Approach 2's assumptions, on the other hand, typically come as critical alternatives, rooted in a certain skepticism toward the ethno-nationalist rhetoric. Explanations emphasizing bottom-up processes, ethnic grievances and/or primordial ties are mistaken, proponents of Approach 2 argue, because they naively take at face value the discourse of ethnic entrepreneurs. And a crucial feature of the latter discourse is to present a particular political agenda as an aspiration stemming from the very nature of those it claims to speak for (see Reicher & Hopkins, 2001). Thus findings in Slovakia and Northern Ireland show that individuals who experience their ethno-national identities as primordial attachments tend to strongly identify with ethno-nationalist political parties (Weinreich et al., 2003). Hence, what is troubling about Approach 1's assumptions is their affinities with a form of essentialism, one that makes ethnic attachment, grievances and antagonisms an inevitable outgrowth of human nature. Indeed, several authors (Balibar, 1991; Condor, 1988; Hopkins, Reicher, et al., 1997; M. Wetherell & Potter, 1992) have shown that modern expressions of racism mobilize a similar rhetorical trope, which justifies conflict over differences of 'culture' and 'origin' through its alleged inevitability. In sum, ethno-nationalist militants typically use Approach 1 to present ethnic conflict as natural, inevitable and thus to justify their political agenda. For this reason, analysts who are skeptical towards ethno-nationalist rhetoric treat Approach 1 as suspicious because of its political overtones. And once the debate is framed in this way, it might useful

to broadly distinguish approaches based on Approach 1 depending on whether they indeed carry such political implications or not. And here, I suggest that we distinguish three cases.

First, there are theoretical stances which unambiguously describe conflict as a natural outcome of ethnic differences. The clearest cases are sociobiological theories of ethnic nepotism (Alt et al., 2020; Harvey, 2000; Van den Berghe, 1987; Vanhanen, 1999). In this framework, the kinship metaphor often used in lay descriptions of shared ethnic identity (Horowitz, 1985/2001) ceases, in fact, to be a metaphor: people, it is argued, naturally divide the world into ethnic groups, and favor co-ethnics, because membership into a common ethnic group is actually a cue to genetic proximity. Following a Darwinian logic, intra-ethnic cooperation and inter-ethnic antagonism increase the likelihood of having one's genes reproduced and are thus necessary outcomes of natural selection. In short, this approach views conflict of interests between ethnic groups as objectively rooted in biology and thus makes ethnic conflict more or less inevitable.

The second case is a bit subtler, as it encompasses cases where essentialist assumptions are not necessarily endorsed explicitly but are implied by research practices. This could be referred to as 'methodological primordialism'. We have seen, for instance, that the use of ethnic fractionalization/polarization indices as proxies for ethnic grievances treat ethnicity as descriptive feature, thus effectively making the assumption that people necessarily identify with their ethnic group (Bhavnani & Miodownik, 2009). Similarly, sociological research on immigration routinely build research designs taking ethnic groups as units of analysis (Wimmer, 2013) and thus take for granted that the corresponding ethnic boundary is subjectively relevant for their participants. Whether explicitly acknowledged or not, such research practices treat ethnicity *as if* it was an objective feature, a social category which individuals necessarily identify with. From there, it is a short step to assume that ethnicity is a natural basis for conflict.

The third case is much more debatable and interesting for our discussion. It is best captured by Geertz's (1963/1973) theory of primordial ties, which I already discussed at some length. Geertz's position is typically identified as the paradigmatic example of primordialist theory in anthropological literature (Eriksen, 2002; Jenkins, 2008) and harshly criticized for essentializing ethnicity as an identity that people necessarily and irrationally cling to (e.g., Eller & Coughlan, 1993). As Jenkins (2008), Brubaker (2015) and Verkuyten (2018a) point out,

however, such criticisms are based on a caricatured version of Geertz's argument and are thus, in fact, attacking a strawman. What Geertz argued was not that ties of blood, quasi-kinship, religion or culture were indeed primordial, natural and unchangeable but rather that they were *perceived as such in certain contexts*; notably in post-colonial societies where political institutions were shifting towards the form of the modern state. Geertz's description referred to a certain lay understanding of ethnic ties, not to the ties themselves. And in that specific sense, it cannot be said to essentialize ethnicity nor to imply that ethnic conflict is inevitable.

The misunderstanding around Geertz's primordialism helps us to clarify why the opposition presented in Table 1 is a misleading dichotomy. As Fearon and Laitin (2000) note, considering that ethnic groups are social categories, which is consensual, makes the claim that ethnicity is 'socially constructed' seem like a tautology: "How could social categories be something other than socially constructed?" (p. 848). If the debate seems to be on this point, it is because proponents of Approach 2 are not always clear whether they are arguing against scientific theories or discourses of conflict protagonists. But the scientific debate is clearly elsewhere. It is about explaining why, sometimes, people come to experience their ethnic membership *as if* it was a natural fact, what Fearon and Laitin call "everyday primordialism" (p. 848) and which has been documented in various contexts (e.g., Gil-White, 1999; Weinreich et al., 2003). What tends to polarize the debate is the assumption that recognizing the existence of such everyday primordialism necessarily implies postulating a *fixed* psychological basis for it. Presented this way, the alternative seems mutually exclusive: either people find their ethnicity to be deeply meaningful and emotionally binding or this emotional tie is a mere illusion. Most contemporary students of ethnic conflict lean toward the second alternative, and thus depict individuals using their ethnic identity in a flexible, calculated and opportunistic fashion, or being manipulated or coerced into ethnic loyalty. But such an alternative is unnecessarily constraining. Theories of ethnic nepotism do indeed imply that everyday primordialism is spontaneous, natural and unchanging because rooted in natural selection, but authors like Geertz do not. By contextualizing his account in changing post-colonial societies, Geertz (1963/1973) on the contrary argued that certain social conditions favored a re-assessment of traditional ties turning ethnicity into a compelling center of political loyalty. This part of Geertz's argument invites a question which will be explored in the remaining of

this chapter: *are there social conditions under which individuals come to perceive ethnic identities as hard facts, the political significance of which can't be denied?*

1.1.5   Instead of a conclusion: playing the primordialist's advocate

We have seen that Herder – or at least his ideas – has bad press, to the point of being a sort of bogeyman for constructivist theorists of ethnicity and nationalism. And indeed, from the vantage point of our own concerns, it is rather easy to regard his ideas as a naïve and dangerous romanticism. We know history only too well, and especially its too many passages where the idea of a primordial and organic ethnic community has served to parade the stigmatization, exclusion and even murder of 'aliens' as something virtuous (Reicher et al., 2008). It seems therefore only fair in this light that Herder should be seen as a reactionary figure (see Zammito et al., 2010) and his legacy as the worst kind of ethnic nationalism (Hermet, 1996, Chapter 5). But the hindsight of history would be a very poor tool if our present concerns were to obscure those which formed the context of an idea's birth.

In the 1770s Europe, as Enlightenment ideas were about to climax in the French revolution, a group of German-speaking artists and intellectuals started to rebel against the spirit of the age (Hermet, 1996). This movement, *Sturm und Drang* (*i.e.* Storm and Desire), contested some hegemonic pretensions of Enlightenment philosophy. To the universal reason championed by Kant, they opposed the exaltation of passions and national idiosyncrasies. Seeing this romantic upsurge as the irrational nostalgia of reactionary men, although tempting because in line with our own political categories, would be completely missing the underlying political stake. Contrary to the neighboring France which was a unified, powerful state and the center of high culture in Europe, German-speaking populations were scattered across a myriad of polities in central Europe, deemed culturally backward and governed by an aristocratic elite that felt alien to them, both politically and culturally: its despise for popular will was matched by a cosmopolitanism which, in practice, meant being imbued with the dominant French culture. Exalting the passions, culture and folk traditions of German peoples was arguably not a reaction against Enlightenment's most progressive ideals but, as we will see, a way to make them practicable in this particular context. In other words, the ideology of the *Sturm und Drang* was a challenge to the existing social order in at least two senses. First, because it was meant to affirm the dignity of the common people against the despise of alien

elites. But most importantly, because it aimed at transforming weak and divided populations into a people united with a sense of common fate and culture, which could claim its political right to determine its own fate against illegitimate rulers.

It is in this political context that the ideas of Herder (1744–1803) – himself a central figure in the *Sturm and Drang* movement – should be assessed. It then becomes more palatable that Herder was no reactionary in any simple sense, for he shared with the most radical Enlightenment philosophers and Jacobins their democratic ideals (Muthu, 2009); and indeed he publicly supported the French revolution at some personal risk (Forster, 2019). But contextualizing Herder's ideas also help us to grasp why he differed in some crucial respects with his contemporary liberal thinkers. The crux of the matter is that his ideas rebelled as much against cultural forms of alienation as they did against political ones. He was born in a poor household in East Prussia (Forster, 2019) and, perhaps because of this humble origin, developed a deep hatred for the airs of superiority of cosmopolitan aristocratic elites, especially the court of Frederic II (Hermet, 1996). The other side of the same coin is that he was anxious since his early writings to challenge the alleged inferiority and backwardness of German peoples.[3] We start to see how Herder came to regard political and cultural alienation as one and the same thing. And from there flows his most subversive and original view: *the right to self-determination goes hand in hand with a community united by shared culture*. The point is important enough to be emphasized. Contrary to the Jacobins – and later Renan (Renan, 1882/2011) – who considered political legitimacy to lie in an abstract community of citizens united by a common state, Herder saw the cultural (and especially linguistic) community to be the paramount basis of political legitimacy. In a world where empires ruled on vast territories irrespective of people's culture, Herder's *ethno-nationalism* was both new and radically subversive: it effectively "declare[d] war to empires of Central and Eastern Europe" (Hermet, 1996, p. 120, my translation). And his theory of 'peoples' (see section 1.1.3),

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[3] "Prejudice is *good* in its time, for it renders *happy*. It forces peoples together into their *center*, makes them firmer on their tribal *stem*, more blooming *in their kind*, more passionate and hence also happier in their *inclinations* and *purposes*. The most ignorant, most prejudiced nation is in such a regard often the first; the age of wishful foreign migrations and journeys abroad in hope is already *sickness, bloating, unhealthy fullness, intimation of death*!" (Herder, 1774/2002, p. 297). This reversal of the value of prejudice, then typically associated with German peoples as compared to the 'great' European peoples (French, English, Italian) constitutes a remarkable example of Tajfel and Turner's (1979/2001) strategy of social creativity, whereby members of a low-status group transform the negative value of a stereotype associated with their group into a positive one.

considered in this light, appears as a description of the world meant to give credence to this political claim.

But it is through the opportunism of Napoleon that history would seal the success of Herder's ethnic nationalism (Mann, 1993; Nipperdey, 1983/2014; Schulze, 1991; Wimmer, 2002). Napoleon – in order to satisfy his imperialist ambitions – would pretend to embrace the democratic ideals of the French revolution: he embarked into a campaign to 'liberate' the peoples of Europe from the grip of the *Ancien Régime*. In the German states, Napoleon would have some success with his rhetorical trickery, with such distinguished figures as Hegel and Beethoven welcoming him as a savior (Hermet, 1996). But the masquerade would be short-lived. By 1806, South and West German states had signed the Rhine Confederation Charter, thus accepting France's tutelage and formally becoming its allies. But alliance had, in practice, the bitter taste of military occupation; an atmosphere eloquently depicted when, in August 1806, Johann Philipp Palm, a book-dealer in Nuremberg, was shot by a French soldier for having distributed a text titled *Germany in Her Deep Humiliation* (Schulze, 1991). Prussia, after suffering a series of diplomatic provocations, entered war with Napoleon only to meet disastrous defeat at the battles of Jena and Auerstedt in autumn 1806, that literally ruined the Prussian army and left Napoleon's further advance virtually unchallenged (C. Clark, 2007). The victor's dictated peace at Tilsit imposed enormous fiscal pressure on Prussia and effectively turned it, along with other German states, into a satellite of the French empire, meant to serve as a platform and pool of resources and soldiers for Napoleon's military operations. These developments were not only daunting for the leadership of the German states, but amounted to a painfully cold shower for the population at large. No liberators ever came, only ruthless occupiers and dire economic hardships.

Herder's ideas, which had *hitherto* remained marginal and grounded in a rather diffuse sense of combined political and cultural subjugation, would now start to echo a much more concrete and explicit experience of foreign oppression. If these ideas resonated indeed, this didn't just happen passively. For concrete experiences to inspire a political project, one needs a narrative that convincingly articulates the former with the latter, to point to a natural path to follow. This task would be accomplished first and foremost by the educated classes (Nipperdey, 1983/2014; Schulze, 1991). One can get a sense of the political mood that took shape among them through Fichte's famous *Adresses to the German Nation*, which he

delivered in the winter 1807-8 to an enthusiastic audience in Berlin under French occupation. Fichte not only equated the ethno-cultural nation with a right to independence, but further erected the German nation's struggle against the occupier into a properly messianic mission that would lead the way for other nations to follow. A key feature of his rhetoric was to strip the struggle of its modernity, projecting the German nation into a distant past, and constructing its yearning for self-determination as both a defining feature and a moral legacy to be protected (Fichte, 1807–1808/2009, pp. 108–109).

In the following years, secret societies and associations started to flourish, especially in Prussia's cities, which cultivated loyalty to the German *Volk* and conspired to a future insurrection against the French (Schulze, 1991). The 'Gymnastics Society' (*Turngesellschaft*), for instance, was founded in 1811 in order to physically prepare the youth to a future insurrection against Napoleon, while German student fraternities (*Deutsche Burschenschaft*) organized to actively promote national unity and spread patriotic fervor. In a few years, Napoleonic oppression created a climate conducive to opposition to French policies and German Nationalism in general that would persist after the disintegration of the French empire. For instance, Napoleon's policy of granting full civic status to the Jews would later backfire by being construed as a foreign attempt to diminish German culture and hence paradoxically contribute to German antisemitism (Fredrickson, 2002; Nipperdey, 1983/2014; Poliakov, 1971). One member of the student fraternities (*Burschenschaft*) could write that the "Jewish emancipation [of 1812] was the destruction not only of Prussia but of the whole German nation, the totality of the *Volk*" (Quoted in Rose, 2014, p. 126).

Going in some details into the trajectory of Herder and his ideas is, I believe, a useful exercise in perspective-taking. If a bit of historical context manages to make us regard with sympathy a Herder – a figure *a priori* so unlikely to be seen with much admiration – surely there is no point being too pedantic or morally entitled in challenging primordialist theories (or ethno-nationalist rhetoric). Of course, our moral and political sympathies should in principle not weigh in when we assess or formulate theories: describing the world is one endeavor, and prescribing how it ought to be is another. In practice, however, it is always tempting to apply this principle more rigorously to world-views that go against our sympathies. In that sense, we might be very keen to see that Herder's theory of 'peoples' is problematic in that it was designed to fit and back up his political aspirations. But perhaps are

we more reluctant to apply the same scrutiny symmetrically to our own views. For the sake of illustration, I'll momentarily take "we" to mean Western-educated social psychologists, in which I can include myself. If we were to engage in self-scrutiny of this sort, we would probably do well to ask ourselves to what extent the appeal of constructivist critiques isn't rooted in a cosmopolitan ideal of harmonious coexistence. Recent debates in the social psychological literature on intergroup relations have indeed shown us that we are not immune to the tendency of describing reality in a light that favor such an ideal. A good deal of the research and key concepts in the field are premised on the unwarranted assumption that fostering harmonious relations between groups is the same as challenging inequalities (Dixon et al., 2012, 2013; Durrheim & Dixon, 2018; S. C. Wright & Baray, 2012; S. C. Wright & Lubensky, 2009). And it took quite a long time before we could recognize that the social harmony we so enthusiastically promoted turns out, in certain contexts, to further entrench social injustice and inequalities by fostering acceptance of the *status quo* among disadvantaged groups (e.g. Cakal et al., 2011; Dixon et al., 2010). Importantly, just like Herder had understandable motivations to describe reality as he did, there are meaningful historical reasons – some of which will be discussed in chapter 2 – why social psychologists, notably in the West, have so unquestionably assumed social harmony to be a desirable end. Thus, the point here is certainly not to simply move the charge of political bias from one side of the debate to the other. Neither is it to suggest that theories and research on ethnicity are mere rationalizations of political stances. It is rather to suggest that historical contextualization, not only of our object of the study, but also of the theories that explain it, helps us to ensure that it is not the case, by working as a method of perspective-taking. Since our sympathies incline us to see the merits of a position and the flaws of the other, such a perspective-taking is a useful tool to take distance from moral and political stakes and thus to achieve a more nuanced and balanced view.

Thus primordialism *à la* Herder might be mistaken as a universal statement but it can, in certain contexts and for perfectly understandable reasons, provide people with a better account of their own concrete experiences than any discourse about the arbitrary, fluid and socially constructed nature of their identities. If we more specifically consider the trajectory of Herder's ideas (rather than just the man's), we also clearly see how the power of collective experiences should be considered not only in a synchronous manner, but also as *legacies*. Just

as Napoleon's imperialism created a political climate conducive to ethnic nationalism in conquered territories, centuries of colonial rule have shaped the political climate of societies about which we now wonder why ethnic and national identities matter so much. In colonial Sri Lanka (then Ceylon), for instance, British colonials typically treated with great despise the so-called 'backward' Sinhala-Buddhist tradition and often actively supported the aggressive proselytism of Christian missionaries which was, to say the least, equally dismissive (Jayawardena, 2000, Chapter 14; Little, 1994, Chapter 2). Until the 1830s, the colonial state strictly regulated the island's economy and made any hope of social mobility for the locals depend on them not challenging their own culture's alleged inferiority (leading many to acculturate to Western cultural practices and beliefs). It is only when liberal economic policies were enforced in the island (1830s), that Ceylonese could start to accumulate capital in relative independence from colonial patrons (Jayawardena, 2000). It is not difficult to see why, from that moment on, an ideology that emphasizes how an ancient and worthy tradition is under threat of annihilation would emerge and prosper among those who had once to bow in the face of arrogant alien occupiers (see DeVotta, 2016). Nor is it difficult to understand that suspicions of alien forces trying to destroy Sinhala-Buddhism continue to nourish political discourse well after independence had been achieved (Bretfeld, 2018).

When properly contextualized, the examples of German and Sinhalese nationalism somewhat demystify the mystery posed by lay primordialism. In both cases, the essentialized and politicized understanding of ethno-national identities can be meaningfully connected to objective collective experiences of political subjugation. This connection might stretch in time and thus become somewhat anachronistic, but it nonetheless strips ethno-nationalism from some of the irrationality that seems to underlie it at first sight. In the next sections, I will show that the connection of German and Sinhalese nationalism with collective experiences of victimization is in fact illustrative of a systematic historical phenomenon, which is central to explain the high prevalence of ethnic conflict in the modern world.

1.2 Making groups real: ethnicity, institutions and collective shocks

My purpose in this section is threefold. First, it is to provide a historical and sociological perspective on the phenomenon we are trying to explain. Current ethnic conflicts occur in a historical context dominated by relatively recent and very specific political institutions: the

nation-states. Modern ethnic conflicts, I will argue, cannot be understood without taking these institutions into account. Second, examining the rise of nationalism and nation-states will serve to illustrate a more general sociological insight: (economic and political) institutions, by shaping mass behavior and experiences, give more or less plausibility to specific narratives about groups and identities. Finally, I will argue that looking at institutions this way leads us to rethink the logic of group behavior in times of collective upheavals, especially violent ones.

1.2.1   *When ethnic cleavages fit social stratification: learning from the nation-state*

If a social scientist had the chance to travel back in time, say some 250 years ago, and ask around people which collectivities define who they are and concretely matter in their existence, she is likely to find that answers differ in many ways from those of her contemporaries. Depending on where the question is asked, she might hear about regional identities that hardly have any significance in modern times, a widespread acknowledgement of the importance of small rural communities, or testimonies on the extreme hardships of living in serfdom and slavery. But the most systematic difference, I should like to speculate, would be the complete absence of *nationalities*, at least in the sense we typically give to that word today. And the reason is quite simple: the nation-state didn't exist yet.

A time-travel thought experiment is in order here because the nation-state is both narrowly situated in time (i.e. very recent) and virtually hegemonic in space, *i.e.* it is extremely difficult to find a territory on earth which is not claimed by a nation-state or another (or several; on the recent spread of the nation-state across the world, see Wimmer & Min, 2006). Taken together, these two features create a rather odd situation for the social scientist. On the one hand, they suggest that the organization of modern societies and corresponding social processes are highly contingent historically; for surely this novel institution changed something about how individuals situate themselves within society. At the same time, assessing its exact impact on social processes is extremely difficult because we lack a synchronous point of comparison. This state of affairs appears even more insidious when we consider how easy it is to forget about something that is a constant in our lives (and in our data). As Michael Billig (1995) pointed out, the ideological implications of living in a world of nations are typically noticed in 'exotic' others, and remembered in established nations only when violent crises threaten to shake their national *status quo*. Where order is safe, and

business goes as usual, daily 'flagging' of the nation largely goes unnoticed, and with it, the myriads of ways in which common sense thinking rehearse the nation as a natural given of social life. Thus, as we are studying ethnic conflict, there is a double pitfall threatening our conclusions. On the one hand, by forgetting that nation-states are a constant in the modern world, we are at risk of wrongly conclude that outbursts of ethno-national violence implies that there is something inherently exceptional and 'flawed' about a given society. On the other hand, forgetting that the nation-state is highly contingent in history, we are at risk of generalizing to human nature what could be the product of modern institutional arrangements.

The most viable solution to avoid this double pitfall is to turn to historical analysis and try to identify plausible ways in which the emergence of modern institutions shaped the phenomenon at hand, *i.e.* the social and political significance of ethnic identities. Based on the historical literature, we can identify two ways in which the emergence of the nation-state profoundly transformed how individuals position themselves within society. The first has to do with people's engagement with state politics and institutions and is the most well-understood aspect of the specificity of modern states. Until the eighteenth century, the state was a distant entity that interfered relatively little with the majority of people's lives (Hobsbawn, 1992; Mann, 1986, 1993). For most people living within a state's territory, concrete experiences of its institutions – if any – were most likely limited to encountering soldiers and tax collectors every once in a while. But this relative innocuousness of the state first began to change in seventeenth-century Europe, one of the major reasons being the cost of warfare (Giddens, 1985; Mann, 1986, 1993; Tilly, 1975). Conflict between European states – heightened by competition over colonial expansion – was raging while the practice of war was becoming more modern and, hence, costly (i.e. development of professional armies and navies). The states which survived this period into the eighteenth-century were those who dramatically extended their bureaucratic structures in order to conscript soldiers, collect taxes and force loans on propertied classes. The result was a state that 'penetrated' much deeper within society and controlled its subjects more closely than it ever did (but see Centeno, 1997).

Such a change would necessarily have social consequences and, while these were obviously complex and depended on the specific historical contingencies of each society, one can nonetheless identify a general trend. Although the extended reach of the state affected society as whole, the most important actors to consider here are the *petits bourgeois* and

literary professionals (Hroch, 2000; Kroneberg & Wimmer, 2012; Wimmer, 2002), for two main reasons. First, members of this class being relatively wealthy, they were particularly affected and concerned by the state's demands for taxes and loans without any substantial compensation[4]. They therefore started to develop a more acute preoccupation with the public sphere as well as a sense of common fate and interests. They thus organized into a network of clubs and associations, which would serve as a space for the elaboration and diffusion of a democratic and liberal ideology (the paradigmatic example being the Jacobin clubs). Second, as it developed its bureaucratic apparatus the state would increasingly have to rely on this literary and educated class for its smooth functioning. In other words, modernizing states created a gradual shift in the balance of power, giving more and more organization, bargaining power and influence to a liberal class aspiring to democratic reforms. This class eventually captured state power, as it had both the incentives and the ability to channel and mobilize mass discontent and its ideology promised a much better compromise for the masses than the *Ancien Régime* in the context of the modern state: increased state control would be compensated by an extended franchise, the abolition of privileges and equality before the law (For a detailed historical account see Mann, 1993, Chapters 4–7; for systematic theorizing, see Kroneberg & Wimmer, 2012; Wimmer, 2002).

The account I described so far explains the emergence of two interrelated features of the modern state, *i.e.* increased state interference in peoples' lives and the abolition of privileges. It is incomplete, however, because it doesn't leave (ethno-)national identities any part in the process. Thus, if we were to be satisfied with this account, we wouldn't have any good reason to refer to modern states as 'nation-states'. It is indeed problematic to just assume as natural that modern state institutions should necessarily be tied to the idea of nationhood. From a historical standpoint, this amounts to be puzzled by the fact that – since their very emergence in nineteenth century Europe – nationalist movements have systematically (and quite successfully) associated the democratic ideal of popular sovereignty to the one of 'national self-determination' (Hermet, 1996). As Michael Mann (Mann, 1993) shows for the specific case of European nationalism, the nationalist tint of democratic movements was partly the result of the Napoleonic wars and imperial project: the abrupt

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[4] As Mann (1993, Chapter 7) points out, European nobility frequently came to accept intermarriage with the richest members of the bourgeoisie, thus opening to the latter opportunities for accessing the aristocracy's privileges. Such opportunities were closed to the *petite bourgeoisie*, however.

intensification of warfare triggered by Napoleon's campaign occurred in a Europe dominated by large empires, even more so as Napoleon's army conquered half of the continent. Hence, Europeans' struggle for democratic and civil rights in practice meant a struggle against oppressors who happened to be 'cultural others' (*e.g.* speaking a different language). Importantly, the historically contingent case of European nationalism fits in a broader historical pattern of shifting principles of political legitimacy, *i.e.* the emergence of nation-states amidst collapsing empires (Wimmer & Feinstein, 2010; Wimmer & Min, 2006). Indeed, data from Wimmer and Min (2006) clearly show that successive waves of nation-states creations systematically corresponded to the disintegration of empires (see Figure 1).

In order to grasp the implications of this, we have to consider a key aspect of imperial regimes' political structure (Eisenstadt, 2017; Howe, 2002; Mann, 1986). In these constellations where an elite from the imperial center rules through conquest over more or less distant populations at the periphery, the institutionalized hierarchy tends to match what we would today call 'ethnic' distinctions. A particularly salient example is, of course, colonial empires: The Portuguese, Dutch and British occupying Sri Lanka, Belgium in today's Congo, Rwanda and Burundi or Spain in Latin America, to name just a few. But the colonial situation is in a key respect structurally similar to, say, Napoleon's France occupying German states, the Austro-Hungarian empire's rule on Slavic peoples, the English in Scotland and Ireland, or the Ottomans occupying Eastern Europe and the Middle East. All these examples points to a situation where a more or less 'culturally alien' occupier exerts domination over locals. And this configuration was the rule rather than the exemption as modern states emerged.

Now if we include this structural parameter in our account of the emergence of the modern state, it becomes much more intelligible that the vanguard of democratic movements would frame their ideology in nationalist terms. We already saw with the case of Herder and the emergence of German ethno-nationalism (section 1.1.5) an example of foreign rule leading local populations to interpret domination as both political and cultural. In more general terms, this explains why the *petit bourgeois* and literary professionals (Hroch, 2000) – as they got increasingly politicized, organized and influential thanks to state and economic modernization – typically mobilized masses *toward 'self-determination' and against foreign rule* (Mann, 1993; Wimmer, 2002) as well as toward popular sovereignty and the abolition of privilege. Their ideology was *nationalist*, that is, it completely shifted the principles of political

legitimacy by imposing a 'like should rule over like' principle and politicizing ethnicity as a criterion for state ownership.

Based on this model (Kroneberg & Wimmer, 2012; Mann, 1993; Wimmer & Min, 2006), two elements are especially important for students of modern ethnic conflicts to consider. The first is that the creation of individual nation-states not only transformed their society locally, but participated in shaping an *inter-national* context: the more states – especially powerful ones – became national, the more their institutional template was available to be imitated (especially for countries formerly included in the same imperial domain; see Wimmer & Feinstein, 2010) and the more it became recognized as *the* legitimate form of political rule (Anderson, 1983/2006; Mayall, 1990; Meyer et al., 1997). This process was dramatically enacted with the US president Woordow Wilson's famous endorsement of the right to self-determination at the end of WWI, in which he took for granted the existence of natural 'nations' endowed with a right to govern themselves. This declaration most likely reinforced the spread of the nationalist ideology around the globe and gave anti-colonial movements an even stronger incentive to frame their liberation struggle as a nationalist one (Manela, 2001). The increased ethno-nationalist violence in the 1990s can similarly be interpreted in terms increased incentives to mobilize this ideological template: with the fall of the Soviet empire cutting material support to communist rebellions across the world, rebel movements had an excellent reason to switch from a Cold War rhetoric to claims of national independence to attract international support (Brubaker & Laitin, 1998)[5]. A general consequence is that the politicization of ethnicity – *i.e.* the 'like should rule over like' principle – increasingly became the norm at the international level.

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[5] Interesting in this regard is Roberts's (2014) observation that Prabhakaran, the leader of the Liberation Tigers of Tami *Ealam*, used Marxist rhetoric and symbols to describe his movement's struggles in its early days.
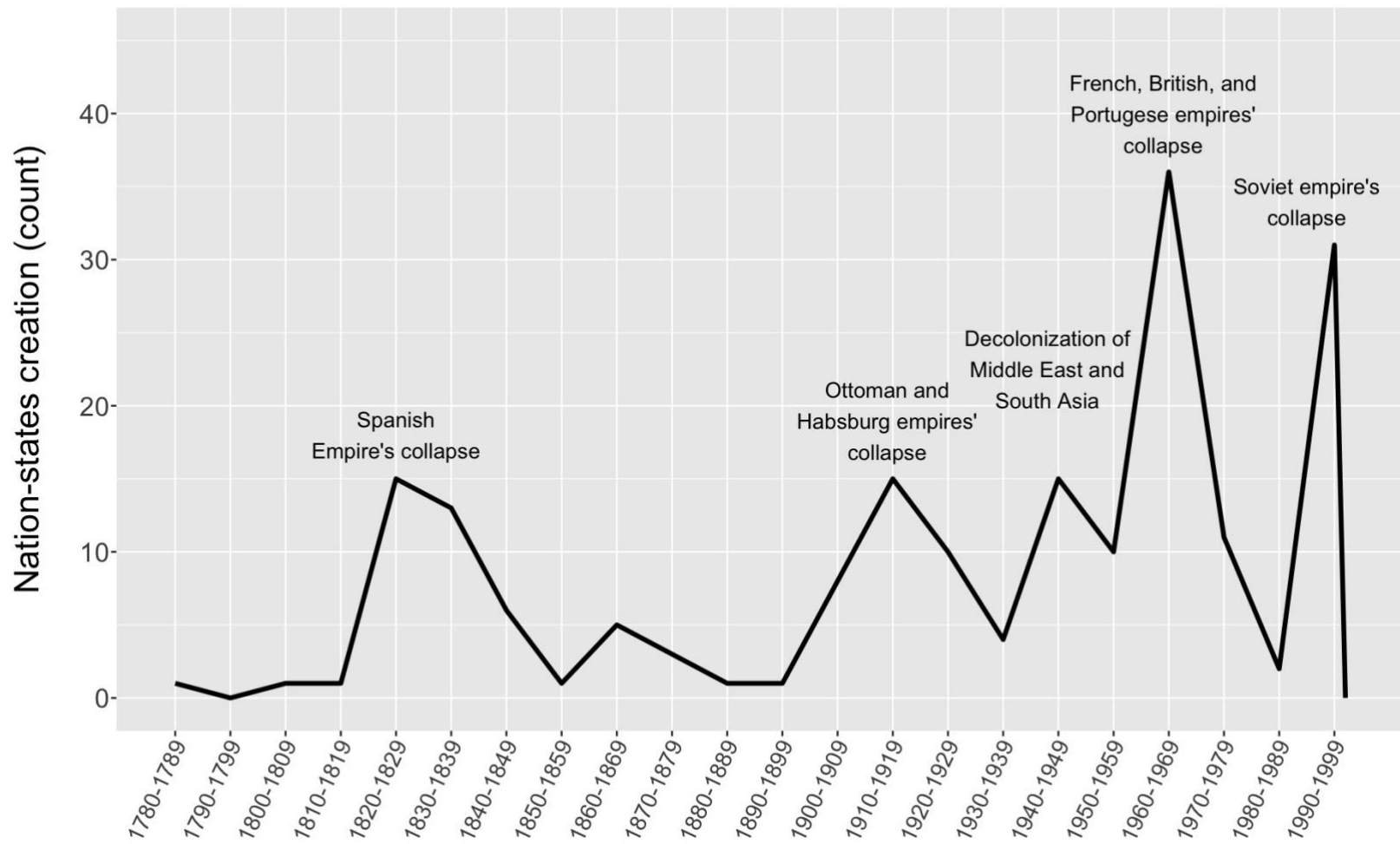
Figure 1. Successive waves of nation-state creation between 1789 and 2001 (data from Wimmer & Min, 2006).

The second crucial thing to consider is why certain ethnic cleavages rather than others end up being regarded with special political significance. As we saw when discussing anthropological theories (section 1.1.3), ethnicity is typically hierarchically nested, that is, the same individual can generally be classified into several ethnic groups depending on the level of inclusion that we pick (Moerman, 1965). One could argue, based on the previous discussion, that this problem is easily solved by identifying the political boundary created by relations of imperial domination: the ethnicity that is politically relevant is the one separating 'us' from the imperialist 'other'. This, after all, has been the crux of the argument so far. In practice, however, things are not that simple. In order to clarify how this politicization of ethnicity plays out in practice, it is necessary to put aside general theoretical statements for a moment and examine how the contingencies of a concrete and situated case produce particular consequences. And since Sri Lanka will be the context of the studies in two empirical chapters (chapters 4 and 5), examining the historical sequence that led to the politicization of ethnic identities in this particular context presents the advantage of providing the reader with the necessary contextual knowledge to appreciate these studies' findings. The next section thus examines how ethnic identities became politicized in Sri Lanka, with a special emphasis on the rise of Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism.

1.2.2   Picking a boundary: The rise of Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism in Sri Lanka

As the discussion so far suggests, contemporary forms of ethnic consciousness in Sri Lanka cannot be understood without considering the impact of colonialism and, more specifically, the social transformations that occurred under British rule during the 19th century. Sri Lanka (formerly Ceylon) was successively colonized by the Portuguese (1505-1656), the Dutch (1656-1796), and the British (1796-1948). Until the early 1830s, these successive colonial administrations imposed strict mercantilist policies in the areas they controlled, thus limiting opportunities of trade and capital accumulation for the locals. In such a state-controlled economy, the few opportunities for acquiring modest wealth and status implied a close collaboration with colonial officials, such as in the retail of arrack liquor which required a license and a protection of the retailer's monopoly by the state (Jayawardena, 2000). This kind of social mobility is best exemplified by the *Mudaliyars*, a class of Ceylonese

who were granted land and feudal-like privileges for good service and loyalty to the colonial administration.

The economic structure therefore generated a promiscuity and interdependence between (aspiring) members of the Sri Lankan proto-bourgeoisie and European rulers which incentivized the former to culturally assimilate and convert to Christianity. Colonizers saw natives' assimilation as a display of loyalty and trustworthiness, while Ceylonese associated it with economic and social progress. Christian missionaries further reinforced this trend through an aggressive proselytism that often depicted colonial imperialism as a God-given mission to save 'heathens' from their false religious beliefs and backward cultural practices (Jayawardena, 2000, chap. 14; Little, 1994, chap. 2). In such a context, local elites' social distinction from the rest of the population most often coincided with a close proximity to the religious and cultural practices of the European rulers.

Events in the early 1830s would set the stage for important disturbances in this state of affairs. The recommendations of the Colebrook-Cameron Commission (1829 - 1833) – which was appointed by the British imperial center to assess the colony's governance – led the colonial administration to liberalize the political and economic system of the island in order to notably promote capitalist investment. Within this new opportunity structure and with the development of plantation capitalism, a new wave of Sinhalese-Buddhist merchants, artisans, professionals and planters were able to accumulate capital in relative independence from the established European and Westernized Elite, and hence without much pressure to assimilate to the values and cultural practices of the British rulers. This newly emerging Sinhalese-Buddhist middle-class and bourgeoisie would become the financial and ideological backbone of the Buddhist revivalist movement and Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism (Jayawardena, 2000, chap. 15; Tambiah, 1996, chap. 3). Two amongst the most important early contributors to the Buddhist cause were Thomas da Silva Amarasuriya – whose wife's relative was the famous *bikkhu* (Buddhist monk) Veligama Sri Sumangala – and Ponnehennige Jeremias Dias, two successful capitalists who built their wealth in the arrack business and generously donated to Buddhist schools, temples and Sinhala newspapers. These financial

pushes were the key triggers that initiated the development of a Sinhalese nationalism centered around the Buddhist faith.[6]

It is important to note that, since its inception, Buddhist revivalism was an ostensibly religious affirmation movement rather than a frontal nationalist challenge to British rule. It first mainly took the form of a challenge to missionaries' propaganda by affirming the superiority of Buddhism as opposed to Christianity through education, public debates and the printed press; the latter also propagating harsh criticisms of the Westernized and Christianized Sri Lankan elite. As Jayawardena (1986) notes, although the religious emphasis may partly have been a strategy to create agitation while avoiding charges of sedition from the British, it is doubtless that many among the emerging Buddhist middle-class and bourgeoisie especially resented the political and economic dominance of the Christian established elites. In any case, especially noteworthy is the fact that the first significant communal violence of the period – the Kotahena riot of 1883 – involved clashes between a Buddhist and a Christian community, both of which were Sinhalese (Tambiah, 1996, chap. 3).

If the early movement mostly challenged Christianity, its consequent affirmation of Buddhism's superiority nevertheless carried the potential of intolerance toward religious minorities; and several factors coalesced to make this chauvinistic potential a reality. First, because capital accumulation through trade was only recently possible in the island, most moneylenders and retail merchants were 'alien' – especially Muslims coming from South India – and represented direct economic competitors for the growing class of Sinhalese merchant capitalists. It was therefore expedient for the latter to spread chauvinistic rhetoric targeting such minorities, which would serve as ideal scapegoats when price rise in times of economic recession (as in the 1915 anti-Muslim riots, see below). Second, racial theories were gaining momentum in Europe which, based on philological research, claimed the biological superiority of the Aryan race from which Europeans allegedly descended (Fredrickson, 2002; Poliakov, 1971). These theories started to spread in Sri Lanka around 1870 through

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[6] A further key development came in 1880, when Colonel Olcott and Mme Blavatsky – both members of the Theosophical Society founded in New York in 1875 – visited Sri Lanka to support the revivalist movement and founded the Buddhist Theosophical Society with local Buddhists. It is through Olcott's and Blavatsky's patronage that Anagarika Dharmapala – the son of a leading Sinhalese capitalist of the period – became the most influential ideologue of Buddhist revivalism at the end of the 19th century (Amunugama, 1985), which he colored with a distinctly politicized and chauvinistic tone.

philological works classifying Sinhala as an Aryan language[7] and were taken over by ideologues such as Anagarika Dharmapala to claim the superiority of the Sinhala race over 'Dravidian' Tamils and 'Semitic' Moors (Gunawardena, 1985).

In 1915, the anti-Muslim propaganda turned into actual violence; in the form of riots targeting Muslims in several areas of the island and which resulted in massive destruction of property and cost the lives of at least thirty-nine people (for a detailed description of the riots, see Tambiah, 1996, Chapter 3). The proximal cause of the riots is generally identified in a ruling of the colonial administration (*i.e.* the supreme court of Ceylon) in favor of a Muslim complaint against loud Buddhist processions passing in front of a mosque in Gampola. Over the following month, tensions built up around similar disputes in Kandy as the *Wesak* – the birth anniversary of the Buddha and also the date he achieved Enlightenment, during which numerous Buddhist pilgrims come to Kandy to visit the temple – was approaching. Clashes broke out between Muslims and Buddhists during the night of the *Wesak* in Kandy. A few hours after these spontaneous clashes, large crowds of Sinhalese formed and systematically attacked Muslims, looted and destroyed their shops and homes. Anti-Muslims attacks of this sort spread in several other areas during the following days, and turned particularly violent in Colombo. In the latter case, there is good evidence that violence wasn't motivated by religious grievances and rather had primarily economic causes (Jayawardena, 1970; Tambiah, 1996): with First World War ongoing, the price of basic commodities were strongly rising, raising suspicions among the urban proletariat that retail merchants and moneylenders – which happened to often be Muslim – were taking advantage of the crisis.

While such violent outbreak didn't occur again during the last years of colonial rule[8], it nevertheless set a precedent that would become all too familiar in post-independence Sri Lankan politics. With the hindsight of history, it seems remarkable that British reformers during the immediate pre-independence period failed to anticipate the potential for ethnic chauvinism to take over the Sri Lankan political arena. Since 1833, only a small minority of Sri

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[7] It is interesting to note that the British government ordered the printing of an English translation of the *Mahavamsa* chronicle from Pali precisely for the interest of western philologists and Historians (Bretfeld-Wolf, 2018).

[8] Witness accounts suggest that the police was generally completely overwhelmed during the riots, and hence unable to contain the violence or arrest the rioters. In the aftermath of the riots, however, colonial administrators heavily repressed suspected political agitators, condemning several Sinhalese nationalist ideologues to jail (Tambiah, 1996).

Lankans had been enfranchised, and the native population was heavily underrepresented with one members of different ethnic groups (Tamil, Sinhalese and Burgher) for three Europeans sitting in the legislative council. Demands for reform among the Sri Lankan elites led the British government to gradually enlarge the representation and franchise in the early twentieth century, which created concerns especially among Tamils that the balance of ethnic representation might tilt in favor of the Sinhalese majority. Despite being a numerical minority, the communal logic of political representation had until now ensured Tamils a status equal to the Sinhalese majority. Ironically, the Donoughmore commission which introduced universal franchise in 1931 argued that it was only by abolishing communal representation that the different communities could develop "a true national unity" (quoted in DeVotta, 2004, p. 36). The subsequent elections, however, turned to the numerical advantage of the Sinhalese; and several Tamils, led by G. G. Ponnambalam, asked for constitutional reform that would ensure fifty percent of the elected seat for ethnic minorities. The Soulbury commission, sent in 1944 under the pressure for independence from the board of ministers headed by D. S. Senanayake, strongly rejected such arrangement and devised a constitution modelled on Westminster's for the transition to independence, with minority guarantees that would prove highly insufficient in the years to come (Kumarasingham, 2017).

Overall, the transition to independence was relatively smooth, which was meant to flatter British's self-conception as benevolent and paternalistic rulers helping a grateful people to achieve a 'civilized' form of self-government. This self-serving view of the independence process arguably prevented British officials to look beyond the superficial appearances of national unity amongst Sri Lankan elites. In fact, Sri Lankan political elites (especially Senanayake and members of the Ceylon National Congress) knew very well that ethnic tensions would delay independence and skillfully reassured the British by ostensibly rejecting any form of ethnic and religious chauvinism (DeVotta, 2004; Kumarasingham, 2017). However, this political class was mostly part of the Englicized elite, largely disconnected from the larger population, and never built a solid electoral base which could claim to represent the aspiration of a united nation.

During the decade following the country's independence from the British Empire in 1948, the issue of linguistic rights gradually crystalized potential Sinhalese-Tamil tensions (DeVotta, 2004, 2014; Stone, 2014). English was still the only official language, and Tamil elites

tended to be proficient in English and to be overrepresented in state administration jobs – which were very prized – and in higher education. While more and more Sri Lankan citizens were becoming literate in their vernacular language, Sinhala or Tamil, during the 1956 election members of the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP; notably S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike) strategically supported a Sinhala-only option to replace English as the national language, in order to mobilize support from Sinhalese nationalists and radical fringes of the Buddhist clergy. Their access to power resulted in the adoption of the Sinhala Only Act, which defined Sinhala as the sole national language. Tamils reacted to the adoption of the bill through non-violent protests organized by the Tamil Federal Party, which in turn were answered by several waves of ethnic riots in which Sinhalese mobs targeted Tamil people in several parts of the country (For a detailed and first-hand account of the 1956 riots, Tambiah, 1996, Chapter 4).

This episode had several immediate consequences on Sri Lanka's political climate. At the societal level, it emboldened Sinhalese nationalists and radical bhikkhus (*i.e.* Buddhist monks), boosting their confidence in their ability to weigh in the political arena, while it strongly undermined Tamils' trust in the willingness of a Sinhalese government to preserve their minority rights. Among Sinhalese political elites, it set a dynamic of competition in motion, by which the two major political parties (the SLFP and United National Party – UNP) outbid each other over who would best claim to serve the interests of the Sinhalese majority, often at the expense of Tamils' rights (DeVotta, 2004; Horowitz, 1989). This competition pushed successive governments to take an uncompromising stance and sabotaged successive attempts to minimally accommodate Tamils' linguistic rights in the years following the 1956 Act, which further undermined Tamils' trust in the Sri Lankan state.

Overall, the example of Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism illustrates how the particular group boundaries that become politicized through imperialist domination don't necessarily reflect a simple distinction between 'indigenous' and 'imperialist other'. Three factors are especially noteworthy. First, British administrators devised a social order that created *conditional* opportunities for social mobility, which produced objective inequalities among the colonized themselves. Second, the specific conditions allowing for social mobility either created new 'cultural' differences among the colonized (through assimilation) or used pre-existing ones as more or less systematic criteria defining opportunities. The *Mudaliyars* who assimilated to Western cultural practices represent the first case, while successful Muslim

traders, and later Tamils who were overrepresented in administrative jobs, represents the second. In both cases, such cultural differences became more or less systematic correlates of the social hierarchy within the colonized populations and associated *minorities* with a relatively 'privileged' status. Third, the *power asymmetry* was largely in favor of the British when structural conditions (*i.e.* liberal economy) allowed for the development of a nationalist ideology. As a result, Sinhalese nationalism developed as a challenge to the *cultural*, much more than the *political*, domination of the colonizers. To use Tajfel and Turner's (1979/2001) terminology, the colonial order was too *stable* to be realistically challenged. The ideology of Buddhist revivalism was thus a form of *social creativity* that left British political control untouched, but challenged the alleged cultural inferiority of Sinhala-Buddhist culture. Furthermore, if the privileged status of colonial rulers was stable and out of reach, minorities 'privilege' wasn't. Hence, Sinhalese nationalist ideologues, such as Anagarika Dharmapala, made minority privilege a topic of choice in their rhetorical repertoire and tirelessly depicted them as *alien* to Sinhala land and culture. A month after the 1915 riots, while he was in exile in Calcutta to avoid British repression, Dharmapala wrote a letter to the secretary of state for the colonies to demand an inquiry on the causes of the riots. The content of the letter vividly illustrates how perceived minority privilege underpins his xenophobic ideology:

> The Muhammedans, an alien people who in the early part of the 19th century were common traders, by Shylockian methods became prosperous like the Jews. The Sinhalese, sons of the soil, whose ancestors for 2358 years had shed rivers of blood to keep the country from alien invaders […] today they are in the eyes of the British only vagabonds […] The alien South Indian Muhammadan comes to Ceylon, sees the neglected, illiterate villagers, without any experience in trade, without any knowledge of any kind of technical industry, and isolated from the whole of Asia on account of his language, religion and race, and the result is that the Muhammadan thrives and the son of the soil goes to the wall (quoted in Tambiah, 1996, p. 70).

This kind of social order, which segments colonized populations, and re-direct grievances between them, can aptly be described as the outcome of a successful "divide-and-rule" tactic (Billig, 1976; Dixon et al., 2020). And Sri Lanka is certainly not the only context where ethnic antagonisms can be traced back to such a political device. Most notably,

Mamdani (2002) provided a detailed account of how Belgian colonial administrators in Rwanda, in collaboration with the catholic church, reshaped the meaning of the Hutu-Tutsi distinction to make it an intrinsic part of the system of colonial domination. The upshot was that the Hutus came to identify the Tutsi as alien and systematically perceive them as embodiments of colonial oppression.

In sum, the particular ethnic cleavages that become politicized through experiences of imperial occupation do not necessarily reflect straightforwardly the distinction between 'imperialist alien' and the colonized. Rather, the location of the politicized boundary will depend on which group comes to be perceived as embodying the injustice of the social structure. In some cases, as was arguably the case in Rwanda, colonial institutions might create such clear-cut inequalities between the colonized that future intergroup conflict appears to be almost 'written' in the social structure. But even in such clear-cut cases, the drawing of the political boundary always requires some interpretive work, that is produced by key influential actors – or entrepreneurs of identity (Reicher & Hopkins, 2001) – which are usually members of the educated classes. We already encountered some clues that the influence of entrepreneurs of identity becomes especially determinant during sudden social and political crises. The last theoretical discussion of this chapter tries to clarify what are the specificities of such turning points.

1.2.3   The two gears of history

Throughout this section, I have made the case that a quite long-term historical contextualization is required to develop a satisfactory account of modern ethnic conflicts. The legacies of imperial domination, the spread of nationalism and its materialization in state institutions are contextual elements we hardly can afford to ignore if we are to make sense of how humans experience their ethnic identities today. If we were to do so, we would be at risk of mistaking socio-historical contingencies for psychological nature. But while necessary, such a macro-historical perspective comes with its own pitfalls. When building a narrative that spans across centuries, it is hard not to brush the contingent details out of the picture which then displays only broad, neatly drawn, historical trends. The task thus easily slips into describing the gradual advance of irresistible historical forces, losing sight of the fundamental

uncertainty that surrounds historical events as they unfold. Barely grasping the contingency of our object within one hand, we would let it slip away from the other.

The final argument of this chapter starts from the acknowledgement that long-term historical accounts of ethnic conflict of the kind I've been arguing for necessarily overlook an essential part of the story. The reason is quite simple: history does not unfold in a gradual, linear, and predictable fashion. Or, more accurately, it only partly does. When describing the rise of ethnic antagonisms on a broad temporal scale, one will systematically encounter moments and events the unfolding of which refuses to comply with the explanatory logic of the broader narrative. What we retrospectively refer to as ethnic riots, nationalist uprisings and civil war outbreaks, for instance, are expressions of such critical times when the rules that governed collective behavior during periods of stability suddenly appear to collapse. And the fact that these examples all involve some kind of collective violence is no accident; for we shall see that violence – and indeed even the mere anticipation of it – is a key ingredient that produces such a qualitative shift in collective behavior (Elcheroth & Reicher, 2017). In sum, the present argument is that long historical sequences are scattered with moments when patterns of behavior within a social system suddenly shift, and collective violence is a cue to such times of crisis.

In order to clarify the implications of this argument, a good place to start is by contrasting it with theories of ethnic violence which fail to acknowledge the qualitative shift entailed by violent turning points. We have already seen (see section 1.1) that sudden changes in ethnic groups' relative status (Petersen, 2002), exclusion of ethnic groups from state power (Cederman et al., 2010; Wimmer et al., 2009) or even mere ethnic diversity (Lim et al., 2007) have all been put forward – based on more or less solid evidence – as structural drivers of ethnic violence. A common feature of the proposed explanations is to assume a triple continuity between the outbreak of violence and the period preceding it: the actors of violence, the motivation that underlies it and the root cause that triggers it, are already constituted before the outbreak. Thus, we have seen that Petersen (2002) explains the link between violence and changes in groups' status through arousal of particular emotions among the masses. What justifies talking about whole ethnic groups as unified and coherent protagonists, Petersen tells us, is that all individual members of the same group experience and are driven to violent action by the same emotion: fear, resentment, or hate. In order to

explain the relationship between armed rebellion and exclusion of ethnic groups from state power, Cederman and colleagues (Cederman et al., 2010) put forward a similar, though more nuanced, version of this emotions-based explanation. Just like Petersen – and actually quoting him –, they give a central explanatory role to individuals' resentment, but in terms of their readiness to grant to violent groups the support they try to mobilize: "The most excluded groups will thus be most likely to support armed organizations that challenge the government. Given nationalist principles of political legitimacy, feelings of resentment will be widespread and can be channeled into successful collective action" (p. 95).

The relative merits and shortcomings of such explanations are well illustrated by the sequence of events that led Sri Lanka to civil war. If we were to specifically ask what explains the formation of several armed separatist organizations among the Tamil youth in the 1970s, we wouldn't have much quarrel with the notion that resentment drives violence. Starting less than a decade after independence, successive Sri Lankan governments implemented, for 20 years, policies consistently discriminating, repressing and shattering the trust Tamil-speaking minorities could place in state's institutions. As we have seen, the first blow came with the passage, in 1956, of the Official Language Act (or "Sinhala-Only Act") which replaced English with Sinhala as the sole official language, thus depriving about one fourth of the population from using their mother tongue in their dealings with the state. This event inaugurated a long and systematic pattern; summarized in a daunting record by DeVotta (2004, p. 167):

> The Official Language Act and the anti-Tamil riots of 1956 and 1958; the language policy's influence on state employment; the military's ham-handed occupation of the Northern Province and the soldiers' humiliating treatment of Tamils; the racist anti-Tamil rhetoric emanating especially from SLFP members and Sinhalese extremists; continued colonization of Tamil lands, coupled with a calibrated policy that prevented resources being allocated to Tamil areas; the attack by government forces during the International Tamil Conference in January 1974, which killed nine Tamils; discriminatory university policies; and an ethnocentric constitution had all coalesced to encourage Tamil militarism.

The 1972 constitution was perhaps the most decisive blow in this regard, since it was now the constitution, rather than bills revocable by parliamentary votes, which "explicitly relegated the island's minorities to second-class status" (p. 167). It is in this context that – among a generation of Tamils who had experienced nothing but systematic discrimination and repression by the Sri Lankan state – formed organizations explicitly dedicated to the achievement of Tamil independence through armed struggle, among which were the Liberation Tigers of Tamil *Ealam* (LTTE).

But at this point, it becomes necessary to move the spotlight away from resentment. To understand why, we first need to consider that Tamil rebel movements remained relatively marginal until 1983, counting less than fifty cadres and being nowhere close to secure enough support and resources for a frontal clash with the Sri Lankan state (DeVotta, 2009). Depending on whether we follow Petersen or Cederman *et al*, we might expect resentment to push Tamil masses either to take arms or to massively support the rebels. But what actually tipped the country into full-fledged civil war doesn't fit in this explanatory logic. For what it took to turn the LTTE into a significant rebel force was a brutal shock that abruptly reconfigured the demographic and political landscape of island; namely, the 1983 ethnic riots (for detailed accounts, see Tambiah, 1986, 1996).

The events of 1983, often referred to as "Black July", marked a decisive step toward a full-fledged civil-war (for a detailed account, see Tambiah, 1986). On July 23, LTTE fighters ambushed a military patrol in the Jaffna District and killed 13 soldiers. The soldiers' bodies were brought to Colombo on the next day for official funerals, where thousands gathered to attend the event. On the evening, parts of the crowd started to indiscriminately attack Tamils, looting and burning their property and sometimes killing them. These anti-Tamil pogroms continued during several days, spreading to Gampaha, Kalutara, Kandy, Matale, Nuwara Eliya and Trincomalee. During the riots, false rumors circulated about various LTTE actions and direct testimonies clearly show how such narrative participated in a widespread conflation of Tamils with LTTE members among Sinhalese perpetrators (J. Spencer, 1990). Furthermore, there is evidence indicating that, from the second day on, these pogroms where planned, organized and perpetrated with the (sometimes active) complicity of the police and military (DeVotta, 2004; Tambiah, 1986). In addition to security forces ostensibly condoning the violence, the president failed to straightforwardly condemn it, an ambiguity that couldn't fail

to further reinforce a profound sense of insecurity among Tamils. This widespread sense of insecurity would have dramatic consequences for future development. Besides the obvious and durable deterioration of Sinhalese-Tamil relations entailed by such violence, the events critically strengthened the rebel forces (DeVotta, 2004): while thousands of young Tamils fled to the North and provided ideal recruits to swell the ranks of a hitherto relatively marginal rebel movement, the riots also triggered the first international Tamil refugees wave, which would result in the main source of financial support for the LTTE. The transformation of the LTTE into a plausible challenger of the state was not driven by resentment about inequalities, it was the result of a massive wave of ethnic violence that forced thousands of Tamils to flee in fear of being killed or wounded because of one particular group membership.

Several important lessons can be taken from the example of the 1983 riots. Most basically, it is clear that the logic underlying collective behavior qualitatively shifted as violence spread. This is most obviously true for Tamils who suddenly had to consider their ethnic identity as putting their lives in danger, a threat that logically became the main drivers of their decisions to hide and then to flee. But there is also evidence that many Sinhalese individuals, not necessarily inclined to violence in the first place, started to treat all Tamils with suspicion and hostility because of circulating rumors about imminent attacks by the LTTE, the truth or falsity of which they had no way check (J. Spencer, 1990; Tambiah, 1996). Such threatening rumors have repeatedly been observed to have a decisive effect on the development and perpetuation of earlier riots in Sri Lanka (Tambiah, 1996). In sum, the threat implied by objective violence, and by rumors that make it appear plausible, change individuals' decisions by making them aware of their *vulnerability*.

A second lesson is that such awareness of their vulnerability led individuals to give increasing weight to their perception of what other people think or (will plausibly) do – *i.e. meta-representations* – in deciding a course of action. If so many Tamils went in exile abroad or in the North, it was probably not a choice based on some grievance or intimate political stance. Rather, it is arguably the anticipation that further violence of this sort was a plausible prediction. Indeed, the ostensible support of perpetrators by authorities only reinforced the plausibility of this scenario.

A third lesson is that when, the experience of vulnerability is unambiguously connected with a politicized group cleavage, vulnerable individuals will be constraint to collectively act in terms of the group cleavage and, in the process, *drastically reduce the complexity of the social structure*. Even if many Sinhalese individuals risked their lives to help Tamils during the riots (J. Spencer, 1990; Tambiah, 1997), the contemplation of violence could leave Tamils with no doubt that their ethnicity effectively put their physical integrity at risk. Thousands of Tamils were thus forced to act on the basis of that particular identity and, as they did so, they further polarized the societal landscape into more clearly ethnically-defined conflict protagonists.

In sum, the example of the 1983 riots in Sri Lanka – as well as various case studies of nationalist mobilizations and ethnic conflicts (e.g., Macek, 2009; Mamdani, 2002; Schulze, 1991) – shows that theories of ethnic relations need to acknowledge that periods of social and political instability entail a qualitative shift in collective behavior. I argued that the mechanisms underlying this shift include individuals' increased awareness of their own vulnerability, the increased weight of others' (anticipated) actions in individuals' decisions, and an increased practical relevance of group identities that plausibly make individuals vulnerable. Thus, examining the legacy of such periods of crises – which will be the aim of the empirical chapters – requires us to take a social psychological approach. Developing such an approach is the object of the next chapter.

Chapter 2

Toward a social psychological contribution to the study of ethnic relations

Social psychologists have of studied intergroup relations intensively, and the resulting literature has much to contribute to our understanding of ethnic conflict. But integrating this literature with insights gained from other social scientific disciplines comes with its own challenges. And one cannot understand those challenges, let alone overcome them, without taking a step back and replacing the concerns at heart of social psychological research within the historical circumstances that shaped them. This is the aim of the first two sections of this chapter: each corresponds to a wave of research on intergroup relations, which I critically discuss. The third section focuses on the current state of the art in the discipline. Finally, the last section locates the thesis' contribution to the existing literature and sets the aims of the empirical chapters.

2.1 First wave: Intergroup psychology and the 'race question'

If one were to guess the nature of early psychological theories of intergroup relations from their object, the guess would be that they are theories of ethnic conflict. And in a certain sense, they were. The first psychological studies of intergroup attitudes were explicitly concerned with the way White Americans judged various 'racial' and 'national' groups (Bogardus, 1928; Katz & Braly, 1933, 1935; Thurstone, 1928, 1931). These early efforts would turn into an extremely prolific research area as the American society grew more concerned with what came to be known as the 'race question'. In the most influential theoretical integration of the field, Gordon Allport (1954b) clarified what the question was about when he pointed out that racism rests on the "confusion between racial and ethnic groupings of mankind" (p. 107).

Considering theories of this period is important because it produced key concepts which continue to influence current direction of research on intergroup relations (Brown, 2011; Dixon & Levine, 2012; Dovidio et al., 2008; Durrheim, 2014; Durrheim & Dixon, 2018). But more importantly, perhaps, it is worth considering because of what it *didn't* produce. For

studying intergroup attitudes – even mapping the psychological mechanisms that produce them – is not the same as explaining why they would target a particular kind of group, and with such stubborn consistency. The main aim of this section is to examine whether the conceptual premises of early intergroup theories and research made it possible to answer the latter question.

2.1.1   From race to racism: the reversal of the 'race question'

While social psychology was taking shape as an independent discipline, something of a revolution occurred around the so called 'race question'. This reversal constituted the starting point for the psychology of intergroup relation. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the racist doctrine of the white race's innate superiority was more of a largely and deeply entrenched commonplace than a 'scientific' problem for psychologists (Duckitt, 1992; Richards, 1997 chap. 2 and 3). Such figures as Le Bon (1898), Spencer (1876), and Galton (1869) may have provided early psychological theorizing for racial differences and eugenics, but social scientists of the time were mainly relying on physical anthropology to find evidence for such speculations (Gould, 1996; Richards, 1997; Samelson, 1978). By the 1920s however, a number of circumstances had concurred to locate 'racial' differences at the forefront of psychological inquiry in the United States (Richards, 1997; for an account of the development of race psychology in the UK see Billig, 1982, 1983). The presence of a huge African-American minority embodying the legacy of slavery and an important flow of European immigrants (especially those of so-called 'inferior races') both participated in threatening partisans of eugenics. Furthermore, the development of new techniques to measure intelligence provided psychologists with seemingly adequate tools to supplant anthropometric methods (for a detailed analysis of racist misuses of the IQ test, see Gould, 1996), which they deemed anecdotical and not sufficiently rigorous in establishing racial differences and hence to demonstrate the need for screening immigrants and enforce racial segregation.

By the 1950s, the situation had shifted dramatically (Richards, 1997; Samelson, 1978). For one thing, the quest for innate racial differences appeared to have largely failed in its own terms. Putting the race question at the center of inquiry had ironically provided critically-minded psychologists with material to make the dubious scientific validity of the race concept itself apparent (e.g. Klineberg, 1944). Crucially, the cracking of the edifice of race psychology

had coincided with the rise of an alternative treatment of the 'race question', which fitted well with the growing importance of attitude research in the social psychological discipline. The main question on its agenda was to understand the roots of whites' negative attitudes toward other 'racial' groups. The upshot is that, in a few decades, the race question had been turned upon its head: from a study of the innate differences (*i.e.* 'inferiority') of 'racial' minorities, psychologists moved on to study the racial *prejudice* of the white majority.[9]

As social scientists, the temptation is great to regard this welcome development as an elegant (and self-serving) tale of scientific progress, a dramatic picture of how rigorous empirical science can defeat harmful age-old prejudices. But however pleasant, such narrative isn't very helpful in understanding the direction that psychological research came to take. First, because it obscures the role of social and political concerns that surrounded the shift from race to prejudice psychology and is therefore almost certainly partial (see Richards, 1997; Samelson, 1978). Second, the very pleasantness of the narrative, and especially the moral dimension of it, implies that our current approach to the problem is necessarily the right one. If there is something to be learned from the history of 'scientific' racism, it is that moral and political assumptions can (and most likely do) blind us in spectacular ways (Gould, 1996). And the more self-serving the assumptions, the more credulous we are.

The relevant societal developments pinpointed in the literature can be roughly summarized in three points:

(1) *New societal demand for social harmony*. Samelson (1978) shows how the passing of the Immigration Restriction Law in 1924 swiftly moved public debate away from the necessity to exclude 'racial' aliens (on eugenicist grounds) to the management of relations between already present 'racial' groups. This concern was further made salient by race riots and rise of the civil rights movement during the 1920s. This new concern for intergroup harmony opened the way for research on intergroup attitudes and, as the very notion of race was losing its respectability, made it more possible to frame whites' negative attitudes toward blacks as irrational *prejudice*.

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[9] This is not to say that 'scientific' racism suddenly vanished from psychological and other social scientific literature. It most notably reappeared with Jensen's (1969, 1980) and Herrnstein and Murray's (1994) publications in the form of controversies over the heritability of intelligence and its difference across racial groups (see Gould, 1996; Richards, 1997).

(2) *Shift toward liberal anti-racism among psychologists and intellectuals in general*. It seems that the Great Depression coincided with a general political turn toward the liberal left within the discipline (Duarte et al., 2015; McClintock et al., 1965; Samelson, 1978) and placed many applied psychologists in contact with members of different ethnicities in a context where racial psychology made little sense (Richards, 1997). Moreover, Samelson (1978) provides some evidence that the number of ethnic minorities members – especially Jewish – in psychological research substantially increased from the 1920s on. These, for obvious reasons, were certainly more inclined to embrace a liberal stance toward the 'race question'.

(3) *The rise of fascism and the events of the second World War promoted a general climate of anti-racism*. On the one hand, the United States' involvement in the war against fascism couldn't fail to make salient the blatant contradictions between "the official egalitarian ideology in the name of which a war was now being fought, and the deeply engrained segregationist strand in US culture" (Richards, 1997 p. 148). Accordingly, Richards (1997) documents a substantial increase in anti-racist academic publications during the war years. On the other hand, the discovery of the Holocaust further intensified the moral stigma attached to racism, which – some argue – explains the contemporary success of theories that pathologize racist individuals (Duckitt, 1992; Milner, 1981).

These observations suggest the following process. Racism, as a scientific and political doctrine, became marginalized through two crucial successive steps: first, because its implications were suddenly at odds with the dominant concern for social harmony and, second, because it started to sound too blatantly immoral as a result of the ideological war against fascism. Psychologists, as they were more and more liberal in political orientation, were particularly sensitive to these developments and well-disposed to translate the moral and political problem racism had become into a scientific one.

This narrative may be overly simplistic but, at the very least, it suggests that the abrupt reversal of the race question owes much more to contingent historical events than a simple tale of scientific success would suggest. Another way to say the same thing, is that the change was most likely underdetermined by conceptual and empirical arguments. But at this point it is important to clarify what change exactly we are talking about. For it is one thing to explain why racism faded away as a 'scientific' theory and it is another to explain how it came to be

approached as an object of inquiry. As to the first point – *i.e.* the marginalization of racism as a way to account for group differences –, it appears to be relatively well accounted for with the elements we have discussed so far. As Gould (1996) demonstrated in details, partisans of 'scientific' racism needed to seriously twist empirical evidence to make it fit their preferred conclusion. It is therefore hardly a mystery that such attempts became marginal in an intellectual climate which increasingly stigmatized racism as immoral. On the other hand, how racism would be approached as an object of inquiry seems much more open at this point. Some authors (Milner, 1981; Reynolds et al., 2012) have suggested that, if psychologists favored the concept of prejudice – defined as an irrational and erroneous attitude –, they did so as a way to express a political judgement toward racist individuals, a judgement that reflected the new normative climate of anti-racism. Although this might be correct, it can only be a partial explanation. For as a statement about political motivation, it doesn't tell us anything about the conceptual reasons or justifications that made prejudice seem like a plausible account of intergroup antagonisms.

2.1.2   From reality to fiction, and back again: the disappearance of the group in social psychology

In historical accounts of psychologists' reversal of the 'race question', as we have seen, the focus is generally on why psychologists gave up on 'scientific' racism. They identify socio-political developments that, in addition to relevant empirical evidence, plausibly explain why psychologists distanced themselves from the idea of racial inequality. That racism would be mainly regarded as *irrational* prejudice, on the other hand, doesn't appear to deserve much conceptual scrutiny. Duckitt (1992), for instance, simply explains it away through the apparent paradox that came with psychologists' abandonment of the racist doctrine. The fact that no biological grounds could plausibly justify racism anymore demanded an explanation for the widespread existence of the latter, and the explanation seems to naturally flow from these new consensual premises: "With the belief in racial equality came the idea that negative and derogatory White racial attitudes were essentially unjustified and unfair". He continues: "This resulted in the emergence of the concept of prejudice as a basically unjustified, irrational, or, in some way, faulty negative intergroup attitude" (p. 1185). If racism has no

biological grounds, it must be irrational.[10] The problem with this account is that it isn't an account at all. For what is needed to determine that an attitude toward a group is irrational, faulty or mistaken is its contradicting a criterion that is *objective*, which is not the same as *biological*. Human groups can obviously differ in objective ways that no one assumes to be biologically determined (*e.g.* the kind of food they eat; the language they speak). Hence, the notion of irrational attitudes entailed a conceptual leap, one which effectively dismissed alternative sources of group differences as valid grounds for people to form attitudes. My main aim in the rest of this section is to pinpoint the conceptual underpinnings of this development. I will argue that prejudice psychology mainly developed as a continuation of Floyd Allport's individualistic conception of the social, that this conception is misguided, and that, as a result, it durably prevented social psychologists from developing a satisfactory account of the relationship between the individual and the group.

Why groups (don't) exist

In order to delineate the object of this section, Katz and Braly's (1933) discussion of their study on racial and national stereotypes is a useful starting point. One reason is that their study turned out to be one of the most influential and emblematic in the early literature on prejudice. But more fundamentally, their justification as to why they treat prejudice as irrational is a particularly strong and explicit version of the argument that is the focus of this section:

> Stereotyped pictures of racial and national groups can arise only so long as individuals accept consciously or unconsciously *the group fallacy attitude* toward place of birth and skin color. *To the realist there are no racial or national groups which exist as entities and which determine the characteristics of the group members* (pp. 288-289; emphasis added).

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[10] Duckitt shows that the successive directions taken by psychological research on prejudice from the 1930's on seem much more sensitive to socio-political circumstances than to empirical data. For instance, the late 1950s' shift of emphasis from personality to social norms in the explanations of prejudice is unlikely to have followed from the limitations of personality theories since they had been empirically demonstrated long before. The late 1950s, however, corresponded to a civil rights campaign that suddenly exposed to public awareness the systemic and institutionalized racism of the US South; something too endemic to be accounted for in terms of personality (Duckitt, 1992).

The bottom line of the argument is a strict individualism endorsed as a matter of principle. What the authors contest are less the facts (*i.e.* stereotypes are inaccurate) than the reasoning in group terms. For Katz and Braly, stereotypes (and therefore prejudice) are *a priori* fallacious because they assume the existence of fictional entities. The crucial starting point is that groups don't exist; and this is simply stated as a premise, one that appears obvious and unquestionable. As it stands, however, one could still suspect that this premise derives from the observation that there doesn't exist any systematic differences between individuals depending on their national origin or skin color. In short, they might claim that groups don't exist because there is no observable trace of them. The next step of their argument, however, shows that this is not the case:

> It is true that certain behavior traits may be more frequently found among individuals of one nationality than those of another, but the overlapping is obviously very great. This can furnish no real basis for the race-entities which are ordinarily accepted and applied to foreigners (as well as to ourselves). Furthermore it scarcely needs to be pointed out that the question of the frequency of appearance of racial traits is not commonly made a subject of strictly objective surveys. Such observations generally succeed the group or institutional fiction which may serve as something upon which to hang typical characteristics, and the width of the field of investigation and difficulties of control provide a fertile field for the fiction to produce distorted and fallacious observations (p. 289).

Remarkably, the core of their argument is not that we have clear evidence that groups don't exist, but rather that we typically lack any decisive evidence. They might mention that empirical group differences are in any case not clear-cut enough (i.e. "the overlapping is obviously very great") to infer the existence of groups. But the essence of their argument is that attributing traits to groups is *in principle* wrong since it is not grounded in a rigorous empirical survey. In fact, it is precisely because objective facts about groups are so difficult to uncover, and hence the reality of group (un)equality so difficult to know for certain, that there is room for uninformed and distorted judgements. It is significant that, from the exact same observation about the difficulty of verifying the accuracy of stereotypes, many authors would later conclude that we should not define stereotypes or prejudice as mistaken (*e.g.* Brown,

2011; Jussim, 2012; Oakes et al., 1994). After all, how can we know that a belief or attitude is mistaken if no objective criterion is available to assess its veracity? If Katz and Braly don't see this problem it's because, for them, the mistake does not lie in the traits that are attributed to the groups, but in the assumption that there exist any groups in the first place.

Now I would like to pinpoint a curious inconsistency in Katz and Braly's forceful individualism, which rests on a sort of double standard in their reasoning. On the one hand, their argument against the existence of groups is directed at purely objective entities, at groups that would exist independently of what people think. It therefore assumes a straightforward causality flowing from the hypothetical groups toward their individual members: the group would "determine the characteristics of the group members" in the same way as genes determine the color of their eyes. Of course, dismissing groups in that sense amounts to deny racial determinism and other forms of essentialism. But, crucially, the relevance of the argument stops there. On the other hand, their own account of racism suggests a quite different model of causality for social phenomena. According to their interpretation of the study's findings, the belief in group entities is the basis on which traits and attitudes are superimposed, which in turn produces discrimination (see also D. Katz & Braly, 1935). Here the primary cause is a (shared) representation (*i.e.* groups exist), and the end result are objective (shared) patterns of behavior (*i.e.* discrimination). In other words, they put their finger on an alternative causal mechanism whereby *individuals produce group-level realities as they act upon the assumption that groups exist*. Once we look at the causal effect of groups from the standpoint of this second model, it becomes rather futile to insist that groups are mere fictions. The easiest way to grasp this, perhaps, is to consider that things as varied as money, national boundaries, Mondays, marriages, laws and football games seem to work based on a similar model: i.e. for them to be consequential, there must be some sort of consensus that they exist in the first place (Searle, 1995).

Katz and Braly's double standard could be seen as an honest mistake or, more accurately, as an honest blind spot. After all, in a context where racism is pervasive and virulent it makes complete sense to attack the idea that groups are objective entities. Their primary concern with biological racism might thus have blinded them to the fact that, once racial groups are out of the picture, attacking groups defined as purely objective entities is basically attacking a strawman. But there is a hint in Katz and Braly's discussion that this

inconsistency is more than a mere neglect. Consider their use of the terms "*institutional fiction*" (p. 289) to talk about the group. This choice of terminology seems strangely specific, and a bit odd if what they are contesting is the existence of biological entities. But the use of these words – as well as their mention of the "group fallacy" (p. 288) – starts to make sense if they are taken as references to Floyd Allport's views, since he systematically used this terminology to criticize collectivist theories. Indeed, both Katz and Braly were graduate students at Princeton, where Allport was teaching, and Katz happened to be Allport's graduate student. Hence, one need to consider Floyd Allport's theoretical stance on group phenomena in order to understand the conceptual underpinnings of Katz and Braly's strict individualism. Importantly, this genealogy is of more than anecdotal significance. For Floyd Allport's ideas and influence, I will argue, durably built strong and principled individualist assumptions as the foundations for intergroup psychology.

Conceptual crossroad: Floyd Allport, groups, and institutions

It has now become a common place to trace individualistic tendencies of social psychology back to the enormous influence of Floyd Allport (Farr, 1996; Greenwood, 2003, 2004; Pepitone, 1981). Most famously, Allport expressed his radical individualism in the credo that "[t]here is no psychology of groups which is not essentially and entirely a psychology of individuals", and by concluding from there that social psychology is a mere "part of the psychology of individuals" (F. H. Allport, 1924a, p. 4).

Allport's position is best understood – and he certainly presented it that way – as part of a crusade against what he termed the "group fallacy" (F. H. Allport, 1924b, 1924a; chap. 1). Many social theorists such as Durkheim, Wundt and McDougall had advanced in their own way that social reality plays a causal role that is not understandable in terms of individual causation. Crucially, they sometimes accounted for this irreducibly collective level of analysis by positing the existence of a "group mind" or some other supra-individual entity. It is this tendency to reify social reality by postulating a collective mind "separate from the minds of the individuals of whom the group is composed" (F. H. Allport, 1924a, p. 4) that Allport attacked relentlessly. When talking about such abstractions, he believed, social scientists were confusing us and diverting our attention from the real mechanisms involved in collective life. But Allport went farther than simply rejecting metaphysical talk. From there he jumped

to the conclusion that there was nothing more to collective life than normal individual psychological mechanisms that happened to be shared. Talking about groups might be a convenient linguistic shortcut but it doesn't – strictly speaking – refer to anything real. What makes behavior collective, he claimed, is merely individuals' "similarities of constitution, training, and common stimulations" (F. H. Allport, 1924a, p. 6). Allport didn't only reject the existence of groups in the metaphysical sense, he denied them any analytical role whatsoever.

As Greenwood (2004) points out, Allport committed a *non sequitur* in reaching that conclusion. From the fact that groups do not exist in the metaphysical sense, it doesn't follow that it is possible to account for collective behavior without any reference to groups (see Sheehy, 2006). If Allport's criticism of the group fallacy seems fair enough, his radical conclusion is clearly unwarranted; and one is left wondering what could possibly explain such an individualistic zeal. One way to make sense of it – one that Allport himself emphasizes (F. H. Allport, 1924b) – is a matter of conceptual coherence; by considering how his individualism fits into his understanding of psychology as a science and into his philosophy of science more generally. Allport's admittedly behaviorist and narrowly empiricist views certainly help to understand why he characterized the social world as he did (Farr, 1996; Greenwood, 2003). Coherent with behaviorist assumptions, he treated the social world as composed of mere stimuli among others and thus conceptualized social influence as a stimulus-response relationship essentially similar to one deriving from interaction with a non-social object. Furthermore, he defended a model of science prescribing a strict causal reductionism, whereby phenomena described at one level (*e.g.* social) of analysis should always be explained at the immediately lower level (*e.g.* psychological; F. H. Allport, 1924b)[11].

If conceptual and philosophical consistency was the main motivation behind Allport's individualism, one would expect him to reconsider his views in the face of contradicting evidence. But Allport's reaction when his individualism was pushed to its limits points to a different reason. When analyzing the data of a survey of students of Syracuse University's

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[11] "[T]he sociologist describes social or collective phenomena and explains them in terms of individual behavior; the psychologist describes behavior and explains it in terms of reflex mechanisms; the physiologist describes the reflex mechanism and explains it in terms of physical and chemical changes" (F. H. Allport, 1924b, p. 701)

attitudes, Katz and Allport (1931) found something that caught their attention. They had included in the survey questionnaire an item that enabled them distinguish two types of student fraternity members: those (two-third of the sample) who believed that their fraternity was more than the individuals that were part of it (Allport and Katz labeled them "institutionalists") and those who equated their fraternity with its individual members ("individualists"). And it turned out that these two groups clearly differed on various attitudes they expressed. Most significantly, institutionalists were more willing to entrust the fraternity institution with controlling power over its members: *e.g.* maintaining strict standards of admission. This entrustment, moreover, was not limited to the fraternity itself. For instance, institutionalists were also more willing to enable the University to constrain the academic freedom of professors or the freedom of the student journal. Believing that institutions are supra-individual entities, it appeared, made students more willing to sacrifice individual autonomy to institutional control.

This finding was of considerable relevance to Allport's individualism, that much is obvious. But the relevance is more profound than it might appear at first sight. For it is possible to draw from it two distinct – and indeed conflicting – implications regarding Allport's individualism. Whether this finding challenges or supports Allport's views depends on whether his individualism is regarded as descriptive or prescriptive, scientific or political. And this is strikingly revealed in the different stress that Allport would later put on 'the Syracuse institutionalists' depending on the purpose of his writing. In his scientific writings on conformity (F. H. Allport, 1934), he doesn't appear to make much of them. The "appeal to institutions" is merely mentioned alongside other "conformity-producing agencies", such as conditioning, propaganda, and education (p. 168). If fact, what he observed among Syracuse fraternity members he used less as a finding to integrate to his theory of collective behavior than as a methodological lesson directed at social scientists. If only scientists would see through institutional fictions, they would more clearly grasp the mechanisms of social control that underpins the illusion (Faye, 2013). Much like the group fallacy, the belief in institutions appears as a mere mystification, a veil that hides the real "common stimulations" (D. Katz & Allport, 1931 p. 345) that push individuals to conform in a shared pattern of attitudes and behavior. In his popular and more militant writings, however, it's a different story. There the Syracuse institutionalists take the center of the stage. And indeed, they are the villains. His

core claim – most fully laid in his book *Institutional Behavior* (F. H. Allport, 1933) – finds the belief in 'institutional fictions' to be the greatest threat to individual freedom and autonomy. He argues that thinking of institutions and groups as if they were more than the individuals that really constitute them makes such fictions appear powerful and unchangeable. Thus, when individual autonomy conflicts with institutional order, reifying the latter forces individuals to comply and to sacrifice their autonomy. His conclusion is that we should promote a 'realistic' attitude towards those fictions because it "would have the effect of minimizing their potency for social control, of breaking them up, and of establishing new adjustments productive of greater individual freedom. Most of us would probably agree that this would be a desirable result" (Allport, 1926; Quoted in Faye, 2013, p. 113).

In this asymmetry between Allport's scientific and militant writing, the reader will recognize the same double standard that underpinned Katz and Braly's (1933, 1935) definition of stereotypes as mistaken. On the one hand, groups and institutions' existence and consequentiality are dismissed on metaphysical grounds. There is nothing 'out there' except individuals, hence explanations should stick with individuals. On the other hand, believing in such entities appears to be part of why we submit to them and hence to make them real in their consequences. Had Allport connected the two threads of his own thinking, he would have realized that whether or not groups and institutions really exist in the metaphysical sense is largely beside the point. What matters is to explain how they can possibly become so consequential. And the very stress that he put, in his political writings, on the danger of taking institutions for granted pointed at the inadequacy of his scientific approach to the problem. If believing in 'groups-entities' and 'institutional fictions' is so powerful in creating our submission to them, then surely 'common stimulations' are not the whole story of collective life. The conclusion that he didn't draw is that people's awareness and understanding of group memberships and institutions shapes their attitudes and behavior (see e.g. Billig & Tajfel, 1973; Tajfel, 1981; Tajfel et al., 1971) and, hence, it becomes impossible to fully explain the latter without reference to groups and institutions (Sheehy, 2006). Coming back to the example of the members of the Syracuse fraternity, when the 'institutionalists' were describing their group as something more than a collection of individuals, they were in fact *enacting* the most basic requirement that creates and perpetuates institutions and group life. That is, acknowledging that there is something that

they are part of. If Allport partly grasped that, he refused to acknowledge the theoretical significance of this observation and treated it only as a threat to his political ideals. And that's why he failed to see that, by the very same description of their group, these students were also *denoting* a collective determinant of behavior more accurately than Allport's own theoretical apparatus could possibly do. In the end, Allport's political fears seem to have overshadowed his scientific perceptiveness.

The logic underlying Allport's individualism can be summarized as follows. The starting point is his conviction that *taking group-level realities for granted can compromise individual autonomy*. Even formulated in such a tendentious manner, this statement could in principle be regarded as a descriptive observation about group processes or, more specifically, about conformity. But instead of treating this observation as one that has theoretical significance, he drew from it the prescriptive conclusion that social scientists *should* deny group-level realities. In other words, the key conceptual feat that makes such individualistic stance misguided is to *mistake a descriptive statement for a prescriptive one*.

Intergroup relations without groups: Gordon Allport and prejudice psychology

It might seem a bit odd to dedicate so much space to Floyd Allport's views when his brother, Gordon, wrote what is perhaps the most influential work ever written on the psychology of intergroup relations, *i.e. The Nature of Prejudice* (G. W. Allport, 1954b; see Dovidio et al., 2008; Durrheim & Dixon, 2018; Reicher, 2007). But there is a good reason for doing so. Floyd's struggle with groups and institutions explicitly displays an 'individualistic fallacy' which is only implicit in Gordon's account of racism.

First of all, it is worth stressing that Gordon Allport clearly shared his brother's political convictions. In his *Historical Background of Modern Social Psychology* (G. W. Allport, 1954a) – which was published as the first chapter in the 1954 *Handbook of Social Psychology* – he went so far as to claim that protecting individual freedom against contemporary threats was the main *raison d'être* of social psychology as a discipline:

> Social psychology began to flourish soon after the First World War. This event,
> followed by the spread of communism, by the great depression of the 30's, by
> the rise of Hitler, the genocide of the Jews, race riots, the Second World War
> and its consequent anomie, stimulated all branches of social science. A special

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challenge fell to social psychology. The question was asked: how is it possible to preserve the values of freedom and individual rights under conditions of mounting social strain and regimentation? Can science help provide an answer? (p. 4)

That political values motivate scientific inquiry is certainly not a problem in itself. But as we have just seen in the case of Floyd Allport, problems arise when prescriptive statements – *i.e.* statements about *how the world ought to be* – are not clearly distinguished from descriptive ones – *i.e.* statements about *how the world is*. And, like his brother, Gordon Allport was indeed prone to blur the line when his political individualism was concerned. In the same chapter (G. W. Allport, 1954a), as he sets out to discuss collectivist theories, Allport embarks us into a slippery historical journey (see Brock, 1992). For him, psychologists such as Wundt – who posit that collective realities are not entirely reducible to individual ones – have the same intellectual forefather as "psychological apologists for racism and nationalism (*e.g.* Jaensch, 1938)" (pp. 34-35). Collectivist theories, to put it bluntly, would share a family resemblance with Nazi theories due to a common origin. This common origin, Allport claims, is Hegel's philosophy.[12] And as one can expect from its alleged legacy, the flavor of this foundational philosophy is not exactly to Allport's taste: "Marx, as well as Hitler, was among the sinister spiritual children of Hegel. Like him, they equated personal freedom with obedience to the group, morality with discipline, personal growth with the prosperity of the party, class, or state. *Du bist nichts: dein Volk ist alles* was the Nazi rallying cry" (p. 34). The concern that pervades Allport's tendentious genealogy is that theories that reify social reality might justify and bolster social regimentation at the expense of individual autonomy. And indeed, his political assessment of Hegel's views doesn't seem to have any other argumentative function than to trigger this suspicion in the reader (for further discussion, see Brock, 1992). Again, we find the conviction that challenges to strict individualism have dangerous consequences; and this time nothing less than Nazism or other brands of totalitarianism.

In *The Nature of Prejudice*, Gordon Allport (1954b) would proceed with his argument in a much more careful manner. He might put a lot of stress on the mistaken character of

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[12] "For Hegel's system is the true antecedent of all theories which pass beyond individuals and claim that in some sense the social mind has unity" (G. W. Allport, 1954a, p. 34)

prejudice. Indeed, he might find it important enough to argue that prejudice is *by definition* based on "a faulty and inflexible generalization" (p. 9). But Allport doesn't ground this definition in an explicit denial that groups exist. Quite remarkably in fact, he doesn't discuss this matter at all[13]. In what sense then is prejudice 'faulty' in Allport's account? At first sight – and contrary to Katz and Braly (1933) – his definition seems to be the outcome of a strictly empirical inquiry. He indeed dedicates two full chapters to 'real' group differences (chapters 6 and 7). The first contains methodological considerations on the study of groups differences in general and the second more specifically covers what the social scientific literature has to say about "racial and ethnic differences". In these chapters, Allport takes on the task to refute the theory that our judgements and impressions of outgroups are in fact a 'well-deserved reputation'. This refutation aims to be empirical and neutral rather than principled and partial. And the phrasing Allport uses to conclude is meant to convey a reasonable and unpassionate empirical stance: "the facts we have about group differences fail to account for our prejudices. Our images and our feelings overreach the evidence" (p. 125).

But for all his rhetorical efforts and skills in building an ostensibly impartial argument, Allport's ideological leaning catches him back. For as he proceeds through his empirical demonstration, he sweeps under the rug an assumption to the effect that group realities disintegrate into purely individual ones. And quite significantly, this occurs precisely as he brings ethnic groups into the picture. When opening his chapter on racial and ethnic differences, Allport points to a confusion at the heart racist thinking. It is a common mistake, he notes, to interpret in racial terms what are in fact *ethnic* differences. He forcefully argues that the traits people have in mind when feeling or expressing prejudices are (virtually)[14] never the kind of traits that could possibly be racially determined. People might think otherwise, Allport insists, but they are actually conflating racial with ethnic traits. Now this distinction is important for at least two reasons. The first – that Allport perceptively notes – is also the reason why mistaking ethnic for racial traits has pernicious consequences: "there is a curious air of finality in the term "racial". One thinks of heredity as inexorable, as conferring an *essence* upon a group from which there is no escape" (p. 107). Allport is of course making an important point here. But there is another reason why the racial/ethnic

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[13] In the whole book, there is only one peripheral mention of the group fallacy (p. 336).
[14] For a discussion of some ambiguities in Allport's anti-racism, see Richards (1997).

distinction matters. Contrary to hypothetical racial groups, he tells us, ethnic groups are not inscribed in nature. And once this is conceded, it becomes necessary to explain in what sense exactly ethnic groups are groups. One would therefore expect an interesting discussion to follow, one that would try to clarify why ethnic categories are more meaningful than any arbitrary classification based on randomly chosen individual traits. Crucially, Allport makes this discussion conspicuous by its absence. In order to differentiate ethnic traits from racial ones, he simply states that "[w]hen people confuse racial with ethnic traits they are confusing what is given by nature and what is acquired through learning" (p. 113). Ethnic traits, in Allport's view, are nothing more than the more or less fixed outcome of what individuals have learned. To substantiate his claim, he notably refers to anthropological theories that trace commonalities in an ethnic group back to "uniform practices in child rearing" (p. 114). By accounting for ethnic traits this way, Allport is simply reducing ethnic groups to empirical regularities among individuals that reflect nothing more than the vagaries of individual life trajectories.[15] Groups, in other words, are nothing more than individuals who happen to share the same traits.

At the end of the day, Gordon Allport's justification for defining prejudice as faulty might seem to contrast with Katz and Barly's (1933). But the difference is merely rhetorical, for the end result is the same. Both accounts deny that there is any intrinsically collective logic that underpins empirical regularities among individuals. And both accounts do so because they take Floyd Allport's individualistic conclusions for granted: *one should not assume group-level realities*. Racism, it seems, is just another dangerous consequence of doing so. It might be a particular 'fiction' – one that stems from believing in racial essences – but it is just an instance among others. From there, it makes sense not only to dissolve this particular mystification, but also to make sure not to leave any other collectivistic Pandora box to be opened. Hence, ethnic – or indeed any other – groups should be defined as nothing more than a collection of individuals, whatever the commonalities they happen to share.

At the most basic level, a psychological perspective on racism needs to say something about individuals' relation to human groups; about how the former think about and act upon

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[15] In another chapter, Allport defines ingroup memberships are just a "web of habits" that individuals come to value because they happen to be their own. This definition is in fact very close to Geertz's (1963/1973) account of primordial ties (see section 1.1.3).

his understanding of the latter. It is therefore a problem with two terms: individuals, on the one hand, and human groups, on the other. The legacy of Floyd Allport essentially annihilated the second term of the problem. Groups, by being mere empirical regularities of traits among individuals, are essentially arbitrary categorizations. There is no essential reason why a classification based on one set of traits is more valid or meaningful than any other, even randomly chosen. The upshot is that racism is to be explained entirely in terms of what the individuals see and interpret, for there is no social counterpart to give meaning to individuals' judgements. Racism effectively became a one-term problem, *i.e.* a problem of individual misperceptions.

2.1.3   Conclusion: the other side of the 'race question'

For the US civil rights movement, the 1960s was a decade of many victories in the fight against *de jure* segregation. These victories, however, were hard-won. It took years of mobilization by civil right activists and urban riots to secure them, a struggle which too often met violent state repression and fierce resistance among part of the White population. In 1968, at the end of this decade of unrest, the African-American writer and activist James Baldwin was invited to Dick Cavett's television talk-show. Baldwin, with his peculiar eloquence, drew a bitter picture of the hypocrisy that Black people's demands for emancipation have never ceased to encounter. Americans, he says, claim to value freedom. They claim to admire those men who fight to overcome their oppression and achieve control over their own fate. They might claim those things, says Baldwin, but when a Black man does exactly what they claim to admire, his White compatriots answer only with repression, despise and by treating him as a mere criminal. At some point during the show, the Yale's philosopher Paul Weiss comes in to join the discussion and to comment on Baldwin's views.[16] Weiss might agree with much of what Baldwin had to say, but he has a point of contention. After a brief exchange, he puts his objection as follows:

> All this emphasis upon Black men and White does emphasize something which
> is here, but it emphasizes it, or perhaps exaggerates it, and therefore makes us
> put people together in groups which they ought not to be in. I have more in

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[16] The exchange between Baldwin and Weiss appears in Raoul Peck's (2016) movie *I Am Not Your Negro* at 1h 10m 47s.

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common with a Black scholar than with a White man who is against scholarship. And you have more in common with a White author than you have with someone who is against all literature. So why must we always concentrate on color? Or religion? Or this? There are other ways of connecting men.

To this strange remark, Baldwin sets out to answer with an anecdote. And as he does, Weiss's words – which might have sounded perfectly sensible in another context – turn out to be embarrassingly beside the point in that one. Baldwin recounts that he decided to leave the United States to Paris some 20 years before; and for one single reason. As a writer, he explains, it is rather difficult "to sit at a typewriter and concentrate on that if you're afraid of the world around you". And as he saw it, the threat was an existential one: "if you turn your back on society, you may die". Going abroad, he recalls, was an effective way to find release from this "social terror" that, he insists, was not "a paranoia of [his] own mind". For the terror he felt in his own country didn't originate in his imagination, but rested on very concrete evidence of which he gives a moving description:

I don't know what most white people in this country feel. But I can only conclude what they feel from the state of their institutions. I don't know if white Christians hate Negroes or not, but I know we have a Christian church which is white and a Christian church which is black. I know, as Malcolm X once put it, the most segregated hour in American life is high noon on Sunday. That says a great deal for me about a Christian nation. It means I can't afford to trust most white Christians and I certainly cannot trust the Christian church. I don't know whether the labor unions and their bosses really hate me. That doesn't matter, but I know I'm not in their unions. I don't know if the Real Estate Lobby has anything against black people, but I know the Real Estate Lobby is keeping me in the ghetto. I don't know if the board of education hates black people, but I know the textbooks they give my children to read, and the schools that we have to go to. Now, this is the evidence. You want me to make an act of faith, risking myself, my wife, my woman, my sister, my children, on some idealism which you assure me exists in America, which I have never seen?

What makes this episode particularly insightful is that it exhibits a typical individualistic approach to 'race' relations being uttered in a context where it is blatantly inapplicable. Weiss's remark is of course morally problematic because it implies that Baldwin – as an African-American – is somehow responsible in perpetuating the 'racial' cleavages of which he is the victim. But in doing so, he is in fact perfectly consistent with the individualistic assumptions we have been discussing throughout this section. If groups don't exist in the real world, why should anyone, Baldwin included, consider skin color particularly worth emphasizing? Why not, Weiss tells us, classify people based on their intellectual tastes instead? The choice seems all but arbitrary. But Baldwin's anecdote makes the entire reasoning crumble. And it does so by suggesting a completely different account of the logic underlying race relations. Three points in particular are worth emphasizing:

(1) Sometimes, it is <u>failing to</u> take groups for granted that can have dangerous consequences. Baldwin's testimony provides us with a very insightful challenge to Floyd Allport's most deeply held conviction. Allport was concerned that believing in the existence of groups would make us prey to their social control, thus threatening our ability to make our own informed choices. Baldwin, on the contrary, depicts a situation where individuals are forced to play along *whatever they believe*. The key mechanism that he identifies as producing such conformity is an *existential threat* (see also Elcheroth et al., 2011). He might not know for certain whether his – and his family's – skin color really matters in every context. But in the face of uncertainty, the very concrete threat to his and his relatives' physically safety forces him to assume so. The anticipation violence shrinks the weight of individuals' intimate beliefs about groups in defining their own behavior, while their anticipation of other's beliefs and behavior becomes much more determinant.

(2) Sometimes, statements about groups are an accurate description of reality. Through Baldwin's testimony, we grasp clearly that it was impossible to account for what church or school people went to, or what neighborhood they lived in, without considering the color of their skin. And it was obviously not a coincidence: people went to that school, church or neighborhood *because of* their group belonging. The fact that a particular group membership could determine people's fate and choices in so many areas of their life blatantly demonstrates that classifying people into groups is not always an arbitrary matter. In some

contexts, one specific categorization of people into groups is necessary to accurately describe what is going on.

(3) *Institutions are mechanisms by which social groups can become objective facts.* This statement is to be understood in both an epistemic and an ontological sense. The ontological sense shows when we consider why Baldwin's 'choice' to categorize the US society based on skin color is not arbitrary; what, in other words, is the real-world fact that made Baldwin's account valid. This fact is that *American institutions actually assumed the existence of racial groups*. Racial groups were built-in American legal institutions, so to speak. And since it is those institutions that actually guide the behavior of individual citizens, the latter systematically behaved *as if* the awareness of those groups were actually guiding their behavior. If there is no way to make sense of the behavior of White Christians, labor unions' bosses and real estate lobbyists without acknowledging that particular group membership, it's because institutions were explicitly designed such that racial groups would determine people's behavior. The epistemic sense of the statement, on the other hand, shows when considering *how* Baldwin knows that skin color indeed matters and which he summarized by saying: "I don't know what most white people in this country feel. But I can only conclude what they feel from the state of their institutions". This illustrates that institutions are used to infer and assess the plausibility of narratives about, or interpretations of, how society is divided into groups. *By looking at institutions one can know what groups organize a society and what are their relations*.

Considered in this light, there is a certain irony in the fact that a psychology denying any group-level reality would emerge in a society where racial segregation was legally enforced. Throughout the Jim Crow era, White supremacists imposed racism as a premise in the working of American institutions, thereby creating one of the most clear-cut possible examples of social groups effectively becoming hard facts. In such a context, social categories delineated by skin color can hardly be regarded as mere fictions or as an arbitrary classification. Rather, one need to acknowledge the causal role of these categories to describe collective behavior.

By making this argument, my aim is to counterbalance the view that groups are mere fictions, which has dominated social psychological theorizing of intergroup relations. But now

that the case is made, it is important not to overstate it. Pointing at the irony of a radically individualist psychology emerging in a segregated society is also acknowledging that this context is, in a very specific but important sense, quite exceptional. It is a defining feature of contemporary states to formally distinguish categories of people (e.g. citizens versus non-citizens) with different access to territories and rights, but the specificity lies in using ethnic background as a formal criterion for doing so. While other examples (still) exist where ethnic segregation between different categories of citizens is explicitly entrenched in legal and political institutions, these are the exceptions rather than the rule. In the overwhelming majority of cases, the relationship between state institutions and ethnic categories of *citizens* is much less clear-cut and much more ambiguous and implicit. In fact, the nuance should be extended to the exceptional case itself; most obviously, by pointing out that segregation was in general much more systematic in Southern compared to Northern States of the US. But more generally, a given society can entail very different concrete experiences across times and places, making social groups more or less real in practice. And perhaps can we better appreciate Baldwin's and Weiss' arguments in this light. As Baldwin mentioned, he left the country to France in 1948, disgusted by discrimination still very present in New York (see Baldwin, 2012), and spent most of his time there. When he came back to the US, it was mostly to engage in civil-rights activism and hence experience the fierce backlash of White supremacists. Weiss, on the other hand, had an academic career at Cambridge and Yale where he most likely experienced the anti-racist turn amongst academics. It is not too bold a speculation to suggest that their different views stem from these different experiences. The latter emphasizes the subjective nature of group cleavages and the former stresses their factual reality. Social psychologists have tended, arguably for similar reasons than Weiss's, to pick one interpretation and to claim its universal validity. Our task is therefore to build a psychological account that recognizes the potential validity of both views, and identify the conditions that tilt the balance.

2.2 Second wave: Legacies of and challenges to individualism

For an important part, social psychological theory of intergroup behavior should be understood as attempts to account for ethnic and other group antagonisms based on the

strong individualistic premises that we identified in the preceding section. These premises owe much to the influence of Gordon Allport's seminal *The Nature of Prejudice* (1954b), the insights of which continue to shape current directions of research (see Dovidio et al., 2008; Durrheim & Dixon, 2018; Reicher, 2007). It more specifically contained two foundational hypotheses about the psychological roots of (ethnic) prejudice (see Billig, 1985; Dovidio, 2001): the notion of *prejudiced personality* and the idea that *prejudice is a normal and universal psychological mechanism*.

2.2.1 The prejudiced personality: on bad apples and (ideological) tastes

The first psychological explanation of prejudice advanced by Gordon Allport – that he describes as "perhaps the most momentous discovery of psychological research in the field of prejudice" (p. 174) – is that "the cognitive processes of prejudiced people are *in general* different from the cognitive processes of tolerant people" (G. W. Allport, 1954b, p. 175, original emphasis). Allport goes on to specify: "a person's prejudice is unlikely to be merely a specific attitude toward a specific group; it is more likely to be a reflection of his whole habit of thinking about the world he lives in" (p. 175). Prejudice, in other words, would be the expression of a personality syndrome.

When talking of "momentous discovery" Allport was mainly referring to the findings presented in the classic *The Authoritarian Personality* (Adorno et al., 1950). With this research, Adorno and his team had the explicit goal of preventing the rise of Fascism and anti-Semitism[17] by profiling the personality of potential fascists and by creating empirical tools to identify them. It is important to note that they theoretically assumed fascism to be defined mainly by racist attitudes targeted at minorities (especially Jewish) and treated political conservatism as a somewhat secondary feature (Billig, 1978). Accordingly, they designed not only a scale to measure fascist potential on a personality basis (the famous F-scale) but also scales which specifically tapped into the attitudes toward various groups deemed relevant on a theoretical basis (a scale for antisemitism and one for ethnocentrism, which covered attitudes towards Blacks and other minorities). One crucial finding of the study was that respondents who expressed anti-Semitic attitudes were also most likely to be prejudiced

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[17] It was sponsored for this purpose by the American Jewish Committee in 1944 (Billig, 1977)

against Black people and other ethnic and sexual minorities. All these attitudes were further correlated to the score on the F-scale.

The defeat of Fascism marked the beginning of the Cold War with its lot of new ideological pressures. In particular, Spiro and Barber (1970) showed how the increasing success of the concept of 'totalitarianism' in post-war American social sciences is intimately tied to this new geopolitical context. Their starting point is that, as a descriptive concept, 'totalitarianism' is very poorly defined and hence creates more confusion than analytical clarity. If not for its descriptive value, they argue, other reasons explain why US intellectuals found it convenient to use this concept to make sense of the new international order (Spiro & Barber, 1970). Between the fresh legacy of the (ideological) war against Fascism and the pressing need to make sense of communist regimes' behavior, the notion of totalitarianism made it possible to pathologize both the new and former ideological enemies by explaining their collective behavior as expressions of one and the same thing: the 'logic of totalitarianism'. This conceptual move provided the added benefit of glamorizing the role of the United States in the world order in general – and in WWII in particular – as a safeguard against a dangerous social pathology. This way, American liberalism could be depicted as an island of rational (*i.e.* 'ideology-free') sanity protecting the world from the madness of totalitarian ideologies.

During the same period – which was also the time of the communists' witch-hunt known as McCarthyism –, Adorno et al's authoritarian personality came under sharp criticism for focusing only on right-wing authoritarianism. Most notably, Shils (1954) argued that identifying authoritarianism with Fascism was politically biased, since it assumed on an *a priori* basis that authoritarian thinking was restricted to one side of the political spectrum. On the contrary, Shils argued, there was an authoritarianism of the left as well, best exemplified by individuals who adhered to 'totalitarian Leninism' and Stalinism (a similar argument was made in the UK by Eysenck, 1954). A few years later, Rokeach (1960) built on this criticism in a way that would prove influential. Just like Shils, he proposed that authoritarianism should be detached from a particular ideological side. But he further provided a way to achieve this that was in line with the general 'cognitivist turn' within psychology. Adorno and colleagues' theory had explained authoritarianism in psychoanalytic terms, tracing it to pathological emotional development during childhood. Rokeach proposed a measure of authoritarianism

which he intended to be 'value-free' by tapping individuals' tendency to cling to their belief system despite contrary evidence or logical inconsistency. This 'dogmatism' scale thus moved away from the content of fascist ideology to the cognitive style of the 'totalitarian', whether communist, fascist, or whatever.

This historical episode is an interesting example of psychologists blurring the line between descriptive and prescriptive claims. And in fact, this blurring can be found within two distinct layers of the argument: *i.e.* one that is controversial and one that is consensual. On the controversial level, the debate is about which ideological content should be equated with a flawed personality, and hence discredited. Thus Adorno and colleagues (1950) openly framed their study as a political critique (see Samelson, 1986). Their aim was not to merely describe a personality type, but rather to back up their political opposition to prejudice toward minorities (and to political conservatism) with empirical facts. By empirically connecting prejudice toward minorities to a general propensity to irrational thinking, they explicitly hoped to discredit fascism as an ideology which dwells in pathological psyches. Shils (1954) and Eysenck (1954), while ostensibly arguing for a more value-free approach, were in fact making claims that were equally political. As Samelson (1986) shows, their critiques at least implicitly charged Adorno and his team of disloyalty in the Cold War effort. Assuming as a truism that Communists were indeed authoritarians, they implied that focusing on the right-wing variety amounted to target the wrong enemy and even to "play into Moscow's hands" (Samelson, 1986, p. 201). Behind the appeal to political neutrality, the stake was thus to ensure that Communism would join Fascism into the club of pathological ideologies, leaving American-style liberalism as the only healthy world-view (Billig, 1978).

Even more interesting, and arguably more consequential for subsequent research, is the consensual level of the argument. Whether arguing that prejudiced thinking was associated with one, two or no political ideology, all shared the assumption that it was the expression of a flawed personality or cognitive style. As Durrheim (1997) argues, this assumption was in fact necessary to validate political judgements through scientific criteria. It is only by postulating that the distribution of psychological characteristics in the population disaggregates into stable individual differences that one can meaningfully claim a section of the population to be *generally* irrational. On that basis, "[i]f a direct relationship can be established between an irrational cognitive style and specific ideological beliefs, then these

beliefs can be reproached on scientific grounds—as inaccurate, unsystematic, or inefficient. It may be argued that the ideology is an expression of a generalized psychological irrationality" (Durrheim, 1997, p. 630). If the controversy was about the particular political foes that needed to be dismissed, there was consensus on the fact that this strategy was a valid way to proceed. In other words, the idea that and process by which a political judgement could be sanctioned by empirical facts was agreed upon. What was missing was just a consensual political target.

Over the years, the specters of both Fascism and Communism faded away and, with them, the pressing need to dismiss a dangerous political foe. The release of these ideological pressures translated into ostensibly more politically-neutral approaches to the prejudiced personality. Rokeach (1960) was, in this regard, a bit ahead of his time (Durrheim, 1997). Even though in the midst of the Cold War, he argued for a strict distinction between the content of historically situated ideologies and the cognitive style of the 'dogmatic' that was supposed to be independent of the historical context. His argument thus put less emphasis on targeting Communism than on treating contemporary political ideologies as somewhat secondary. As Durrheim (1997) shows in details, subsequent authors – such as Tetlock (1983, 1994) and Sidanius (1985, 1988) – would pursue this line of argument further as the Cold War was reaching its end. One is therefore tempted to conclude that "value-free empiricism had won the day" (Samelson, 1986, p. 203) because, as political circumstances changed the need for political critique became less pressing (Durrheim, 1997).

With the hindsight of more recent trends in the authoritarianism literature, a slightly different interpretation of the legacy of the Cold War period seems perhaps more compelling. While it is true that value-free and empiricist rhetoric came to dominate the post-Cold War authoritarianism literature, rhetoric isn't necessarily accurate. Instead, I would like to suggest that, if researchers were able to claim their work to be value-free, it is because they moved their attention away from *controversial* political judgements and focused on *consensual* ones (*i.e.* consensual among scholars). Controversies on the irrationality of Communists and Fascists had tainted research on these issues with the charge of political bias, but the notion that conservative and racist individuals were indeed irrational had not been part of such controversies. And as political circumstances released the pressure to engage in uncomfortable political arguments, researchers could retreat in the comfort of consensual

political judgements that would remain unchallenged by their colleagues. These consensual political judgements are not too difficult to identify considering that political liberalism (as opposed to conservatism; Duarte et al., 2015; Jussim et al., 2015) has become increasingly uncontested among post-war social psychologists. Even more consensual, and beyond the academic world, is the rejection of overt racism and prejudice toward minority groups, visible in the general reluctance to express such views (Amodio & Devine, 2006; Billig, 1988; Crandall et al., 2002; Gaertner & Dovidio, 2005; Meertens & Pettigrew, 1997; Perry et al., 2015; Pettigrew & Meertens, 1995; Van Dijk, 1992).

And indeed, post-Cold War works on the authoritarian personality certainly fit comfortably within this ideological climate. They further strive to be coherent with the rhetoric of value-free empiricism by following Rokeach's (1960) advice to neatly distinguish the content of ideological beliefs from individuals' cognitive and dispositional traits. With regard to ideological beliefs, two developments provided useful tools to assess them. First, Altemeyer (1981, 1998) developed a scale measuring Ring-Wing Authoritarianism (RWA) with improved psychometric properties compared to the F-scale. It more specifically taps into three attitudinal constructs – *i.e.* submission to established authorities, conservatism/support for established conventions, and aggression toward unconventional targets – which Altemeyer showed to co-vary as one underlying dimension. Second, Sidanius and Pratto (1999) designed a scale of Social Dominance Orientation (SDO) which measures individuals' general endorsement of hierarchical intergroup relations and dominance of their in-group over outgroups. With regard to dispositional traits, three constructs already suspected by Adorno et al (1950) to define authoritarians have received special attention: intelligence, intolerance to ambiguity and close-mindedness.

In an influential meta-analysis, Jost and colleagues (2003b) notably found that a series of dispositional epistemic needs – including dogmatism-intolerance of ambiguity, needs for order, structure and cognitive closure and un-openness to experience – predicted political conservatism, operationalized by SDO and RWA among other measures. Sibley and Duckitt (2008), in another meta-analysis, found that the traits of agreeableness and openness to experience from the Big-Five personality scale robustly and negatively predicted prejudice. The effect of agreeableness was fully mediated by SDO and the effect of openness to experience largely mediated by RWA. A third meta-analysis by Onraet and colleagues (2015)

showed that cognitive ability negatively predicted both right-wing ideological attitudes (especially RWA) and prejudice (see also Hodson & Busseri, 2012). Finally, a recent study (De Keersmaecker et al., 2018) embodies what is perhaps the culmination of this line of arguments by fitting most pieces of the puzzle together into a coherent portrait. In a path analytic model explaining prejudice toward ethnic minorities among a Belgian sample, the authors found that both cognitive ability (i.e. intelligence) and motivation (i.e. need for cognitive closure), though correlated, independently predicted respectively lower and higher prejudice and that both effects were mediated by RWA and essentialism. To put it in a simpler (and hardly exaggerated) way, displaying ethnic prejudice is a sign of being either closed-minded, mentally challenged, or a little bit of both.

Both the political motivation and implications of such research are hard not to see, but the authors typically present it as a purely empirical matter. The moral condemnation of prejudice being normative as it is, discussions of the possible political bias of studies connecting prejudice to flawed personality traits have been, until recently (see below), extremely scarce (but see Reynolds et al., 2012). Hence, works in this area hardly even mention this possibility. When it comes to connecting conservative ideology with close-mindedness and low intelligence, the political implication appears less consensual among the general public. And public debate permeates academic ones enough to create a need to rebut the charge of political bias, though without seriously, or even explicitly, considering it. Thus Jost and colleagues (2003b) acknowledge that "the psychological study of ideological conservatism is one that invites controversy". The possibly of political bias is, however, swiftly avoided by simply stating that it is a "legitimate empirical issue whether there are demonstrable links between a clearly defined set of psychological needs, motives, and properties and the adoption of politically conservative attitudes" (p. 339). A similar, ostensibly neutral, rhetoric is used when commentators (Greenberg & Jonas, 2003) reiterated critiques close to Rokeach's (1960) and Tetlock's (1983), among others's, by expressing skepticism that close-mindedness and rigidity would characterize only conservative individuals. Jost and colleagues (2003a) answered on a purely conceptual and empirical plane, not at all considering that such findings – rather convenient for a cohesively liberal community of psychologists – might call for a more reflexive discussion of whether political bias might be entrenched in research practices. An even more revealing reply came from Kruglanski (2004)

who, in a remarkable display of confidence, retorted to Greenberg and Jonas' (2003) argument that "the data speak for themselves and they do so unequivocally" (p. 147).

If Kruglanski's confidence has any merit, it surely is to remind us that no data has ever spoken without being asked to and that the terms of the question largely constrain what is being said, and what is being heard. A first possibility of constraint lies in embedding an answer within the very terms of the question (Duarte et al., 2015). This was elegantly illustrated by Emler and colleagues (1983) who showed that our measures might not distinguish dispositional traits from ideological content as neatly as it is generally assumed. Earlier research (e.g. Fishkin et al., 1973) had observed that individuals with liberal or leftward political leanings exhibited more 'post-conventional' (Kohlberg, 1976) moral reasoning than conservatives. Consistent with Kohlberg's (1976) theory of moral development, such findings were interpreted as implying that liberal or left-wing individuals had reached a higher moral maturation than conservatives, enabling them to move beyond the conventions of their own society and think in more universal, principled terms. Emler and colleagues (1983) asked British students across the political spectrum to complete a moral reasoning task twice: once from their own perspective and once as they thought either a radical (left-winger) or a conservative would. Results replicated previous findings when participants completed the moral reasoning task from their own perspective but, when asked to answer as the opposite political side would, their performance would shift to accurately reflect either left- or right-wingers. These findings not only showed that conservatives are perfectly able of 'post-conventional' moral reasoning, but also strongly suggest that what was believed to measure a dispositional trait – *i.e.* moral maturation – turns out to largely overlap with the content of political ideologies. These findings might not bear directly on current research on the authoritarian personality but, at the very least, they should make us pause before we accept the extraordinarily convenient and rather self-serving conclusion for 'left-minded' social scientists that conservative and prejudiced individuals are, after all, relatively dumb and close-minded.

Another way to constrain what the data tell us is to formulate questions that *a priori* excludes a portion of reality out of the answer. Recent research in the United States suggests that previous evidence for the notion of prejudiced personality is rooted in precisely this kind of artefact (Brandt & Crawford, 2019). Since its earliest formulations (Adorno et al., 1950; G.

W. Allport, 1954b), the notion of prejudiced personality has assumed that certain individuals were prejudice-prone because of their general way of thinking and, thus, would exhibit comparatively more prejudice independently of the target outgroup. In line with this hypothesis, several researchers (e.g., Ekehammar et al., 2004; Sibley & Duckitt, 2008) found generalized prejudice to correlate with personality traits (and low intelligence; Onraet et al., 2015). But it is instructive to consider how the hypothesis has been translated in operational terms. Akrami and colleagues (2011), to take a representative example, considered "generalized prejudice" to be adequately captured by the covariance between scores on scales measuring prejudice towards "women, immigrants, persons with disabilities, and homosexuals" (p. 57). If the choice of such specific groups as targets of prejudice rests on rather transparent, and perfectly legitimate, moral and political preoccupations, it is nevertheless methodologically problematic given the research aim and the claim to measure "generalized prejudice". As recent research shows, the prejudiced personality literature is better described as identifying correlates of prejudice *specifically targeting low-status and unconventional groups* (Bergh et al., 2016; Brandt et al., 2015) rather than anything generalized. When diverse target groups are included in research designs, neither cognitive ability (Brandt & Crawford, 2016) nor open-mindedness (Brandt et al., 2015; Crawford & Brandt, 2019) is associated with generalized prejudice. Rather, individuals who score high on cognitive ability tests and openness to experience scales turn out to be as prejudiced as others, but toward types of groups – i.e. socially conventional and high status – that had virtually never been included in research designs (see also Chambers et al., 2013; G. A. Wetherell et al., 2013). Furthermore, these apparent personality differences in preferred targets of prejudice seem to be driven by perceived ideological dissimilarity (Brandt, 2017; Brandt et al., 2014). Thus, liberal/left-wing individuals tend to score higher than conservative ones on cognitive ability (Hodson & Busseri, 2012; Onraet et al., 2015) and open-mindedness (Sibley & Duckitt, 2008) tests and both liberals and conservatives tend to express prejudice toward groups they perceive to be ideologically dissimilar (Crawford et al., 2017; Czarnek et al., 2019).

There are important lessons to be taken from the bumpy trajectory of the notion of prejudiced and authoritarian personality. At the most general level, it should work as a cautionary tale, inviting us to be perplexed when research on politically charged issues

suggests conclusions that are at the same time ideologically convenient and presented as ideologically impartial. And the need for such perplexity becomes more pressing as the academic community becomes ideologically homogeneous with regard to the issue at hand. When a research's political implications are both explicit and controversial – as was the case with Adorno et al's work – scholars with differing political preferences are naturally inclined to look for ways in which controversial assumptions might find their way into the research practices of political challengers. Reflexive discussions about the assumptions underlying our research practices are, in such a context, difficult to bypass. When, on the contrary, political assumptions go virtually uncontested, it is all too easy to take the rhetoric of ideological impartiality at face value and hence fail to apply the rigorous scrutiny we reserve for controversial matters. In short, the absence of political controversies within the scientific community isn't a guarantee of impartiality, and might actually contribute to make ideological pressures on the production of knowledge invisible. Perplexity in the face of convenient findings and consensual assumptions is then more necessary than ever.

Besides these rather abstract considerations, this historical overview provides very concrete and insightful examples of questionable assumptions – political or otherwise – permeating research practices. First of all, we have seen that empirical support for the notion of prejudiced personality has been partly sustained by a systematic focus on certain kinds of (i.e. low-status and unconventional) social groups at the expense of others. It is not too bold a speculation to attribute this bias to researchers' political conviction that prejudice toward vulnerable groups is the most pressing societal issue to address. What is interesting then is that this conviction – while of course perfectly sensible and moral in principle – translated into systematic un-scrutinized methodological choices which, in turn, created an equally systematic blind spot. With the hindsight of findings shedding light onto this blind spot, we might be tempted to complacently dismiss this episode as an anomaly made possible by a blatant lack of rigor. But that would be to too hastily forget that focusing the spotlight on a particular segment of social reality based on moral and political concerns is common practice in intergroup relations research.

Second, Emler and colleagues' (1983) experiment shows that one way to too quickly consider our preferred conclusions empirically grounded is to be overconfident about the construct validity of our measurements. The point, however, is not to argue for some sort of

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generalized skepticism toward measurement of psychological constructs, which would hardly be helpful. Quite the contrary, the specifics of Emler et al's findings point to a concrete avenue for improving our measures and facilitating sounder interpretations. By adjusting their responses in the moral reasoning task to the political ideology they were supposed to enact, their participants demonstrated a reflexive awareness that answering in a way or another to such a test amounted to position themselves within a symbolic space defined by shared representations. It is, in my view, unfortunate that social psychologists routinely dismiss such reflexivity through the *ad hoc* notion of 'social desirability'. The assumption on which such a notion rests – i.e. that individuals possess a 'real' attitude, belief, cognitive style or personality trait that can be meaningfully isolated from normative influences – is after all a strong claim that might very well prove mistaken in many cases. Even if such a clear-cut distinction between the psychological construct and its normative significance was warranted, the fact of individuals' reflexivity remains and cannot be ignored. Methodologically, because we are always at risk of mistaking individuals' positioning in relation to social norms for an outcome of strictly individual processes. And theoretically, because there is no principled reason why we should give conceptual primacy to psychological constructs 'free' of normative influences[18].

2.2.2 The banality of prejudice: naturalizing (ethnic) conflict

Gordon Allport (1954b) advanced another view of the psychology of prejudice, which fits rather uneasily with the other – personality-based – explanation. In a chapter titled *The Normality of Prejudgement*, he argued that prejudice was a byproduct of normal thought processes, as the latter is characterized by a "natural tendency to form generalizations, concepts, categories, whose content represents an oversimplification of his world of experience" (p. 21). According to this view, one can't meaningfully distinguish between prejudiced and tolerant thinking, for prejudice is a condition of thought and thus, by implication, inevitable (Billig, 1985).

This idea would have a lasting influence on intergroup relation research, but would have to wait for its time. And this time was one of shattered optimism. In the early 60s,

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[18] If anything, there is good evidence that perceived social norms are more reliable indicators of collective behavior than are individuals' intimate beliefs (for a review, see Tankard & Paluck, 2016).

scholars could expect racism to fade away in Western countries as norms were changing and (White) individuals were more and more reluctant to express crude racist attitudes (Schuman et al., 1997). But if inter-group attitudes suggested a shift away from racism, concrete political issues suggested otherwise. In the US, the end of the 60s was marked by a series of urban riots and a hardening of resistance against demands of the civil right movements (Duckitt, 1992). As Durrheim (2014) points out, it is after observing such a gap between intergroup attitudes and political behavior that Sears and Kinder (1971) eventually argued that a new form of racism had emerged, replacing its crude, "old-fashioned", former expression, with one that was more in tune with prevailing egalitarian values (Kinder & Sears, 1981; Sears & Henry, 2003).

Subsequently, the basic idea and pattern of findings behind symbolic racism was variously formulated as 'modern racism' (McConahay et al., 1981), 'aversive racism' (Dovidio et al., 2017; Gaertner & Dovidio, 1977), 'subtle prejudice' (Meertens & Pettigrew, 1997; Pettigrew & Meertens, 1995) or 'implicit race bias' (Devine et al., 2002). Although conceptualized in different ways, these notions have in common the distinction between a more or less conscious, enduring and deep-seated antipathy towards African-Americans or ethnic minorities in general and emerging norms that make this antipathy unacceptable. The findings behind these notions all indicated that racism, as an outright hatred or pseudo-scientific doctrine, wasn't endorsed anymore but that outgroup antipathy persisted and was expressed in subtler and more implicit forms (see also Crosby et al., 1980). While norms were changing, outgroup antipathy displayed a sort of inertia which pointed at psychological factors as explanations for the persistence of racist behavior.

A key finding that supported interpretations of racism as a psychologically-rooted antipathy was that opposition to egalitarian policies were correlated with Whites' symbolic racism but not with their perception that African-Americans were threatening their interests (e.g., Kinder & Sears, 1981; but see Bobo, 1983). This line of interpretation was further reinforced by the findings of the famous 'minimal groups experiments'. Tajfel and colleagues (Tajfel et al., 1971) designed a series of experiments with the aim to rule-out any imaginable factor participating in intergroup discrimination, at the exception of the mere presence of an ingroup-outgroup distinction. This 'minimal group paradigm' consisted in classifying participants into groups that were ostensibly meaningless – or even explicitly random (Billig

& Tajfel, 1973) –, without any within- or between-group interaction whatsoever, and then to ask them to choose how to divide rewards between an ingroup and an outgroup member. It is notable that at first the authors didn't actually expect these minimal conditions to produce discrimination. Rather, they intended them to serve as a baseline on top of which they would add relevant factors and thus identify the key threshold that produces intergroup behavior (Otten, 2016; Turner, 1996). Even in this absurdly minimal setting, however, participants tended to allocate rewards in a way that favored ingroup members and maximized ingroup-outgroup differences.

While not the interpretation favored by Tajfel and his colleagues (which I will discuss in the next section), these findings were often taken as a demonstration that discrimination is a natural and inevitable outcome of our cognitive functioning (Duckitt, 1992). The idea was that social categorization necessarily leads to stereotyping, prejudice and discrimination of outgroup members, and is at the same time a necessary simplification of an otherwise too complex reality for our minds to process (Ashmore & Del Boca, 1981; Fiske & Neuberg, 1990; Hamilton, 1981).

If a psychological theory is to be of any use in understanding ethnic conflict and violence, it has to provide an explanation of why antagonisms should be about ethnic rather than any other (say class) cleavages. In the context of the United States, many have suggested that, along with age and gender, 'race' is so immediately obvious to the perceiver that it is naturally and automatically activated (e.g. Bodenhausen et al., 2012; M. B. Brewer, 1988; Fiske & Neuberg, 1990). The main basis for such claims is that, among US research participants, sensitivity to 'racial' visual information occurs at extremely early stages of cognitive processing (i.e. as early as 122 milliseconds based on electro-encephalographic measures; Ito & Urland, 2003). In other words, and if we were to generalize this claim to other multi-ethnic contexts, our minds would be naturally inclined to divide the world in ethnic categories because the latter are simply too ostensible.

Besides the fact that this idea has been heavily criticized for its distasteful political implications (Condor, 1988; Hopkins, Reicher, et al., 1997), it doesn't takes much conceptual and empirical scrutiny to see its inability to account for real ethnic antagonisms. Conceptually, automatic activation of 'racial' categories doesn't tell us anything about the reason for this automaticity. Hence, there is no reason to assume that it is the cause rather than the

consequence of a long and extremely violent history of 'racial' antagonisms. In other words, findings about the automatic activation of 'racial' categories amounts to the trivial observation that, in a country marked by centuries of ethnic exploitation, violence and segregation, people cannot help but notice ethnic group membership. On the empirical side, 'racial' categorization turns out – whatever its automaticity – to be overridden by alternative categorizations with disconcerting ease. Suffice it to take into account that individuals always belong to a multiplicity of groups other than ethnic (Kang & Bodenhausen, 2015). For example, Albarello and Rubini (2012) observed that white Italian students dehumanized and denied basic rights to a Black target only identified by its 'race', but that such derogation disappeared when other target's identities were mentioned (e.g. age group, gender, religion). Even when pitted against completely artificial groups and considered at the implicit level, 'racial' ingroup bias can be completely overridden. Thus Simon and Gutsell (2019) randomly divided White US participants into two minimal groups (*i.e.* Asteroids or Comets) and measured various forms of implicit ingroup bias towards pictures of faces while manipulating the latter's 'racial' and minimal group membership. Across the various measures, participants consistently expressed bias based on minimal groups while showing no sign of 'racial' bias.

Again, deriving constructive lessons from this literature requires us to be a bit reflexive about the historical background of our theories and research practices. The notion of prejudice, we have seen (section 2.1.1), emerged out of a societal debate about the existence of racial categories. These, social psychologists came to argue, objectively don't exist and judgements that assume their existence are therefore mistaken. And since 'racial'/ethnic antagonisms have endured as a persistent societal problem despite more 'tolerant' norms, it might seem compelling to assume that a persistent psychological tendency predisposes individuals to such a mistake. But so-called old-fashioned racism is a very peculiar way to understand the nature of social groups – or rather natural groups, for that matter – which is narrowly situated in history (Pehrson & Leach, 2012); and there are numerous alternative ways to understand groups as non-arbitrary classifications. Once this is acknowledged, the intriguing question is not so much why individuals 'mistakenly' act or think as if groups exist, but rather why they would classify reality in one particular way at the expense of all others. The experiments of Albarello and Rubini (2012) and Simon and Gutsell (2019) indeed provide some evidence that intergroup conflict along a particular social cleavage requires to downplay

alternative cleavages. How this reduction of multiple groups into a simple binary opposition is achieved thus constitutes a crucial question. To answer it, we cannot design our research by assuming that the reduction of multiple groups into a dichotomy has already occurred. In other words, we need research designs that propose multiple groups as potential prisms through which individuals make sense of reality in order to investigate the causes and consequences of their choice of classification.

2.2.3   Social identity: rediscovering the social group

In the previous section, we have seen how the 'minimal groups' findings have sometimes been interpreted as empirical demonstrations that discrimination is inevitable. From the moment individuals are aware of an ingroup/outgroup distinction, they would necessarily start to discriminate outgroup members. Combined with the idea that categorization is a necessary byproduct of thought, this interpretation seems to provide a simple psychological explanation of intergroup conflict. The social world being too complex, individuals need to simplify it into social categories and once they do so, they necessarily denigrate and discriminate those categorized as outgroup members. However, Tajfel and Turner (1979/2001) proposed a different interpretation of the minimal groups findings, which became known as Social Identity Theory (SIT).

The starting point of their explanation is their definition of *social identity* as "those aspects of an individual's self-image that derive from the social categories to which he perceives himself as belonging" (Tajfel & Turner, 1979/2001, p. 16). The important implication of this definition is that individuals partly define and evaluate their self through the social category they find themselves to be included in. On that basis, they formulate three hypotheses about the motivational processes underlying intergroup behavior: (1) because people generally try to maintain a positive self-esteem, or a positive evaluation of their self, they will strive to maintain a positive social identity; (2) the value connotation of social categories is comparative, hence a positive social identity is achieved through a favorable comparison of the ingroup with some relevant outgroup and (3) when their social identity is 'unsatisfactory', individuals will attempt to leave their group or make their social identity more positively distinct. According to this framework, one needs to consider three constraining aspects of the artificial social structure created in the minimal groups

experiments in order to understand the findings (Reicher, 2004). First, by preventing any interactions between participants and by identifying the recipients of the rewards only through the group membership defined by the experimenters, participants have only one meaningful way to categorize reality and thus to define their social identity. Second, this constraining setting leaves participants with only one possible outgroup in comparison to which they can evaluate their social identity. And third, since they have no information whatsoever about the artificial groups, the only dimension of comparison available to the participants lies in the rewards they need to allocate between an ingroup and an outgroup member. As Reicher (2004) points out, it is only by forgetting about these constraints – which required a highly artificial environment – that one can conclude that the minimal groups findings or SIT imply that discrimination naturally flows from social categorization. In natural settings, these tight constraints typically become much looser, which means that individuals can in principle navigate various social identities, comparison groups and dimensions of comparison. In fact, particular social contexts can turn the process of positive differentiation described by SIT into the exact opposite of discrimination. Thus, Hopkins and colleagues (Hopkins et al., 2007) found that experimentally making salient that British people stereotype Scots as 'mean' increased Scottish participants' volunteering to help a British individual as a way to re-value their social identity.

By giving a central place to intergroup comparisons, SIT is a theory that explains intergroup behavior through individual's understanding of the social structure as more or less equal. And in the context of the present discussion, Tajfel and Turner's (1979/2001) further hypotheses are especially interesting because they imply a break with Floyd Allport's idea that assuming the existence of social groups is necessarily a mistake (see sections 2.1.2 and 2.1.3). According to them, people certainly don't always cling to a social identity that devalues their sense of self-worth: when possible, they will adopt a strategy of individual mobility and stop acting in terms of that group membership. However, such a course of action is not always possible because material, institutional or ideological circumstances can make boundaries between groups *impermeable*. One can think of institutionalized segregation, for instance. And indeed, the shrinking possibility of social mobility was vividly illustrated in Baldwin and Weiss's argument (see section 2.1.3). While Weiss essentially assumed that defining one's

social identity was a matter of choice, Baldwin portrayed an environment where neglecting his skin color could put his and his relatives' very lives a risk.

Tajfel and Turner's hypothesis about the role of the perceived permeability of group boundaries is highly significant because if forces us to consider that group identities might be related to the actual social structure. Groups, in other words, are not assumed to be just in the head of individuals. They are valid descriptions of the world in the sense that they reflect individuals' concrete possibilities of action. This hypothesis was further developed by John Turner and his colleagues in Self-Categorization Theory (SCT; Oakes et al., 1994; Turner et al., 1987). In particular, SCT predicts that individuals classify their social context as a function of both their goals, prior knowledge and assumptions ('perceiver readiness'), on the one hand, and of how the categories actually account for – or 'fit' – empirical reality, on the other hand (Oakes et al., 1994; Turner et al., 1994). In other words, if social categorization is partly determined by individuals' situated vantage point (their goals, expectations and prior knowledge), it is not just a vagary of their mind. More specifically, the notion of (comparative and normative) "fit" suggests that individuals will apply social categories to a particular context to the extent that (1) these categories map the real organization of similarities and differences (comparative aspect) and that (2) what they know about these categories is consistent with the empirical reality (normative aspect). Thus, according to SCT, how we organize our social environment into social categories, and includes ourselves in one of those (*i.e.* self-categorize), functionally reflects the organization of social reality and enables individuals to act appropriately in it (Oakes et al., 1994; for experimental tests of the 'fit x perceiver readiness' hypothesis, see Blanz, 1999; Oakes et al., 1991; Voci, 2006).

A great merit of SCT is thus to describe well-documented psychological underpinnings of categorization and social identity which includes individuals' direct social environment into the picture. However, the notion of 'fit', with its emphasis on perceptual processes, could suggest that social categorization is a matter-of-fact kind of process through which individuals' social identities straightforwardly reflect the objective organization of society (Reicher et al., 2010). Such an interpretation isn't very helpful because it downplays the ambiguity inherent in social life in general, and in social conflicts in particular, which leaves room for much disagreements about the appropriate classification in a given context (Edwards, 1991; Reicher & Hopkins, 1996, 2001; M. Wetherell & Potter, 1992). To take but

one example, in his speech just following the victory of the government's armed forces against the Liberation Tigers of Tamil *Eelam* (LTTE), the then Sri Lankan president Mahinda Rajapaksa gave the following account of the groups composing Sri Lankan society:

> We have removed the word minorities from our vocabulary three years ago. No longer are there Tamils, Muslims, Burghers, Malays and any other minorities. There are only two peoples in this country. One is the people that loves this country. The other comprises the small groups that have no love for the land of their birth. Those who do not love the country are now a lesser group (Quoted in Jayawickreme et al., 2010, p. 212).

Through this triumphalist statement, Rajapaksa was signaling his audience that the victor's interpretation of what the civil war had been about was not to be contested anymore. And this interpretation makes sense only when contrasted with that of the other side's. The LTTE defined the conflict as the Tamil people's emancipation (*i.e.* independence) struggle against an oppressive Sinhalese-dominated Sri Lanka and presented itself as the vanguard in this struggle. Rajapaksa's speech, on the other hand, illustrates the Sri Lankan government's version: the conflict was not about ethnic minority emancipation at all, but rather opposed a dangerous *terrorist* organization to the legitimate government who fought for the security of all its citizens. None of these interpretations can be dismissed on purely empirical grounds, and deciding between them is therefore a matter of *debate*. And, as Nadarajah and Sriskandarajah (2005) argue, which interpretation is picked carries heavy political implications. They are rhetorical devices that the source uses in order to mobilize support and de-mobilize opposition (see Klein et al., 2007; Klein & Licata, 2003), both within Sri Lanka and internationally. The LTTE's version, by emphasizing the reality of ethnic groups and the social injustice faced by minorities within Sri Lanka, intends to mobilize support among Tamils within the island and among the international community. The government's version, on the other hand, attempts to cut the LTTE from Tamils' support and justify internal repression for international audiences. Because of such (de-)mobilizing effects of particular constructions of conflict protagonists, disagreements about how to define the 'sides' appear to be a systematic feature of intergroup conflicts (e.g., Elcheroth & Reicher, 2014; Herrera & Reicher, 1998; Stevenson et al., 2007).

The picture of the relation between social identity and social reality that emerges from research inspired by SIT-SCT is a nuanced one. On the one hand, individuals define their social identity in a way that is *not* arbitrary: impermeable group boundaries and the real organization of the social environment are cues that individuals use to organize the social structure, define their position within it and the course of action that such a position implies. On the other hand, deciding which groups appropriately account for a given social structure is not always (and arguably rarely) a purely empirical and unambiguous business and thus leaves room for various conflicting interpretations. The objective organization of the social environment, and the very experiences that they imply for individuals, is thus better thought of as setting boundaries which define a range of plausible social identities. Conditions that make this range more or less wide, or on the contrary shrunken, is an issue we will explore in the next sections.

2.2.4   Summary

I would like now to discuss some important methodological implications of the preceding literature review, and it is thus worth summing up the main conclusions that we have reached. First, intergroup differentiation doesn't necessarily imply intergroup conflict because its outcome depends on the contextually specific dimension on which the ingroup is defined (Hopkins et al., 2007). When there is intergroup antagonism (i.e. prejudice), it seems to be underpinned by individuals framing group differences in political terms: as we saw in our discussion of the literature on the prejudiced personality, recent research in the US (Brandt, 2017) indicates that prejudice depends on the ideological stance that individuals attribute to target social groups. In short, individuals tend to express prejudice toward groups they perceived to be ideological or political opponents, and (ethnic) minorities tend to be associated with an ideological (here, liberal) position. Second, even if individuals find some reasons to be prejudiced against members of a particular group, the attitude's target always belong to multiple groups that do not necessarily have the same ideological significance (see Roccas & Brewer, 2002). Thus, intergroup antagonisms seem to require individuals to perceive others through prism of one particular ingroup-outgroup cleavage while neglecting alternative classifications that would invite conflict-reducing attitudes. Third, research inspired by SIT-SCT informs us on how such an exclusive cleavage might be picked. On the one

hand, the choice is not completely arbitrary because the social structure delineates a range of plausible interpretations of what groups organize a given context. On the other hand, the organization of the social structure is more or less ambiguous, and thus leaves more or less room for conflicting interpretations of the social categories that best account for a given context.

2.3 Current wisdom: ethnicity, meta-representations, and complex identities

In the preceding parts of this chapter, I put a great emphasis on replacing current social psychological theories and research in their historical trajectories. This enabled us to better appreciate the legacies and blind spots that contemporary research inherited from the particular socio-political context of the post-war US. However, because of its historical emphasis, the preceding discussion doesn't give a clear account of the current social psychological literature and of how it contributes to our understanding of ethnic conflicts. In this section, I discuss current social psychological research on five important points: the politicization of ethnicity, ethnic relations in the aftermath of ethnic violence, the role of meta-representations in periods of rapid social change and, finally, recent advances in the literature on social identity.

2.3.1   Explaining the political significance of ethnicity

I have argued (see section 1.2) that, if ethnic distinctions are regularly the basis for political conflict in the modern world, it is because of the historical roots of the nation-state state: as modern states emerged in a world dominated by empires, nationalist ideologues defined political legitimacy in terms of both popular sovereignty and ethnic ownership of the state ('like should rule over like'; Wimmer, 2002). And while the social-psychological literature rarely puts ethnic relations in perspective of a socio-historical analysis of the modern state, recent research suggests interesting ways to examine how the historical connection between states and ethnic groups shapes contemporary ethnic relations. For instance, Nijs and colleagues (2020) showed in the Netherlands and the UK that participants' anti-immigrant attitudes were positively related to their conviction that the country was owned by the Dutch and the Brits, respectively. This sense of ethnically-defined collective ownership over the

country's institutions arguably drives political exclusion of ethnic minorities. Verkuyten (2018a) showed in an experiment that a Muslim immigrant claiming political representation of its ethno-religious group elicited a strong power threat among Dutch participants, which in turn predicted negative feelings toward Muslim minorities.

Even more to the point, Staerklé and colleagues (2010) examined the ethnic minority-majority asymmetry in national attitudes. The argument which frames their analysis is explicitly rooted in socio-historical analyses arguing that nation-states typically developed around 'ethnic core groups' which imposed a dominant culture and its symbols in state institutions (e.g., Gellner, 1983/2008; Horowitz, 1985/2001). On that basis, ethnic majorities should be expected to feel closer to their nation and its legitimizing ideology than ethnic minorities. Within a sample of 33 countries across the world, their analyses indeed show that members of majority ethnic groups tend to identify more with the nation and endorse a more nationalist stance than members of minority ethnic groups. Moreover, they also observed (within a sample of 20 countries this time) that ethnic identification was a much stronger predictor of both national identification and endorsement of nationalism for members of majority ethnic groups compared to members of ethnic minorities. In other words, they provide evidence not only that ethnic majorities identify more with the nation (defined by the state), but also that this greater attachment (and nationalism) reflects a greater conflation of the nation with their own ethnic group.

It is interesting to compare Staerklé and colleagues' argument with two more more recent studies, for it illustrates the kind of contributions that are specific to a social psychological approach. Generally speaking, these two studies (Ray, 2018; Wimmer, 2017) further support Staerklé *et al*'s results, but with a more suitable operationalization of political inequality between ethnic groups. As Wimmer (2017) argues, what makes an ethnic group (or a coalition of ethnic groups) dominant within a state is its control of core state institutions at the expense of one or several other ethnic groups rather than mere majority status in a demographic sense. Relying on the Ethnic Power Relation dataset (Vogt et al., 2015) which includes data on the inclusion status of politically relevant ethnic groups within states around the globe, they operationalize dominant groups as those politically represented in the central state and dominated groups as those excluded from it. Both (Ray, 2018; 38 countries) and (Wimmer, 2017; 123 countries) found that national pride (*i.e.* pride in one's nationality status)

was substantially higher among members of politically included compared to members of politically excluded ethnic groups. Thus, these studies also indicate that the connection between nationalism and ethnicity is the rule rather than the exception. They further show this connection to be a matter of state ownership among ethnically defined actors: what drives pride in one's nation-state is the representation of one's ethnicity in state institutions.

Both Ray and Wimmer that assume that the relationship between national-level factors – *i.e.* inequality in political representation of different ethnic groups or national-level economic inequality between ethnic groups – and endorsement of (ethno-)nationalism is direct and independent of local social processes. This is perhaps most obvious in Ray (2018) when he argues that "violations of the norm of ethnic representativeness in political institutions are likely to produce intense feelings of resentment among the members of the excluded group" (p. 265). He then draws on Petersen (Petersen, 2002) to argue that resentment is a particularly tenacious emotion – because unlikely to disappear until the perceived injustice is rectified – to argue that members of politically excluded ethnic groups are likely to report more negative affects toward the nation.

Recent social psychological research in Europe suggests that the mechanisms turning ethnicity into a source of conflict is less deterministic and straightforward. Such evidence points at mechanisms that are more consistent with Staerklé et al.'s' (2010) argument of major national institutions and symbols being defined in terms of the dominant culture and thus creating a sense of alienation among excluded groups. As Fleischman and colleagues (2019) show in a longitudinal study among a large sample of German teenagers of foreign ancestry, there is nothing necessary about the fact that membership in a politically excluded ethnic group conflicts with national identity. Indeed, they observed that national, religious and ethnic identification were generally positively associated. Those who perceived discrimination, however, tended to later decrease their national identification and increase their ethnic identification. In other words, it is perceived discrimination that seems to foster the impression that ethnic and national identities are incompatible (see also Holtz et al., 2013; Leszczensky et al., 2020). In the Belgian context, Gharael and colleagues (2018) found among a large sample of high school students of Moroccan and Turkish ancestry that their participants perceived that Belgian national identity was conditional on adopting the ethnic majority's culture; and the more they believed so, the less they identified as Belgian nationals

(see also Cárdenas & Verkuyten, 2020). Research in post-war Kosovo further suggests that such conflation of national and ethnic identity by members of the majority can entrench ethnic segregation. Thus, Maloku and colleagues (2019) found that the more members of the Albanian majority perceived overlap between their ethnic (Albanian) and national (Kosovar) identity, the less they were willing to engage in intergroup contact with Serbs.

Overall, recent social-psychological research provides some important insights on how ethnic exclusion operates in contemporary (Western) societies. It suggests that it is not exclusion from state power *per se* that fosters a perceived incompatibility between ethnic and national identity among ethnic minorities, but rather the consequent discrimination, diffuse assimilationist pressures and segregation that result from the monopoly of dominant ethnic groups on societal institutions. On the side of dominant ethnic groups, justifications for social and political exclusion of ethnic minorities appears to be driven by a sense of ethnically-defined ownership aver the country's institutions. Such findings, however, are rarely anchored in a socio-historical analysis of the relationship between ethnicity and the modern state. I argue that social psychologists have much to gain by contextualizing their research in such analysis.

Another important argument I have made (see section 1.2) is that contemporary ethno-national identities are typically built on past experiences of collective victimization. And because such sense of victimization can define the identity of 'dominant' ethnic groups within a society, even when objective victimization is long forgone, ethno-nationalism appears irrational and anachronistic. Social psychological research indicates that such anachronism appears when past victimization is used as a lens to interpret the present, and thus fuel contemporary ethnic conflicts. For instance, research in Israel and Northern Ireland (Schori-Eyal et al., 2017) has shown that individuals who interpret past victimization as a sign that their group is constantly persecuted tends to justify violence committed by their group (see also Schori-Eyal et al., 2014). Importantly, these representations of the past are not just spontaneously shared within a group. For instance, past victimization of Jews, and especially the Holocaust, is pivotal to contemporary Israeli national identity (Bar-Tal & Antebi, 1992). And as Klar and colleagues (2013) have shown, the Israeli state has played an extremely proactive role in ensuring that it is the case. In 1980, the Israeli state passed an amendment defining "Holocaust and Heroism awareness" as an official aim of the educational system.

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Since 1988, 10 000 high school Israeli students "embark on intensive 8-day trips to death camps and other Holocaust sites" (Klar et al., 2013, p. 128). During the Holocaust Remembrance Day, "[a] siren is sounded throughout the country for 2 minutes in the morning, during which all activities in Israel come to a complete halt and the entire public stands at silent attention" (p. 127). Such commemorative practices are significant because they show that what appears as spontaneous and bottom-up intergroup attitudes might in fact be actively mobilized by authorities and leaders who impose a constant rehearsal of past suffering and hence cultivate a sense of collective victimhood (see also Lerner, 2020; Ramanathapillai, 2012).

If mechanisms of ethnic exclusions and remembering of past victimization are important to understand why ethnic identities tend to become politicized in the first place, a central argument of this thesis is that periods of political instability – especially when it is accompanied by collective violence – can drastically transform the meaning of such politicized ethnic identities in the short term. I therefore turn to the social-psychological literature which examines the effect of collective violence on intergroup relations.

2.3.2 Ethnic relations in the aftermath of ethno-nationalist violence

Social psychologists generally work on the assumption that rigidly and antagonistically defined identities are a basic condition for protracted intergroup violence (e.g., Bar-Tal, 2007; Kelman, 1999; Livingstone & Haslam, 2008; Lowe & Muldoon, 2010; Muldoon et al., 2007). But while ethno-nationalist exclusions at the state-level have been shown to be a major factor in the outbreak of civil wars in the modern world (Wimmer et al., 2009; Wucherpfennig et al., 2016), there is evidence that such armed violence in itself play a critical role in entrenching ethno-nationalist divisions amongst the population at large. A telling example of this line of research comes from (Sekulić et al., 2006) who observed in the context of Croatia that ethnic intolerance was still rather low just before the outbreak of the war in 1989, despite the massive ethno-nationalist propaganda that was broadcasted at the time. But their data show it to have dramatically increased by 1996, hence suggesting that ethnic intolerance was manufactured by the war itself (Elcheroth & Reicher, 2017; Gagnon Jr, 2006; Maček, 2009; Sekulic, 2014).

Most research on the topic examined the consequences of war by looking at the effect of individuals' exposure to violence on a range of outcome pertaining to the quality of intergroup relations. This literature overwhelmingly points to a hardening of ethno-nationalist divisions following exposure to violence. For instance, it has been shown to damper intergroup forgiveness in Northern Ireland (Hewstone et al., 2006; Voci et al., 2015) and in the North Caucasus region of Russia (Bakke et al., 2009), to reduce Sri Lankan Tamils' tolerance for Sinhalese political rights (Rapp et al., 2019) and to make individuals' less inclined to make concessions regarding the ethno-nationalist conflict in Northern Ireland, the Palestinian Territories and Israel (Canetti et al., 2018).

A more complicated picture emerges when the contextual effect of violence is considered in addition to individual exposure. Indeed, from a theoretical point of view, it is arguable that a community's reaction to collective violence is not reducible to the aggregation of its individual members' reactions (Elcheroth, 2006; Elcheroth & Spini, 2014). On the one hand, there is evidence that contextual effects of violence tend to entrench intergroup conflict. In Northern Ireland (Lowe & Muldoon, 2010) found tentative evidence that ethno-national identifications were higher in areas highly exposed to violence compared to non-exposed areas. In the Bosnian context, Hadzic and colleagues (Hadzic et al., 2017) found that the number of casualties at the municipal-level predicted the share of votes obtained by ethnic parties. Furthermore, using multilevel analyses covering 69 countries between 1989 and 2008 (123 surveys), Tir and Singh (2015) showed that ethno-nationalist forms of intolerance were substantially stronger in countries which faced a civil war within the previous year. Other evidence, however, suggests that contextual exposure to violence attenuate intergroup conflict. For instance, Dyrstad et al.'s (2015) study in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo indeed points in this direction, as they found that the more individuals' local area had been affected by war, the less they endorsed ethno-nationalism[19].

An important contribution in the literature on the contextual effect of violence is the distinction between symmetric and asymmetric violence introduced by Penic and colleagues in their studies of post-war former Yugoslavia: while asymmetric violence disproportionately affects members of one of politicized groups, symmetric violence on the contrary affects

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[19] Research on the endorsement of human rights principles points in this direction as well (Elcheroth, 2006): it finds that individuals living in countries relatively more affected by war condemn human rights violations more, including those perpetrated by an ingroup member.

individuals across the politicized group boundary (see also Spini et al., 2008). In one study based on a representative survey conducted in 2006 (Penic, Elcheroth, & Spini, 2016), they found that individuals endorsed collective guilt for atrocities perpetrated by their own ethno-national group the most when living in local areas affected by symmetric violence while, on the contrary, individuals living in areas exposed to asymmetric violence endorsed collective guilt the least. Another study (based on a representative survey conducted in 2003-4; Penic et al., 2017) further supports the differentiated effect of symmetric and asymmetric violence on the quality of intergroup relations by assessing their relationship with intergroup forgiveness. Moreover, it reveals important insights into the social mechanisms by which violence either entrenches ethno-nationalist conflict or, on the contrary, attenuates it. The authors observed that the area's level of exposure to symmetric and asymmetric violence had opposite effects on its inhabitants' intergroup forgiveness: positive and negative, respectively. Crucially, both effects were mediated by two contextual-level variables. On the one hand, the more an area had been exposed to asymmetric violence, the less inter-ethnic contact would occur in that area, which in turn was associated with lower levels of individual's intergroup forgiveness; the opposite pattern being true for symmetric violence. On the other hand, areas most heavily exposed to asymmetric violence had a highest average level of (ethno-)national sacralization, which decreased individuals' willingness to forgive outgroup members. Again, the same indirect but opposite effect was true for symmetric violence.

It is noteworthy that Penic and colleagues (2017) found the effect of war exposure on intergroup forgiveness to be mediated by contextual variables. This suggests that social change produced by war-time violence operates through a transformation of the normative climate of exposed communities. When violence appears to follow an ethnic logic (i.e. is asymmetric), discourses of ethno-national sacralization promoted by ethnic entrepreneurs (see Penic et al., 2015) become more plausible and normative, as does ethno-national segregation. On the contrary, when violence is blind to ethno-national boundaries (i.e. is symmetric) it seems that ethno-nationalist sacralization isn't compatible with complex experiences on the ground and, hence, fails to become normative. Still in the context of post-war former Yugoslavia, Spini and colleagues (2018) found that contextual exposure to symmetric violence was associated with a collective perception of normlessness (or collective anomie), which in turn was associated with heightened willingness to enforce human rights.

Thus, these findings suggest that, in contexts where violence affects all ethno-national groups, it is not only group boundaries that are problematized but also the very existence of a community where shared social norms prevail. This finding echoes ethnographic observations which document how, in times of war, the systematic violation of basic moral principles is likely to create a perception of normlessness in affected communities (Abramowitz, 2005; Ajdukovic, 2004; Maček, 2009). What Spini and colleagues (2018) further show is that such climates of normlessness can trigger a bottom-up motivation to re-instate normative principles that transcend particularistic group identities.

The literature on the short-term legacies of ethno-nationalist violence thus draws a complex picture. First, whether ethnic violence will further entrench ethnic conflict depends on the concrete collective experiences produced by the war. More specifically, it appears to be in contexts where violence selectively targets specific groups that intergroup attitudes are worsened, the opposite being true where violence is indiscriminate. This finding is coherent with my argument (see section 1.2.3) that periods of violence, when individuals are suddenly made aware that their ethnic identity make them vulnerable, force them to take decisions based on that identity, and hence participate in transforming their social context in one where ethnic groups become a practical reality. And indeed, the fact that Penic and colleagues (2017) found inter-ethnic contact to be the rarest in areas exposed to asymmetric violence further supports the idea that, in such contexts, ethnic boundaries are turned into reality by collective practices. But while coherent with my argument, the studies I have reviewed do not take social identity as a direct outcome.

A second important insight emerging from this literature is that the effect of war-experiences on intergroup attitudes appears to be driven by a change in the normative climate of affected communities. And indeed, there is growing evidence in the social psychological literature that social norms are generally powerful determinants of intergroup attitudes and a prominent path through which rapid social change can occur. I review this evidence in the following section.

2.3.3 *Meta-representations: impact, malleability, and relation to social identities*

Social psychological research since Allport (1954b) has mainly studied intergroup conflict through its individual cognitive and emotional underpinnings and, in more recent

years, has been increasingly dedicated to automatic, implicit, and subtle manifestations of racism and prejudice. We have seen (see section 2.2.2) that this trend needs to be connected with normative changes of the late twentieth century which, at the time, justified some optimism: racism and prejudice, it seemed, were becoming increasingly difficult to express openly. But in recent years, the rise of right-wing populisms around the globe has shown that such normative changes are reversible: in many places, outright expressions of racism seem to enter more and more into the range of acceptable discourse. An important resource in this context is the tradition of research theorizing social norms as critical determinants of intergroup attitudes and behavior (Crandall & Stangor, 2008; Paluck, 2012), which goes at least as far back as Sherif and Sherif's Group Norm Theory (Sherif, 1936; Sherif & Sherif, 1953). According to this framework, attitudes, beliefs and values are less the outcome of individual cognitive mechanisms or life trajectories than of the adoption of those shared within a valued ingroup (i.e. *reference* group).

Recent research has provided evidence that perceived social norms – defined as "socially shared definitions of the way people do behave or should behave" (Paluck, 2009, p. 575) – constitute strong determinants of individuals intergroup attitudes (Blanchard et al., 1994; Crandall et al., 2002) and (intended) behavior (Paluck, 2009, 2011; Portelinha & Elcheroth, 2016). Some findings even suggest that intergroup attitudes are hardly distinguishable from social norms: Crandall and colleagues (2002) found that perceived acceptability of prejudice toward 105 groups among one sample of American students correlated at .96 with personal attitudes toward the same groups expressed by a different sample of students from the same campus. However, Crandall and colleagues' findings most likely reflect a specific configuration where attitudes can align with social norms because the latter are perceived as stable. Indeed, a distinctive feature of social norms that emerges from a number of field experiments is their relative *malleability* compared to individual attitudes and beliefs (Paluck, 2009, 2011; Portelinha & Elcheroth, 2016). In her two field experiments conducted in completely different contexts, Elizabeth Paluck (2009, 2011) observed that the experimental (media-based and a network-based, respectively) interventions transformed perceived social norms and behavior but *not* individual attitudes (see also Crandall et al., 2018).

Given their malleability and impact (on intergroup attitudes, behavior and political behavior in general), social norms have been suspected to be a privileged vehicle for social change (Elcheroth et al., 2011; Tankard & Paluck, 2016). Hence, there is an important stake in understanding the sources that shape them. At least three important sources emerge from the literature: the mass-media (e.g., Bodor, 2012; Elcheroth & Reicher, 2014; Paluck, 2009), formal institutions (e.g., national laws; Eisner et al., 2020) and the direct observation of peers' talk and behavior (e.g., Fein et al., 2007; Paluck et al., 2016; Shepherd & Paluck, 2015; Zingora et al., 2019). While these different sources can shape social norms (and thus behavior) independently, their mutually amplifying effects arguably produce the largest consequences. This assumption is at the heart of the *Spiral of Silence Theory* (Neumann, 1993; Noelle-Neumann, 1974). According to this theory, an initial shift in perceived public opinion on a contested issue (e.g., produced by a mass-mediated political event) can change expressive behaviors: those who now perceive they hold a minority opinion avoid expressing their view while those who think they are on the majority's side feel, on the contrary, more confident to speak out. This triggers a spiraling process: self-censorship among the perceived minority and increased expression among the perceived majority further amplifies the initial shift in perceived opinion climate. Evidence for this spiraling process has been found for diverse contested issues such as strategies to fight unemployment in Italy (Matthes, 2014), voting intentions in the US (Bodor, 2012) or attitudes toward immigration in Europe (Thurre et al., 2020; see also Matthes et al., 2018). And while some research findings are at odds with the theory's emphasis on the self-censorship of the perceived minority (e.g., Louis et al., 2010), they are consistent with the logic of an initial shift in perceived norms being amplified by shifts in collective expressive behavior, thus (potentially) resulting in rapid social change.

The literature on social norms has important implications for the argument of the present thesis. There are, however, a number of theoretical ambiguities that need to be clarified. First, the initial emphasis of Group Norm Theory on reference groups (Sherif & Sherif, 1953) tends to be less pronounced in recent research on social norms, resulting in a not always clear specification of who are those 'others' whose perceived attitudes and behavior produce normative influence (Spears, 2020). In this regard, self-categorization theorists (Turner, 1991; Turner et al., 1987) have elaborated a solid theoretical framework predicting that others' perceived attitudes, beliefs and behaviors have fundamentally

different effects depending on whether individuals categorize sources as ingroup or outgroup members. Because individuals perceive ingroup members as essentially similar to themselves when a social identity is salient (i.e. depersonalization process; Turner et al., 1987), they expect ingroup members' attitudes, beliefs and behavior to be valid sources of information about the proper way to think, feel and behave. Hence, disagreement with ingroup members questions the subjective validity of one's own views; and one looks at ingroup members for information when uncertain about the proper way to interpret or behave in a particular situation (Turner, 1991). This process by which ingroup members' views and behaviors are used as information to achieve subjective validity and internalized – which Turner calls Referent Informational Influence – leads to *conformity* to group norms. There is now a lot of evidence showing that such conformity to normative information is conditional on perceiving sources as ingroup members (e.g., Abrams et al., 1990; Platow et al., 2005; K. M. White et al., 2009; for reviews, see Michael A. Hogg & Reid, 2006; Spears, 2020). On the contrary, individuals don't expect information about what outgroup members think and do to be a valid source of information about themselves and can even lead them to differentiate themselves from the source (e.g., Abrams et al., 1990; David & Turner, 1996). In that case, overt *compliance* (with perceived outgroup norms, including self-censorship) is likely to occur when power relations create a threat of sanctions for non-compliance (Reicher et al., 1998; Reicher & Levine, 1994). This distinction between conformity to ingroup norms and compliance to outgroup pressure is essential to understand why shifts in the perceived opinion climate don't necessarily produce a corresponding change in attitudes. For instance, Lönnqvist and colleagues (2019) measured attitudes toward immigration among a representative sample of Finns before and after the parliamentary election of a populist anti-immigration party (Finn's Party) in 2015. They observed that, among those who didn't vote for the Finn's Party, pro-immigration attitudes strongly *increased* after the election while no change was recorder among supporters of the Finn's Party. Crandall and colleagues (2018) observed among one US sample that prejudice towards groups targeted by Trump's rhetoric (and not others) was perceived as *more* normative after than before Trump's election. On the contrary, they observed in another US sample that self-reported prejudice toward the same groups *diminished* after the election. Moreover, there is tentative evidence that shifts in the opinion climate can even produce overt resistance. Thus, Louis and colleagues (2010) observed

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among an Australian sample that, among opponents to a rising anti-immigration candidate, the perception that public opinion was becoming more anti-immigration didn't predict self-censorship (as the Spiral of Silence Theory would predict) and actually increased these participants involvement in the debate.

Thus, when talking about the general notion of beliefs that individuals form about others' mental states, the generic term *meta-representations* (Elcheroth et al., 2011) is perhaps preferable to that of social norms because the former doesn't presume the kind of effect these perceived mental states will have on the perceiver. Within this terminological framework, one can reframe the role of social categories in mechanisms of social influence by describing them as *organizing principles* of meta-representations (Elcheroth et al., 2011; Raudsepp, 2005): individuals divide social reality into groups to which they associate particular beliefs, attitudes and behaviors. Hence, the significance of others' mental states to the self will depend on which group these mental states are associated with and on the relationship of that group to the self. Another way to put this is to say that, when considering a particular way of thinking or acting, individuals reflexively consider its meaning in terms of location within a system of social categories. For instance, the experiment by Emler and colleagues already discussed in section 2.2.1 (Emler et al., 1983), conservative participants demonstrated their reflexive awareness that a particular type of moral reasoning was stereotypical of left-wing ideology and hence enacted it only when asked to answer as left-wingers.

There is a second theoretical ambiguity that flows from the first. If salient social identities organize meta-representations, social identities are meta-representations themselves (Elcheroth & Reicher, 2017). In other words, individuals are aware that others have beliefs about the social categories that are relevant to understand a given situation. The most obvious evidence for this comes from the fact that leaders (or 'entrepreneurs of identity'; Reicher & Hopkins, 2001) often attempt to actively shape their audience's categorization of social reality through rhetoric (e.g., Elcheroth & Reicher, 2014). As I already argued (section 2.2.3), dividing the social structure into social groups is often a difficult task leaving room for ambiguity, uncertainty and debate (Elcheroth & Reicher, 2014; Herrera & Reicher, 1998; Stevenson et al., 2007). Hence, what others think about social identities can be determinant in validating the social identities inferred in isolation. For instance, Wright

(1997) created an experimental situation where participants were ostensibly discriminated against but where the impermeability of group boundaries were ambiguous (*i.e.* highly restricted boundary permeability) and manipulated exposure to another (confederate) ingroup member's interpretation of the situation. Compared to those who were isolated from their peer's interpretation, participants exposed to an ingroup member expressing anger and talking about discrimination were more interested in collectively challenging unfair treatment of their group, and perceived the experimental social structure as less legitimate and stable. More generally, interaction between group members has been shown to be crucial to enable collective action by fostering a consensual definition of ingroup and outgroup among ingroup members (Stott & Drury, 2004).

In sum, social norms or more generally meta-representations constitute powerful vehicles of social change because they are highly malleable, they can transform behavior independently of intimate beliefs, and such shifts in behavior can feedback into the perception of social norms and thus amplify the initial change. However, the literature on these processes of change tends to neglect the fact that social identities are themselves meta-representations and, as such, can be subject to the same kind of processes. This gap appears even more important to given that social identities are pivotal in organizing the conforming effects of meta-representations. A crucial contribution of the present thesis is to treat social identities as meta-representations as well as intimate beliefs.

2.3.4   Complex identities: multiple groups, dimensions, and perspectives

The concept of social identity has played a central role in the social psychological literature on intergroup relations since the seminal contribution of Tajfel and Turner (1979/2001). In recent years, significant developments have occurred in this literature which have important consequences on how to conceptualize and study the role of group memberships in intergroup relations. In the following, I identify three of such recent developments and review the relevant literature.

The first development is an increased attention paid to the fact that individuals systematically to belong to *multiple social groups*. For instance, there is a rapidly growing body of evidence indicating that identifying with multiple groups improves mental (Cruwys et al., 2013) and physical health (Steffens, Cruwys, et al., 2016; Steffens, Jetten, et al., 2016) as

well as for general well-being. These beneficial effects are thought to operate through increased self-esteem (Jetten et al., 2015) and perceived personal control (Greenaway et al., 2015). These findings have important consequences notably for members of marginalized groups. Indeed, belonging to devalued, discriminated or stigmatized social groups has adverse effects on well-being and health (Paradies et al., 2015; Puhl & Brownell, 2006; Schmitt et al., 2014; Sønderlund et al., 2017). In that case, identifying with multiple groups can prove an important resource buffering these negative effects, but only to the extent that these include more socially valued identities (Rydell & Boucher, 2010; Sønderlund et al., 2017). The beneficial effect of identification with multiple groups is mitigated, however, by the fact that they sometimes entail conflicting or even incompatible norms, values or goals, creating an identity conflict (Hirsh & Kang, 2016; Jones & Hynie, 2017), which can reduce well-being and produce acute stress (Brook et al., 2008; Hirsh & Kang, 2016).

More importantly for the present thesis, researchers have recently examined how membership to multiple ingroups can shape the quality of intergroup relations (see Crisp & Hewstone, 2007). A pioneering contribution in this regard is Roccas and Brewer's (2002) concept of *social identity complexity, i.e.* the degree to which individuals perceive their different social identities to be dissimilar and non-overlapping (high complexity) or, on the contrary, similar and overlapping (low complexity). For instance, a Sinhalese Buddhist considering that most Sinhalese are Buddhist (high overlap) and that a prototypical Sinhalese is very similar to a prototypical Buddhist (high similarity), would display a lower level of social identity complexity than a Sinhalese Christian who perceives a more limited overlap and similarity between his linguistic and religious identities. According to Roccas and Brewer, high social identity complexity problematizes exclusive – and promotes more inclusive – intergroup attitudes because it confronts individuals to situations where outgroup members become ingroup members when a different categorization is used. And indeed, there is accumulating evidence that social identity complexity improves intergroup relations by increasing the willingness to engage in intergroup contact (Maloku et al., 2019), reducing negative attitudes toward outgroups (Marilynn B. Brewer & Pierce, 2005; Miller et al., 2009; Roccas & Brewer, 2002; Schmid et al., 2009, 2013) and fostering intergroup trust (Xin et al., 2016).

Recent research has also examined how perception of a target is affected by its belonging to multiple groups (Nicolas et al., 2017; for reviews, see Petsko & Bodenhausen, 2020). For instance, one individual can belong to two groups associated with contradicting stereotypes. In that case, evaluation of the same target on the stereotypic dimension will radically change depending on which category is salient (Rattan et al., 2019). We have already seen (section 2.2.2) evidence that dehumanization of a racialized target depended on neglecting its other group memberships (Albarello & Rubini, 2012). In particular, we have seen making salient an identity that is common to the perceiver and the target can completely override even implicit racial bias (J. C. Simon & Gutsell, 2019). And there is evidence that the positive effect of perceived common group membership increases cumulatively with the number of common group memberships. Thus, in a survey experiment with Russian participants, Grigoryan (2020) asked respondents to evaluate individuals presented in vignettes, the group membership of which was experimentally manipulated through eight identity markers (*e.g.*, ethnicity, religion, immigration status). Analyses showed that the number of group memberships the participants had in common with the target linearly increased the positivity of their attitude.

The second important development consists in differentiating *multiple dimensions* of social identity. Although social identification is often measured as a one-dimensional construct, Tajfel's (1981) famous definition already distinguished between cognitive, evaluative and affective components of social identity. Accordingly, a number of studies (Brown et al., 1986; Cameron, 2004; Hinkle et al., 1989; Jackson, 2002) attempted to identify this three-component structure empirically, with rather mixed results: while agreeing on the multidimensionality of social identification, they obtained contrasting results with regard to the nature of the dimensions and their relationship to ingroup bias. More recently, Leach and colleagues (2008; see also Jans et al., 2015) integrated insights from sociological theory to develop a sophisticated hierarchical model of identification distinguishing five modes of identification nested within two broader dimensions (self-definition and self-investment) which proves empirically robust. This model offers the possibility to refine our understanding of individuals' relationship to their ingroup. For instance, Masson and Fritsche (2019) have shown that only individuals who scored high on prototypicality (a mode on the self-definition

dimension) *and* self-investment were willing to challenge harmful ingroup norms (as opposed to conform to them).

In the context of intergroup conflict, it is arguably the distinction introduced by Roccas, Klar & Liviathan (2006) which has proved the most useful in advancing our understanding of individuals' compliance or criticism of group norms and authorities. They proposed to distinguish between *attachment*, which refers to the degree to which individuals include the group in their self-concept, feel emotionally attached to it and want to contribute to its improvement, and *glorification,* which explicitly implies a belief in the superiority of the ingroup and in unconditional respect for the group's rules and authorities. Thanks to this distinction, social psychologists have accumulated evidence that it is when accompanied by glorification that attachment leads to justify wrongdoings committed by ingroup members. When attachment is free of glorification (i.e. critical attachment), it can motivate individuals to be critical of their group's action in order to contribute to its moral improvement (Elcheroth & Reicher, 2014; Leidner et al., 2010; Penic, Elcheroth, & Reicher, 2016; Roccas et al., 2006).

A third development increasing recognition that social identity is defined by *multiple perspectives*, *i.e.* not only self-defined but defined by others as well. Thus, research indicates that people are motivated to influence others' perception and provoke feedback that confirms and consolidates their internalized social identity (Chen et al., 2004, 2006; Hopkins & Greenwood, 2013; Klein et al., 2007). When individuals are faced with an external categorization that doesn't align with their internal sense of self, this is likely to trigger aversive feelings and a motivation to contest this external categorization (i.e. 'categorization threat'; Barreto et al., 2010; Barreto & Ellemers, 2003; Branscombe, Ellemers, et al., 1999; see also Blackwood et al., 2013, 2015). However, it is not always possible to successfully resist external categorization. A powerful audience, for instance, can force us to comply with their external categorization. Thus, Blackwood and colleagues (2013, 2015) interviewed Scottish Muslims about their encounters with authorities. Their analysis revealed that for many of them encounters with airport security constituted highly problematic experiences because they felt publicly treated in a way that reduced them to a pathologized version of their Muslim identity and denied them belonging to the national community, or simply their identity as a respectable person (e.g. as a business person, community elder, etc.), a kind of exclusion they felt unjustified but were unable to challenge. But the ability to challenge an external

categorization can also depend on more subtle factors, such as whether the categorization is made explicit or not : in three experiments, Barreto et al. (2010) showed that treating a female student according to her gender while leaving this category-based criterion implicit – as it is arguably most often the case in everyday social practices – makes it more difficult for her to actively protest and reject that categorization and, ironically, more likely she will internalize it, than if the gender discrimination had been made explicit.

Thus, the relationship between self-categorization and categorization by others is best understood as bi-directional. This was well-illustrated by Lemay and Ashmore (2004). In a longitudinal study examining changes in students' social identity during their transition to college, Lemay and Ashmore (2004) asked their participants to rate the extent to which they belonged to 84 social groups (*i.e.* self-categorization) and the proportion of other students who perceived them to belong to these same groups (*i.e.* reflected categorization) at the beginning of the Fall semester (T1) and two to three months later (T2). They observed that self-categorization at T1 predicted reflected categorization at T2, but also that reflected categorization at T1 predicted self-categorization at T2. Study participants hence tended to re-align self-categorization and reflected categorization, sometimes by interiorizing and sometimes by resisting and re-shaping how they perceive that others categorize them.

In sum, the recent research increasingly recognizes that individuals belong to multiple groups, that social identity should be conceptualized through multiple dimensions, and that individuals define their social identity through multiple perspectives (*i.e.* self and others). However, research examining these three different sources of complexity tends to develop separately. In particular, quantitative research lacks the appropriate empirical tools to perform assessments of social identities that integrate these theoretical insights.

2.4 Contributions of the thesis and overview of the empirical studies

The preceding argumentation has been quite long, and it is now time to situate how the present thesis contributes to the different literatures we have encountered. In this section, I thus sum up and clarify the contributions of the thesis. Theoretical, empirical, and methodological contributions are discussed in turn. Finally, I specify the general research

question and give an overview of the empirical chapters and the more specific questions they aim to answer.

The main theoretical contribution of the present thesis can be summarized in two major assumptions. The first one is that *there can be 'good reasons' for ethnic identities to inspire a special political loyalty*. When looked at from a proper historical perspective, ethno-nationalist aspirations often appear much less baffling and irrational than they do out of context. On the one hand, they are coherent with the principle of political legitimacy that justified the spread of the nation-state and collapse of empires across the world and became increasingly normative on the international arena: state power is illegitimate when exerted by 'aliens', but it is legitimate when exerted by 'likes' (Wimmer, 2002, 2012). On the other hand, such politicized understanding of ethnic differences has emerged out of collective experiences of victimization, which themselves followed an ethnic logic. The second major theoretical assumption is that *periods of social and political instability abruptly amplifies how politicized group cleavages weigh on individuals' decisions and behavior*. Although an essential backdrop to consider, the relatively long-term historical foundations of modern ethnic identities do not fully account for the varying degrees to which these identities actually guide individuals' behavior at different points in time. Ethnic identities become crystalized during periods of *social and political instability*. Social and political instability refers here to periods when some significant events make individuals within a social system suddenly aware of their own *vulnerability*. Such shared awareness produces a systematic shift in individuals' decision-making process: individuals suddenly give more weight to their beliefs about what others think and do – i.e. meta-representations – as they decide a course of action. This shift in individual decision-making aggregates into a highly unpredictable, or *volatile climate*, where small causes can have large-scale consequences. In particular, narratives of intergroup conflict can have the most powerful performative effects, to the extent that they plausibly connect the experience of vulnerability to a particular social identity.

The main empirical contribution of the thesis is threefold. First, using the Afrobarometer data (chapter 3) and two surveys conducted in post-war Sri Lanka (chapter 4 and 5), I examine empirically whether ethnic identities tend to be more important than other group identities in contexts that are heavily understudied in the existing social psychological literature. The two studies in Sri Lanka further provide a fine-grained analysis of what makes

ethnic identities important by examining them not only as intimate attachments, but also as meta-representations, an aspect typically neglected in the existing literature. Second, using a representative survey in post-war Sri Lanka (chapter 5), I study the legacy of periods of political instability by examining how collective experiences of war and poverty relate to complex identity configurations. This fills an important gap in the literature on intergroup relations in the aftermath of ethnic violence by directly examining how identities are defined in such contexts. Third, using the Afrobarometer data (chapter 3), I examine how contextual fluctuations of ethnic salience are related to expressions of political views, thus shedding light on the normative changes entailed by periods of instability.

At the methodological level, the most important contribution of this work is to propose an innovative procedure to empirically assess complex identities through social surveys. While the existing literature recognizes that social identities are the outcome of individuals' self-positioning in relation to multiple groups, multiple dimensions and multiple perspectives, research on these different sources of complexity tends to unfold in isolation from each other and lacks a measurement procedure integrating these various insights. This thesis fills an important gap by developing such a procedure and by showing how, in combination with dimension reduction techniques and cluster analyses, it can be used to extract empirically-rooted typologies of complex identity configurations (chapter 4 and 5). In addition to developing a new instrument, I show (in chapter 5) how to use life calendars to trace experiences of war and poverty through time and examine their spatial distribution. This enables me to provide a rich contextualization of identity configurations through their experiences of victimization.

In sum, the overarching research question which informs the empirical part of the thesis is the following.

<u>Main research question:</u> *how do individuals and communities self-position in relation to multiple group cleavages – and especially ethnic ones – during periods of social and political instability and in their aftermath?*

This overarching question is broken down into three more specific research questions, each of which is addressed by one empirical chapter.

Q1: **How do changes in the collective importance of ethnic identities interact with conflict-prone political norms at key turning points?**

Some authors (e.g., Gagnon Jr, 2006; Stoessinger, 2010) have noted that the initial cause of violent ethnic conflict can be authoritarian leaders imposing a violent course of action upon a mostly reluctant population. Study 2 develops and tests a hypothesis about how shifting political norms can create a space for the rise of authoritarian leaders. Given that ethnic identities are typically politicized (e.g., Eifert et al., 2010), individuals are likely to consider others' ethnic membership and identification as a privileged lens to infer their adherence to particular political norms. Thus, social contexts where the relative salience of ethnic identities suddenly changes – *i.e.* increases *or* decreases – should imply uncertainty with regard to prevailing political norms, and hence produce a *volatile climate*. Relying on the Spiral of Silence theory (Neumann, 1993) and the social representation approach to social change (Elcheroth et al., 2011), Chapter 2 tests the hypothesis that volatile climates favor the emergence of usually censored authoritarian political norms. More specifically, I suggest that individuals supporting authoritarian forms of leadership usually refrain from expressing their views because they conflict with democratic principles, which constitute the normative justification for state power in the context of modern states. When the local social context becomes volatile, and prevailing political norms become uncertain, supporters of authoritarian leadership might perceive a window of opportunity to express their views. This change in expression can, on the one hand, increase other authoritarians' perception that their views are widespread and further encourage their expression ('escalation of expression'). On the other hand, it can induce among supporters of democratic leadership the perception that there is becoming the minority's and encourage self-censorship. Such self-censorship would, in turn, reinforce other democrats that their opinion is the minority's ('spiral of silence'). This hypothesis is tested in the context of ten African countries using the first and second rounds of the Afrobarometer survey data. The first two rounds of the Abrobarometer survey included an open question assessing respondents' "first and foremost" source of social identification.

Q2: **How can we assess individuals' self-positioning of their position within multiple group cleavages (*i.e.* complex identities) in large-scale surveys?**

Throughout this chapter, I have repeatedly argued that individuals' definition of their social identities should be a central empirical question. In this regard, recent social psychological research is rich in theoretical insights about the ways individuals can relate their self to multiple social groups. However, Chapter 4 (co-authored with Guy Elcheroth) starts from the observation that widespread methodological practices in quantitative research mostly fail to do justice to these theoretical advances. We therefore attempt at filling this gap by introducing an innovative methodological proposal for the study of complex identity configurations in social surveys. For this purpose, we rely on three critical insights from the recent social-psychological literature on the role of identity in intergroup conflicts: (1) there is always a multitude of intersecting social categories involved in a conflict, and it is problematic to pick out one or two of these categories and leave everything else unobserved (multiple affiliations); (2) there are qualitatively different ways of relating to social categories that are relevant to the self, which cannot be subsumed under the sole umbrella of identification (multiple modes) and (3) social categories do not only shape social conflicts when people embrace them, but also when they perceive them as relevant to others (multiple perspectives). We present a methodological procedure which attempts to integrate these insights and apply it in a survey conducted in post-war Sri Lanka (N=400). Presented with a list of identity markers, respondents indicated which were the most important for themselves and others and, when important for themselves, rated them on items assessing modes of identification as well as categorization by ingroup and outgroup members. Using a combination of Non-Linear Principal Components Analysis (see Linting et al., 2007) and cluster analysis, we extracted dimensions underlying participants' answers and an empirically-rooted typology of identity configurations. The social-psychological and sociological profiles of these identity configurations was analyzed. We further assessed the political significance of these identity configurations by testing if they differentially predict support for the public sharing of politically-loaded memories of the civil war.

Q3: **How do violent societal crises – and the collective experiences they produce – shape individuals' complex identities?**

Chapter 5 stays in the context of post-war Sri Lanka and attempts fulfill a double aim. Consistent with the inductive approach I have been arguing for, the first aim is to describe the main ways of defining social identities among the Sri Lankan population. For this purpose, we

rely on the methodological approach developed in Chapter 4, but improve it in significant ways. On the one hand, analyses are based on survey data collected among a representative sample of the Sri Lankan population (in 2017). This enables us to treat the extracted identity configurations as relative positions within a coherent social system. On the other hand, we modified the measurement tool in order to further relax constraints on participants' choice of relevant identity markers and allowed them to select as many as they fond appropriate for each dimension. The second aim was to examine the impact of war-time individual and collective experiences of war and poverty on individuals' social identities. In order to achieve it, we relied on life calendar methods (1) to produce a temporal perspective on the trajectories with each identity configuration and (2) to compute contextual indicators of exposure to violence and poverty based on individual experiences.

Chapter 3

Ethnicity, authority and political participation
Expressing political attitudes in contexts of shifting ethnic salience[20]

3.1 Introduction

In recent years, ethnicity has come to play an increasingly important political role on the international scene. The most striking manifestation of this importance lies in the prevalence of ethnic violent conflicts in the modern world: according to the data collected by Wimmer and Min (2006), only 20 percent of the wars around the world involved ethnonationalist aims between 1814 (Congress of Vienna) and 1919 (Versailles Treaty), while this percentage rose to 45 percent between the Versailles treaty and 2001 and even to 75 percent when considering the period between the end of the Cold War and 2001 (see Wimmer, Cederman & Min, 2009).

This state of fact didn't fail to attract the attention of researchers in the field of political violence, who increasingly included the concept of ethnicity in their analysis of violent conflicts (Brubaker and Laitin, 1998). Reviewing this literature, I argue that it is characterized by two broad limitations which impede a better understanding of the political importance of ethnic identities and its consequences. One the one hand, methodological practice often fails to take seriously into account the idea that ethnic categories are socially constructed. As a result, theoretical acceptance of social constructivism has often been insufficient to formulate research questions adapted to the political nature of ethnic identities and deepen our understanding of how people may come to accept the authority of ethnic entrepreneurs. In the present study, fill this gap in two ways: first, by conceptualizing and operationalizing the role of ethnicity in the constitution of the political climate in a fundamentally constructivist way, that is, by investigating how *changes in the importance of ethnic categories* among the population in a given context affect its pattern of political participation. Second, instead of assuming any simple relationship between ethnic identity

[20] Bady, Z. (2017). Ethnicity, authority, and political participation: Expressing political attitudes in contexts of shifting ethnic salience. *Lives Working Papers 59.2*, 1-43.

and acceptance of political leaders' authority, I examine whether contexts of shifting ethnic salience may favour a climate of submission toward (or rejection of) authority by selectively affecting individuals' political participation depending on their ideological orientation.

On the other hand, research generally focuses on either the societal (national) level or the individual level when trying to understand the relationship between ethnicity and violence, and therefore confuses dynamics that happen at the national level with those occurring at more local scales. In the following, I will argue that it is necessary to study more local levels of analysis in order to understand societal outcomes. More precisely, I suggest that normative upheavals happening in local communities may create a fertile ground for the emergence of otherwise silenced ideologies (*e.g.* authoritarian) and that changes in the importance of ethnic categories are a critical factor in this process. These points are addressed in a study based on data collected in eleven African countries.

3.1.1   Ethnic politics: the case of political violence

As Brubaker and others have noted (Brubaker, 2009; Brubaker and Laitin, 1998; Fearon and Laitin, 2000), it is now a commonplace among social scientists to argue that ethnic categories are socially constructed, meaning that they are not given, fixed and stable. Apart from few exceptions (*e.g.* Harvey, 2000; Vanhanen, 1999), virtually all scholars working in the field of ethnicity would agree that the relevance ethnic categories are not given by biology, human nature or some unchangeable historical force – views that are called *primordialist* – but are rather conventional and contingent upon social and historical processes. However, this doesn't mean that this theoretical acknowledgment has always led to draw the right implications in terms of research practices and methodologies.

One form of what one could call '*methodological primordialism*' consists in assuming that, rather than asking whether and why, particular 'ethnic' categories are politically relevant, or relevant at all, for the actors in a particular context. This is exemplified by the widespread use of "ethnic fractionalization" (e.g. Collier & Hoeffler, 2004; Sambanis, 2001) or "ethnic polarization" (*e.g.* Reynal-Querol, 2002 ; Reynal-Querol & Montalvo, 2005) indices as measures of a country's ethnic composition in order to predict the likelihood of conflict (Bhavnani & Miodownik, 2009; Elcheroth & Spini, 2011). What these indices have in common is that they treat individuals' ethnic identity as a given characteristic without any indication

about its subjective relevance for individuals, let alone their political importance. This proves problematic, however, since the relevance of ethnic groups for individuals can strongly vary over time (Eifert, Miguel, & Posner, 2010) and regionally (Bhavnani & Miodownik, 2009) in the same country. It is therefore not surprising that researchers find contradicting results when using this kind of indicators (for a review, see Wimmer, Cederman, & Min, 2009), thus letting the question of the relationship between ethnic diversity and conflict open.

Wimmer and colleagues (Wimmer, 2002; Wimmer et al., 2009) made an important contribution to this field by asking the question differently. They argue that ethnicity matters for conflict – and for politics more generally – not because ethnic identities have some primordial importance in themselves, but because the modern nation-state precisely relies on an ethnonationalist principle of legitimacy (Wimmer, 2002; see also Mann, 2005), meaning that the government is supposed to rule in the name of an ethnically defined people. They argue that when a state's resources are too scarce for universal inclusions and/or the development civil society institutions enabling clientelist networks along non-ethnic lines is too weak, the self-determination and self-rule principles at the core of nationalist ideology will apply to less inclusive ethnic identities and create a struggle for state power between ethnically defined actors. Based on this reasoning, they identify configurations which are more likely to lead to specific forms of conflict depending on the inclusion or exclusion of ethnically relevant actors (Wimmer et al., 2009). They show, for instance, that states in which a large part of the population belongs to a politically relevant ethnic group excluded from state power are more likely to face a rebellion.

One critical aspect of this model is to emphasize the role of power and leadership in the political relevance of ethnic identities: in a world of nation-states, political leaders have strong incentives to legitimize their authority through an ethnic lens. From this perspective, it seems rather irrelevant to look for a direct relationship between ethnic diversity in general and political conflict, since most conflicts involving access to state power or resources are likely to be framed as ethnic. A more interesting matter in this context is rather to understand why political agendas implying political violence or extreme forms of exclusion would gain acceptance among the population at large. This question, which is essentially about acceptance of leadership, matters greatly for at least two reasons. First, even if we know that particular ethnic boundaries are consensual, politically salient and result in conflict over

resources and inequality between ethnic groups in a given context[21], it does not follow that ethnic violence will occur (Elcheroth & Spini, 2011; Brubaker & Latin, 1998). This has for instance been shown by Gurr's (1993) analyses of 227 minority groups in 90 countries: while groups' relative deprivation determined "the issues around which leaders are able to mobilize collective action" (p. 189), it did not explain the use of a violent strategy (*i.e.* rebellion) to address their grievances, which depended much more on the state's reaction and the group's leadership and organization. In other words, explaining the political salience of ethnic identities – and even conflict between ethnic groups – is not enough to explain the outbreak of violence, we further have to understand how leaders advocating a violent course of action are able to secure their authority and the followership of other group members (who would arguably be reluctant to be drawn into a violent conflict; Brubaker & Laitin, 1998).

Second, while it is undoubtedly true that social (*e.g.* ethnic) categories constitute powerful tools through which leaders can mobilize a constituency in service of their political agenda (S. A. Haslam et al., 2013; Reicher & Hopkins, 2001; B. Simon & Oakes, 2006), we should not overestimate ethnic entrepreneurs' ability to successfully impose whatever political agenda through discourse and persuasion appealing to ethnic sentiments. As

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[21] The conditions participating in the political salience of and consensus about particular ethnic boundaries in a society are elaborated by Wimmer (2008; 2013a). In a nutshell, his theoretical framework predicts that individuals try to maximize their access to political, symbolic and material resources through boundary making strategies (*i.e.* strategies aimed at emphasizing particular group boundaries), which are shaped by three main factors: the society's institutional framework, its power structure and the pattern of political networks. The type of group boundaries (class, gender, ethnic, etc.) that is likely to be emphasized depends on the society's political institutions. In the modern world, the hegemonic political institution is the nation-state, which creates incentives to focus on *ethnic* rather than other types of boundaries. The power hierarchy created by the institutional order influences the type of strategy enacted by actors in two ways. First, individuals' boundary making strategies will depend on their own position in the power structure, as they try to maximize their access to resources. This is for instance the case when members of an ethnic minority cross group boundaries, trying to assimilate into the national majority, in order to access citizenship rights and avoid discrimination. Second, power differences imply inequality in individuals' ability to make their boundary making strategies influential, consequential and constraining for others. This is obvious when members of one ethnic group control the state' institutions and exclude minorities as aliens to the nation. Finally, the reach of already existing networks of political alliances will determine the precise location of group boundaries, that is who will be included within the boundary. The result is a picture of multiple strategies of boundary making enacted by actors according to their resources and social position; how does political salience of particular group boundaries emerge in this field of diverging strategies? According to Wimmer (2013a), "a consensus between individuals and groups endowed with different resources is more likely to emerge if their interests at least partially overlap and their strategies of classification can, therefore, concur on a shared view" (p. 98). An interesting aspect of this theory is that, although it clearly recognizes that power differentials between actors imply differences in their ability to make their boundary making strategies consequential and constraining for others, it does not assume that the population will just accept elites' boundary making strategies. It rather conceptualizes consensus about group boundaries as a political exchange or a compromise "between actors who are mutually interested in an exchange of resources" (Wimmer, 2013a; pp. 98-99).

Gagnon's (2004) analysis of the wars in the Former Yugoslavia shows, warlike nationalist appeals were met with considerable resistance among the population. Crucially, he argues that military violence – which presupposes access to political power – was a means to crystalize group boundaries and shut down contention. While this analysis obviously suggests that political violence can be a means to secure one's authority, we should not loose from sight that in this case authority and power are as much the cause as the consequence of political violence because the very ability to implement such a violent course of action presupposes access to political power.

This suggests that leaders' ability to make their authority sufficiently uncontested not only enables them to transform a political struggle into a violent one, but also gives them the power and resources to impose group boundaries into society; strategies which can in turn be used to further secure their authority. For these reasons, I argue that a crucial step forward is to clarify what processes can create an ideological climate which leads the masses to rally around their leaders. Hence, the present study investigates the following question: *in which situation would the masses uniformly and without contestation accept leaders' authority?*

3.1.2 Mobilizing followers, demobilizing challengers

At first glance, one could argue that leaders gain authority by arguing that they work for the interest of the ethnic group, even more when they promise to defend their co-ethnics against a discriminatory or even an aggressive and dangerous outgroup. While I readily acknowledge that such narrative may convince some part of the population, this argument neglects two important points. First, people are not just passive receptors of political propaganda but actively construct meaning based on discourses they are exposed to as well as their experienced social reality, which they in turn communicate to others (Elcheroth, Doise & Reicher, 2011). And because a society will always be characterized by a diversity of social realities and experiences on the ground – *e.g.* friendships, marriages and acts of solidarity crossing ethnic boundaries –, there are always disagreement with and contestation toward political discourses trying to define ethnic identities in exclusive ways (see Gagnon, 2004).

Following this reasoning, the central matter becomes to identify when challengers to authority are made invisible or reduced to silence. In this regard, the spiral of silence theory

(Noelle-Neumann, 1984; Noelle-Neumann & Petersen, 2004) offers a conceptual framework to understand why and when self-censorship may happen in parts of the population. This theory considers public opinion as an instrument of social control that indirectly ensures social cohesion. Public opinion is defined as: "opinions on controversial issues that one *can* express in public without isolating oneself" (Noelle-Neumann, 1993; pp. 62-63, original emphasis). It is assumed that individuals strongly fear isolation and, as a result, constantly monitor their social environment in order to know which opinions can be expressed publicly without being isolated. They refrain from expressing their opinion when they perceive it will attract threats of isolation, whereas those who believe their opinion will be met with approval, on the contrary, tend to easily voice it in public settings. This eventually sets a spiralling process in motion: the ones' tendency to publicly speak out their opinion reinforces the others' impression of holding a minority opinion and therefore their willingness to conceal it in public.

Empirical tests of the theory are nevertheless mitigated: in a meta-analysis of 17 studies, Glynn, Hayes and Shanahan (1997) found that perceived support for one's opinion predicted the willingness to speak out but the effect size was so small that they considered it negligible. Noelle-Neumann and Petersen (2004) argue, however, that such tests abstract one core hypothesis from the theory as if it applied universally, whereas the theory actually assumes that the phenomenon is constraint by a number of factors. An important one is the moral importance of the controversy, its implications for collective values. Further, change in opinion climate is critical in the theory: "Devoid of a heated, morally loaded controversy and an initial shift in the opinion climate that would put pressure on one of the camps, no spiral of silence is expected to occur" (Bodor, 2012; p. 271; see also Matthes, 2015). Finally, the spiral of silence is assumed to be strictly limited in time (Noelle-Neumann & Petersen, 2004). This temporal dimension was clearly illustrated in a study by Bodor (2012): in the context of the U.S. presidential election campaign, he observed that voting intention for Bush (versus Kerry) negatively predicted the self-reported frequency of political discussions at the workplace, but this effect only appeared for the precise week corresponding to a dramatic drop in Bush perceived chances of winning by the public[22].

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[22] This change in opinion climate followed a television debate between Bush and Kerry and corresponded to a shift in media coverage in favour of Kerry (Bodor, 2012).

Overall, this theoretical framework suggests that there are critical moments during which the norms of a society can be put into question through a selective expression of opinions. This provides us with an interesting explanation of how criticism of authority might be shut down which does not focus on leaders' strategy and discourses and give an active part to the society as a whole in the process. Further, it points to the critical role of *political participation* in this process of change by emphasizing that individuals' behaviour shapes the normative context of other people surrounding them; thus constituting a feedback loop in the relationship between collective norms and individual behaviour. As authors taking a social representation perspective (Elcheroth et al., 2011) have argued, there are nevertheless some conceptual weaknesses behind the notion of fear of isolation. First of all, the theory seems to assume that individuals always strongly desire to be part of, and fear to be isolated from, the national majority as whole, an assumption which is arguably unrealistic. On the one hand, it is quite clear that individuals can use a variety of groups as a reference for comparing their opinion (*e.g.* their local community) depending on the context and the controversial issue (see Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987; Turner, 1991). On the other hand, while it may be true that individuals fear isolation, it seems more doubtful that being part of a minority is equivalent to be isolated.

From a social representation perspective (Elcheroth et al., 2011), the critical factor enabling individuals to enact their political opinion is less the perceived majority or minority status of their opinion than the conviction that *some relevant others* happen to share their view (see also Turner, 1991; Wright, 1997). This argument interestingly suggests that we change the focus from the self-censorship of those normally expressive to the expression of those normally silent, thus turning the spiral of silence hypothesis on its head into a complementary hypothesis: periods of upheaval may trigger an '*escalation of expression*'[23] where otherwise silent parts of the population realize (accurately or not) that their stance is shared by others, which leads them to increasingly express it, which in turn shapes others' impression that this opinion is widespread.

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[23] The use of the term "expression" here is not meant to restrict the phenomenon to the act of speaking per se, but rather to emphasize the communicative consequences of political participation in general for political norms, *i.e.* the fact that it contributes to shape the normative context of those who witness the behaviour.

3.1.3   Ethnic identities and volatile local contexts

This approach to the transformation of political norms (described in the previous section) postulate an initial shift in the opinion climate – which would have important implications for collective values – for such collective dynamics of change to occur (Bodor, 2012; Noelle-Neumann & Petersen, 2004). A key question is therefore to identify these periods of upheaval during which collective norms are called into question. In this regard, Bordor's study illustrates the important point that mass-mediated communication can play an important role because it reaches people at the scale of a whole society. This is of course a fact which makes ethnic politics highly relevant by enabling ethnic mobilization at the national scale. It suggests that when the salience of ethnic identities increase or decrease in a whole country, this change occurs in response to an event broadcasted through the channel of mass media.

On the other hand, mass media are obviously not the only source of information about norms and values, and arguably not the most important to individuals. Indeed, what happens in their close social environment may be far more significant and engaging to them. Besides being part of large-scale 'imagined communities' (Anderson, 1983), people belong to local communities with their institutions, norms and values forming the context of their everyday social interactions (Elcheroth & Spini, 2014). When such local communities are relatively stable, social categories play an important role in shaping normative expectations because social representations include knowledge about opinions, beliefs and values associated with different social groups (Raudsepp, 2005; Elcheroth et al., 2011). This not only means that people tend to enact the (political) opinions they think normative for the social category they contextually identify with, but also that they predict others' opinions and behaviour based on how they categorize them. As a result, substantial alterations in the salient social categories should question normative expectations and create a climate of uncertainty. It is (notably) through this process, I argue, that ethnic categories are especially consequential for at least two reasons. First, they are typically represented in an essentialized way (*e.g.* acquired by birth), as inherently stable and rooted in a long history of shared fate and culture, a fact which should give them a highly structuring role regarding normative expectations. Second and most importantly, nationalist ideology – which dominates the modern world and legitimizes the power of nation-states' government – makes them highly loaded in political meaning by

pushing rulers and leaders to find legitimacy in and mobilize an ethnically defined constituency (Wimmer; 2002; 2013b; Wimmer et al., 2009; Wimmer & Min, 2006; Mann, 2005). Hence, change in the importance of *ethnic* identities in a given local context, regardless whether their significance rise or decline, should imply a *volatile climate*, *i.e.* a climate of uncertainty regarding political norms which creates a strong potential for altering patterns of political participation.

Hence, I expect that change in the relative salience of ethnic categories (*i.e.* volatility) in local contexts blurs and changes individuals' knowledge about which opinions are shared by whom within their community and therefore creates uncertainty regarding which political opinions are normative. This, I argue, constitutes a fertile ground for the emergence of spirals of silence and/or escalations of expression. This, however, does not imply a deterministic process: as I already emphasized, such normative changes occur when a highly morally loaded controversy about collective values is at stake (Bodor ,2012), which in turn depends on how the collective is specifically constructed, *i.e.* which stances are debated, mobilized or stigmatized by epistemic authorities. Penic, Elcheroth and Reicher (2015; study 2) nicely illustrated this point in a study in which they analysed the rhetorical structure of a Croatian parliamentary debate about media voicing criticisms toward the regime. They notably showed that the debate constructed certain stances as unspeakable and dissent as inacceptable because of a threatening international context. They argue that this kind of rhetorical demobilization of criticism toward national authorities – because it marginalized such views in the Croatian society – explained why critical patriotism was incompatible with Croatian national identity (as they quantitatively observed in study 1). Besides, the previously emphasized pervasiveness of nationalist ideology as a justification of power in contemporary politics allows us to make a further prediction: because governments and leaders routinely claim to rule "in the name of the people", it seems compelling to expect more democratic views to be normative, and therefore democrats to be more expressive, in stable contexts.

Based on this reasoning, I formulate the following hypotheses. First (1), I expect local – *i.e.* regional – volatility (defined as the absolute temporal variation of ethnic salience in a given context, see below) to predict political participation. As the preceding discussion suggested that both a negative (spiral of silence hypothesis) and a positive (escalation of expression hypothesis) relationships are theoretically possible, I don't formulate any

prediction regarding the direction of the effect and consider it as an empirical question. Second, I expect this effect of regional volatility on political participation to be moderated by individuals' political opinions toward authority. More specifically, I predict that democrats are more participative than authoritarians in stable contexts (democratic opinions are the 'normative baseline') and that this difference is reduced in more volatile ones. Again, for reasons just mentioned, I let the question of the direction of the contextual effect of volatility open: I expect it to either reduce democrats' participation or to increase authoritarians'.

3.2 Method

3.2.1   *Data and sample*

In order to answer my research questions, I rely on data from the Afrobarometer surveys. While I used data from the rounds 1 and 2 and included the eleven countries present in both rounds to explore the variation of ethnic salience (see below, section 3.1.), the models corresponding to my main research questions are tested on data from the round 2 surveys. These data originally include representative samples of 11 countries divided in a total of 104 regions (*N*=16584; see Table 1) although I exclude Zimbabwe for these analyses because a shorter version of the questionnaire was implemented in this country and some crucial predictor variables are not available as a result. The demographic characteristics of the full sample are shown in Table 2.

Table 1. Sample size by country and region (round 2; N_{total} = 16584)

country	Region	n	country	region	n	country	region	n	country	region	n
Botswana $N = 1016$	Central	400	Namibia $N = 1198$	Caprivi	56	Tanzania $N = 1175$	Arusha	48	Uganda $N = 2400$	Central	568
	North East	88		Erongo	95		Dar es Salaam	88		East	608
	South East	208		Hardap	56		Dodoma	51		North	544
	Southern	128		Karas	56		Iringa	47		West	680
	Kgalagadi	32		Kavango	104		Kagera	72	Zambia $N = 1197$	Copperbelt	194
	Kweneng	160		Khomas	200		Kas. Pemba	16		Luapula	103
Lesotho $N = 1200$	Berea	146		Kunene	40		Kas. Unguja	8		Lusaka	163
	Butha-Buthe	72		Ohangwena	127		Kigoma	48		Central	117
	Leribe	199		Omaheke	40		Kilimanjaro	48		Eastern	132
	Mafeteng	124		Omusati	136		Kusini Pemba	8		North-Western	71
	Maseru	308		Oshana	104		Kusini Unguja	8		Northern	172
	Mohales Hoek	112		Oshikoto	96		Lindi	24		Southern	153
	Mokhotlong	48		Otjozondjupa	88		Mara	48		Western	92
	Qacha's nek	56	Nigeria $N = 2423$	Lagos	225		Mbeya	72	Zimbabwe $N = 1101$	Bulawayo	71
	Quthing	64		North Central	313		Mjini Magharibi	24		Harare	200
	Thaba-Tseka	71		North East	296		Morogoro	64		Manicaland	160
Malawi $N = 1200$	Central	487		North West	500		Mtwara	40		Mashonaland Cenral	8
	Northern	152		South East	268		Mwanza	104		Mashonaland East	118
	Southern	561		South South	528		Pwani	32		Mashonaland West	128
Mali $N = 1279$	Gao	54		South West	293		Rukwa	38		Masvingo	128
	Kayes	160	South Africa $N = 2395$	Eastern Cape	319		Ruvuma	40		Matabeland North	72
	Kidal	45		Free State	162		Shinyanga	95		Matabeland South	72
	Koulikoro	325		Gauteng	432		Singida	40		Midland	144
	Mopti	177		KwaZulu Natal	451		Tabora	56			
	Segou	220		Limpopo	244		Tanga	56			
	Sikasso	235		Mpumalanga	180						
	Tombouctou	63		Northern Cape	116						
				North West	207						
				Western Cape	284						

Table 2. Demographic characteristics of the sample.

country	Rural (%)	Women (%)	Mean (SD) education level	Mean (SD) household income
Botswana	55.12	49.90	6.49 (0.85)	5.17 (2.50)
Lesotho	83.08	50.00	6.04 (1.16)	4.92 (2.83)
Malawi	87.33	50.67	5.80 (1.06)	7.05 (3.03)
Mali	69.43	49.34	7.52 (1.08)	3.37 (2.30)
Namibia	60.02	49.67	4.93 (0.43)	4.60 (2.77)
Nigeria	48.95	50.10	6.03 (0.94)	5.72 (2.50)
South Africa	40.79	48.85	5.31 (0.99)	5.69 (2.42)
Tanzania	69.11	50.13	7.89 (0.71)	3.68 (1.91)
Uganda	79.83	51.00	7.64 (0.86)	4.59 (2.64)
Zambia	62.57	48.79	6.50 (0.90)	3.09 (2.06)
Zimbabwe	60.85	49.68	6.64 (0.86)	-
Pooled	63.45	49.86	6.41 (1.30)	4.82 (2.70)

Note. Household income was not asked in the survey in Zimbabwe.

3.2.2   Outcome variables

Political participation. In order to approximate the degree to which respondents publicly disclose their political opinions, I relied on the following items assessing two alternative ways of political participation:

> *Here is a list of actions that people sometimes take as citizens. For each of these, please tell me whether you, personally, have done any of these things during the past year. If not, would you do this if you had a chance? (0=No, would never do this, 1=No, but would do if had the chance, 2=Yes, once or twice, 3=Yes, several times, 4=Yes, often)*
>
> *1) Discussed politics with friends or neighbours?*
> *2) Joined others to raise an issue*

While the first item is similar to traditional measures of political expression used in the spiral of silence research (*e.g.* Matthes, 2015; Bodor, 2012), the second one assesses a quite different behaviour that is not traditionally used in this field; so it provides us with an interesting opportunity to observe whether these two items will be predicted in a similar way. It should be noted that the original response categories make a distinction between respondents who did not implement the behaviour in question and never would from those

who did not implement it but would do if they had the chance. This distinction makes it problematic to treat the different points of the scale as measuring the same constructs for the present study because I am precisely interested in factors that affect the actual implementation of the behaviour. In this perspective, it is clearly not appropriate to consider the interval between the first two points of the scale (0-1) as measuring the same construct as the following ones, let alone to consider them as equivalent intervals.

Furthermore, there are at least two reasons why the response "Yes, once or twice" may be problematic in this context. First, while it is true that it indicates an actual behaviour, it can nevertheless be interpreted as an exceptional event especially when considering the time interval to which the question refers, which is one year. In this sense, respondents who answered in this way may well participate only in exceptional circumstances. Second, our research question makes quite clear that the threshold separating silence from expression is important to the extent that it contributes to the transformation of the normative climate at the aggregated level. The fact that I model political participation as an outcome should not lead us to forget that it is theoretically interesting precisely because it is likely to feedback at the aggregated level and not because I am interested in an effect on the willingness to participate per se. Hence, it is theoretically meaningful to code this variable in a way that emphasizes the boundary between participation and non- (or exceptional) participation. Following this reasoning, my analysis strategy is to dichotomize these variables in order to distinguish respondents who unequivocally implemented the behaviour (i.e. who answered "Yes, several times" or "Yes, often") from the others, and then to check whether the results are robust to the use of these items as continuous.

3.2.3 Individual-level predictors

The individual-level predictors used in this study are of two kinds. The first one concerns concrete examples of authoritarian regimes, asking respondents whether they would approve them or not. The second type of measure covers different attitudes toward leadership.

Acceptance of authoritarian rule. The first set of political attitudes used as predictors assesses the acceptance (or rejection) of different kinds of authoritarian regimes, which are measured with the following items:

> *There are many ways to govern a country. Would you disapprove or approve the following alternatives (1=strongly disapprove – 5=strongly approve)?*
> *1) Only one political party is allowed to stand for election and hold office*
> *2) All decisions are made by a council of chiefs and elders*
> *3) The army comes in to govern the country*
> *4) Elections and parliament are abolished so that the president can decide everything*

Although a principal component analysis shows that all items load on a single factor in each country, reliability indices (ranging from 0.431 to 0.689) are too weak in some countries (especially in Uganda and Zambia). As the deletion of none item improves the scale's reliability, it is better not to treat these items as a coherent scale. Besides, since the response to each of these items may have a different meaning depending on the actual regime of the respondents' country and its history, it seems theoretically meaningful to treat them as distinct variables.

Moreover, since belonging to the majority or the minority is an important aspect in the spiral of silence theory, it seems also appropriate to dichotomize each of these items in order to differentiate those who accept these types of regime from those who reject them. Therefore, I recoded each item response as "reject" for those who explicitly rejected the proposed political regime (*i.e.* who answered "strongly disapprove" or "disapprove"), and "accept" for the others (*i.e.* who answered "Neither Approve Nor Disapprove, "Approve" or "Strongly Approve").

Support for leaders' ingroup favouritism.[24] This measure taps into the ideological justification of discrimination by distinguishing those who believe that leaders should favour their ingroup at the expense of outgroup members, from those who think that they should work for the interest of everyone without distinction. This measure is interesting because it enables us to see whether volatile contexts are associated with the expression of a typical

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[24] This item and the next one were not asked in the round 2 survey in Zimbabwe, which was a shorter version of the survey compared to other countries.

justification of ethnonationalist leaders, *i.e.* that they should and will defend the interest of their co-ethnics. It is formulated as follows:

> *Which of the following statements is closest to your view? Choose Statement A or Statement B. (Agree very strongly with A - agree with A - agree with neither - agree with B - agree very strongly with B)*
> *A: Since everyone is equal under the law, leaders should not favour their own family or group.*
> *B: Once in office, leaders are obliged to help their own family or group.*

Since this measure (and the two following) implies a choice between two affirmations before rating the strength of the agreement, it seems natural – in addition to be theoretically meaningful – to dichotomize the items as a function of the affirmation chosen. Hence, I dichotomized the responses in order to differentiate those who explicitly reject leaders' ingroup favouritism (*i.e.* who agree very strongly or agree with A) from others.

(Un)critical followership. The following item measures directly whether respondents think that they should criticize their leaders and question their actions or believe that they should follow them without criticism.

> *Which of the following statements is closest to your view? Choose Statement A or Statement B. (Agree Very Strongly with A - Agree with A - Agree with Neither - Agree with B - Agree Very Strongly with B)*
> *A: As citizens, we should be more active in questioning the actions of our leaders.*
> *B: In our country these days, there is not enough respect for authority.*

I also dichotomized this item in order to distinguish critical followers (i.e. those who "Agree Very Strongly with A" or " Agree with A") from uncritical ones.

Affirmation of people rule. Finally, I included a measure of the conception of the relationship between the people and the government, which oppose a paternalistic view of the population to an affirmation that the power belongs to the people:

> *Which of the following statements is closest to your view? Choose Statement A or Statement B. (Agree Very Strongly with A - Agree with A - Agree with Neither - Agree with B - Agree Very Strongly with B)*
> *A: People are like children; the government should take care of them like a parent.*
> *B: Government is an employee; the people should be the bosses who control the government.*

I also dichotomized this item in order to distinguish those who affirm people rule (i.e. those who "Agree Very Strongly with B" or " Agree with B") from those who don't.

3.2.4   Contextual-level predictors

Ethnic salience, ethnic salience increase and volatility. A critical aspect of my methodology is to measure the importance of ethnic identities for individuals instead of assuming it in order to construct contextual indicators of ethnic salience. To do so, I rely on the following open question, which was asked in Afrobarometer surveys of the two first rounds:

> *We have spoken to many [citizens of country name] and they have all described themselves in different ways. Some people describe themselves in terms of their language, ethnic group, religion, or gender, and others describe themselves in economic terms, such as working class, middle class, or a farmer. Besides being [nationality], which specific group do you feel you belong to first and foremost?*

The respondents' verbatim answers were then recoded as a function of the type of group chosen (gender, profession, tribe, etc.). Based on these categories, I coded an individual-level variable – *ethnic identification* – differentiating those who define themselves in ethnic terms from those who don't by coding respondents who fell in categories "Language/tribe/ethnic group", "Race" and "religion" as ethnic identifiers. This choice to include racial and religious categories under the construct of ethnic identity reflects a constructivist definition of ethnicity, as religion and 'race' can both constitute the basis for a mythical narrative of common ancestry and culture (see Wimmer et al., 2009, Wimmer, 2013a, 2013b), and therefore symbolize boundaries between essentialized groups (Barth, 1969).

Then, this individual-level variable was used to create *contextual indicators of ethnic salience* for each country and region present in the sample by computing the proportion of ethnic identifiers among the respondents living in the region/country. This was done separately for round 1 and round 2. I computed two additional contextual indicators based on the salience of ethnic identities for each region and country: (1) I computed the *increase in ethnic salience* by subtracting the proportion of ethnic identifiers at round1 from the proportion at round2 ($proportion_{round2}$ - $proportion_{round1}$) and (2) I did exactly the same

computation except that I took the absolute value of the result ($|$proportion$_{round2}$ - proportion$_{round1}|$). This allowed me to construct an indicator of *volatility*, defined as the change in the normative importance of ethnic categories regardless of the direction of this change.

3.3 Results

3.3.1   Preliminary analyses

To start with, an important thing to know is whether there has been a variation in the salience of ethnic identities through time (*i.e.* between rounds) in the countries composing the sample, the extent of this variation and its direction. As can be seen in Figure 1 (see also Table 3), there is on average a decrease in the salience of ethnic identities (*M* = -0.10, *SD* = 0.22) and the average absolute variation (*i.e.* volatility) amounts to one fifth of the population (*M* = 0.20, *SD* = 0.13).

Table 3. Ethnic salience, ethnic salience increase and volatility by country.

Country	ethnic salience (time 1)	ethnic salience (time 2)	ethnic salience increase (ES 2 – ES 1)	Volatility ($|$ES 2 – ES 1$|$)
Botswana	0.37	0.33	-0.11	0.11
Lesotho	0.30	0.61	0.28	0.28
Malawi	0.69	0.28	-0.45	0.45
Mali	0.62	0.60	0.07	0.07
Namibia	0.63	0.27	-0.28	0.28
Nigeria	0.69	0.67	-0.05	0.05
South Africa	0.62	0.28	-0.34	0.34
Tanzania	0.08	0.23	0.13	0.13
Uganda	0.21	0.27	0.06	0.06
Zambia	0.48	0.28	-0.20	0.20
Zimbabwe	0.58	0.32	-0.23	0.23
Mean	0.48	0.37	-0.10	0.20
SD	0.21	0.16	0.22	0.13

As a second step, I computed ethnic salience and its variation between the two rounds at the regional level. Figure 2 helps to get an idea of the homogeneity of this variation among regions of the same country.
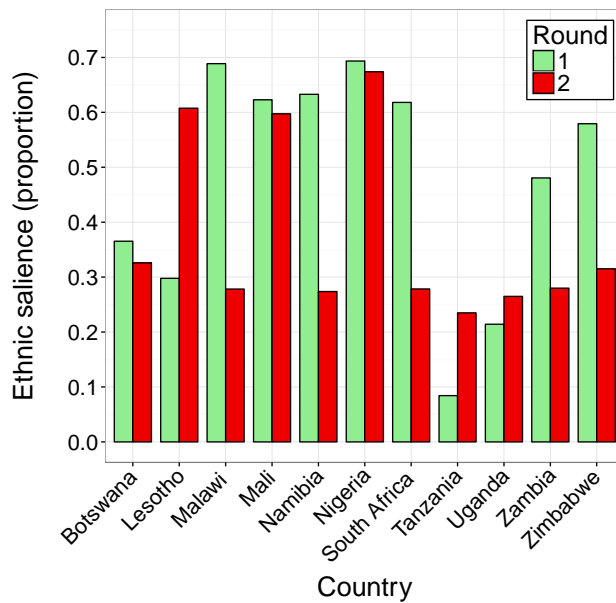
Figure 1. Proportion of respondent identifying first and foremost with their ethnic group, religion or race (*i.e.* ethnic salience) for each country at round 1 and 2.
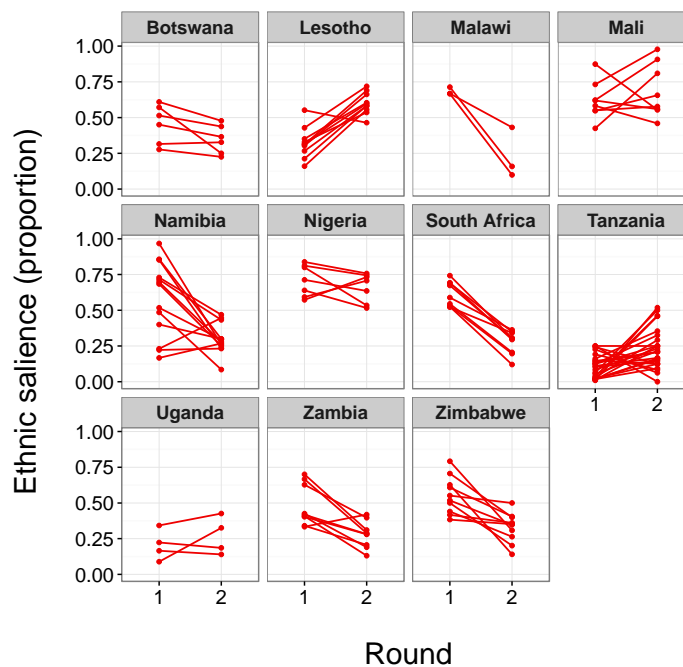
Figure 2. Regional ethnic salience as a function of time (round) in each country

As can be seen from Figure 2, considering the regional level shows that variations of ethnic salience are not homogenous within countries. This is consistent with my assumption

that distinct collective dynamics occur at the regional level that would not be captured by analysing country level variations only.

Table 4. Percentage of respondents holding each political opinion.

country	Accept one party rule	Accept military rule	Accept one-man rule	Accept traditional rule	Uncritical followership	Support leaders ingroup favoritism	Affirm people rule
Botswana	28.87	19.46	13.25	46.18	34.87	20.58	45.48
Lesotho	37.45	13.09	15.43	48.92	23.83	15.00	42.33
Malawi	32.97	13.14	18.91	50.00	17.55	10.73	28.15
Mali	26.49	32.69	28.67	65.05	26.62	33.91	35.08
Namibia	44.65	48.15	41.08	51.88	63.35	27.36	32.80
Nigeria	18.92	30.61	26.18	37.66	32.50	21.53	29.63
S. Africa	29.19	19.66	23.02	33.17	29.50	19.77	38.89
Tanzania	36.29	11.07	11.69	22.86	24.59	24.72	35.75
Uganda	44.82	14.18	8.79	49.83	17.46	30.37	39.69
Zambia	26.05	4.38	7.99	23.39	26.28	12.25	37.67
Zimbabwe	39.22	15.71	15.79	36.24	-	-	48.57
Pooled	32.68	20.62	19.27	42.07	28.80	22.23	37.12

When looking at the distribution of political attitudes in each country (see Table 4), we can see that authoritarian opinions are generally held by a minority, some being nevertheless more accepted than others, such as the opinion regarding traditional rule which is accepted by a majority of the sample in Mali and Namibia, and by half of the sample in Malawi. A surprising exception to this rule, however, is the affirmation of people rule: in all countries the majority of the sample endorses a paternalistic view of the relationship between government and governed and only a minority considers that "*Government is an employee; the people should be the bosses who control the government*". Surprising as it may be, the advantage of this for our purpose is that it may enable us to disentangle the effect of the opinion's minority/majority status from its democratic/authotitarian nature, since it is the only item for which the democratic opinion is not endorsed by the majority in most countries.
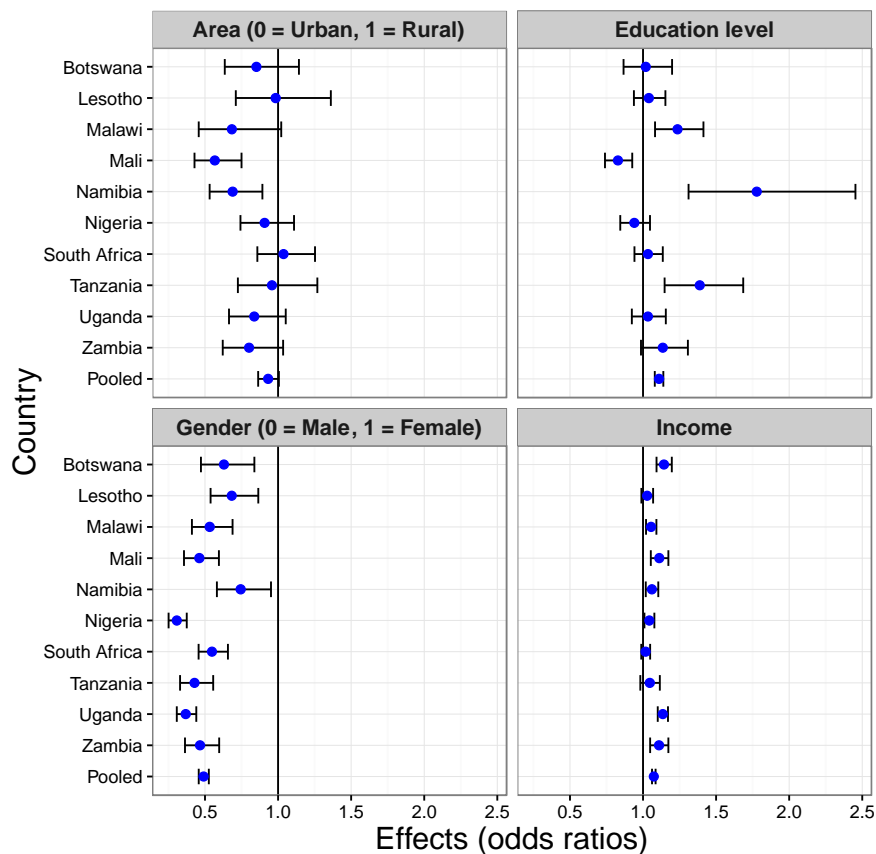
Figure 3. Effect of the area of residence (urban versus rural), level of education, gender and household income on the likelihood of political discussions during the last year.
Note. Odds ratios were computed through separate logistic regression models (one for each country and one with the full sample) including the four variables. Zimbabwe is excluded because household income was not measured.

Let us now examine the effect of demographic characteristics on political participation. When considering the characteristics of respondents who discussed politics - as shown Figure 3 (see appendix 1 and 2 for distributions of participants depending on their political participation and demographics) –, one finds that political expression (*i.e.* discussion) seems to be linked to a higher social status: there are more men, a tendency to live in an urban area (not significant, though), they have a higher household income and they tend to be more educated in some countries (as the overall trend indicates, though the opposite is true in Mali).
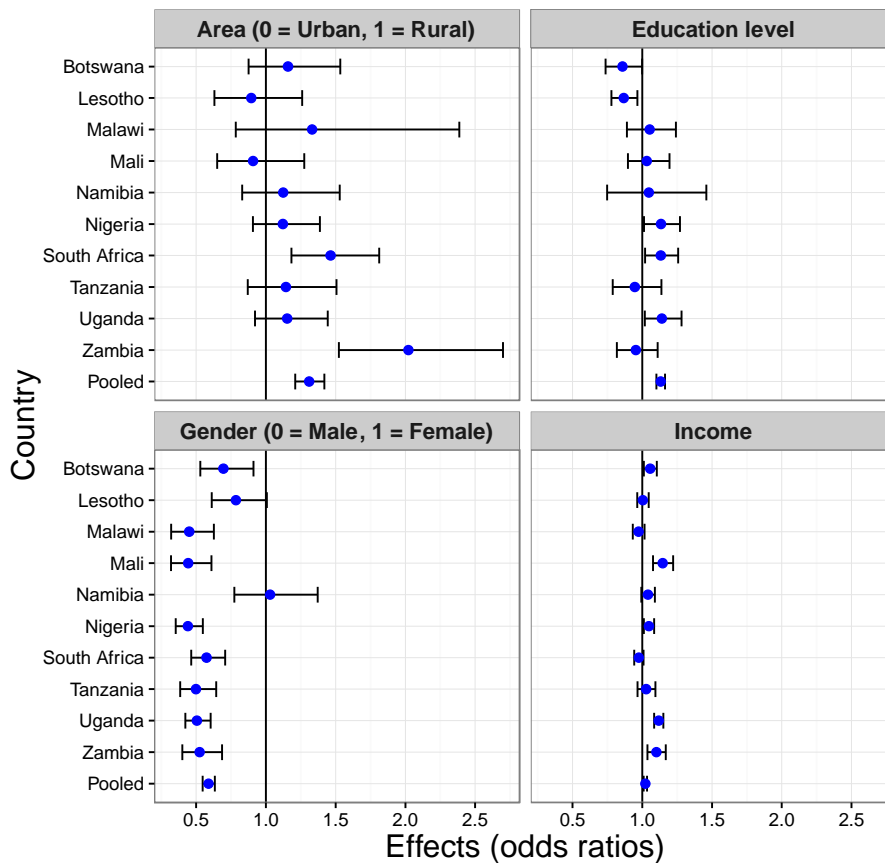
Figure 4. Effect of the area of residence (urban versus rural), level of education, gender and household income on the likelihood of having joined others to raise an issue during the last year.
Note. Odds ratios were computed through separate logistic regression models (one for each country and one with the full sample) including the four variables. Zimbabwe is excluded because household income was not measured.

The profile is less clear when we consider the characteristics of respondents who joined others to raise an issue (see Figure 4 and appendix 2). While there are typically more men, the pooled model indicates more participation in urban areas, the effect of the level of education is heterogeneous across contries and, while they tend to have a higher houshold income, the effect is tiny and clearly smaller than in the case of repsondents who discussed politics.

3.3.2   *Does volatility predict political participation?*

My first hypothesis suggests that regional-level volatility predicts political participation. In order to test it, the first step is to check whether there is a significant

variation of political participation at the regional level that volatility could explain[25]. For this purpose, I fitted a null model for both outcome variables (with region- and country-level random intercepts but no group-level predictors) while controlling for gender, area (urban versus rural), level of education and political opinion dummies (see Table 5, models *(1)*)[26]. From here on, I didn't include household income as a control because of its very high number of missing values (n = 2301). Then I computed 95% bootstrapped confidence intervals around the random intercepts' standard deviation to check if they included zero. For the political discussion model as well as for the joining others', the standard deviation's confidence intervals of the regional level random intercept does *not* include zero (SD = 0.280, CI = 0.214 − 0.347 and SD = 0.360, CI = 0.284 − 0.439, respectively). This confirms that the intercept significantly varies across regions in both models, even though the intraclass correlations are quite low at the regional level for the political discussion model (ICC_{region} = 0.023; $ICC_{country}$ = 0.019) as well as for the joining others' (ICC_{region} = 0.034; $ICC_{country}$ = 0.104).

As a second step, I added volatility as a regional-level predictor and ethnic salience (round 2) as a regional-level control. Contrary to my expectations, Table 5 (left part, model *(2)*) shows that regional volatility does not significantly predict the likelihood of political discussions, although the odds ratio indicates a positive relationship (OR = 1.426, p = 0.203). As can be seen from the right part of Table 5 (model *(2)*), however, regional volatility does positively predict the likelihood of joining others to raise an issue (OR = 2.322, p = 0.014). These data therefore suggests that volatility is indeed a political process since it is related to at least one form of political participation.

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[25] The adequate procedure for testing for the significance of random effects is a debated issue in the literature on multilevel modelling. Indeed, classical tests using a chi-squared statistic for the likelihood ratio test yield highly conservative results because the value of the null hypothesis is located at the edge of the parameter space (*e.g.* Bates, 2010). In this paper, I use bootstrapped confidence intervals as suggested by Crainiceanu and Ruppert (2004).

[26] All models were tested using Maximum Likelihood Estimation with Laplace Approximation.

Table 5. Multilevel logistic regression models predicting the likelihood of political discussions (left part, *N*=13905, 94 regions) and joining others to raise an issue (right part, *N*=13896, 94 regions) during the last year (unstandardized odds ratios).

		Discussed politics				*Joined others to raise an issue*			
		(1)		*(2)*		*(1)*		*(2)*	
		Odds ratio	St. error	Odds ratio	St. error	Odds ratio	St. error	Odds ratio	St. error
Individual level	Intercept	1.262	0.208	1.146	0.242	0.620†	0.160	0.391**	0.120
	Gender	0.466***	0.017	0.467***	0.017	0.542***	0.021	0.542***	0.021
	Area	0.788***	0.033	0.785***	0.033	1.120*	0.052	1.115*	0.051
	Education level	1.047*	0.021	1.049*	0.021	1.008	0.023	1.009	0.023
	Accept one party rule	0.859***	0.036	0.858***	0.036	1.035	0.047	1.033	0.046
	Accept military rule	0.897*	0.046	0.895*	0.046	0.883*	0.049	0.881*	0.049
	Accept dictatorship	1.029	0.054	1.029	0.054	0.887*	0.051	0.888*	0.051
	Accept traditional rule	0.808***	0.033	0.808***	0.033	1.032	0.044	1.031	0.044
	Uncritical followership	0.810***	0.034	0.809***	0.034	1.007	0.045	1.006	0.045
	Accept leaders' ingroup bias	0.950	0.043	0.950	0.043	0.949	0.045	0.946	0.045
	Affirm people rule	1.132**	0.043	1.131**	0.043	1.047	0.042	1.045	0.042
Contextual-Level	Ethnic salience	-	-	1.018	0.309	-	-	1.963†	0.742
	Volatility	-	-	1.426	0.398	-	-	2.322*	0.799
Fit	Marginal R² (%)	6.013		5.992		2.693		3.285	
	Conditional R² (%)	9.930		9.886		16.319		17.391	

Note. † *p* < .1 * *p* < .05 ** *p* < .01 *** *p* < .001. The significant effect of volatility holds when testing the model with the outcome as continuous. Fit indices are pseudo *R-squared* adapted to multilevel models based on Nakagawa and Schielzeth (2013) and Johnson (2014). *Marginal R-squared* should be interpreted as the percentage of variance explained by fixed effects only, whereas conditional R-squared should be interpreted as the variance explained by both fixed and random effect

3.3.3   *Testing the moderating effect of political opinions (1): discussing politic*

My second main hypothesis predicts that regional volatility interacts with individuals' political opinion toward authority. Because I expect democratic opinions to be the normative 'baseline', I predict that authoritarians participate less than democrats in stable (*i.e.* low volatility) regions and that this gap is reduced or inversed in more volatile regions. However, I am especially interested in the *kind* of selective effect of regional volatility, that is: does regional volatility necessarily implies a decrease of one part of the sample's participation (spiral of silence) or – as a social representation approach suggests – does it create some kind of 'escalation of participation'?

In this section, I test whether regional volatility interacts with each political opinion to predict political discussions. But before testing cross-level interactions, one first needs to check whether slopes significantly vary across contextual units. To do so I followed the same strategy as in the previous section: for each political opinions I fitted a null model (controlling for demographic and every political opinion dummies) in which I allowed the individual-level coefficient involved in the hypothesized interaction (in addition to the intercept) to vary across regions, but also across countries (*i.e.* I specified them as region and country level random effects) in order to ensure that the variance of the regional-level random coefficient (and the observed interactions in the following models) cannot be explained by country-level variation. Then I computed bootstrapped confidence intervals around the random slopes' standard deviation. As none of them includes zero, we can conclude that each political opinion's coefficient significantly varies across regions.

I therefore turned to the main tests, by adding the interaction of each political opinion with regional volatility in separated models; these are shown in Table 6. We can see that model (4) indicates a significant interaction between acceptance of traditional rule and volatility (*OR* = 2.259, *p* = 0.048). In order to decompose the interaction, I fitted successively model (4) after transforming the regional volatility variable such that regions with the lowest volatility have a value of zero (*i.e.* its original, not mean-centered, form) and then again such that regions with highest volatility have a value of zero. This allows me to asses the simple effects of acceptance of traditional rule at these respective values of regional volatility.

As expected, in less volatile regions (when volatility equals its lowest value, which is zero) those who accept the rule of chiefs and elders discussed less politics than those who reject it (*OR* = 0.700, *p* = 0.010) which is not the case when volatility is at its highest value – the odds ratio even indicates a positive trend, though not significant (*OR* = 1.246, *p* = 0.315; see Figure 5) – or at its mean value (as in Table 6) in which case the effect is only marginaly significant (OR = 0.844, p = 0.089).

Figure 5. Representations of the simple effects involved in the cross-level interaction in model (4) from Table 6.
Note. Low = lowest value; High = highest value.

More relevant to my research question, however, are the simple effects of regional volatility itself. I fitted model (4) while coding individuals who reject traditional rule as zero and those who accept it as one (as in Table 6) and then I reversed the coding in order to examine the effect of volatility on those who accept and those who reject traditional rule, respectively. As Figure 5 clearly shows, volatility does not predict the likelihood of political discussions for individuals rejecting traditional rule (*OR* = 0.964, *p* = 0.918) whereas it does for those who accept it: they discussed *more* politics in highly volatile regions than in stable ones (*OR* = 2.178, *p* = 0.025).

The only other significant interaction from Table 6 is in model (7), which indicates that regional volatility interacts with the affirmation of people rule to predict political discussions

(*OR* = 0.496, *p* = 0.034). When examining the simple effects of political opinion (represented in Figure 6), we can see that those who affirm people rule discussed *more* politics than those who support a paternalistic position of the rulers toward the ruled in the least volatile regions (*OR* = 1.302, *p* = 0.004), whereas there is an opposite trend in the most volatile regions, though not significant (*OR* = 0.794, *p* = 0.165). Again, this is consistent with our expectation that democrats participates more in stable contexts and that this gap is reduced when the local environment becomes volatile.

Turning to the simple effects of regional volatility, the odds ratio indicates a positive effect of regional volatility for individuals holding a paternalistic view of the people but the p-value is just above the threshold of significance (*OR* = 1.851, *p* = 0.050) and there is no effect for those who affirm people rule (*OR* = 0.919, *p* = 0.800).

Table 6. Multilevel logistic regression models predicting the probability of political discussions during the last year (unstandardized odds ratios, *N*=13905, 94 regions, 10 countries).

		(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
Individual-level	Intercept	1.179	1.193	1.188	1.269	1.228	1.227	1.272
	Accept oneparty rule	0.912	0.857***	0.854***	0.856***	0.859***	0.855***	0.853***
	Accept military rule	0.885*	0.872	0.889*	0.891*	0.891*	0.897*	0.899*
	Accept dictatorship	1.013	1.023	1.055	1.007	1.023	1.024	1.022
	Accept traditionnal rule	0.803***	0.812***	0.805***	0.844†	0.810***	0.808***	0.807***
	Uncritical followership	0.815***	0.810***	0.812***	0.807***	0.814*	0.811***	0.805***
	Support leaders ingroup favouritism	0.955	0.955	0.954	0.952	0.952	0.943	0.938
	Affirm people rule	1.127**	1.124**	1.133***	1.132**	1.130**	1.137***	1.109†
Contextual (region)	Ethnic salience	0.992	1.049	1.047	1.020	0.979	1.027	1.016
	Volatility (centered)	1.130	1.423	1.318	0.964	1.574	1.415	1.851†
	Accept oneparty rule * volatility	1.918	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Accept military rule * volatility	-	0.861	-	-	-	-	-
	Accept dictatorship * volatility	-	-	1.279	-	-	-	-
	Accept tradit. rule * volatility	-	-	-	2.259*	-	-	-
	Uncrit. followership * volatility	-	-	-	-	0.782	-	-
	Support leaders ingroup favouritism * volatility	-	-	-	-	-	0.995	-
	Affirm people rule* volatility	-	-	-	-	-	-	0.496*
Fit	Marginal *R²* (%)	5.820	6.022	5.957	5.963	5.998	6.033	6.084
	Conditional *R²* (%)	11.096	10.078	10.343	10.937	10.457	10.280	10.502

Note. † *p* < .1 * *p* < .05 ** *p* < .01 *** *p* < .001. Gender, area, level of education (not shown) and regional ethnic salience are controlled for. Interaction effects are robust to models with a continuous outcome
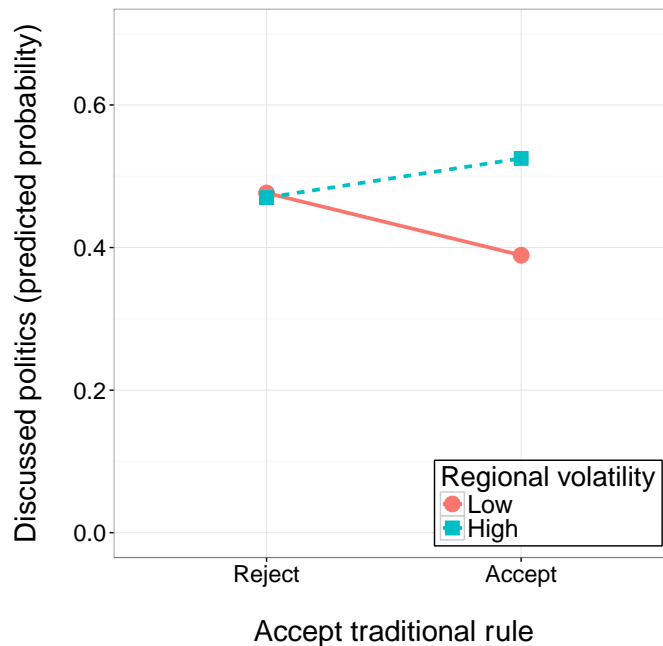
Figure 6. Representations of the simple effects involved in the cross-level interaction in model (7) from Table 6.
Note. Low = lowest value; High = highest value.

Summary. To summarize the results so far, we have observed that regional volatility interacts with two political opinions to predict political discussions: acceptance of traditional rule and affirmation of people rule. Analyzing these interactions leads to two important observations regarding my hypotheses. First, in both cases simple effects of political opinions indicates that less volatile (*i.e.* more stable) contexts are characterized by a greater political expression of democrats (those who reject the rule of chiefs and elders in model (4) and those who affirm that the governement is people's employee in model (7)) and that this difference disappears in more volatile contexts. This is consistent with the assumption that democratic opinions are the normative standard in stable regions and that volatility can be a contextual impetus to question this state of affairs. Second – and most importantly – the reduction of the expression gap between democrats and authoritarians in volatile regions did not arise as a result of a reduced expression of democrats (as the spiral of silence theory suggests). Rather, it reflected a higher expression of authoritarians in highly volatile regions compared to stable ones.

3.3.4 Testing the moderating effect of political opinions (2): joining others

I now turn to the second measure of political participation – *i.e.* joining others to raise an issue – by following the exact same procedure as in the previous section. I therefore start by testing whether political opinions' slopes significantly vary across regions by fitting a null model for each one and computing bootstrapped confidence intervals around the random slopes' standard deviation. Again, none of them includes zero – even though for acceptance of traditional rule the lowest bound is very close (*SD* = 0.126, *CI* = 0.002 – 0.230) – so we can conclude that all political opinions' random slopes significantly vary across regions.

I therefore added the interactions to the models which are shown in Table 7. We can see that model (2) indicates an interaction between acceptance of military rule and volatility (*OR* = 0.459, *p* = 0.047). This time, the analysis of poltical opinion's simple effects (see Figure 7) shows that there is no difference in probability of joining others depending on the acceptance of military rule in the least volatile regions (*OR* = 1.021, *p* = 0.874) but that, in the most volatile regions, individuals who *reject* military rule (*i.e.* democrats) did it *more* than those who accept it (*OR* = 0.589, *p* = 0.013). So here we observe an opposite effect of political opinion than in the previous section. Turning to the simple effects of volatility, the analysis reveals a *positive* effects for individuals who reject military rule such that they joined others more in the most volatile regions than in the least ones (*OR* = 2.936, *p* = 0.003) while there is no effect for those who accept military rule (*OR* = 1.348, *p* = 0.488).
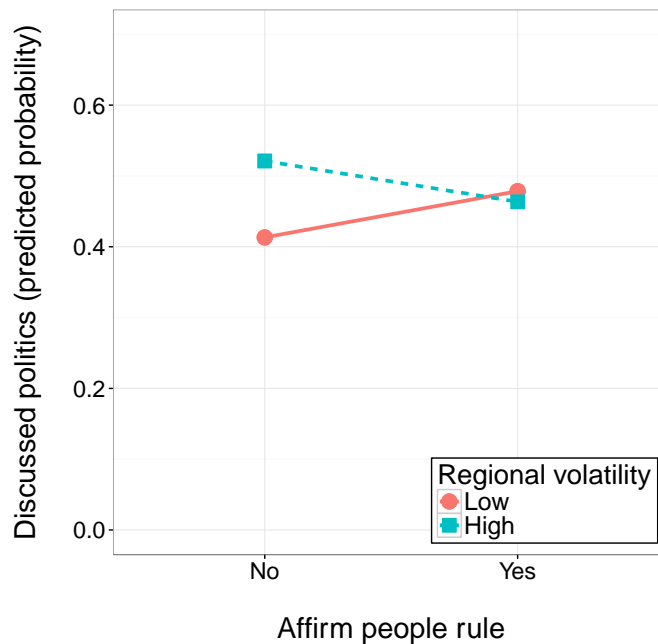
Figure 7. Representations of the simple effects involved in the cross-level interactions in model (2) from Table 7.
Note. Low = lowest value; High = highest value.

Finally, the only remaining significant interactions is in model (4) and indicates a significant interaction between acceptance of traditional rule and volatility (*OR* = 0.471, *p* = 0.048). The analysis of acceptance of traditional rule's simple effects (shown in Figure 8) indicates that none is significant, even though the interaction suggests a difference between them – and the odds ratios indeed reflect opposite trends: a trend toward more participation by individuals who accept traditional rule in the least volatile regions and the reverve in the most volatile regions (*OR* = 1.235, *p* = 0.131 and *OR* = 0.725, *p* = 0.128 for the least and most volatile regions, respectively).

Concerning volatility's simple effects, it predicts *positively* the likelihood of joining others to raise an issue for individuals who reject the rule of chiefs and elders (*OR* = 3.178, *p* = 0.004) but not for those who accept it (*OR* = 1.497, *p* = 0.269).

Table 7. Multilevel logistic regression models predicting the probability of joining others to raise an issue during the last year (unstandardized odds ratios, N=13896, 94 regions, 10 countries).

		(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
Individual-level	Intercept	0.464*	0.489*	0.490*	0.496*	0.477*	0.463*	0.455**
	Accept oneparty rule	1.014	1.031	1.028	1.036	1.041	1.023	1.030
	Accept military rule	0.885*	0.854	0.873*	0.874*	0.868*	0.883*	0.874*
	Accept dictatorship	0.886*	0.880*	0.819†	0.884*	0.883*	0.885*	0.886*
	Accept traditionnal rule	1.031	1.035	1.026	1.039	1.041	1.033	1.023
	Uncritical followership	1.008	1.004	1.007	0.999	0.985	1.008	1.009
	Support leaders ingroup favouritism	0.948	0.944	0.954	0.942	0.942	0.970	0.933
	Affirm people rule	1.042	1.044	1.042	1.044	1.040	1.058	1.090
Contextual-level (region)	Ethnic salience	1.972†	1.816†	1.861	1.900†	1.945†	1.952†	2.263*
	Volatility (centered)	2.178*	2.936**	2.192*	3.178**	2.493*	2.467*	2.338*
	Accept one-party rule * volatility	1.236	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Accept military rule * volatility	-	0.459*	-	-	-	-	-
	Accept dictatorship * volatility	-	-	1.207	-	-	-	-
	Accept tradit. rule * volatility	-	-	-	0.471*	-	-	-
	Uncrit. followership * volatility	-	-	-	-	0.968	-	-
	Support leaders ingroup favouritism * volatility	-	-	-	-	-	0.854	-
	Affirm people rule* volatility	-	-	-	-	-	-	0.777
Fit	Marginal R^2 (%)	3.333	3.374	3.312	3.364	3.313	3.300	3.473
	Conditional R^2 (%)	18.127	17.732	18.270	17.725	18.718	17.769	18.060

Note. † $p < .1$ * $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$. Gender, area, level of education (not shown) and regional ethnic salience are controlled for. Interaction from model (4) becomes marginally significant when tested with a continuous outcome.
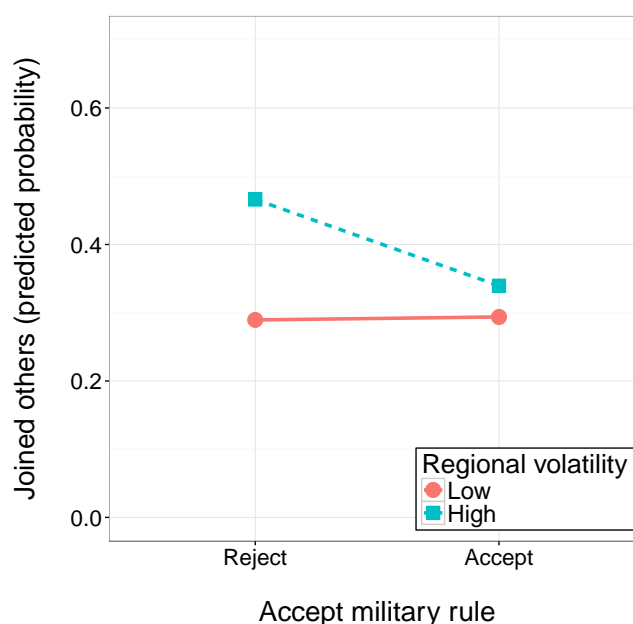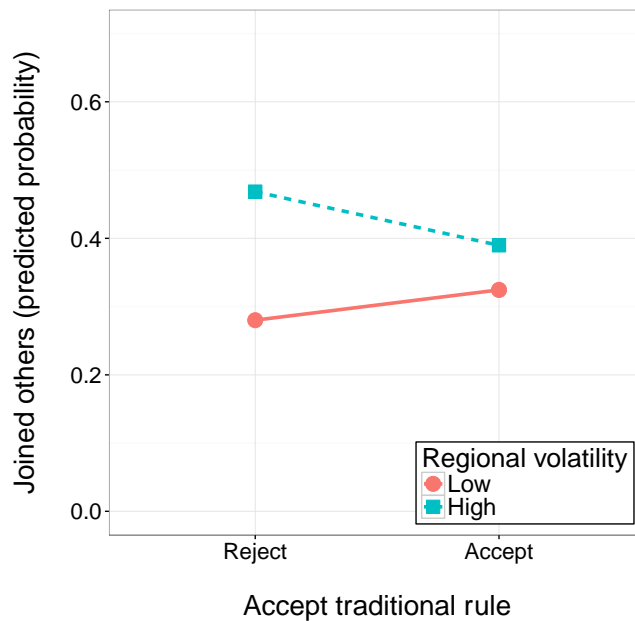
Figure 8. Representations of the simple effects involved in the cross-level interactions in model (4) from Table 7.
Note. Low = lowest value; High = highest value.

Summary. When we compare these results with those of the previous sections, several points should be emphasized. First, the political opinions which interacted with volatility were not exactly the same as in the previous section: when joining others is the outcome, regional volatility interacts with acceptance of traditional rule (as when political discussion is the outcome) and acceptance of military rule. Second, both interactions involved a positive effect of regional volatility on political participation – similarly to the results of the previous sections – but this time *this effect concerned those who hold a democratic opinion*. Third, the only significant simple effect of political opinion (acceptance of military rule) was in the most volatile regions and indicated a higher participation of democrats (those rejecting military rule) compared to authoritarians. This contrasts with the results of models predicting political discussions – which showed a stronger participation of democrats than authoritarians in the most *stable* regions but not in the most volatile ones – and also with my hypothesis.

3.4 Discussion

The main purposes which motivated this study were to bring the political and socially constructed nature of ethnic categories at the center of the stage by investigating their role in the consitution of political norms regarding authority and leadership. At the roots of my argument is the following question, the answer of which can be – so I argued – more closely

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approached if the take the constructivist view of ethnicity seriously: *in which situations do the masses accept leaders' authority without contestation?* Relying on the spiral of silence theory (Noelle-Neumann, 1984; Noelle-Neumann & Petersen, 2004) and the criticisms and insights of the social representation approach (Elcheroth et al., 2011), I argued that political participation is a crucial element of answer in the sense that individuals' political behaviour creates the normative political context of those surrounding them, thus constituting a feedback loop between the individual and collective levels. My main argument was that changes in ethnic salience (*i.e.* volatility) can trigger changes in political norms through this feedback loop, by altering individuals' expectations or creating uncertainty regarding what political views are normative for whom and therefore modyfing patterns of political participation. And because this argument assumes a process occuring through the interaction of individuals with their local social environement, a methodological implication is to focus on local (as oppose to societal) levels of analysis. Based on this reasoning, I formulated the following hypotheses. First, I expected regional volatility to predict political participation. I didn't have rigid expectations regarding the direction of this effect since a case could theoretically be made for both a negative (a 'spiral of silence') and a positive effect ('an escalation of expression'). Second, I predicted that this effect of volatility would interact with individuals' political opinions, creating a selective political participation. Here too I didn't have too specific predictions since the precise political opinions to be interacting with volatility would depend on which norms are debated, marginalized or mobilized (*e.g.* Penic, Elcheroth, & Reicher, 2015) in the public shpere.

To begin with, there are several limitations to the present study, which are worth noticing directly before discussing the results. First of all, the dependent variables were not ideal to test my hypotheses. On the one hand, the political discussion measure (which asks for discussion with "friends and neighbours") makes it unclear whether it captures expression in public or private settings and therefore complicates the interpretation. On the other hand, the second dependent variable – *i.e.* joining others to raise an issue – is not very precise about its meaning, such as the type of issue implied, and is therefore particularly vulnerable to differences of interpretation depending on the respondent's region or country, among other things[27].

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[27] When computing the proportion of respondents who joined others to raise an issue by country (shown in appendix 3), one can see that there is far more between-country variation than for political discussions. A different interpretation of the former measure across countries could explain why there were such relatively strong between-country differences.

A second important limitation concerns the time interval which separates the two moments at which ethnic salience was measured, which ranges from 1 year (Mali) to 4 years (Botswana, Malawi, Namibia and Zambia). This important difference of time intervals depending on the country makes it possible that my volatility index didn't measure the same kind of processes in every country. More generally, one cannot be sure that the time laps between the two surveys is not too long, such that the process that I expected to observe occurred before the round 2 survey and was therefore not detectable with the present data.

Finally, the fact that we included different countries in our sample may create the problem that processes occuring at the regional level are moderated by contry level factors, which is a plausible scenario since measures of political opinions may have different meanings associated with a country history or political regime[28].

Notwithstanding these limitations, this study provides several methodological innovations as well as theoretically important results. the first important and most basic result lies in the important variation of ethnic salience in both space and time within countries, which has already been observed in previous research in the African context (Bhavnani & Miodownik, 2009; Eifert et al., 2010). At the theoretical level, the fact that the proportion of a society's population considering ethnic belonging as its most important group identity varied substantially (20 percent on average) in such a short period of time strongly supports a social constructivist understanding of ethnic categories. Besides, it is interesting to note that this proportion *decreased* in most countries. While it is tempting to interpret this as a sign of a global decrease of the importance of ethnic identities in African politics at the beginning of the century, I would argue that there is an important contextual element that we should take into account. The 1990s have seen a wave of political liberalization in subsaharan Africa with the emergence of multi-party legislative elections as a norm; and indeed all countries included in the sample started to have 'partly regular' elections involving at least one opposition party between 1992 and 1995 (at the exception of Uganda ; Van de Walle, 2003). Importantly, Van de Walle (2003) argues that the party structure has overwhelmingly followed ethno-linguistic

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[28] I tried to deal with this issue by exploring how the effects of regional volatility (and its interaction with political opinions) varied across countries but in addition to substantially complexify the models and the analyses, a sample as small as ten countries makes it difficult to test for country-level moderation in a systematic way. However, descriptive analyses of country-level random effects generally suggested that, when they substantially varied, they did so as a function of the country rate of positive responses to the outcome predicted by the model (*i.e.* country-level random slopes correlated with country-level random intercepts) and that countries with higher positive response rates to the outcome tended to show patterns similar to those obtained when not considering country-level moderation. The details of these analyses are available by sending a request to the author at zacharia.bady@unil.ch.

divisions rather than ideological ones, which suggests that first elections have made ethnic identities highly salient. The results reported by Cederman, Gleditsch and Hug (2013) are consistent with this interpretation as they found that a country's first two competitive elections predicts the onset of ethnic civil wars, which suggest that this kind of context is prone to the politicization of ethnic identities. I therefore suggest that the average decrease in ethnic salience we observed is due to a high level of ethnic salience at the round 1 survey reflecting the relative proximity of the first competitive elections (all countries were surveyed between 1999 and 2001 at round 1) compared to the round 2 survey (between 2002 and 2004).

In terms of research practices, this observed fluidity of ethnic salience also points to the problems of what I have called *methodological primordialism*, which consists in effectively assuming that ethnic categories are constantly important for actors in a particular context, notably through the use of ethnic fractionalization indices. Our results clearly show that this descriptive approach to measure a country's ethnic composition in order to predict collective outomes is misleading. To take the example of Malawi – which is the most extreme case in our sample –, it would hardly make sense to use the same value to describe this country's ethnic diversity in 1999 and 2003 to predict some collective outcome, since our data suggest that ethnic salience dropped by nearly half of the population (*i.e.* 45 percent) between the two surveys.

One more original aspect of the present study is to illustrate the relevance of considering more local levels of analysis (regional rather than national). We indeed oberved that temporal variation of ethnic salience was not always homogenous across regions in a given country, indicating that disctinct social processes occur at the regional scale. A point which leads us to my main research questions (*i.e.* the relationship between regional volatility and political participation).

My first hypothesis stated that regional volatility would have an effect o political participation. Although our analysis didn't reveal an effect of volatility on political discussions, it did show one on the other form of political participation, *i.e.* joining others to raise an issue. This is in itself an important finding since it quantitatively demonstrates that fluctuations of ethnic salience are not politically neutral and play some part in the normative climate of a society. Besides, it is theoretically important that volatility *positively* predicted the likelihood of joining others (and that, although not significant, the trend of the effect on political discussion was also positive). This fact seems at odds with predictions derived from the spiral

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of silence theory (Noelle-Neumann, 1984), as it would suggest that when the norms are called into question, one part of the population (those who perceive that their opinion becomes a minority opinion) will increasingly fall silent.

I now discuss the results relevant to my second hypothesis, which predicted that the effect of volatility would interact with political opinions. Interestingly, the analyses revealed unexpected differences for the two outcome variables. First, while both were predicted by interactions between regional volatility and two political opinions, the specific opinions involved were not exactly the same. Second, the simple effects involved showed contrasting patterns depending on the outcome. For political discussions, it was consistent with my expectations: democrats were more expressive than authoritarians in stable regions and this gap disappeared in highly volatile contexts; a pattern which I would interpret as sign that democratic values are generally normative because in a world of nation-states, governments legitimize their power by arguing that they rule in the name of the 'people' (Wimmer; 2002; 2013b; Wimmer et al., 2009; Wimmer and Min, 2006; Mann, 2005). However, when political participation is measured through the likelihood of joining others to raise an issue, the only significant simple effect of political opinion shows that authoritarians (*i.e.* accepting military rule) participated *less* in volatile contexts while there was no difference in stable ones. While this result seems to contradict my assumption that democratic values are generally normative, it may also be that the behaviour of joining others has a different relationship with the normative context compared to "discussing politics with friends and neighbours". Indeed, one could argue that joining others clearly implies a more active process of selection of people than political discussions and therefore, is not straightforwardly affected by the perception that one's opinion is normative. Rather, the effect of the normative context could be more indirect and strategic, such that when a person perceive his opinion to become anti-normative or is uncertain about it, she will react by selecting people from her network which she knows to share the same point of view in order to make sense of and act upon the situation.

The other way to analyze these interactions – looking at the simple effects of volatility – is directly relevant to the demarcation between the 'spiral of silence' and the 'escalation of expression' hypotheses. Again, the analyses showed that volatility's simple effects were different for the two forms of participation: volatility positively predicts *authoritarians'* political discussions but it positvely predicts *democrats'* joining of others. As I suggested in the previous paragraph, this difference can be interpreted as reflecting a greater posssibility of strategic selection of people share one's opinion when it comes to joining others to raise

an issue: if democratic opinions are generally normative, contexts in which norms seem to vanish or change are likely to foster the expression of authoritarians (normally silent) and make democrats (normally expressive) more prone to turn to people they know to be democrats, and hence to actively join others. But independently of the interpretations we can advance to explain them, these results suggest that the mechanism postulated by the spiral of silence theory – which essentially implies pressure towards conformity – seems to simplistic and restrictive to account for the processes that occur in such volatile contexts. The pattern we observed is much more coherent with Moscovici's (1961) notion of cognitive polyphasia, which recognizes the possibility that several representations may coexist within the same group and be actively contested and debated. It is consistent with a scenario where the change in the relative importance of ethnic categories in local contexts – and therefore the questioning of their normative climate – gave an impetus for political participation to a part of the population less participative in more stable contexts. As we saw in the introduction, a social representation perspective (Elcheroth et al., 2011) can provide the following interpretation to this escalation of expression: volatile contexts – in which the change in ethnic salience blurs the organization of social reality – changes expectations regarding others' political opinions and gives (otherwise isolated) individuals the impression that others may share their view, especially if their stance is mobilized in the public sphere through communication channels like the mass-media. This leads them to express their opinions, a behaviour that in turn reinforces others impression that this opinion is shared. It is nevertheless worth keeping in mind that our failure to observe a pattern consistent with a spiral of silence may be a matter of timing: it is for instance possible that the competition of different modes of expression by holders of different views may reach a point where one side takes advantage over the other and that this triggers a spiral of silence.

Another interesting way to look at these results is to pay attention to the demographic characteristics of respondents who implemented each type of political participation. We indeed saw that the profile of those who discussed politics tended toward a high social status: they were more likely to be men, from urban areas, relatively more educated and with higher income (see Figure 3 and appendix 1). This profile was less clear for those who joined others to raise an issue (Figure 4 and appendix 2), which suggest that this kind of political participation was not tied to a particular social position and included more diverse profiles. Considering the fact that in volatile contexts political discussions constituted a vector for the expression of authoritarian views, the higher social status of those who discussed politics may

indicate their willingness to prevent change of the status quo and strenghthen the social order protecting their high status. In this scenario, these actors would have perceived volatile contexts as opportunities to spread political opinions which would serve their agenda. Hence, it would be interesting to conduct further analyses to investigate this possibility, notably by testing whether expressive authoritarians tended to have a higher social status.

3.4.1   Conclusion

Overall, the results are consistent with the idea that regional changes of ethnic salience salience alter the patterns of political participation in the corresponding region. However, the pattern we observed is more complex than expected, notably because different actors seem to have used different strategies of political expression in volatile contexts, depending on their political opinion. This pattern contradicts the predictions derived from the spiral of silence theory, as volatility never implied self-censorship, but rather suggest a battle between holders of different political conceptions, each using their own weapon to impose (or restore) their view as normative and hegemonic.

Chapter 4

A minority complex within a complex majority?
How a new method to study identity configurations sheds a new light on social cleavages and contested memories in post-war Sri Lanka[29]

4.1 Introduction

This paper pursues a simple goal: to show that it is possible to study complex identity configurations in social surveys and that, once we do so, it changes our understanding of the role of identity in social conflicts. This objective might be straightforward, but there is no obvious, pre-drawn path to achieve it. While there is a growing understanding among social and political psychologists that collective conflicts are fuelled by conflicting definitions of identity, the corresponding theoretical shifts have so far more effectively inspired the deconstruction of traditional methods than the systematic construction of new methods to study identities in large social systems. Today, an increasing number of social and political psychologist recognise that if the goal is to grasp what drives large-scale, historically rooted conflicts, it is not enough to ask people how strongly they identify with a particular group forming a side in the conflict, or else with a superordinate category that groups together conflicting sides. This insight has triggered genuine theoretical and methodological creativity across the discipline and resulted in the development of a range of new approaches, which address specific shortcomings of previous methods separately. Some of the new approaches focus on the fact that there is always a multitude of intersecting social categories involved in a conflict, and that it is problematic to pick out one or two of these categories and leave everything else unobserved (Elcheroth & Reicher, 2017; Herrera & Reicher, 1998; Roccas & Brewer, 2002). Others emphasise that there are qualitatively different modes of relating to social categories that are relevant to the self, which cannot be subsumed under the sole umbrella of identification (Leach et al., 2008; Roccas et al., 2006). Or still that social categories do not only shape social conflicts when people embrace them, but also when they belief that these categories matter to relevant others, i.e., when they are part of perceived social norms

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(Blackwood et al., 2013, 2015; Howarth, 2002; Klein et al., 2007). But these different developments still tend to unfold in a dispersed way, and what we therefore hope to contribute with the present work is to facilitate their integration.

This is not something that can easily be done at an abstract level. Conceiving identities as structured configurations, embedded in a complex web of social relations, implies acknowledging that particular contents and configurations depend on particular contexts. Our methodological objective is therefore not to develop a fixed set of survey questions that could be used universally, but rather to propose a way of doing survey research that brings us closer to the goal of studying complex identity configurations. Our strategy of validation will not be ontological but heuristic: we are not looking for proofs that the model to identity that orients our research encompasses more truth than competing model but we hope to show that in a concrete case our approach allows to make visible relevant aspects of a conflict that would have passed unobserved with a different approach.

The concrete setting in which we hope to gain a different understanding of conflict thanks to a different way of looking at identity is postwar Sri Lanka. On May 19 2009, the then president of Sri Lanka Mahinda Rajapaksa declared military victory over the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), thus ending a ruthless civil war that tore the country for almost 30 years. Although this conflict was highly complex and multi-layered, its main thread can be summarized as the clash between two nationalist visions: while the government claimed to defend the integrity of a unitary and primarily Sinhala Buddhist Sri Lanka, the LTTE – which violently imposed itself as the only representative of the Tamil minority – fought for the independence of the historical Tamil homeland in the Northeast of the island. The defeat of the LTTE had been achieved at the cost of a brutal offensive in the North that took the life of thousands of civilians caught in the crossfire and displaced hundreds of thousand during the last months of the war (Anonymous, 2011; Höglund & Orjuela, 2013). Over the following years, Rajapaksa's government maintained an important military presence in the northeast, strictly policing Tamil populations (Camilla Orjuela et al., 2016). It implemented post-war policies largely restricted to economic development and reconstruction of infrastructures in war-affected areas (Höglund & Orjuela, 2013; Lecamwasam, 2016), but did not include power-sharing measures in the constitutional amendment voted in 2010 (Anonymous, 2011). To the surprise of most observers, a coalition headed by Maithripala Sirisena defeated Rajapaksa in the January 2015 presidential elections, and confirmed its victory in the subsequent parliamentary elections, held in August 2015. This major political shift raised many hopes,

especially among minorities supportive of Sirisena's coalition whose campaign promises included the implementation of constitutional change removing power from the central executive, and a genuine reconciliation policy (Devotta, 2016; Goodhand & Walton, 2017; Lecamwasam, 2016).

The present study is based on a survey conducted in two of Sri Lanka's ethnically most diversified regions – Ampara and Matala – in the immediate aftermath of the historical 2015 elections, at the midst of the country's transition to a new chapter of its short postwar history. This has been a period when previously marginalized claims for minority rights and transitional justice entered mainstream political discourse and became legitimized by state authorities: a propitious period to question the role of historic cleavages around language and religion as well as of new cleavages forged by war experiences and post-war politics, in the way how Sri Lankans understand identity, perceive self and others, and refer to potentially divisive experiences.

So far, these questions had not yet received much attention in the social and political psychology literature. A study recently published by Webber et al. (2017) provides a debatable exception. Although the study's explicit focus is not on identification but on deradicalization, its methodology is telling about the perils of the underlying reductionist assumptions on conflict sides and relevant identities. Adopting the Sri Lankan governments' definition of the conflict as fought between the Sri Lankan nation and LTTE terrorists, the study appears driven by the question whether the loyalty of defeated combatants, as well as of other members of the Tamil community, lies with the nation or with the terrorists. The former is operationalized through a set of questions regarding attitudes toward "the various opponents of the LTTE, namely the Sinhalese and the government/military (p. 10)", the second through questions about "extremism" and "LTTE nostalgia". Apart from reifying the victor's definition of the conflict and legitimizing its way to handle the aftermath of conflict, the study appears to limit our understanding of the conflict and its transformation by arbitrarily fixing many relevant parameters ahead of the analysis, rather than questioning and investigating them: Which groups have a distinct sense of identity? Which categories do they use to describe their identity and how do they refer to these categories? Which categories do they embrace and which do they see as imposed by others? Which conflict narratives do they support and which do they reject?

In order to avoid similar omissions and allow for an analysis of the role of identity in the Sri Lankan postwar controversies that is less tinted by ideological assumptions, in the

present paper we will proceed in three successive steps. First, we look at how variability in identity configurations is organized: what are the main polarities alongside which different people think differently about identity? Second, we analyze the sociological underpinnings of such organized variability in subjective identity: to what extend are there different perspectives on identity between the Sinhalese majority and the country's Tamil-speaking minority groups; which cleavages are there within the majority itself? Third, we analyze the role of different identity conceptions in the process of sharing controversial accounts of Sri Lanka's recent past, looking at how subgroups defined by specific identity configurations vary in their willingness to support the public expression of different conflict-related narratives.

These analyses were made possible thanks to a new instrument included in the survey conducted in Ampara and Matala, developed in order to document complex identity configurations in larger population surveys. The paper thus introduces a research tool meant to function as a boundary object between different research traditions, insofar as it bridges opportunities to study complex configurations on the one hand, and patterns systematic of (co-)occurrences on the other hand. Our analyses of the resulting survey data aim to bridge three types of theoretical developments in social psychological models of identity, which respectively highlight the importance of multiple affiliations, of multiple modes in the subjective meanings attached to these affiliations, and of multiple perspectives on their respective relevance. Before going further into the specifics of the study background and methodology, we will first attempt, in the following section, to summarize these developments and to highlight the need for more theoretical and methodological integration across the three corresponding research strands.

4.1.1   Multiple affiliations: which categories matter to whom?

While traditionally research on intergroup relation and group processes has tended to focus on a single ingroup-outgroup distinction, more recent works have paid more attention to the fact that individuals always belong to several groups. There is now ample evidence that taking into account multiple identities has strong implications for a variety of individual and collective outcomes. Most prominently, a growing number of studies indicate that a sense of belonging to several social groups has beneficial consequences in terms of mental (Cruwys et al., 2013) and physical health (Steffens, Cruwys, et al., 2016; Steffens, Jetten, et al., 2016) as well as for general well-being, by bolstering self-esteem (Jetten et al., 2015) and a sense of personal control (Greenaway et al., 2015). However, belonging to devalued, discriminated or

stigmatized social groups has adverse effects on well-being and health (Paradies et al., 2015; Puhl & Brownell, 2006; Schmitt et al., 2014; Sønderlund et al., 2017) and identifying with multiple groups may buffer these negative effects only to the extent that these include more socially valued identities (Rydell & Boucher, 2010; Sønderlund et al., 2017). Multiple affiliations sometimes also entail conflicting norms and values, or even incompatible demands and goals, resulting in identity conflict (Hirsh & Kang, 2016; Jones & Hynie, 2017), and dealing with important conflicting identities may lead to reduced well-being and acute stress (Brook et al., 2008; Hirsh & Kang, 2016).

Researchers have also directed their attention to the potential capacity of multiple identities to facilitate inclusive intergroup relations (see Crisp & Hewstone, 2007). Roccas and Brewer (2002) argue that the extent to which people see the different groups they belong to as overlapping and similar differs from one person to another, and therefore implies more or less inclusive intergroup attitudes. They propose the term *social identity complexity* to designate the degree of perceived overlap and similarity between an individual's group identities, with high overlap/similarity implying low social identity complexity. For instance, a Sinhalese Buddhist considering that most Sinhalese are Buddhist (high overlap) and that a prototypical Sinhalese is very similar to a prototypical Buddhist (high similarity), would display a lower level of social identity complexity than a Sinhalese Christian who perceives a more limited overlap and similarity between his linguistic and religious identities. There is indeed evidence that social identity complexity reduces negative attitudes toward outgroups (Marilynn B. Brewer & Pierce, 2005; Miller et al., 2009; Roccas & Brewer, 2002; Schmid et al., 2009, 2013) and fosters intergroup trust (Xin et al., 2016).

But there is still a more general and arguably simpler reason why it is important in studies on social identity to take into account that no person ever belongs to a single group and that there is always more than one way to define the categories that matter in a given social situation. In practice, social psychologists often label their research with terms that already imply the social groups that, according to their own understanding, play a part in the social issue at hand. We are studying 'race relations' or 'ethnic conflict', and often do not ask whether people indeed frame things in those terms and, if they do, how this comes to be so. When we do ask, it creates an opportunity to see how different ways of defining inter-group categories are tied to different ways of understanding intergroup conflict. For example, in a study conducted just at the end of the first Gulf war, Herrera and Reicher (1998) asked respondents to indicate the impact that images taken from media coverage of the war had on

them. Their results suggest that respondents' position regarding the war (pro or anti) depended on their construction of the sides of the conflict, as reflected in their choice of images. They conclude: "[T]he answer to the well-known question 'which side are you on?' depends on the answer to a prior question: 'What are the sides?' Unless we pay more attention to the latter question we may find ourselves unwittingly excluding choice in the former" (p. 992). As this study illustrates (see also Elcheroth & Reicher, 2014, 2017; Stevenson et al., 2007), the definition of the 'sides' should be treated as an inherent part of each inter-group conflict (Elcheroth et al., 2011; Elcheroth & Reicher, 2017).

In a way, social identification scales are precisely designed to assess rather than take for granted whether a given social group is relevant to define the self. Researchers are developing increasingly sophisticated tools to measure the precise way in which a social group may partake in self-definition (see Amiot & Aubin, 2013; Cameron, 2004; Jackson, 2002; Leach et al., 2008; Roccas et al., 2006, 2008). However, as long as the items used single out one particular binary of 'sides' in advance, they impose predefined categories as potential drivers of a conflict-related outcome, leaving the consequences of all alternative category constructions unexplored. In this sense, the mentioned trend towards research designs that ask questions about a system of inter-related category memberships clearly opens promising avenues to avoid the traditional pitfalls of social psychological analysis of intergroup conflict. However, to live up to this promise, they still need to be articulated with two concurrent developments: with the development of new tools to integrate multiple modes and multiple perspectives into the study of social identities.

4.1.2 Multiple modes: how do people relate to their groups?

While the construct of social identification is routinely measured as a one-dimensional construct, the possibility that it is better accounted for by distinguishing several facets has been discussed since the very first developments of identification measures (e.g., Brown et al., 1986). Several models have been proposed over the years, starting with attempts to empirically distinguish between cognitive, evaluative and affective components based on Tajfel's (1981) famous definition of social identity (Brown et al., 1986; Cameron, 2004; Hinkle et al., 1989; Jackson, 2002). These studies clearly supported the multidimensionality of social identification but failed to reach an agreement regarding the nature of the dimensions and which one was more likely to predict ingroup bias. Building on these and notably integrating insights from sociological theory, Leach and colleagues (2008; see also Jans et al., 2015) more

recently developed a sophisticated hierarchical model of identification distinguishing five modes of identification nested within two broader dimensions (self-definition and self-investment).

However, these models are arguably limited by their inclination to abstract the process of group identification from the ideological content with which individuals color their group and their relationship to it. They fall short of taking into account people's awareness that when they declare themselves, say, committed members of their nation, their interlocutors will make inferences regarding their beliefs, knowledge, intentions, etc. (Edwards, 1991). Because people tend to be reflexive about these inferences on the part of their audience, they know they can become accountable for the ideological implications of embracing certain identities in a certain manner. For example, when Condor (2000) analysed interviews conducted with a large sample of British respondents, she observed that almost all of them were highly reluctant to endorse their national identity, or even answer questions that they understood to be framed in terms of national categories. As several respondents made clear, they were concerned that using national categories could be interpreted as an endorsement of prejudices associated with a bigoted British nationalism.

The understanding that different modes of identification have different ideological implications appears foundational to the distinction made by Roccas, Klar & Liviathan (2006) between *attachment*, which refers to the degree to which individuals include the group in their self-concept, feel emotionally attached to it and want to contribute to its improvement, and *glorification,* which explicitly implies a belief in the superiority of the ingroup and in unconditional respect for the group's rules and authorities. This distinction allowed to make a significant step forward in conceptualizing the relationship between group identification and group conformity, and to document concrete cases where national attachment net of national glorification appears to drive a critical, rather than a compliant, attitude toward current or past wrongdoings done in the name of one's nation (Elcheroth & Reicher, 2014; Leidner et al., 2010; Penic, Elcheroth, & Reicher, 2016; Roccas et al., 2006). But the scales typically used to measure these different modes of identification still fall short of revealing the reflexive perceptions through which different identities are colored with ideological meaning and with pragmatic relevance in specific contexts. Making these processes tangible implies to inquire about the different ways in which others can participate in shaping one person's social identity.

4.1.3   Multiple perspectives: categorized by self and by others

For one thing, recent research has paid attention to the long-standing suggestion (e.g. Mead, 1934) that one's identity is not only a matter of self-perception but depends on the alignment of others' treatment and recognition with one's internal sense of self. Consistent with this view, research indicates that people are motivated to influence others' perception and provoke feedback that confirms and consolidates their internalized social identity (Chen et al., 2004, 2006; Hopkins & Greenwood, 2013; Klein et al., 2007). When others' fail to confirm an individual's social self and treat him/her on the basis of a social category (s)he doesn't identify with this is likely to trigger aversive feelings and attempts to resist this external categorization (i.e. 'categorization threat'; Barreto et al., 2010; Barreto & Ellemers, 2003; Branscombe, Ellemers, et al., 1999; see also Blackwood et al., 2013, 2015). This does not mean, however, that it is always possible to successfully resist external categorization. In a longitudinal study examining changes in students' social identity during their transition to college, Lemay and Ashmore (2004) asked their participants to rate the extent to which they belonged to 84 social groups (*i.e.* self-categorization) and the proportion of other students who perceived them to belong to these same groups (*i.e.* reflected categorization) at the beginning of the Fall semester (T1) and two to three months later (T2). They observed that self-categorization at T1 predicted reflected categorization at T2, but also that reflected categorization at T1 predicted self-categorization at T2. Study participants hence tended to re-align self-categorization and reflected categorization, sometimes by interiorizing and sometimes by resisting and re-shaping how they perceive that others categorize themselves. Obviously, the practical conditions often play against resistance, such as when it is likely to attract sanctions from a powerful audience (Blackwood et al., 2013, 2015). Whether people lean toward resistance or interiorisation may also depend on the way the external categorization is communicated: in three experiments, Barreto et al. (2010) showed that treating a female student according to her gender while leaving this category-based criterion implicit – as it is arguably most often the case in everyday social practices – makes it more difficult for her to actively protest and reject that categorization and, ironically, more likely she will internalize it, than if the gender discrimination had been made explicit.

We referred previously to Condor's (2000) study, where many respondents felt uncomfortable with the ideological meaning attached to British national identity and actively contested it. Because common sense provides alternative resources to categorize social reality, they were able to negotiate their identity in a way that was more satisfactory to them.

However, there is evidence that people don't always have such room for manoeuvre. Howarth (2002) for instance conducted focus group discussions with teenagers from a highly devalued neighbourhood in London. She observed that many participants – especially young black men – were unable to challenge the strongly stigmatized identity that outsiders ascribed to them as "Brixtonites", even though this identity had strong negative consequences in terms of feelings of guilt and low self-esteem. Similarly, Blackwood and colleagues (Blackwood, Hopkins & Reicher, 2013, 2015) interviewed Scottish Muslims about their encounters with authorities. Their analysis revealed that for many of them encounters with airport security constituted highly problematic experiences because they felt publicly treated in a way that reduced them to a pathologized version of their Muslim identity and denied them belonging to the national community, or simply their identity as a respectable person (e.g. as a business person, community elder, etc.), a kind of exclusion they felt unjustified but were unable to challenge.

This speaks to Elcheroth and Reicher's (2017) more general argument about the nature of identity and how it is transformed in the aftermath of political violence: identity is as much about what it enables people to achieve in practice and collectively, as it is about their own intimate construction of self and others (be it cognitive or discursive; see Antaki et al., 1996). And what people are able to do is, in turn, contingent upon their expectations of how others' will see them and treat them as a consequence. In other words, identity is not only a matter of how we define ourselves; it also stems from how we think others define themselves and us. Furthermore, because being treated as 'one of us' or 'one of them' depends on the collective perception of recognizable characteristics, identity markers such as one's language, religion or skin colour potentially have strong pragmatic relevance. They tell us how we may expect others to act toward us and what we can achieve together with them as a result.

To summarize then, there are three different pitfalls in the assessment of social identities in conflict settings, through the use of survey methods and closed-end questions in particular. The first consists in assuming, rather than assessing empirically, which identities matter to understand the conflict. The second consists in seeing identification as a uni-dimensional construct and/or in being blind to specific ideological resonances of different modes of identification. The third pitfall is to forget others' gaze and the role of perceived social norms in making social identities pragmatically relevant. Whereas many influential studies have proposed creative ways to avoid one or the other of these pitfalls, and some have made a contribution at the intersection of two different types of shortcomings, in the

present paper we make a concrete methodological proposal to address the three pitfalls simultaneously, and to analyse complex identity configurations in the context of an innovative survey conducted in post-war Sri Lanka. To this end, we developed a system of survey questions that allowed participants to position themselves alongside multiple social categories and modes of identification and which ask them about the meaning of the categories for both self and other. After analysing the corresponding response patterns to show how identities are structured in a specific turning point of the recent Sri Lankan postwar context, we will illustrate how this approach can be used further to reveal otherwise invisible aspects of the relationship between different understandings of collective identity and different ways to refer to contested memories.

4.1.4   Study Background

Contemporary political conflicts in Sri Lanka have roots going back to the colonial and post-colonial periods. During the decade following the country's independence from the British Empire in 1948, the issue of linguistic rights gradually became the cornerstone of a Sinhalese-Tamil conflict (DeVotta, 2004, 2014; Stone, 2014). At a time when English was still the only official language, Tamil elites tended to be proficient in English and to be overrepresented in the state administration and higher education. While more and more Sri Lankan citizens were becoming literate in their vernacular language, Sinhala or Tamil, during the 1956 election members of the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP; notably S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike) strategically supported a Sinhala-only option to replace English as the national language, in order to mobilize support from Sinhalese nationalists and radical fringes of the Buddhist clergy. Their access to power resulted in the adoption of the Sinhala Only Act, which defined Sinhala as the sole national language. Tamils reacted to the adoption of the bill through non-violent protests organized by the Tamil Federal Party, which in turn were answered by several waves of ethnic riots in which Sinhalese mobs targeted Tamil people in several parts of the country.

This episode had several immediate consequences on Sri Lanka's political climate. At the societal level, it emboldened Sinhalese nationalists and radical bhikkhus (*i.e.* Buddhist monks), boosting their confidence in their ability to weigh in the political arena, while it strongly undermined Tamils' trust in the willingness of a Sinhalese government to preserve their minority rights. Among Sinhalese political elites, it set a dynamic of competition in motion, by which the two major political parties (the SLFP and United National Party – UNP)

outbid each other over who would best claim to serve the interests of the Sinhalese majority, often at the expense of Tamils' rights (DeVotta, 2004; Horowitz, 1989). This competition pushed successive governments to take an uncompromising stance and sabotaged successive attempts to minimally accommodate Tamils' linguistic rights in the years following the 1956 Act, which further undermined Tamils' trust in the Sri Lankan state.

In the years following the adoption of the Official Language Act and all across the 1960s, Tamils systematically resorted to non-violent protests (*satyagraha*) to pressure the government in abandoning its discriminatory policies and were often met with violent state repression. By the 1970s, a perception started to emerge – among Tamil youth in particular – that their aspirations could not be met within the constitutional framework of the Sri Lankan state. Several rebel Tamil groups formed during the end of the decade and resorted to bank robberies, attacks against police and military personnel and assassinations of political personalities with the aim to achieve an independent Tamil state. The LTTE, however, quickly secured its dominance over rival rebel groups and henceforth claimed to be the only legitimate voice of Tamil aspirations. Through sustained violence, it managed to impose and maintain a leaden shroud on Tamil political life, efficiently preventing any serious rival to propose an alternative political perspective (Wickramasinghe, 2006).

The events of 1983, often referred to as "Black July", marked a decisive step toward a full-fledged civil-war (for a detailed account, see Tambiah, 1986). On July 23, LTTE fighters ambushed a military patrol in the Jaffna District and killed 13 soldiers. The soldiers' bodies were brought to Colombo on the next day for official funerals, where thousands gathered to attend the event. On the evening, parts of the crowd started to indiscriminately attack Tamils, looting and burning their property and sometimes killing them. These anti-Tamil pogroms continued during several days, spreading to Gampaha, Kalutara, Kandy, Matale, Nuwara Eliya and Trincomalee. There is evidence indicating that these pogroms where planned, organized and perpetrated with the (sometimes active) complicity of the police and military (DeVotta, 2004; Tambiah, 1986). Besides the obvious and durable deterioration of Sinhalese-Tamil relations entailed by such violence, the events critically strengthened the rebel forces (DeVotta, 2004): while thousands of young Tamils fled to the North and provided ideal recruits to swell the ranks of a hitherto relatively marginal rebel movement, the riots also triggered the first international Tamil refugees wave, which would result in the main source of financial support for the LTTE.

The following two decades saw a succession of several cease-fire and open warfare periods, during which the LTTE gained extensive control of the East and especially the North of the island, and created a *de facto* state infrastructure in these areas (Stokke, 2006). In 2004, however, LTTE's eastern factions split from the northern factions, which ultimately led to the expulsion of the LTTE from the Eastern province by the Sri Lankan government's forces. Finally, the Sri Lankan government launched its final offensive in the North over the first moths of 2009, which would put an extremely violent end to the war. Overall, armed violence created hundreds of thousands of 'Internally Displaced Persons' in Sri Lanka (Glatz, 2014) and, according to the Upsala Conflict Data Program database (see Allansson et al., 2017), between 1989 and 2010 it killed more than 65,000 persons.

4.2 Methodology

4.2.1   Participants

Four hundred Sri Lankan respondents participated in the survey, conducted in the framework of the Pluralistic Memories Project. Recruitment was realized through network sampling. Although not resulting in a representative sample, the network sampling procedure allows for a broader coverage and a more diversified sample – in comparison with a sample based on mere convenience or on non-systematic snowballing - by systematic random selection of participants among previous participants' social contacts. For the present study, 24 seed respondents were selected on a convenience basis and were asked to mention members of their network during the interview. Three members were then randomly selected among each seed's network to participate in the survey and the procedure was repeated iteratively with respondents selected among each recruitment wave's network, the number of randomly selected network members diminishing to 2 at iteration 2 and to 1 at iterations 3, 4 and 5.

Respondents were selected in 12 DS Divisions distributed in two Districts, Ampara and Matale. Ampara is located in the Eastern part of the island, which is, with the North, the area where most battles occurred during the war and therefore highly exposed to violence, while Matale is located in the central part of the country and has been less exposed to armed violence. Furthermore, the DS Divisions in which seed respondents were selected were chosen in order to ensure that the sample would include respondents from areas where there is a substantial Sri Lankan Tamil, Indian Tamil or Muslim community. 176 respondents, or 44%,

were female and 198 (49.5%) were Tamil-speaker while 202 were Sinhalese-speaker. The mean age was 48.1 with a standard deviation of 14.7 years.

4.2.2   Measures (I): social identity

Relevant categories. In order to assess which social categories are most relevant to define the self, we presented respondents with a list of 12 characteristics potentially source of social cleavages (shown in Table 1) and asked "*Among the following characteristics of yours, which are the three most important to define you?*".

Table 1. Potential identity markers

<table>
<tr><td>

1) *Among the following characteristics of yours, which are the three most important to define you?*

2) *Please make a guess. Among all of these characteristics, which three characteristics do you think would be chosen as the most important by most people in this country?*

</td></tr>
<tr><td>

1. *Your profession/occupation*

2. *Your economic situation*

3. *Your language/accent/way of speaking*

4. *Your gender (being a man or a woman)*

5. *Your religious affiliation (your own religion or parents' religion)*

6. *Your political views/affiliation*

7. *Your place of residence (Region/city were you live)*

8. *Your place of origin (Region/city were you grew up)*

9. *Your age*

10. *Your nationality*

11. *Your ethnic background*

</td></tr>
</table>

12. Your skin colour

Modes of identification and categorization. The three characteristics respondents selected as most important to define themselves were then included in a set of items designed to capture the degree to which they define themselves through that identity marker or the degree to which they perceive others to categorize them based on that identity marker (i.e., perceived categorization). The first two items, measuring identification, were constructed based on the distinction between attachment ("*I feel strong bonds with people of the same [characteristic] as me.*") and glorification ("*Compared to others, those who share my [characteristic] are particularly good.*") proposed by Roccas and colleagues (Roccas et al., 2006 ; 2008).With regard to categorization, we further distinguished between categorization by ingroup members (*i.e.* those sharing the same identity markers as the respondent) and categorization by outgroup members (*i.e.* those who differ from the respondent regarding that identity marker). Based on research showing that individuals recognizing others as ingroup members will expect to agree with them (S. A. Haslam, Turner, Oakes, McGarty, et al., 1998, 1998) and be more likely to support and help them (Levine et al., 2005), we assessed categorization by ingroup members with an item measuring pressure to agree ("*For some topics, people sharing the same [characteristic] as me make me feel that I must agree with them*") and one item measuring support ("*People sharing the same [characteristic] as me are likely to help me*"). Regarding categorization by outgroup members, we distinguished two ways in which others can force one to consider his or her identity relevant and which are credible and consequential in a context torn by political violence (Elcheroth & Reicher, 2017): threat of violence ("*My [characteristic] makes me a potential target of violence*") and discrimination ("*Because of my [characteristic], some people refuse me things*")[30].

Perceived social norms. Normatively important social categories were measured using the same list of characteristics mentioned before, but asking the respondents this time to

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[30] It is important to stress that by operationalizing categorization by outgroup members in this way, we are absolutely not implying that defining someone as outgroup member systematically leads to discriminate and/or be aggressive toward her. This choice is rather informed by the insight that, when they happen or are anticipated by potential targets, discrimination and violence toward a specific group are likely to force members of this group to consider their targeted identity as pragmatically relevant, and to act on that basis regardless of its importance at an intimate level (Elcheroth & Reicher, 2017). Hence, this operationalization does not target the experience of being categorized in its most typical form but rather in the form that is the most consequential in shaping identities.

"guess" which three characteristics would be chosen as most important by most people in the country (see Table 1).

4.2.3   Measures (II): conflict-related memories

As part of the Pluralistic Memories Project, a set of testimonies were recorded among witnesses of war events across a variety of Sri Lankan communities and regions. On the basis these testimonies, brief vignettes were constructed in order to reflect a diversity of perspectives on conflict-related memories. The complete contents of the vignettes are reported in Appendix 1. In order to broaden the range of narrative covered without over-burdening individual respondents, eight vignettes were split into two questionnaire versions, containing 4 difference vignettes each. Respondents were randomly assigned to one of the two versions: 198 participants read vignettes 1 ("Attacked at home"), 2 ("Collectively expelled"), 4 ("Helping the displaced") and 8 ("Blackmailed by combatants"), while 202 of them read vignettes 3 ("Staying near frontline"), 5 ("Divided by an army attack"), 6 ("Hiding the persecuted") and 7 ("Blackmailed by combatants"). After reading each vignette, respondents were asked the following question: "*Imagine a situation where the statement that you just read is made by a member of your own ethnic group, in front of other people. How would you react in this situation?*". The respondent could choose between three possible answers: (1) "I would express disbelief or disagreement", (2) "I wouldn't react" and (3) "I would express support or empathy". The first response option, chosen by very few respondents, was recoded into a single category with the second, resulting thus in a dichotomous variable differentiating those who would express support or empathy from those who wouldn't.

4.3 Findings

4.3.1   Structure of identity configurations

As our analyses are motivated by a holistic interest in the configuration of identities in the study sample, we submitted respondents' selection of relevant categories together with their answers to the items measuring their modes of identification and categorization to a

nonlinear principal component analysis ((Linting et al., 2007; Linting & Kooij, 2012)[31]. A PROMAX rotation was carried out in order to allow for correlation between the extracted components. For each identity marker, we included two separate dichotomous variables, treated as nominal in the analysis: one indicating whether the respondent chose it as important for self-definition (chosen *vs* not chosen) and one indicating whether the respondent chose it as normatively important. The choice of skin colour as self-defining was excluded because no respondent selected it. The items measuring identification and categorization were also in the analysis three times each, *i.e.* one for each characteristic selected as important for self-definition. In order to allow for the possibility of nonlinear relationship between these items and the extracted components, we only specified a nominal measurement level. Hence, we included a total of 41 variables in the analysis.

The NLPCA resulted in two components with eigenvalues of 7.2 and 4.6, respectively. Both dimensions presented a high reliability, measured by Cronbach's alpha (α_{Dim1} = .88 and α_{Dim2} = .88). Despite the model allowing for correlation, object scores on the two dimensions were unrelated (*r*=-0.012, *n.s.*). For items measuring attachment, glorification and pressure to agree, the relationship between the original values and the transformed values was either close to linearly positive (for the item measuring pressure to agree) or such that an original value of 3, on the one hand, corresponds to a strongly lower transformed values than original values of 4, 5 or 6, on the other hand, with no substantial differences between the latter (for all other items)[32]. In other words, high positive loadings generally mean that respondents who score high on the corresponding component had expressed agreement beyond the scale mid-point. Figure 1 shows the component loadings of all identity-related variables, *i.e.* the choice of identity markers as self-defining and normative, together with the items measuring modes of identification and perceived categorization.

When first considering only modes of identification and categorization (purple squares on figure 1) a very clear pattern is identifiable, with each component loading a distinct set of items, consistently grouping related modes. The first, horizontal, component loads all items measuring either identification (for attachment, loadings range between 0.75 and 0.080 and for glorification, they range between 0.76 and 0.80) or categorization by ingroup members

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[31] NLPCA is similar to standard principal component analysis but has the advantages of allowing for the inclusion of categorical variables in the analysis and of being flexible regarding the measurement level applied to the variables included.

[32] Original values of 1 and 2 were virtually non-existent for these items, which is not very surprising given that participants only answered them in relation to identity markers they had previously selected as one of the three most important to define themselves.

(for pressure to agree, loadings range between 0.77 and 0.78 and for support, they range between 0.37 and 0.39). The second component is defined by both items measuring categorization by *outgroup* members: *i.e.* threat (loadings ranging between 0.75 and 0.87) and discrimination (loadings ranging between 0.73 and 0.80).
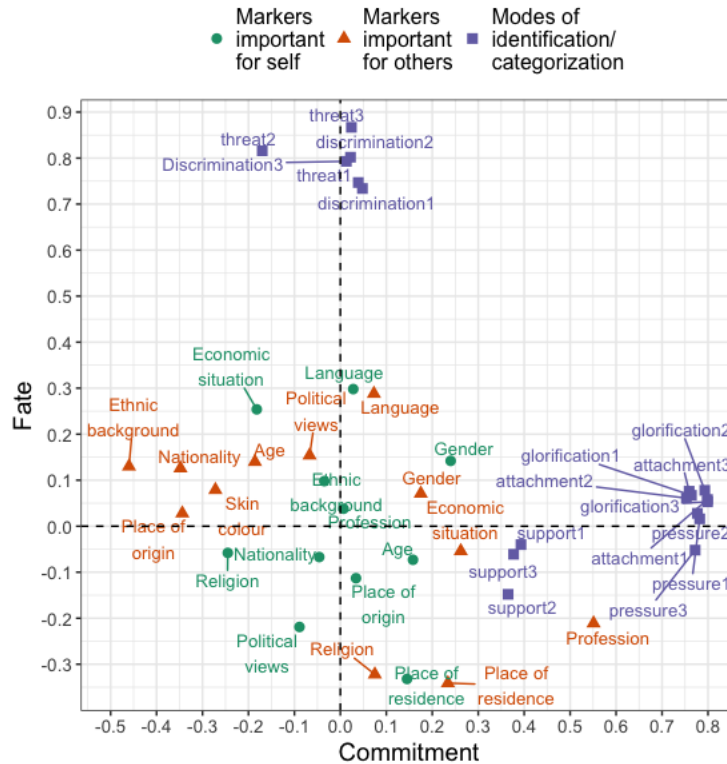
Figure 1. Component loadings of the choice of self-defining identity markers (green dots), normative identity markers (orange triangles) and modes of identification and categorization (purple squares). The latter appear three times each, i.e. once for each identity marker chosen as self-defining.

Turning to the categories selected as relevant for self and others, a first thing to note is that the first dimension is pre-eminently structured by perceived social norms (much more than by categories relevant for self): mostly by profession (0.55) and to a lesser extent by economic situation (0.26) and place of residence (0.23) on the positive pole; as well as to ethnic background (-0.46), nationality (-0.35), place of origin (-0.34) and skin colour (-0.27) on the negative pole. This dimension thus appears to be grounded in the degree of control that individuals (at least theoretically) have over their membership to the concerned groups: on the left side (negative pole), social norms are perceived as favouring categories to which individuals don't chose to belong to , that is, groups defined by geographical or ethnic origins, nationality and skin colour versus, on the right side (positive pole) social norms are perceived as favouring category memberships that depend on life choices and trajectories, and indeed

allow for social mobility (profession, economic situation and place of residence), an orientation one could qualify as 'liberal' or 'meritocratic'. Regarding the second dimension, its positive pole is most strongly defined by language, as both self-defining (0.30) and normative (0.29), and economic situation as self-defining (0.25). On the negative side, it is defined by place of residence, as both self-defining (-0.33) and normative (-0.34), and by religion as normative (-0.32). The strongest positive association of the linguistic marker with this dimension is especially meaningful, given the pivotal role of the language issue in the Sri Lankan conflict: the fact that both normative and intimate importance of language relate to a dimension that is strongly tied to a perception of social categories as a source of threat and discrimination appears to reflect the (long-standing) politicization of linguistic categories.

To summarise, the first dimension corresponds to the degree to which identities are incorporated into the self in the forms of attachment and glorification, ingroups are characterised by cohesion, *i.e.* mutual support and expectation of consensus among group members, and norms perceived as allowing for social mobility and shifting affiliations. We therefore label this dimension *commitment*. The second dimension, on the other hand, indicates how much social categories in general, and linguistic affiliation in particular, are the seen as the basis for others to discriminate certain categories and potentially attack them (independently of their intimate meaning for their bearer). We will refer to it as *fate*[33].

4.3.2   Underlying social cleavages

Given the historic importance of the language issue in the Sri Lankan conflict and the centrality of mother tongue as a marker of identity that differentiate between the country's Sinhalese majority and its various minority groups (including the autochthonous Tamils from Hindu and Christian backgrounds, who had been the main political constituency for pro-separatist rebels in the North and East, as well as Tamil-speaking Muslims and so-called Indian Tamils), we start our analyses of social cleavages with a comparison between Sinhala- and Tamil- speaking respondents. When language is added to the NLPCA described in the previous section as a passive (*i.e.*, non-structuring) variable, it is negatively associated to the first dimension (-0.59): Tamil-speaking respondents score much lower on *commitment* than

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[33] The negative association of place of residence with the fate dimension and its positive association with the identity fluidity dimension makes intuitive sense. Since place of residence is defined in the questionnaire as the "region/city where you live", it is most likely the place where people experience most of their social interactions. Hence, people's daily social environment is typically filled with people sharing this identity with them with and look at them as an ingroup member.

Sinhala-speaking respondents. Indeed, Tamil-speaking respondents (*M*=-0.60) score significantly lower on this dimension at average than Sinhala-speaking respondents (*M*=0.58) according to a Welch t-test (*t*(218.96)=14.408, *p* < .001, *d*=1.45)

A more complex pattern arises with regard to respondents' likelihood to think of identity as an imposed fate. While it is true that on average Tamil-speaking respondents score slightly higher on this dimension (when introduced as a passive variable, its loading on the fate dimension is 0.36), Figure 2 displays an important subgroup among the Sinhala-speaking respondents who score particularly high on this dimension. Overall, while Figure 2 suggests that Sinhala-speaking respondents are extremely compact on *commitment* (they virtually all score higher on identity fluidity than Tamil-speaking respondents), they are just as heterogeneous when it comes to *fate,* spanning from the lowest values to the highest values observed. While the cleavage is between linguistic groups on the first dimension, it hence appears to run *within* the Sinhalese majority on the second dimension.

In order to explore further the social significance of the cleavage within the majority, alongside the majority-minority cleavage, we performed a cluster analysis with the scores on both identity dimensions (*commitment* and *fate*) as well as respondents' linguistic affiliation (Sinhalese *versus* Tamil) as clustering variables. Using the *cluster* package (Maechler et al., 2012) within the statistical software *R*, we first computed Gower's distances between respondents based on their values on the three clustering variables and then we performed a cluster analysis on the resulting distance matrix using the Partitioning Around Medoids (PAM) method. In order to determine the number of clusters, we used the *NbClust* package for *R* (Charrad et al., 2012) which includes an algorithm suggesting the appropriate number of clusters based on 30 indices of clusters' validity. A large majority of indices (9) suggested a four clusters solution[34]. And since this solution clearly distinguished participants on both dimensions, we decided to retain it. Among the four clusters, one gathered all Tamil-speaking respondents and three clusters differentiated between different types of Sinhala-speaking respondents (see Figure 2).

As already mentioned, Tamil-speaking respondents stand out mainly insofar as they do not see their identity in terms of commitment. We therefore interpret the cluster that groups them together as *bounded minorities*, constrained by social origin. The three other clusters all score high on the commitment dimension but differ by their position on the fate

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[34] The second most suggested solution was three clusters, with five indices suggesting it.

dimension. Cluster 3 groups the respondents who score highest on this latter dimension: they are the most likely to consider language as important for themselves and for others and who feel threatened and discriminated notably on that linguistic basis. Indeed, this cluster has the highest proportion of respondents choosing language as self-defining (40.3%) and normative (37.5 %), even compared to the minorities cluster (23.7 %; *OR*=2.17, *p* < .01 and 20.2 %; *OR*=2.37; p < .01, respectively). The irony of course is that these respondents are the most likely to report being threatened and discriminated because of their language, while they belong to the country's linguistic majority, in a post-war context that puts them at a political advantage, after the central government has triumphed militarily over the separatist rebels who had fought in the name of Tamil rights and interests. Sociologically this cluster groups relatively well-off individuals, who have been spared more than all other groups by the hardships of poverty and by the violence of war (see Table 2). Their stance appears however in historic continuity with Sinhala nationalist movements, which became first vocal in the early post-independence period, claiming that the overrepresentation of Tamils in political, administrative and educational institutions constituted an injustice and even a threat to the very existence of the Sinhala language (DeVotta, 2004). Hence, we labelled the position grouped in this cluster as *grieved majority*.
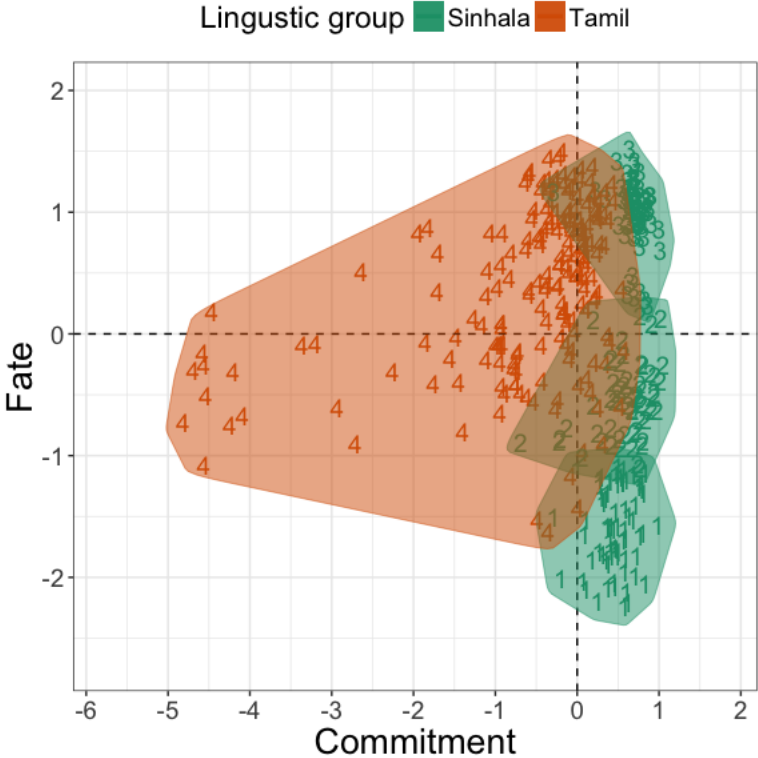
Figure 2. Respondents' objectscores on the two dimensions extracted from the NLPCA as a function of their linguistic group and their assigned cluster.

Table 2. Clusters' demographic and socio-economic composition.

		Cluster		
	Cohesive communities	**Social Optimists**	**Grieved majority**	**Bounded minorities**
n	70	60	72	198
Age (Mean)	52.96	49.55	53.10	44.12
Women (%)	15.71	60	40.28	50.51
Education level (Mean)	2.27	2.53	2.14	2.53
Professional activity — Paid worker (%)	17.14	5	11.11	43.65
Self-employed (%)	28.57	31.67	48.61	19.29
Student (%)	1.43	0	0	3.05
Unemployed (%)	1.43	1.67	0	9.64
Home care (%)	10	45	23.61	16.24
Retired (%)	40	15	16.67	7.61
Other (%)	1.43	1.67	0.00	0.51
Economic hardship experiences — No school (%)	29.85	20.69	12.68	16.67
No medical help (%)	24.29	25	2.78	23.23
Lack of food (%)	34.29	33.33	2.78	26.77
Homeless (%)	37.14	21.67	12.50	25.25
At least one of the above (%)	67.16	56.90	22.54	39.39
Number of experiences (Mean)	1.30	1.02	0.31	0.92
Conflict experiences — Displaced (%)	21.43	30	9.72	22.22
Imprisoned or kidnapped (%)	2.86	6.67	4.17	9.09
Family member killed (%)	25.71	25.00	12.50	18.18
Family member disappeared (%)	2.86	6.67	4.17	20.71
At least one of the above (%)	40	50	26.39	32.32
Number of experiences (Mean)	0.53	0.68	0.31	0.70
Carried weapon (%)	38.57	11.67	6.94	2.55

Cluster 1 is located at the opposite, *i.e.* lower, end of the fate dimension. Most respondents in this cluster selected place of residence as self-defining and normative (68.6 % and 64.3 %, respectively) and they by far most often selected religion as normative (45.7 %), which is again consistent with the position of these categories on the fate dimension

(remember Figure 1). 57.1 % of respondents in this cluster selected religion as self-defining, far more than in the other two Sinhalese clusters (an outcome not predictable on the sole basis of the overall NLPCA, which displays religion as important for self to be almost independent at average from the fate dimension). Because respondents in this cluster do not define their identity through perceived discrimination and threat, but through identification with mainly local and religious communities and expectations of mutual support and agreement within these communities, we labelled it as *cohesive communities*. It's noteworthy that this cluster appears to group the more vulnerable segments in the population: predominately male, often inactive, highly exposed to poverty, and including many people with a direct frontline experience or carrying a weapon during the conflict (most likely as governments soldiers or, in some cases, as civil guards).

Finally, cluster 2 occupies an intermediary position on the fate dimension. As its main defining feature appears to be its embracement of chosen identities and a belief in social mobility, we label the group position it reflects as *social optimists*. Sociologically the most remarkable characteristic of this cluster is that it is predominantly female (60 %).

4.3.3   Relationship with contested memories

In a final set of analyses, we looked at the relationship between different types of identity configurations (the four clusters of respondents identified in the previous section) and people's willingness to support the expression of specific war memories, descriptively and through regression models. Because each respondent indicated his or her support to four different vignettes, we conducted a multilevel logistic regression model with random intercept for individuals (*i.e.* we allowed the intercept to vary across individuals) using the *lme4* package for *R* (Bates et al., 2014). The (binary) dependent variable was support for the war memory and was predicted by an interaction between cluster (type of identity configuration) and vignette (type of war memory), as shown by an analysis of deviance test (χ^2(21)=36.82, *p* < .05).

Figure 3 shows the predicted likelihood of support for the different types of war memories among each cluster, with war memories organized on the x-axis by decreasing level of overall support (confidence intervals were bootstrapped with 1000 simulations). Looking at the pattern across vignettes first, we can identify two broad regions in the graph. The first five types of memory (from "Staying near frontline" to "Collectively expelled") generated relatively high and consensual levels of support, across all clusters of respondents. The three

remaining memories proved to be more controversial and thus more revealing of distinct ideological stakes involved. On the bottom of the distribution, the vignette about "Radicalised by morning", which displays a victim of violence becoming a perpetrator of violence, appears to express the most sensitive content and to provoke a marked graduation in tolerance across clusters.

Looking at individual clusters, *social optimists* (cluster 2) systematically expressed high levels of tolerance, almost independently from the content of memory at stake. *bounded minorities* displayed a similar pattern, while a bit less constant and being substantially less supportive for the most controversial vignette. But arguably the most interesting findings concern the *grieved majority* and *cohesive communities* clusters, and in particular their contrasted reactions to the vignettes labelled *"Divided by an army attack"* and *"Blackmailed by combatants".* As clearly visible from Figure 3, not only were these two groups the most sensitive to the memories content, but they seem to react in opposite ways.

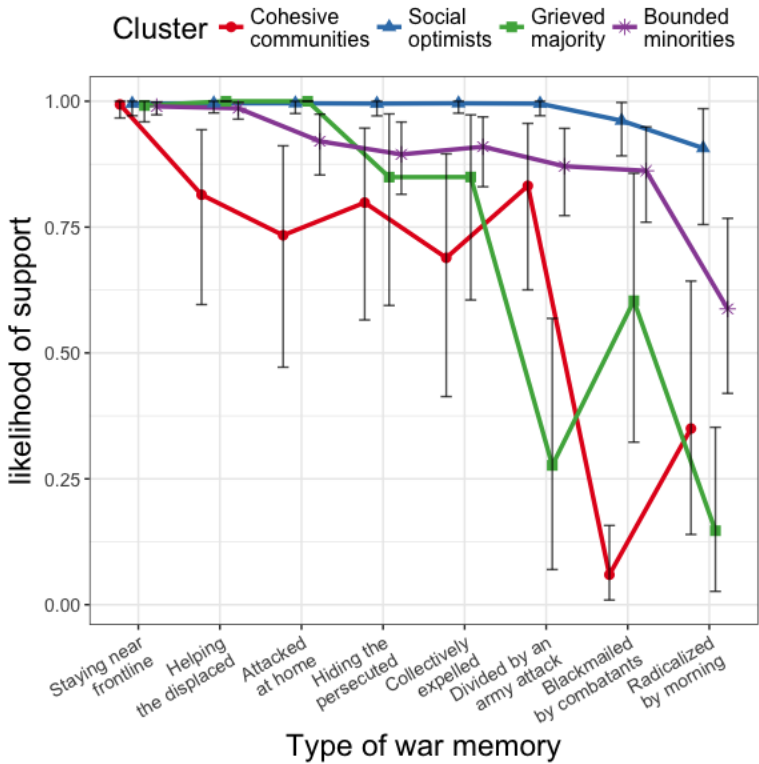*Figure 3. Likelihood of support for each type of war memory by cluster with bootstrapped confidence intervals (1000 simulations). War memories are organized on the x-axis from the most consensual (arousing the greater general support) on the left to the least consensual (arousing the least general support) on the right. The full content of the war memories vignette is available in Appendix 1.*

When confronted to the memory *"Divided by an army attack"*, respondents from the cohesive *communities* were more likely to express support than were respondents from the grieved m*ajority* (OR=12.95, p<.01). This memory vignette narrates how members of a different religious group, who used to live harmoniously in the same village as the narrator, betrayed her/his community when the army attacked. Importantly, the use of the word "army" in the vignette makes it the only memory in which the government's forces are clearly identified as perpetrators of unjustified violence. This suggests that the low level of support among the grieved majority may actually reflect a nationalistic refusal to acknowledge crimes perpetrated by the state. By contrast, respondents from the cohesive communities cluster showed a relatively high likelihood of support, similar than for the most consensual memories.

The vignette *"Blackmailed by combatants"* describes a woman who was unable to secure the release of her husband from an armed movement. It is strongly associated with Tamils' experiences, by clearly referring to practices of the LTTE which forcefully enrolled Tamils to fight for *Eelam*. This kind of story is perfectly in line with the government's rhetoric during the war, which claimed to protect Sri Lankan citizens, including the minorities, from LTTE's terrorist practices. When presented with this memory, the cohesive *communities* cluster's support dramatically dropped compared to their level of support for the *"Divided by an army attack"* narrative (OR=0.01, p<.001), and they were this time far less likely to express support than were respondents from the grieved *majority* cluster (OR=0.04, p<.001).

4.4 Discussion

The primary aim of this paper was to demonstrate how a considerable amount of complexity can be encompassed when assessing social identity in surveys. We developed a set of measures designed to assess the configuration of social identities in a sample while minimizing the constraints imposed by the researcher's a priori assumptions about the social groups that matter, capturing the multi-faceted nature of the social identity construct, and taking into account the role of (imagined) other's perspectives in shaping a person's identity. Importantly, we wanted to show that the complex data produced by such an instrument gain their meaning from, and should therefore be analysed and interpreted in close relation to, the specific political and historical context in which they are collected. Located in the immediate aftermath of the 2015 elections which led to an unexpected regime change, this context was in many respects a potential turning point in Sri Lanka's post-war period. After

an electoral campaign which notably promised the demilitarization of the North of the island, constitutional changes reducing the power of the central executive, and the implementation of full-hearted transitional justice mechanisms, the election of Sirisena's coalition potentially constituted a favourable climate for the emergence of previously repressed discourses and for the re-negotiation of relevant identity configurations.

To briefly summarize the findings, we found that the configuration of social identities was structured by two independent dimensions. *Commitment* reflects the extent to which group belongings are a basis for identification and intragroup cohesion and is mostly defined by *normative* identity markers: *i.e.* those who perceived their ingroups as cohesive also believed that most people in their country cared about identity markers that potentially allow for individual mobility – *i.e.* profession, place of residence and economic situation – as opposed to social groups that are relatively impermeable and hence constrain individuals according to their social origin (*i.e.* ethnic background, place of origin, nationality and skin colour). Further analyses revealed that this dimension strongly differentiates respondents along the minority/majority cleavage: Sinhalese participants virtually all displayed higher levels of commitment than Tamil-speaking minorities' members. The second dimension, *fate*, refers to social groups imposed on the individual from 'from the outside': it reflects the degree to which identity markers are the basis of perceived discrimination and threats of violence. Importantly, this understanding of identity as essentially threatened is most notably defined by the perception that the linguistic marker mattered both personally and normatively. Although Tamil-speaking participants tend to score higher on this dimension than Sinhalese ones, fate scores mostly reveal a cleavage within the Sinhalese majority itself. On its positive extreme (*grieved majority* cluster), we identified a group of relatively privileged Sinhalese, who – rather ironically – seemed to have been relatively insulated from the hardships of poverty and war. On its negative extreme, by contrast, we found *cohesive communities*, who were actually heavily affected by the war, both economically and through exposure to violence, and who included many veteran soldiers with a direct combat experience, but who were the least likely group in the sample to perceive their identity in terms of group-based threat or discrimination. Instead, they were rather inclined to emphasize the cohesion of their local and religious communities and their perceived importance, for both self and others.

When developing our instrument, we faced several difficult choices inherent to the endeavour of collecting such complex data and, with choices inevitably come downsides that we would like to adress before going any further in the discussion of the findings. As all

researchers working with survey questionnaires we had to face constraints interview and potential fatigue of the respondents, which pressure us to be parsimonious with survey questions. Facing the tradeoffs created by the practical reality, we opted to prioritize complexity over classis psychometric rigour. This decision has been guided by the maxim that psychometric quality shouldn't be thoughtlessly adopted as the default priority, but methodological choices should always be contingent on the specific research objectives. While prioritizing the construction of reliable scale fits an analytical approach, which aims at isolating a specific aspect of the identity construct (*e.g.* the process of social identification) in relation to specific social categories, trying to relocate identity within societal dynamics and to understand how it relates to complex collective outcomes is another matter that, we argue, requires first and foremost a more holistic approach to survey measurement.

Also, it wasn't practically possible to ask our respondents to rate each of our twelve identity markers on each of the six items assessing dimensions of identification and categorization. Our solution to this problem was to first screen for the three identity markers that were the most relevant for the respondents (*i.e.* the three most important to define themselves). There are downsides to this procedure. First, as responses to the items assessing modes of identification and categorization were mostly answered by high identifiers (but see below), we were unable to compare their answers with respondents who didn't consider these identity markers as highly relevant to them. Second, by fixing the number of relevant identities to three, we lose the information about the number and range of social groups relevant for our respondents' self-definition.

Another limitation derives from the finite list of identity characteristics proposed in the survey. Aiming for a wide applicability – and with an eye on facilitating the transferability of the proposed approach to different contexts and communities - we opted here for deliberately general social categories. It is hence possible that the inclusion of more context-specific characteristics – such as caste, for example[35] – would have made visible aspects of the identity configurations that remain invisible in our analyses. Nothing precludes that future usages of the research tool adapt it to integrate more specific characteristics, depending on the particular research context and goals.

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[35] While it is true that caste divisions lost much of their economic consequences with the introduction of a capitalist economy in Sri Lanka under British colonial rule (Jayawardena, 2000), it still often constitutes a marker of social status which may be consequential notably by creating cleavages within ethnic groups.

More generally, we would like to avoid an important pitfall regarding the interpretation of our findings. In our view, it is quite clear that the dimensions of identity derived from the present analyses - *commitment* and *fate* - should not be understood as universal psychological constructs, nor do we necessarily expect them to be replicated in a different societal or temporal context. They should rather be seen as mapping how a set of analytical constructs (*i.e.* modes of identification and categorization by others) came to be articulated together in relation to certain markers of identity, at a particular time and place. This is not only true in the self-evident sense that the association between, say language and perceived threat, is contingent on the specific political history of Sri Lanka. There is equally nothing natural and necessary about the fact that perceived group-based discrimination and threat happen to be correlated and form a common underlying dimension, distinct from identification and ingroup cohesion. In our view, including explicitly normative items – *i.e.,* items relating to what other people think or do – alongside items measuring intimate self-views (*i.e.* glorification and attachment) as structuring variables rules out an interpretation of the extracted components as universal psychological constructs. As shown by Portelinha and Elcheroth (2016), Tankard and Paluck (2016), or Paluck and Green (2009) normative beliefs are far more malleable than intimate beliefs, which makes them both an important vehicle and an indicator of social change. Whether individuals perceive that others usually categorize them in a way that matches their own self-definition can strongly vary with social and political circumstances. Technically, this translates to varying levels of correlation between identification and modes of categorization by others, and therefore to different configurational spaces.

Bearing these caveats in mind, we can now move on with the discussion of the substantial findings, which illustrate what can be gained from the proposed methodological approach. To begin with, the fact that perceptions of threat and discrimination were first and foremost associated with the linguistic marker is in itself an important insight about the (post-)conflict dynamics. As discussed in the introduction, the issue of linguistic rights has been the cornerstone of the Sinhalese-Tamil conflict and has made the language people speak in their everyday life a deeply political matter (DeVotta, 2014). On this basis, it was possible to anticipate that language had some kind of relevance to our participants. But what our method enabled us to see is that, if language indeed strongly mattered to some respondents, it was not in the sense that it was a particularly powerful basis for social identification (*i.e.* language was unrelated to the commitment dimension) but rather because it was perceived as a source

of threat and discrimination independently of how much people actually identified with their linguistic group. In other words, it is an example of how identity may have pragmatic importance because of others' gaze rather than as an intimate self-perception (Elcheroth & Reicher, 2017), even more so given that mother tongue is almost inevitably visible or, we should say, 'hearable'.

But there is still another way in which language participates in shaping an understanding of identity: when respondents believed that language mattered to others, (i.e., when they perceived language as a normative marker of identity) they felt more threatened and discriminated *even based on other group identities* than language itself (see Appendix A for further empirical demonstration of this point). This finding may reflect how violent and discriminatory politicization of a particular social cleavage can spill-over to, and intertwine with, other types of identities. In the context of Sri Lanka, ethnic riots and other forms of repression and intimidation against Tamils protesting the discriminatory (language) policies for instance popularized the informal hiring of *goondas* (*i.e.* thugs) by political parties to do the dirty job outside the framework of the law (Tambiah, 1986). This practice then spread as a way to destroy the property of Tamil economic competitors in the context of ethnic riots, and eventually became a general way to intimidate political opponents independently of ethnic considerations; hence generalizing the climate of insecurity to members of the ethnic majority (especially under Jayewerdane's regime in the 70s; DeVotta, 2004). In short, when violent practices are legitimized with regard to a particular social divide, the latter is likely to be used as a pretext to generalize these practices to other areas of social relations, or it is simply likely to normalize these practices in society. We suggest that it is the awareness of this kind of spill-over effect that made our participants feel more threatened when perceiving language to be normatively important (see appendix A for further elaboration on this point).

But to make the picture even more complex, among members of the Sinhalese majority, embracing this conception of identity (*i.e.* scoring high on the fate dimension) appeared to be peculiar to a rather privileged group who was relatively spared by economic hardships as well as frontline experience. While this finding appears in stark contrast with works suggesting that exposure to communal violence inclines people to feel threatened by and distrust outgroup members (e.g., Hewstone et al., 2006; Staub, 2006), it is consistent with the tenets of collective vulnerability theory (Elcheroth, 2006; Elcheroth & Spini, 2014; Penic, Elcheroth, & Spini, 2016), which posits that exposure to the break-down of social and moral

order brought along by war, generates social motivations to restore the social fabric of communities and reestablish clear moral norms regulating their everyday life. From this perspective, it makes theoretical sense that people living in contexts strongly affected by violence would tend to reject simplistic narratives justifying violence and focus on the reconstruction of the social fabric of their community – *i.e.* the *cohesive communities* cluster – while those who were only indirectly exposed to war (*e.g.*, through mass-mediated narratives) would more easily embrace nationalistic visions (*i.e.*, the *grieved majority* cluster)[36].

Following this reasoning, we suggest that the grieved majority cluster – having a largely indirect experience of the conflict mainly shaped by mass-mediated and politicized narratives – actually embodies central features of the Sinhalese nationalist ideology. One of these features has been referred to as the "minority complex" of the Sinhalese majority (De Silva, 1986), which in part stems from the fact that the overrepresentation of Tamils in higher education and state administration under British colonial rule led Sinhalese nationalist ideologues to recurrently depict Tamils as benefiting from unfair advantages (DeVotta, 2004; Tambiah, 1986). This ideology typically depicts Tamils as foreign invaders and powerful oppressors, and refers to the presence of nearly 70 million Tamils in the neighboring Tamil Nadu state in South India counts, to portray Sinhalese as a religious and linguistic minority in the wider region (DeVotta, 2016). The combined effects of these elements are powerfully illustrated in an experiment conducted by Schaller and Abeysinghe (2006) during the civil war. They asked 100 Sinhalese high-school students to identify cities marked on a map, ostensibly to assess their geographical knowledge. In fact, respondents were randomly assigned to one of two conditions designed to manipulate the salience of the geographical frame of reference: in one condition the map showed only the contours of Sri Lanka, whereas in the other the map included most of India as well. They found that including India in respondents' frame of reference led them to take a more uncompromising stance regarding the conflict (*e.g.* they supported the peace negotiations less and were less supportive of the establishment of a sovereign state of Tamil *Ealam*) and to stereotype Tamils as more malevolent and agentic.

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[36] It is important to stress that, by only assessing individual experiences, our data conflate the individual and the collective level since individuals who were directly exposed to violence are more likely to live or to have lived in social contexts more affected by violence. But based on the findings from the existing literature, it seems more plausible to explain the Community cohesion cluster's position on the fate dimension as the outcome of collective effect of communal violence (for further analyses regarding this point, see appendix 4)

The clusters derived from our analysis did not only reflect different subjective understandings of identity but also implied distinct stances in public debates about the war, as shown by marked differences between clusters of Sinhalese respondents in their reaction to war memories. A first thing to notice is that the two clusters located at the extremes of the *fate* dimension were the most sensitive to the specific content of the memories; these two groups displayed the greatest fluctuations in intended support for their expression. This, in itself, is a further indication of the ideological significance and consequentiality of the *fate* dimension. Furthermore, these two 'extreme' clusters seemed to construct their respective position in opposition to each other with regard to two controversial memories that bear important political implications. When faced with a memory suggesting the Sri Lankan army as perpetrator of war crimes, the *grieved majority* was far less supportive than the c*ohesive communities*. While this already suggests an accommodating stance toward Rajapaksa's government's and the army's actions during the war, it is important to take into account that the new government was elected based on the promise of enforcing Transitional Justice mechanisms, including procedures to hold accountable war criminals (Devotta, 2016; Goodhand & Walton, 2017; Lecamwasam, 2016). This makes this kind of narratives even more threatening for Sinhalese nationalists who consider soldiers from the Sri Lankan army as war heroes (DeVotta, 2016b). When it came to a memory depicting LTTE's blackmailing practices, the *cohesive communities* cluster displayed massive rejection. This reaction might be understood in relation to the rhetoric of the government which systematically justified its actions by depicting the LTTE as a terrorist organization against which all Sri Lankans needed protection. Applying the terrorist label to the LTTE was a strategy aimed at delegitimizing the LTTE's political project of self-determination and led to a systematic semantic association between terrorism and separatist struggle in the government's discourse (Nadarajah & Sriskandarajah, 2005). Members of the cohesive communities cluster might therefore recognise in the content of the latter vignette first and foremost the rhetorical devices characteristic of the government propaganda during the war, at odds with their first-hand experience of the conflict.

It is noteworthy that, in order to have a conventional point of comparison, we included a traditional item assessing ethnic identification in our survey questionnaire (i.e. "I identify with other members of this group"; Postmes et al., 2013) and when comparing the three

Sinhalese clusters' mean score on this item, no significant difference appeared[37]. In other words, a classical ethnic identification item alone would have left unobserved the social cleavage we observed along the *fate* dimension within the majority, and hence the different reactions toward war memories that it underlies. In fact, all three Sinhalese clusters displayed relatively high levels of ethnic identification (means ranging from 4.87 to 5.00 on a scale from 1 to 6), indicating that these contrasting stances can all be found among high ethnic identifiers. A close examination of the identity markers most relevant in each cluster suggests that relying on this kind of ethnic identification measures can not only lead us to neglect the qualitative changes that arise from intersections with other important identities (*e.g.* gender, economic situation) but also obscure the diversity of meanings hidden behind the label of 'ethnic group' given the flexibility of such a concept. Indeed, what made our cohesive communities and grieved majority clusters distinctive was the relative importance they attached to religion (*i.e.* Buddhism) and language (*i.e.* Sinhala), respectively; which are arguably the two most central features of the Sinhalese identity. By emphasizing these identity markers both groups were emphasizing their Sinhalese identity but in a different way and with different ideological overtones. This illustrates an important methodological point: we can open a window into the specific content that people ascribe to social categories by learning what identity markers they use as symbols defining the boundaries between groups and what ideological stances are tied to these.

Despite these important differences between subgroups of Sinhalese respondents, they had commonalities that consistently differentiated them from Tamil speaking minorities in terms of identity construction, which shed some light on what it meant to be a minority member in this important moment of Sri Lanka's post-war history. This sharp difference between minorities and majority members played out on what we called the *commitment* dimension.

We saw that commitment was positively defined by both identification (attachment and glorification) and perceived categorization by ingroup members (pressure to agree and support). Taking into account that the items measuring modes of identification and categorization were answered in relation to identity markers that had previously been identified as the most important for the respondent's self-definition - what could almost be considered as a way of screening for high identifiers - the pattern emerging from the NLPCA

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[37] A one-way ANOVA with Sinhalese respondents showed that there was no difference in ethnic identification between cluster ($F(2,199)=0.83$; *n.s.*).

can be understood as differentiating respondents who conformed to this expectation (*i.e.* who score beyond the scale midpoint on *commitment*) from those who didn't . Theoretically, we can therefore consider respondents who score relatively lower on the *commitment* dimension are those interesting cases who, despite having selected identity markers as most important to define themselves, don't answer identification and categorization items as high identifiers would. In other words, these are respondents who *are defined* by social categories, without actually defining themselves through them.

The identity markers defining the commitment dimension give us further information on what differentiated these respondents from the others. This difference is not so much about self-defining social categories as it is about perceived social norms: Those who scored lower on the commitment dimension (systematically minorities' members) were also more likely to believe that others see social origins (*i.e.* place of origin, ethnic background, nationality and skin colour) to be more important than anything else.

All in all, the cleavage between minorities and majority members along the commitment dimension reveals a sharp difference in their perception of the Sri Lankan normative context. The most telling illustrations of this gap are the importance attributed to profession and ethnic background. In the case of profession, 85.64 % of Sinhalese respondents believed it to be among the three most important markers for the majority of Sri Lankans while only 5.56 % of Tamils said the same. In the case of ethnic background, only one Sinhalese respondents out of 202 (0.5 %) would pick it when more than one third of the Tamil sample (34.34 %) believed it to be among the three most important identity markers for Sri Lankans (see appendix 3 for details). If Sinhalese respondents can afford to believe that social origins are largely irrelevant to most people, this probably reflects the fact that, as members of the ethnic majority they can take their own inclusion in the national community for granted. For them, the normative relevance of markers such as ethnicity or nationality can be kept in the background and the focus is on markers defining status and stratification within the boundaries of the national community. Minorities members, on the contrary, are well aware that people actually care about their social origin as they see things through the other side of the symbolic boundary that defines full-fledged citizenship through an ethno-nationalist lens. From their perspective, markers such as ethnic background are more likely to appear at the forefront of a normative context in which majority members frequently conflate Sri Lankan and Sinhalese/Buddhist identities (DeVotta, 2004, 2016b).

4.4.1 Conclusion

Social identity is certainly one of the most influential concepts in contemporary research on intergroup conflict. Since Tajfel and Turner's (1979/2001) seminal formulation of Social Identity theory, most research has operationalized this construct as a self-perception through social identification scales. Recent research enriched our theoretical understanding, emphasizing how multiple identities, modes of identification and normative aspects couldn't be ignored if we were to understand group processes in all their complexity. The impetus for the present study was our impression that, despite these theoretical advancements, survey research often lacks the methodological means to do justice to social and political psychologists' theoretical understanding of identity. While integrating this kind of complexity into survey methods certainly is an important methodological challenge, we believe that it can be rewarding because surveys bring added value to study complex social dynamics unfolding at multiple interrelated scales. They make it possible to observe structural patterns emerging from aggregated individual responses, which, in turn, help to contextualize any specific identity construction, that is, to locate individuals' position within the context shaped by others' positions. Therefore, they can lend precious insights into the normative background prevailing in a given context, against which individuals negotiate their identity construction. We hope to have shown that the limits of current methods are not a fatality, and that concrete options are available to narrow the gap between our theoretical understanding of identity and our methodological practice.

Beyond ethnicity
Rethinking social identities as complex configurations rooted in collective experiences

5.1 Introduction

Over the last decades students of intergroup conflict and political violence have more and more adopted ethnicity as an analytic category, as several authors across disciplinary boundaries have pointed out (Brubaker & Laitin, 1998; Cederman & Vogt, 2017; Elcheroth & Spini, 2011). And social and political psychologists are no exception to this trend, to the extent that they routinely assume ethno-nationalist identifications to play a central explanatory role in intergroup conflict and reconciliation (Bar-Tal, 2007; Canetti et al., 2018; Licata et al., 2012; Livingstone & Haslam, 2008; Roccas & Elster, 2012; J. R. Vollhardt & Bilali, 2014).

The key aim of this paper, however, is to put forward a theoretical and methodological approach to the role of collective identities in (post-)conflict societies that goes beyond a narrow focus on ethnic and national categories. We suggest that, by taking the subjective relevance of ethnic identities for granted, our research practices often fix parameters that should on the contrary be at the center of a social-psychological investigation. If many (or the most vocal) actors in a political conflict use ethnic identities to make sense of it (or to mobilize others), this doesn't necessarily follow that we should take their interpretation at face value. And not doing so doesn't imply that we deny ethnic identities to be consequential. To use Brubaker's (Brubaker, 2002, 2013) terminology, we shouldn't lose from sight that categories of practice (*e.g.* ethnic groups) don't always constitute adequate categories of analysis.

Relying on the recent social-psychological literature on social identity we identify three pitfalls that underpins a narrow focus on relations between ethnic groups and thus prevent an adequate analysis of the role of social identity in large-scale social processes, including political conflicts. These pitfalls consist in reducing a complex intergroup system into an ingroup/outgroup binary opposition, in narrowly defining social identity as social identification to one or two social groups, and treating a given identity as fixed entity across time. When we overcome these obstacles, we can take a step back and see two typically overlooked questions emerge as paramount to a social psychological analysis of the role of social identity in political conflicts: (1) what are the main ways of thinking about identity, or

the main identity configurations, in a given context? And (2) what are the individual and social conditions that promote specific identity configurations, and especially identity configurations that fit a narrative of ethno-nationalist conflict?

We try to answer these two questions in a context torn by political conflicts that are typically analyzed through an ethnic lens: post-war Sri Lanka. There are several reasons why the Sri Lankan context in particular invites a move beyond a narrow focus on a pair of pre-defined ethnic identities. In terms of the historical roots of intergroup conflicts in Sri Lanka, it is generally accepted that successive – and especially British – colonial policies favored the fragmentation of the colonized population into multiple distinct ethnic identities and the development of an exclusive form of nationalism among the Sinhalese majority in particular (DeVotta, 2004; Jayawardena, 1986, 2000; Little, 1994; Tambiah, 1996; Wickramasinghe, 2006). With regard to the present constellation, political tensions between Sinhalese and Tamils associated with war-time violence are now complemented with a growing climate of intolerance against ethnic minorities, especially Muslims (Devotta, 2018; Imtiyaz & Mohamed-Saleem, 2015; Silva, 2016).

Building on and further improving the approach developed in a previous study (see Chapter 4), the present study's methodological procedure enabled us to assess how individuals position their self in relation to multiple group cleavages. This methodology takes as a starting point that collective identities are located within a system composed of multiple groups. Furthermore, analyses were based on data collected among a representative sample of the adult Sri Lankan population, which enabled us to treat the different types of complex identities as forming a coherent social system.

5.1.1 Describing complex identities

Social-psychological analyses of intergroup relations have overwhelmingly relied on some form of the ingroup/outgroup binary opposition: minority versus majority, dominant versus dominated, high versus low status group (Kerr et al., 2017). While this two-group paradigm has been the basis for extremely fruitful theoretical frameworks – prime examples being research inspired by social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979/2001) and realistic group conflict theory (Sherif et al., 1988) – it hasn't remained unquestioned (Dixon et al., 2020). Within the social identity framework, Reicher (2004) pointed out that one typically neglected source of flexibility of intergroup behavior is the choice of comparison group. Even given a specified ingroup membership, there is typically several possible outgroups to

compare with and the choice of one or the other can radically change the meaning of one's identity (S. A. Haslam et al., 1992; S. A. Haslam & Turner, 1992; Hopkins, Regan, et al., 1997). Hence in order to understand the behavior and meaning attached to a given social group, we most often need to re-contextualize it within a system of multiple groups. Other authors (Subašić et al., 2008) have suggested that the mobilization toward social change (or toward preservation of the status quo) was better conceptualized through a triangular group system where a minority and the authority struggle over their relative influence on an undecided majority (see also Simon & Klandermans, 2001).

The first significant contribution in stressing the blind spots of the two-groups paradigm came from Micheal Billig's (Billig, 1976) critical review of the Robbers Cave Experiment (Sherif et al., 1988). He argued that analyzing the results of the experiments in terms of relationships between two groups of similar status (*i.e.* the two groups of boys) amounted to obscure the crucial role of the powerful third-party that originally set up the distinction and competition between them (*i.e.* the camp authorities and experimenters). He pointed out that the experimenters' design was structurally similar to the implementation by a powerful group of a 'divide-and-rule' strategy by manufacturing group divisions amongst subordinates (see also Kerr et al., 2017).

In the present study, we use a methodology that take as a starting point that collective identities are located within a system composed of multiple groups. In terms of concrete measurement, this starting point implies, first, that we don't limit the definition of collective identities to a pre-defined ingroup-outgroup opposition, which is a typical feature of social identification scales (e.g., Leach et al., 2008). A crucial reason for avoiding such restrictions is that it obscures an essential puzzle posed by ethno-nationalist exclusion. By narrowing down the national community to one's own ethnic group, ethno-nationalism implies the exclusion of a whole section of the population from the community of legitimate citizens (e.g., Connor, 2015). Our point of departure is that this sometimes violent exclusion of ethnic others constitutes a theoretical puzzle, which cannot be solved by simply looking at ethnic and national identifications. The reason is that individuals are always embedded in complex webs of social relations within which ethno-national distinctions constitute but one type of social cleavage among many possible others (Deaux et al., 1995; Freeman, 2003; Kuhn & McPartland, 1954). If two individuals differ by their ethnic background, it will most often be the case that they share a common identity based on other criteria, such as their profession, social class, gender, age cohort, or because they live in the same neighborhood (Marilynn B. Brewer, 2010; Roccas & Brewer, 2002). When we focus on ethnic/national identification, we

arbitrarily pick one or two divisions of social reality and leave all alternative constructions of common group membership as well as their consequences unobserved. Furthermore, such a narrow focus prevents us to ask the crucial question of how ethno-national identifications fit within the broader network of alternative possible group memberships. We are therefore unable to ask questions such as: do ethno-nationalist identifications come at the expense of alternative group identifications? If so, what are the social processes which account for this exclusivity? In contrast, our approach consists in studying how different potential markers of group membership tend to be chosen together, or exclude each other, as significant bases for locating the self within the social environment. We therefore looked at identity as a *configuration* of different internalized group memberships.

Understanding why allegiance to a particular group would take precedence over others is not a trivial thing, let alone understanding how it comes to justify exclusion and violence toward those who are defined as outgroup. As opposed to misreadings of social identity theory which picture intergroup domination to be a natural consequences of social identification (see Reicher, 2004), we consider the passage from group (ethno-national) identification to exclusive attitudes as something that is not self-evident. One explanation is to be found in the ideological content which color individuals' relationship to a social category. More specifically, we rely on the distinction put forward by Roccas and colleagues (Roccas et al., 2006) between *attachment*, which refers to the degree to which individuals include the group in their self-concept, feel emotionally attached to it and want to contribute to its improvement, and *glorification,* which explicitly implies a belief in the superiority of the ingroup and in unconditional respect for the group's rules and authorities. The ideological significance of this distinction has been illustrated in several cases where attachment net of glorification has been found to foster a critical stance toward wrongdoings perpetrated in the name of one's nation (Elcheroth & Reicher, 2014; Leidner et al., 2010; Penic, Elcheroth, & Reicher, 2016; Roccas et al., 2006). These studies therefore demonstrate that identifying with one's nation doesn't automatically imply the justification of violence or exclusion of outgroups, which rather requires an ideological construction of the ingroup as superior and beyond criticisms.

A third feature of our approach is to treat social groups as produced collectively rather than through many individual decisions made in isolation. We translate this at the individual-level by the key observation that (perception of) others' treatment of the self is consequential for one's identity. Different lines of research provide ample evidence of this fact. First, individuals actively try to influence others' perception in order to create feedbacks that

confirm their internalized sense of identity (Chen et al., 2004, 2006; Klein et al., 2007). Second, being treated on the basis of a social category that one doesn't identify with is likely to trigger a negative experience (*i.e.* categorization threat) and a willingness to resist the external categorization (Barreto & Ellemers, 2003; Branscombe, Ellemers, et al., 1999). Third, successful resistance to an external categorization is not always practically possible, such as when the categorization is implied rather than explicit (Barreto et al., 2010) or when it is likely to attract sanctions from a powerful audience (Blackwood et al., 2013, 2015). We therefore consider social identity as the product of a two-ways relationship between self-categorizations and external categorizations from the social environment (see Lemay & Ashmore, 2004).

The resulting model of identity which informs this study purposefully avoids to take as a starting point pre-defined social (*e.g.* ethnic) groups that are assumed to be important by the researcher. It rather centers around the key role of multiple markers of potential social cleavages (*i.e.* identity markers). This methodological choice is grounded in a theoretical understanding of identity which complements its classic self-perception aspect with a more practice-oriented approach (Elcheroth & Reicher, 2017). It is now well documented that when individuals recognize each other as members of a common social group, their mutual treatment changes in a way that fosters mutual help (Levine et al., 2005), the creation of a common understanding (S. A. Haslam, Turner, Oakes, McGarty, et al., 1998; S. A. Haslam, Turner, Oakes, Reynolds, et al., 1998), and cooperation (Balliet et al., 2014); which provides individuals with a number of important benefits ranging from improved health (C. Haslam et al., 2012; Jetten et al., 2017) to a vehicle of social power to produce changes in social reality (Drury & Reicher, 1999, 2009; S. A. Haslam & Reicher, 2012). There is therefore a highly important and pragmatic stake not only in determining which social categories we belong to, but also which social identities others in our social environment allow us to enact. We argue that such recognizable identity markers as one's religion, language, economic situation or place of residence play a crucial role in organizing the performance of collective identities by serving as concrete interplays between internal and external categorization. In other words, identity markers constitute bases on which to anticipate others treatment of the self, and what to expect to achieve with them as a result (Elcheroth & Reicher, 2017).

In sum, our approach to describe collective identities avoids to assume the relevance of a pre-defined set of social categories. Instead, we opt for an approach that is partly inductive and partly informed by theoretical interests. It is inductive in the sense that we don't assume in advance which and how identities are relevant. Rather, we use a tool developed in

a previous research (see Chapter 4) that enables us to capture individuals' multiple group affiliations, multiple modes of identification and multiple perspectives on how their self relates to a given social cleavage. However, our approach is also informed by theoretical interest, and more particularly, the aim to identify configurations that give some relevance to ethnic markers. Our analytical choices are therefore not purely inductive, but also aimed at identifying different ways in which ethnicity matters.

5.1.2 Rooting complex identities in concrete (collective) experiences

Collective identities are not things that are written in stone. There is clear evidence that identities are subject to change, and that we can provide a meaningful social psychological analysis of how this change occurs. Research on crowd psychology in particular is rich in lessons in this respect as it offers a micro-social picture of the movement of identities in relation to concrete collective experiences (Reicher & Haslam, 2013). Across multiple studies where they analyzed interaction between crowd members and the police from a social identity perspective, a group of researchers (Drury et al., 2003; Drury & Reicher, 2000; Reicher, 1996; Stott et al., 2001; Stott & Drury, 2000) observed a systematic sequence leading to the emergence of a common identity within the crowd. At the onset of the interaction, the crowd is typically heterogeneous, *i.e.* composed of multiple groups which differ in the way they understand their social position in relation to the police. The police, however, perceives the crowd as homogeneously antagonistic and dangerous, and enacts this understanding by using control method (*e.g.* cordons, charging) which *de facto* treats the crowd in an undifferentiated way. As a result of this treatment, the previously least antagonistic members of the crowd start to join the more antagonistic ones in perceiving the police's actions as illegitimate. This produces a sense of unity within the crowd around a conflicting interpretation of the situation, which in turn gives crowd members the power to challenge the police and confirm the latter's initial perception of the crowd as antagonistic. The end result is put by Reicher and Haslam (2013; p. 117) as follows: "even those crowd members who started off seeing themselves as 'respectable' and the authorities as 'on their side' emerge with a sense of themselves as 'oppositional' and the authorities as the opposition". Across these cases, a key element for the emergence of a common identity within a previously heterogeneous crowd is their homogeneous treatment by the police and its psychological counterpart within the crowd: a sense of *common fate* (S. Reicher, 2011; see Campbell, 1958). Recently Drury and his colleagues have shown the notion that a sense of common fate rooted

in shared experiences leads to a common identity to apply to a variety of situations of emergencies and disaster (Alfadhli & Drury, 2018; Drury, 2012, 2018; Drury, Cocking, & Reicher, 2009; Drury, Cocking, Reicher, et al., 2009, 2009; Ntontis et al., 2018). For instance, using data from a large survey among people affected by the 2010 earthquake in Chile (Drury et al., 2016) they found that the severity of exposure to the earthquake predicted a sense of common fate amongst the victims, which in turn increased the identification with the survivors.

An important lesson from research on both crowds and disasters, then, is that a crucial antecedent for the emergence of a new collective identity – *i.e.* a sense of common fate within a collective – shows in many cases a systematic relationship to objective shared experiences. Most such emergent collective identities decline over time, however (Kaniasty, 2020). Whether they persist or not depends on what happens after the original shared experience. In particular, research on victims of disasters indicates that shared experience of *secondary stressors – i.e.* hardships resulting from the disaster but encountered in the aftermath of it – plays an important role in persistence. Research among Syrian refugees in Jordan showed that the more refugees had been in exile, the more secondary stressors (*e.g.,* being unemployed) predicted identification with other refugees through a sense of common fate (Alfadhli, Güler, Cakal, & Drury, 2019; study 2). Analyzing interviews conducted among flood victims 15 months after the disaster, Ntontis and colleagues (Ntontis et al., 2020) also found that secondary stressors, when perceived to be a shared experience, re-instilled in participants a sense of common identity with other victims.

In the context of ethno-nationalist war, there is evidence that collective experiences of violence make group identities politicized by the conflict more or less practicable depending on their matching the boundaries of shared victimization. Thus, Penic and colleagues (Penic et al., 2017), in the context of the former Yugoslavia, distinguished between local area's level of exposure to symmetric (*i.e.* affecting members of all ethnic groups equally) and asymmetric (*i.e.* affecting members of one ethnic group more than others) violence. They found that these two indicators had opposite effects on its inhabitants' interethnic forgiveness: positive and negative, respectively. Crucially, both effects were mediated by two contextual-level variables. On the one hand, the more an area had been exposed to asymmetric violence, the less inter-ethnic contact would occur in that area, which in turn predicted higher levels of individual's intergroup forgiveness; the opposite pattern being true for symmetric violence. On the other hand, areas most heavily exposed to asymmetric violence had a highest average level of (ethno-)national sacralization, which decreased

individuals' willingness to forgive outgroup members. Again, the same but opposite indirect effect was true for symmetric violence. Beyond its important implications for post-conflict reconciliation, the pattern observed in areas exposed to symmetric violence suggests that concrete collective experiences impose constraints on the kind of collective identities that can be enacted within those communities. When the dire consequences of the fighting ignore ethnic distinctions, narratives where ethno-national bonds override any other forms of solidarities don't seem to account for the reality and hence fail to take root both ideologically (i.e. ethno-national sacralization) and in social practices (i.e. inter-ethnic contact; see also Macek, 2009).

Considering, on the other hand, communities affected by asymmetric violence further raises an important point. If ethnic boundaries became entrenched in these communities through the disappearance of inter-ethnic contact, this didn't occur by chance, because of spontaneous ethnic bigotry or through some sort of inertia. War had to happen and violently inscribe these categories into reality by selectively victimizing people according to a seemingly ethnic logic. To put it in more general terms, it is not only the movement of identities that that we need to account for, but their stability as well (Reicher & Haslam, 2013).

One way to interpret the disappearance of intergroup contact in areas exposed to asymmetric violence (Penic et al., 2017) is to argue that the shock of war doesn't only affect collective identities instantaneously, by creating a sense of common fate through shared experience, but also in a more long-term sense by reshaping institutions. Ethnographic evidence from war-time Sarajevo indeed suggests that war violence made pre-war banal institutions, such as providing help to a neighbor, suddenly questioned and reinterpreted in ethnic terms (Macek, 2009). Institutions serve to shape concrete social practices in such a way that makes representations about collective identities more or less plausible and practicable (Elcheroth et al., 2011). In this sense, they provide us with a model of why collective identities persists over time, which focuses our gaze on the fit between representations of groups and concrete social arrangements. When we ask what social arrangements make ethno-national identities plausible, we need to properly contextualize the nationalist narrative itself. As Hermet (1996) points out, contemporary thought on nationalism tends to emphasize its xenophobic tendencies and systematically downplays its historical role as the main ideological vehicle of the struggle for political equality and democratic control over the state. And indeed, support for contemporary nationalist movements such as Scottish separatism appear to be rooted in such perceptions political and economic inequalities (Abrams & Grant, 2012; Grant et al., 2017). If nationalist mobilization took on an ethnic tone, one can barely ignore the fact

that it was most often in contexts where economic and political stratification followed an ethnic logic; the divide-and-rule policy of colonial regimes discussed in the previous section being a good example. The contemporary persistence of xenophobic rhetoric, we argue, should be regarded as anchored in a similar argumentative structure. Glick (Glick, 2002, 2005), for instance, argues that scapegoating processes occur because, in times of economic downturns, groups that are traditionally stereotyped as malevolent and agentic – *i.e.* which are believed to be powerful and imbued with harmful intentions, as is typically the case with ethnic minorities with a relatively high socio-economic status (Fiske et al., 2002) – will be identified as a plausible cause and hence chosen as a scapegoat. If we contextualize such ideological processes within the history of nationalist mobilization, we can understand why scapegoats are typically ethnicized targets, which would otherwise appear all but arbitrary.

While the xenophobic tendencies of nationalism may incline us to emphasize its irrational and distorted nature, this shouldn't blind us to the objective circumstances that make it appear more or less plausible and attractive. For relative deprivation research shows that people don't automatically interpret inequalities in group (ethnic) terms. For instance, Osborne and colleagues (Osborne et al., 2015) observed in the context of New Zealand that objective patterns of economic inequality at the neighborhood level alternatively decreased inhabitants self-esteem or led them to give a more central importance to their ethnic identity, depending on whether they interpreted inequality in individual or ethnic (*i.e.* perception of group-based relative deprivation) terms, respectively. It is an empirical question whether there is a specific patterning of economic deprivation which favors ethno-nationalist definitions of social identities.

In sum, we expect that identity configurations to be rooted in collective experiences. This means that, if some identity configurations turn out to give a central relevance to politicized ethnic cleavages, they would not have emerged and persisted spontaneously. Rather, we expect war-time collective experiences of violence and poverty are likely to predict such ethnically-centered identities. In particular, exposure to war-time violence is likely to foster ethnically-centered identities to the extent that objective patterns of exposure are consistent with a sense of common fate among members of an ethnic group. Such identities are likely to persist through time if they are 'rehearsed' by secondary stressors.

5.1.3 Overview of the study

This study is based on survey data collected among a representative sample of the adult Sri Lankan population. The survey fieldwork was conducted in 2017, in the framework of the Pluralistic Memories Project (for details about the fieldwork and sampling scheme, see Jayakody et al., 2019).

The first aim of the study is to empirically distinguish the different ways in which individuals define their relation to multiple group cleavage that coexist in the Sri Lankan population. To achieve this aim, we rely on the method developed in the preceding chapter (see Chapter 4) but we improve it in two important ways. First, by further relaxing the constraints on participants' choice of relevant identity markers. In Chapter 4, our strategy was to screen for the three most important identity markers and then further asses how participants relate them to their self. In the present study, we slightly modified the response format in order to make this screening step unnecessary. Participants were therefore able to select as many identity markers as they judged relevant to each facet of their identity.

Second, this study being based on a representative sample of the Sri Lankan population, we can treat the extracted identity configurations as relative positions within a coherent social system. This is an important advantage: since the dimensional analyses that we used produce a dimensional space where the position of an observation depends on the positions of others, analyses performed only on fragments of a social system might exclude important reference points and hence produce a dimensional space that does not reflect the most structuring oppositions in the system.

In order to achieve the second aim – *i.e.* examining the relationship between identity configurations and collective experiences of war and poverty – we rely on a life calendar method (Elcheroth et al., 2013) to record individual-level experiences of war and poverty. This life calendar approach provides us with a double advantage. First, it guides respondents as situate in time their past experiences and thus enables us, through individual trajectories, to gain a historical perspective on the relationship between identity configurations and experiences of victimization. Second, by recording the time and location of the individuals when they experienced a particular event, we are able to compute contextual indicators of exposure to violence and poverty based on the location of the individual at the time of exposure. Finally, we assessed the impact of collective experiences of war and poverty using spatially-weighted rather than raw contextual indicators (see Elcheroth et al., 2013).

5.1.4 Context of study

The most important element of context is the civil war that opposed the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Ealam (LTTE) to government forces and which ended in 2009 with the government's military victory. The medium-term background of the civil war goes back to the passage of the 'Sinhala-Only' bill in 1956 which defined Sinhala as the only official language of Sri Lanka – thus excluding Tamil, spoken by roughly one-fourth of the population – and inaugurated twenty years of consistent state discrimination of Tamil and Muslim minorities (DeVotta, 2004). Tamils mobilized against state discrimination through peaceful means – *i.e.* parliamentary avenues, protests and strikes – but failed to achieve substantial results and repeatedly faced violent repression by state authorities and anti-Tamil riots. In the 1970s, armed separatist organizations emerged among the Tamil youth, among which the LTTE, which soon eliminated, through targeted executions, competing groups for the leadership of Tamil separatism.

While at first relatively marginal, the LTTE became a significant political force in the aftermath of the 1983 anti-Tamil riots (DeVotta, 2004; for a detailed account of the riots, see Tambiah, 1996, Chapter 4). The riots, which followed the killing of 13 soldiers of the government forces in a LTTE ambush in the North, were so violent and blatantly endorsed by the police and military that they produced a massive exodus of Tamils in the North and abroad, which massively reinforced LTTE's personnel and funds, respectively.

While the civil war has a quite complex history (Jayawickreme et al., 2010), two landmarks are particularly worth mentioning. First, in the end of October 1990, the LTTE forcibly evicted the entire Muslim population from the five Northern districts of the island under its control. Around 70,000 people were faced with an unexpected ultimatum – sometimes as short as two hours (Citizens' Commission, 2012) – to leave their home and most of their belongings behind. The label 'Northern Muslim' gradually came to denote this common experience of expulsion both for the evicted and Sri Lankans in general (Thiranagama, 2011, 2013).

The second crucial event is the government's final military offensive in the North, which started in 2008 and resulted in the complete defeat of the LTTE in May 2009. The fighting during this period was extremely violent in general, but turned particularly murderous between January 2009 and the end of the war. While the fatalities are not precisely known because the area was difficult to access for international observers, it is estimated that 300,000 civilians in the Vanni – the mainland Northern area – were caught in the crossfire in

extreme sanitary conditions and that an estimated 10,000 civilians lost their lives (International Crisis Group, 2010; Somasundaram, 2010).

As the 1990 expulsion of Muslims from the North illustrates, intergroup relations in Sri Lanka can hardly be reduced to a simple conflict between Sinhalese and Tamil nationalists. Going back to the colonial period, early Sinhalese nationalist ideologues not only targeted 'Westernized Sinhalese elites' for betraying the Buddhist way of life but readily aimed their guns at ethno-religious minorities whose alleged association with certain economic activities (e.g. merchants, moneylenders, state administration) turned them into ideal scapegoats in times of economic downturns. In 1915, such economic downturn happened and xenophobic rhetoric helped turn a local religious incident into anti-Muslim riots across several areas of the island (Tambiah, 1996). More recently, the end of the civil war and the consequent disappearance of any serious Tamil claim to independence were accompanied by Sinhalese nationalists renewed efforts at propagating anti-Muslim rhetoric (which in fact never totally disappeared; Devotta, 2018; Sarjoon, Yusoff, & Hussin, 2016; Silva, 2016). This long history of shifting targets of xenophobia show that politicized definitions of the Sinhala-Buddhist identity relies on an ideological construction of multiple threats to the survival of its culture and even of the 'Sinhala race' (DeVotta, 2007, 2016).

5.2 Method

5.2.1 Survey and participants

The survey was conducted in 2017 Sri Lanka as part of the Pluralistic Memories Project. The sample (*N* = 1188) was representative of the Sri Lankan population and stratified in order to oversample relatively more war-exposed and ethnically mixed areas of the island. The target population and sampling probabilities were established based on voters' lists obtained from the relevant Divisional Secretariats (DS) offices. The response rate of potential participants was very high. The survey interviews were face-to-face, lasted on average 77 minutes and were performed local trained interviewers in the vernacular language of the respondent (Sinhala, Tamil, or English).

We excluded forty-five participants from the present analyses because they didn't answer to items which were part of our most important measure (*i.e.* social identity; see the

method part)[38]. The final sample thus comprised 1143 participants. Among these, 637 (53.62%) were females; 555 (46.72%) self-identified as Sinhalese, 370 (31.14%) as Sri Lankan Tamils, 11 (0.93%) Indian Tamils and 252 (21.21%) Moors. Although Sri Lankan Tamils and Indian Tamils constitute sociologically distinct groups, we treated them as a common group in the analyses because of the very low number of self-identified Indian Tamil respondents.

5.2.2   Measures

Social identity. We assessed participants' identity construction building on and improving a methodology that we implemented in a previous study (Bady & Elcheroth, in rev.). Participants were presented with two successive matrices with potential identity markers in rows and a series of statements (i.e. items) in columns (see Appendix1) and asked: "For each the following characteristics of yours [*i.e.* identity markers], please choose the statements that apply". This resulted in 12 (identity markers) X 10 (items) = 120 dichotomous variables (chosen versus not chosen). The potential identity markers were the following: profession, economic situation, language, gender, religious affiliation, political preference, place of residence, place of origin, age, nationality, ethnic background, skin colour. Each item tapped into one possible way a given identity marker might be relevant for one's self or might be of practical relevance in one's close social environment. These items are fully reported in Table 1 with their associated theoretical construct.

The first two items are inspired by Roccas and colleagues' (Roccas et al., 2006) distinction between attachment and glorification. Attachment is understood here as a minimal definition of social identification, that is whether the identity marker have some relevance to define the self. Glorification indicates a feeling of pride arising from perceived ingroup superiority. The next two items specifically target the treatment of the self by members of the ingroup with regard to a particular social cleavage: whether ingroup members are likely to be supportive (ingroup support) and whether their behavior suggests expectations of consensus within the group (ingroup pressure to agree). Perceived categorization assesses whether the identity marker seem to generally shape how other community members interact with and perceive oneself, without distinction between in- and outgroup or valence of the categorization. Then follow two statement about negative implications of one's identity marker (presumably

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[38] We decided to exclude them because the format of the questions didn't offer the possibility to refuse answering. The measure was presented in the format of a matrix where participants were asked to indicate a cross in the relevant cases (cf. method section). Some participants nevertheless used the code corresponding to "Refuse" or "Don't know" in the rest of the questionnaire. We decided to exclude them since this suggests a misunderstanding of the question.

because of outgroup members' treatment): the perception that one's identity marker can expose oneself to violence (perceived threat of violence) and discrimination (perceived discrimination). Next, perceived normativity is basically the normative counterpart of attachment as it assesses how the identity marker is important for other community members' self-definition. The two last items target how the identity marker informs one's (relevance for memory sharing) and others' (normative relevance for memory sharing) decisions about whom to talk about the past and hence shapes the construction of collective memory according the associated social cleavage.

Table 1. Items assessing each dimension of social identity

Construct	item
Attachment	My [identity marker] is important to define who I am.
Glorification	My [identity marker] is a source of pride to me because it includes the best of people.
Ingroup support	My [identity marker] is something I share with people who are likely to help me when I'm in need.
Ingroup pressure to agree	My [identity marker] binds me to people who expect that I agree with them on important topics.
Perceived categorization	My [identity marker] affects how other people in my community look at me and talk to me.
Perceived threat of violence	My [identity marker] makes me a potential target of violence.
Perceived discrimination	My [identity marker] leads some people to refuse me things.
Perceived normativity	Their [identity marker] is important for most people in my community to define themselves.
Normative relevance for memory sharing	Their [identity marker] matters when people in my community decide with whom to talk about the past.
Personal relevance for memory sharing	Their [identity marker] matters to me when I choose with whom to talk about the past.

Conflict exposure was assessed by asking respondents whether they directly experienced eight violent events as a result of the armed conflict (yes or no). When applicable, they were then asked to indicate during which year(s) each event happened on a life calendar. Life calendar methods are designed to guide the relocation of memories in time by first locating past events of the highest personal and collective relevance on a life calendar and then using them as landmarks to locate other events. Similar life calendars have been used in previous research in the former Yugoslavia to assess individuals' experiences was war and poverty and compute contextual indicators based on aggregated individual experiences (see Elcheroth et al., 2013). The events were: (1) Have you been forced to leave your home and live elsewhere? (2) Have you ever been imprisoned, kidnapped, or taken hostage? (3) Has a member of your immediate family been killed (son, daughter, father, mother, brother, sister, grandmother, grandfather, or grandchild)? (4) Has a member of your immediate family disappeared? (5) Have you lost your home or land (as a consequence of violent conflict)? (6) Has there been serious damage to your property (to your belongings)? (7) Have you been wounded by the fighting? (8) Did you have your house looted?

Exposure to poverty. We asked respondents whether they experienced six kinds of economic hardships as follows: Has there been a period in your life during which (1) You and your family did not have adequate clothes or furniture to be comfortable in your daily life? (2) You did not have an access to clean water nearby? (3) You were unable to send your children to school (if you have children)? (4) You were unable to get medical help for you and your family? (5) You did not have enough food for you and your family? And (6) Have you ever been homeless (living in the street or in a collective shelter, including as a refugee/displaced person)? Again, when relevant they were asked to indicate the years during which these hardships happened with the help of the life calendar.

5.3 Results

5.3.1 Analytic strategy

Our analyses proceeded in two broad steps, which corresponds to the two aims of the study. The first one aimed at producing a typology of identity configurations based on respondents' answers to the social identity questions. Our approach in defining dimensions organizing our typology was purposefully inductive: rather than looking for theoretically driven dimensions that would manifest themselves in a universalistic fashion, we looked at

configurations of identities as a social system, the organization of which reflects specific social, political, and historical contingencies (see chapter 4). We submitted all 120 (dichotomous) variables pertaining to social identity to a Multiple Correspondence Analysis (MCA, using the *FactomineR* package for *R;* Lê, Josse, & Husson, 2008). We then submitted the dimensions extracted by the MCA[39] to a cluster analysis using the Partitioning Around Medoids (PAM) method, implemented with the *Cluster* package for *R* (Maechler et al., 2012). In order to choose the appropriate number of clusters, we based our decision on both empirical indices of clusters' validity and on theoretical interests. On the one hand, we used the *NbClust* package for *R* (Charrad et al., 2012) which suggests the best number of clusters based on 30 indices of clusters' validity. On the other hand, blindly following the algorithm (using the 'majority rule', as suggested by Charrad et al., 2012) would not have allowed to differentiate clusters on theoretically relevant dimensions (*i.e.* dimensions related to ethnic markers). Hence, we examined competing clustering solutions supported by different validity indices and picked the one which offers the best differentiation on dimensions defined by ethnic markers (for a comparison between these different clustering solutions, see Appendix C). The second broad step was to provide an in-depth analysis of our clusters in terms of sociological characteristics and individual and collectives experiences of war and poverty. Since experiences of war and poverty were collected using a life calendar, we were able to trace the temporal evolution of each cluster in terms of relative exposure to war and poverty.

Contextual indicators. Thanks to the life calendar we were able to collect respondents' successive living places (*i.e.* DS Divisions), the corresponding years as well as the years (if any) during which they experienced conflict/poverty. This enabled us to compute contextual indicators of exposure to both conflict and poverty at the level of DS Divisions defined as the proportion of respondents who experienced at least one conflict event/economic hardship when living in a given DS Division. We then spatially weighted these raw indicators following the procedure described in Elcheroth et al. (2013). The main rationale behind the use of spatial weights can be succinctly described as a need to relax the unrealistic assumption of traditional multilevel analyses that social processes – in this case, the social consequences of war and poverty – stop at the boundaries of (often administratively defined) contextual units. As Elcheroth and colleagues (2013) argue, such an assumption needs strong theoretical

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[39] We determined the appropriate number of dimensions using a cross-validation technique implemented in the *R* package *missMDA* (Josse & Husson, 2016). This method consists in randomly inserting a percentage (here 5%) of missing values in the data matrix and then imputing these missing values based on an MCA model and repeat the process iteratively (here 100 times). The number of dimensions which leads to the smallest mean square error of prediction is selected.

justification, like for instance when studying the impact of a particular legal framework the implementation of which is dependent on administrative divisions. When there is no such justification, we need to model collective experiences by considering interdependence between contextual units.[40] Here we used relative spatial proximity between DS Divisions' centroids to model their interdependence. Using the *Spacom* package for *R* (Junge et al., 2013), we computed spatially weighted indicators' value for each given contextual units by considering every contextual units' observed value and their spatial proximity to the target contextual unit; the farther a contextual unit is from the target one, the less its observed value will influence the latter's spatially weighted value. The relative mutual influence of two contextual units is not modelled as a linear function of distance, but rather using a kernel function that needs us to specify a point of inflexion (referred to as "bandwidth") beyond which interdependence starts to sharply decline (see Elcheroth et al., 2013). In the present case, we used 20 km bandwidth for several reasons. Theoretically, the literature reviewed in the introduction indicates that collective experiences of victimization trigger social processes at the level of local communities because rooted in concrete social interactions. Modeling the contextual impact of war and poverty as decreasing beyond 20 km distance plausibly reflects daily movements of individuals and hence captures social influences resulting from concrete social interactions. Furthermore, more detailed analyses show that using spatial weights based on 20 km bandwidth offers the best compromise between (1) convergent validity of our indicator of contextual exposure to violence using the number of conflict events in the area according the UCDP Georeferenced Events Dataset (see Sundberg & Melander, 2013) and (2) divergent validity between our indicators of contextual exposure to violence and poverty (see supplementary material in Appendix B).

5.3.2   Identity configurations

For clarity and parsimony in the presentation, we report the results of the MCA and cluster analysis together by directly describing each of the resulting clusters and how they

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[40] Spatial weights presents the further advantage of making the contextual indicators more reliable when some observed values are aggregated from a small number of observations (Elcheroth et al., 2013). As we computed our raw contextual indicators by aggregating data from our sample, the sample size for each contextual unit depends on how many respondents from our sample ever lived in that area and is therefore in some cases be too small to produce reliable estimates. Spatial weights ensure that estimates are not entirely based on few observations by taking into account surrounding areas. See the appendix for an illustration of how spatial weights affect our indicator's correlation with conflict exposure estimated with the UCDP dataset (Sundberg & Melander, 2013)

relate to the dimensions extracted by the MCA. Figure 4 and 5 each provide in a graphical form information on two dimensions and show how they differentiate between clusters. More specifically, in both figures the left panel shows the coordinates of the social identity items which contribute the most to the definition of one or two dimensions; that is, for each dimension we displayed only the items with highest contributions the cumulative sum of which explains 50 percent of the variance of the dimension. The right panel displays respondents' scores on the two dimensions and their assigned cluster. Each cluster's mean score on the four dimensions is shown in Figure 3 (the complete clusters' distributions on the five dimensions as well as the coordinates of all social identity items on each dimension are available in the appendix). The analyses resulted in a typology of five identity configurations, which we labeled *Ethno-nationalist, ethno-cultural, ethno-class, civic and communal*.

Ethno-nationalist identity. The first group (*n* = 99, population estimate = 10.55 %) is distinguished from all others by its extremely high score on the corresponding dimension of Ethno-nationalism (which explains 12.6 % of the total variance; see Figure 3). This dimension is unipolar and mainly defined by all items – excluding discrimination and threat – relating to nationality and ethnic background, and most items pertaining to language: attachment, glorification, support and pressure of the linguistic group, categorization based on language, normative importance of language in the community for past sharing and perceived threat based on one's language. It is further associated with glorification of the place of origin, place of residence, gender and age, hence suggesting a tendency to easily consider one's ingroups are superior to others. Importantly, this dimension is strongly correlated with total number of items endorsed on the identity measure (independently of the identity marker; r_s = 0.94, *p* < .001) [41]. The ethno-nationalists also score relatively high on the *local and religious cohesion*

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[41] The unusually strong correlation between this dimension and the number of items selected on the measure naturally raises the concern that the meaning of the former can be reduced to the latter and hence reflect a mere tendency to select more items. However, several elements show that this dimension captures a genuine social phenomenon and led us to confidently discard the possibility of such a mere methodological artifact. First, the combination of identity markers that are most structuring for the dimension (ethnic background, nationality and language) is not only coherent with an ethno-nationalist profile in general, but consistently fits the specific context of Sri Lanka by associating ethno-nationalism with the linguistic marker. Second, subsequent analyses (see below) show that individuals who score high on this dimension (1) are almost exclusively Sinhalese and (2) happen to score highly on another dimension which emphasizes the importance of the religious ingroup. Taken together these characteristics perfectly fit the description of Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism. Third, examining the correlations of this dimension with the number of positive responses on the measure broken down by the different facets of identity show that correlations are not uniform and reflect a meaningful pattern (see appendix): the correlation is high for all facets of identity (all r_s between 0.62 to 0.80, all *p* < 0.001) except when considering perceived discrimination – in which case it is moderate (r_s = 0.37, *p* < 0.001) – and threat where there is no correlation (r_s = 0.04, *p* = 0.19). This clearly undermines the possibility that this dimension merely reflects an undifferentiated tendency to select more items. Finally, we further checked whether scores on this dimension would correlate with the number of items selected on an unrelated but identically structured part of the

dimension (the vertical axis in Figure 4; explaining 2.9 % of the total variance). This dimension is mainly defined by answers that emphasize the importance of religion as a glorified ingroup, a source of group cohesion (support and pressure to agree), for community members' treatment of the self (categorization) and its normative relevance for sharing the past. Pressure to agree from the ingroup defined by place of residence also contributes strongly to this positive side of the dimension. In terms of socio-demographic characteristics, the most striking feature of this group is that virtually all its members (97.98 %) report to be Sinhalese which makes it the most ethnically homogeneous.

Overall, the Ethno-nationalists are virtually all Sinhalese and mostly Buddhist. They define their area of residence, and especially their religion, as important sources of social cohesion (and pride in the case of religion). But most importantly, they attach a simultaneous importance to ethnicity, language, and nationality across all the dimensions that shape their identity (at the exception of threat and discrimination). These characteristics makes this identity configuration a remarkably accurate and specific description of Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism. But they present a number of further features that would not have been easy to derive from such an ethno-nationalist ideological commitment. They tend to perceive multiple identity markers to be self- and socially relevant and easily glorify the corresponding ingroup. Relatedly, the unipolarity of the dimension that mainly distinguishes means that the particular emphasis that these respondents place on nationality, ethnicity and language doesn't imply a trade-off with other identity markers but rather allows for diversity of social categories to be meaningful in some ways (e.g. political views).

Ethno-cultural identity. This group (*n* = 191, population estimate = 5.59 %) is most clearly distinguished by its location at the negative (*i.e.* ethnic) pole of the *ethnic-civic* dimension (explaining 4.5 % of the total variance). All items most contributing to this pole of the dimensions relate to ethnic background and language. Furthermore, the relevance of both identity markers appears here on a broad range of items. For ethnic background, all items except categorization (although the latter's coordinates clearly lie on the negative side of the dimension, see appendix) strongly define this dimension negatively. It therefore points to respondents who find that ethnicity matters in every possible way we measured: they identify with their ethnicity (attachment and glorification), experience cohesion within their ethnic ingroup (support and pressure to agree), feel threatened and discriminated because of their

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questionnaire (a matrix where respondents had to select dimensions on which their network members where similar to themselves). The correlation proved almost null and non-significant (r_s = 0.02, *p* = 0.418).

ethnicity, pay attention to ethnicity when deciding to whom to talk about the past and perceive that other community members do the same and, finally, perceive that other community members also identify with their ethnicity (normative). With regard to language, it appears in terms of glorification, support from ingroup members, perceived threat and discrimination and relevance for sharing the past from both self and others' perspective. In terms of socio-demographic composition, the majority of individuals report to be Sri Lankan Tamil (72.25 %) with a minority of Sinhalese (23.04 %). The most represented religion is Hinduism (47.12 %), the other half of the group being either Christian (30.37 %) or Buddhist (20.42 %).

In sum, the ethno-cultural identity group mostly comprises Tamils but also a minority of Sinhalese who mostly report ethnic and language-based social categories to matter for themselves and in the organization of their social environment. They also rarely see more 'civic' forms of identities such as economic situation or political views to matter (compared to the two next identity configurations below), which differentiates them from the previously discussed ethno-nationalist group. Another key difference with the ethno-nationalist identity is that in the present case, the overwhelming centrality of ethno-linguistic identities comes with a sense of being threatened and discriminated on that basis. A final key difference is that the ethno-linguistic markers are not connected in this case with the national one.

Ethno-class identity. This identity profile (*n* = 188, population estimate = 9.6 %) is defined by two clearly distinct features. On the one hand, compared to the ethno-cultural identity cluster this group is located on the other (*i.e.* civic) side of the *ethnic-civic* dimension. This civic pole is defined by all items relating to economic situation, with the notable exception of threat of violence and perceived discrimination. It thus corresponds to answers that reflect the importance of respondents' economic situation for themselves (in the forms of attachment and glorification) as well as for others (normative), by shaping how other community members act toward and perceive them (perceived categorization), by attracting support and expectations of consensus from people sharing their economic situation (ingroup support and pressure to agree), and by regulating communication about the past (personal and normative importance for talking about the past). This civic pole also indicates that individuals invest (attachment and glorification), and find social support through, their political identity and perceive generation to be normatively important (perceived normativity of age and normative importance for past sharing). On the other hand, a key information is provided by the location of this group on the positive pole of another dimension, which we label *ethnic constraints on social mobility* (in Figure 4; explaining 3.7 % of the total variance).

This positive pole is associated with perceived threat and discrimination based on three identity markers: economic situation, profession, and ethnic background. If there is indication that this dimension implies a form of ingroup cohesion – in the form of pressure to agree within the group – based on economic situation, profession is associated with this dimension on all measured facets of identity. Hence, it points to a profile in which professional identity deeply structures the self and social relations. This centrality of professional identity goes with a sense of potentially violent victimization linking ethnic, professional and class identities together. With regard to sociological composition, ethnic minorities are highly overrepresented in this cluster, especially with Muslims (48.94 %) but also Sri Lankan Tamils (31.38 %). It is notable that amongst Tamils in this group, almost half of them (44.44 %) are Christians. Furthermore, this group is the one with the highest percentage of self-employed individuals (42.55 %) and the lowest prevalence of women (38.3 %).

Civic identity. This identity configuration (*n* = 315, population estimate = 35.55 %) is most clearly intelligible when put in contrast to the previously discussed ethno-cultural and ethno-class identities (see Figure 4). Like the ethno-class group but in contrast to the ethno-cultural group, this cluster is located at the civic end of the ethnic-civic dimension. Hence, individuals in this group tend to reject any meaningful role of ethnicity and language in their life; they see both their self and social environment to be mainly structured by one's economic position (but without necessarily implying any threat and discrimination); they invest (attachment and glorification), and find social support through, their political identity perceive generation to be normatively important. However, they crucially differ with the ethno-class group by scoring negatively on the *ethnic constraints on social mobility* dimension. This contrast provides us with two further information: (1) their civic orientation is dissociated from a systemic importance of professional identity and (2) most importantly, they don't feel threatened nor discriminated based on their profession and ethnic background. With regard to sociological composition, this cluster has the highest prevalence of women (63.17 %) and of individuals who are in charge of home care as their main activity (40.13 %). Furthermore, most individuals with this civic identity configuration are Sinhalese (66.67 %) with a substantial minority of Tamils (31.75 %).

Communal identity. The group characterized by a communal identity is the most frequent in the population (n = 350, population estimate = 38.71 %). The most distinguishing feature of this group is a negative one, *i.e.* this cluster is located at the extreme lower end of the unipolar dimension of Ethno-nationalism. Hence, as opposed to ethno-nationalists, communal individuals find only a limited number of social categories to matter in their life

and most likely not large-scale social categories such as ethnic, linguistic and national groups. However, they score relatively high on the dimension of local and religious cohesion which indicates normative pressure from their local community (defined by their place of residence) as well as their religious group. This more generally indicates religion to matter as a glorified ingroup, as a source of group cohesion (support and pressure to agree), for community members' treatment of the self (categorization) and as having normative relevance for sharing the past. In terms of sociological composition, this cluster is the most ethnically heterogeneous but with the Muslim minority being clearly overrepresented (42.29 % of Muslims, 37.14 % of Sinhalese, and 20.29 % of Tamils).

Summary. To sum up, our analyses distinguished five different identity configurations that are largely 'trans-ethnic' in that they systematically (except in one case) characterize members of several ethnic groups. Amongst them, we identified three distinct ways in which ethnicity played a key role in shaping respondents' identities. The *ethno-nationalist identity* was the only one exclusive to a given ethnic group – the Sinhalese – and shows features typical of committed majority nationalists who conflate their ethnicity (and its associated language marker) with the nation as whole. The important place that ethnic and national identities play in their life doesn't imply any trade-off: they can unproblematically express their pride in and recognize the meaning of a variety of other identity markers. The situation is certainly different for the *ethno-cultural* and *ethno-class* identities: for both of them – though each differently – ethnic identity markers impact their lives in a way that directly conflict with more civic forms of identities. The ethno-cultural identity implies a rather unique relevance of ethno-linguistic identities for self and social relations which explicitly exclude a reading of social reality in terms of more civic identities such as social class and political allegiances. The conflict appears different for the *ethno-class* identity, which characterizes mostly members of ethnic minorities (first Muslims and then Tamils) and men. In this case, a civic reading of social reality with the central importance of (often entrepreneurial) profession comes with a sense of being threatened and discriminated in a way that connects their ethnicity to their social class and professional activity. For these individuals, a completely civic world-view doesn't seem to be possible as the ethnicization of their professional activity and economic situation impose their ethnic background upon them.

The two further identity configurations we identify indicates two distinct alternatives to an identity shaped by ethnicity. The first one, the *civic identity*, characterizes mostly women and don't seem to be a viable identity construction for Muslims who are virtually absent from this group. This identity configuration generally excludes ethnicity, but also profession, as
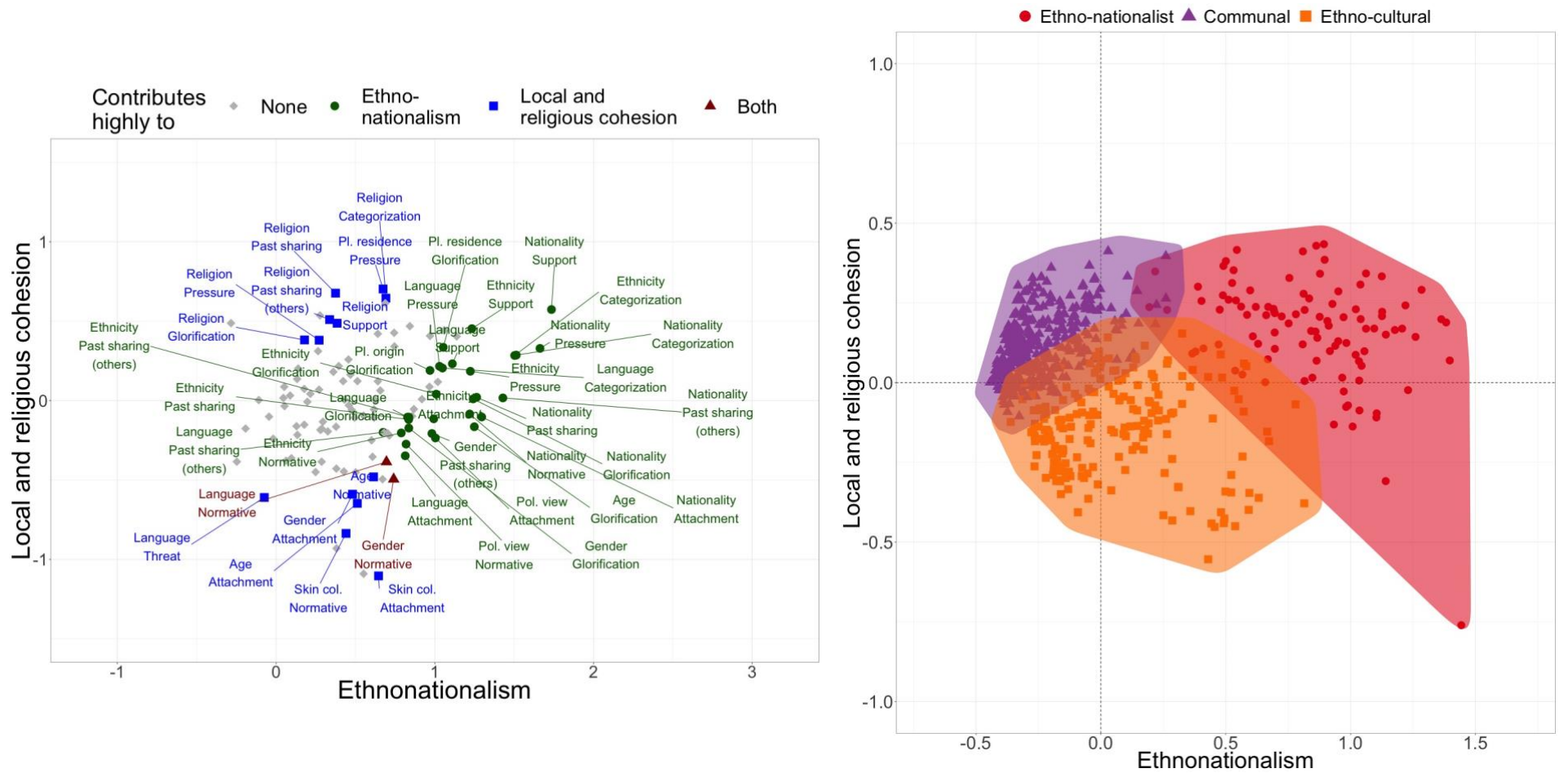
Figure 1. Items defining the *Ethnonationalism* and *Local and Religious Cohesion dimensions* (left panel) and positions the three most differentiated clusters on these dimensions (Ethnonationalist, Ethno-cultural and Communal).
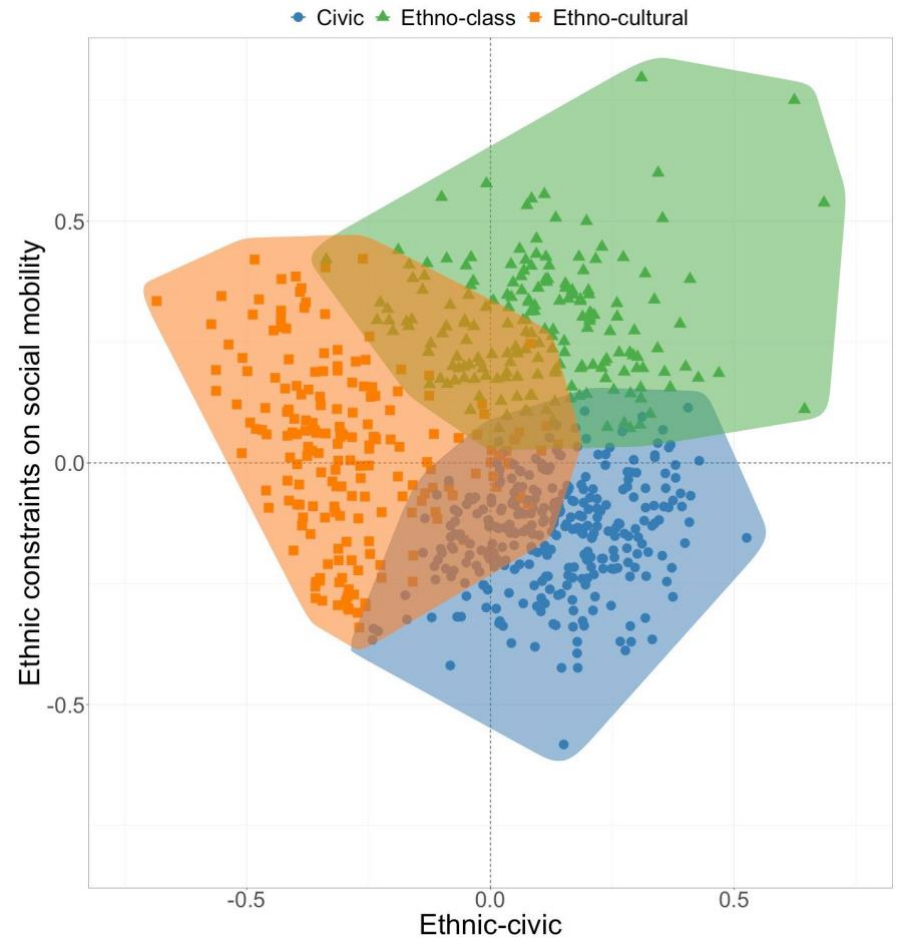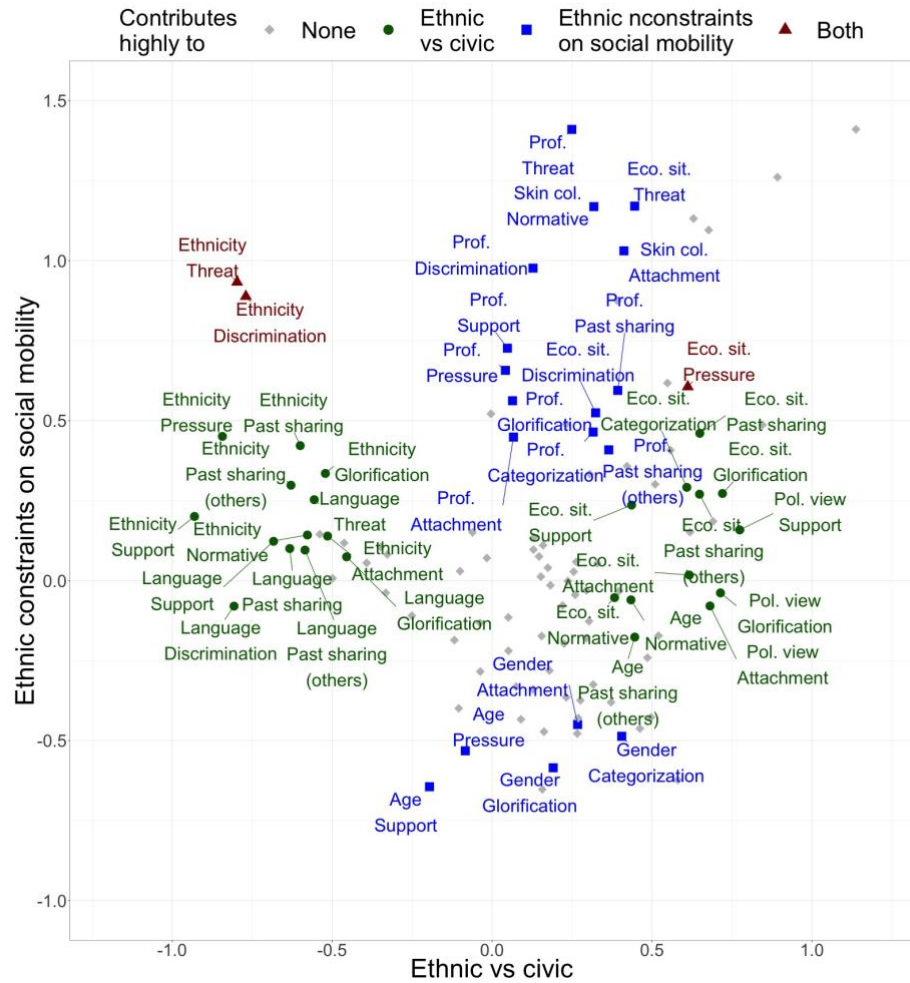
Figure 2. Items defining the *Ethnic-Civic* and *Ethnic Constraints on Social Mobility* dimensions (left panel) and positions the three most differentiated clusters on these dimensions (Civic, Ethno-cultural and Ethno-class).
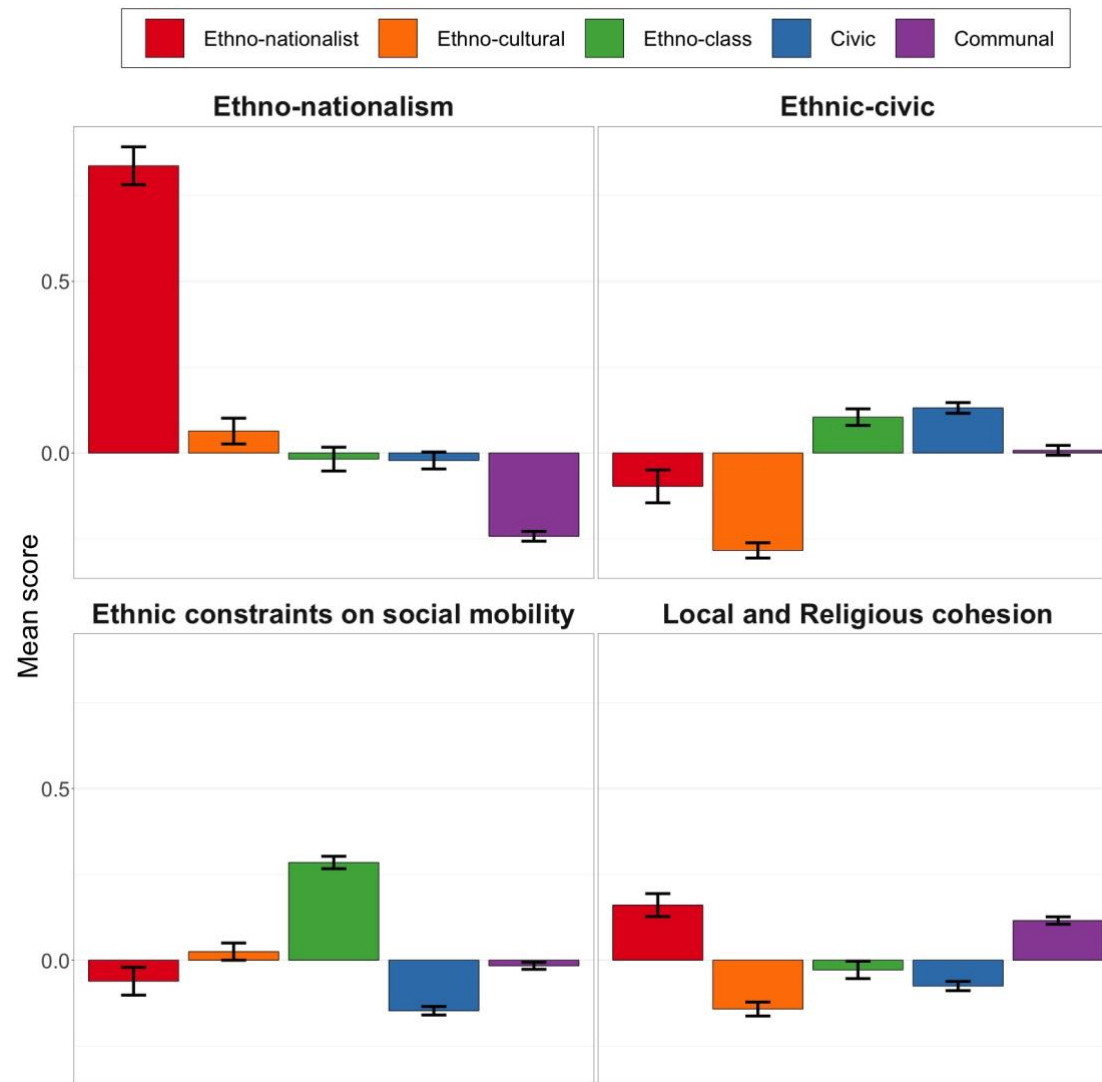
Figure 5. Clusters' mean standardized score on each dimension extracted by the MCA with 95% confidence interval (one dimension by panel).

relevant and rather emphasizes the importance of civic identities: primarily social class but also political orientation, gender and generation (recognizing the normative importance of the latter). Finally, the communal identity – the most numerous and ethnically heterogeneous type – appears more locally-oriented. It is characterized by a parsimony in the social categories that are deemed relevant and an emphasis on the (normative) importance of the local and religious communities as opposed to large-scale social categories.

Table 2. Clusters' socio-demographic and ethnic composition

		Ethno-nationalist	Ethno-cultural	Ethno-class	Civic	Communal
Raw cluster's size		99	191	188	315	350
Weighted percentage		10.55	5.59	9.60	35.55	38.71
Demographic characteristics	Women	55.56	51.83	38.30	63.17	53.71
	Age (mean)	45.31	43.66	44.44	43.65	44.99
	Paid worker	22.22	23.56	25.53	15.92	26.57
	Self-employed	26.26	30.37	42.55	23.57	24.57
	A student	1.01	2.62	3.72	4.46	3.71
	Unemployed	3.03	3.66	1.60	5.41	1.43
	Home care	31.31	23.56	17.55	40.13	28.29
	Retired	3.03	8.38	4.79	4.46	7.14
	Other activity	13.13	7.85	4.26	6.05	8.29
Self-reported ethnic group	Sinhalese	97.98	23.04	17.55	66.67	37.14
	SL. Tamil	1.01	72.25	31.38	31.75	20.29
	Ind. Tamil	0.00	2.62	2.13	0.32	0.29
	Muslim	1.01	2.09	48.94	1.27	42.29

5.3.3 Descriptive analyses: exposure to conflict and poverty through time and spatial distribution

As a next step, we took advantage of data collected through the life calendar to descriptively examine how each cluster's exposition to conflict and poverty evolved between 1970 and 2017 (see Figure 5). Starting with conflict exposure, we can see that, if the *ethno-class* and *ethno-cultural* clusters have been similarly exposed to violence in general (see also Table 2), it mostly happened at a different time for the two groups. Moreover, the specific timing of exposure further clarifies these clusters' sociological profile. Individuals with an ethno-class identity profile (32.47 %) – and

to a lesser extent communal individuals (17.85 %) – were mostly affected in 1990, which corresponds to the year when the LTTE massively expelled Muslim populations from the North of the island and perpetrated various atrocities against Muslims in the East (e.g., The New York Times, 1990). On the other hand, the ethnicized cluster was mainly exposed to conflict in 2008 (26.46 %) and 2009 (18.62 %), which coincides with the final massive offensive of the government forces against the LTTE in the North.
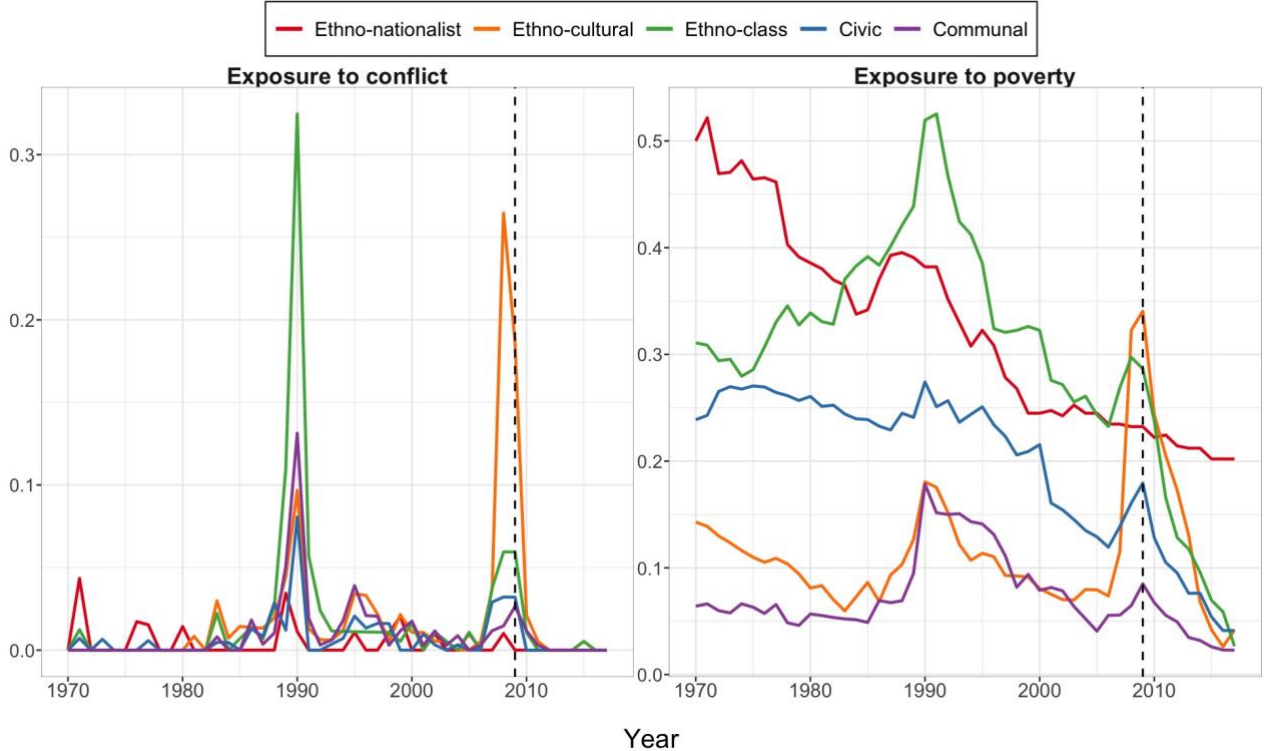
Figure 5. Proportion of individuals exposed to conflict (left panel) and poverty (right panel) as a function of time and cluster. The dotted vertical line indicates the end of the war (2009).

The evolution of poverty over time shows a very interesting pattern. First of all, we can see that for groups that have been highly exposed to violence, exposure to poverty peaks around the same years: around 1990 for the ethno-class group (and again to a lesser extent the communal group) and around 2009 for the ethno-cultural group. This strongly suggests that poverty has been partly a consequence of war in their case. The communal group remained quite consistently the most well-off group but experienced a peak of poverty (with a rate of 17.85 %) in 1990. Most crucially, all clusters saw their level of poverty drop close to zero in the years following the end of the war at the exception of the Ethno-nationalist group, 20 % of whom were still exposed to poverty

at the time of the study (*i.e.* 2017). This different articulations of war and poverty for the different groups is particularly salient when comparing the trajectories of the ethno-nationalist and ethno-class groups whose poverty rate intersect at highly significant moments. First in 1983 – year of the 'black July' which is often taken as the turning point toward a full-scale civil war – when the ethno-class group 'caught up' with and then exceeded the poverty rate of the ethno-nationalists who had been historically the more economically deprived. The second intersection came in the year following the end of the war (*i.e.* 2010) when poverty was on its way to disappear within the ethno-class group while stagnating around a rate of one fifth amongst ethno-nationalists. Talking in relative terms, the war was a bracket in the path toward the upward mobility of the ethno-class group while it temporarily 'evened the score' for the ethno-nationalists who found themselves back in a situation of relative deprivation when the bracket had been closed.

All in all, these results converge to indicate that distinct and clearly identifiable experiences characterize the three groups for which ethnicity play a major part in the configuration of identity.

In the case of both ethno-cultural and ethno-class groups, these experiences are connected to the war, though the specific events are different for the two groups. The ethno-nationalist group, on the other hand, experienced substantial levels of poverty which seemed to have been mostly independent from the war. Most importantly, it appears that this group was somehow 'left behind', being the one who economically benefitted the least from the end of the war and – speaking in relative terms – was thus the most negatively affected by its end.

We then introduced the spatial dimension to our analysis by descriptively examining the clusters' geographical distribution. A quick examination of Figure 6 (middle panel) strikingly shows that individuals sharing the same identity configuration tend to be clustered in the same geographical areas. This in itself constitutes an important finding. Methodologically speaking, it adds some credibility to our contention that the present measurement and analytic approach enabled us to capture identity configurations that are tied to specific local contexts. Had it not been the case, clusters should have been distributed randomly on the map. Moreover, it clearly suggests not only that identity configurations are rooted in *collective* experiences but also that the organization of these experiences follow a spatial and relatively local logic. This is most obvious in the case of the ethno-cultural cluster, with the vast majority of individuals gathered in the North of the island. The Northern area was the theater of the 2008-9 government's final military offensive against the LTTE and is therefore logically the most exposed to violence. Individuals with an ethno-class identity configuration are mostly located in the East and Northeast – which are historically

areas with important Muslim populations – with a substantial number in the Northwest (*i.e.* in the Mannar district, where Muslims displaced by the LTTE relocated after the end of the war; Haniffa, 2015; McGilvray, 2011). The case of the majority nationalists is again particularly interesting: they are gathered in areas that have been relatively exposed to poverty (compared to the south and south west) mostly spared by the war (compared to the east and the north). This is consistent with our previous observation that this cluster's exposition to poverty has been largely independent from the events of the war (see Figure 5).

Table 2. Clusters' socio-demographic composition exposure to conflict and poverty (percentages).

|		Ethno-nationalist	Ethno-cultural	Ethno-class	Civic	Communal
Conflict exposure	Forced to leave home	5.38	37.17	34.25	12.99	23.15
	Imprisoned/ kidnapped	1.09	1.57	7.14	2.57	3.55
	Family member killed	6.52	31.94	20.88	9.35	7.74
	Family member disappeared	4.35	16.75	14.29	7.42	7.12
	Home/land lost	3.26	27.89	27.47	10.65	15.77
	Property damaged	4.35	62.30	43.41	16.45	20.24
	Wounded	0.00	9.42	8.79	1.94	4.46
	House looted	2.17	27.75	31.32	13.96	19.05
	At least one	12.12	71.20	59.57	29.84	36.29
Poverty	inadequate clothes/ furniture	47.47	60.21	65.41	44.34	38.22
	No clean water	27.27	53.40	45.99	32.27	24.14
	No school	2.11	34.04	34.05	13.18	12.75
	No medical help	3.06	49.21	34.22	16.61	17.48
	Lack food	31.31	61.78	58.82	41.16	29.80
	Homeless	5.05	60.21	40.22	20.97	28.37
	At least one	60.61	74.35	73.40	54.92	48.57
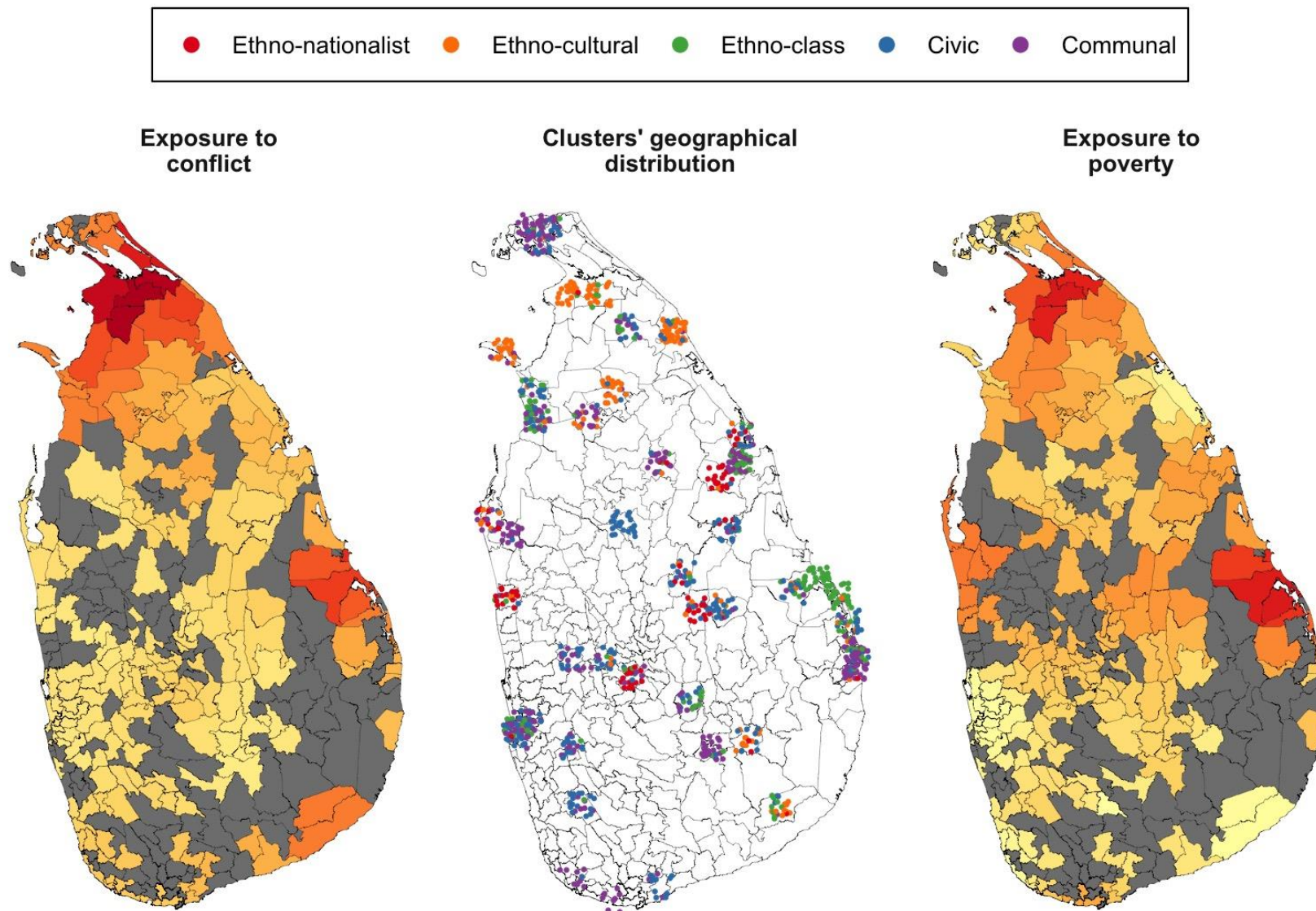
Figure 6. Clusters' geographical distribution (middle panel) in relation to geographical areas' exposure to violence (left panel) and poverty (right panel).

5.3.4 Disentangling individual and contextual effects

So far, our descriptive analyses strongly suggest that each identity configuration in which ethnicity plays a structuring role is connected to specific experiences of war and/or poverty. Our aim in this section is to clarify these findings in three ways. First, we test these relationships for statistical significance by looking at how experiences of war and poverty predicts identity configurations in (multilevel; see below) multinomial logit regression analyses. Second, while all identity configurations except one are largely 'trans-ethnic', the prevalence of different ethnic groups substantially vary across identity configurations. Hence, we need to disentangle the contribution of exposure to conflict and poverty from the contribution of belonging to a given ethnic group in predicting identity configurations. We do this by including self-reported Tamil and Muslim membership dummy variables as additional predictors in the models. And third, the clustering in certain areas of individuals sharing the same identity configurations (cf. Figure 6) supports our contention that identity configurations are related to collective – rather than individual – experiences of war and/or poverty. We further test this hypothesis by including both individual and collective indicators of exposure to war and poverty as predictors of identity configurations. More specifically, we fitted two multilevel multinomial logit models predicting identity configuration (*i.e.* cluster membership) with a random intercept at the level of DS Divisions using *Mplus 7*. We used the civic identity as a reference category as it this cluster most clearly contrasts with an identity defined in ethnic terms (see Figure 4 and 5).

We first fitted a model with random intercept but only individual-level predictors (model (1) in Table 3 shows the logarithms of the odds ratios, their standard errors and *p* values). Quite logically given that ethno-nationalists are almost exclusively Sinhalese, being Tamil significantly decreases the likelihood of constructing one's identity as ethno-nationalist as opposed to civic. Furthermore, the model shows that the ethno-nationalist group has been on average more exposed to poverty, which is consistent with our descriptive analyses in the previous section. Turning to the ethno-cultural cluster, the picture is also consistent with our analyses so far: compared to the civic group this cluster includes significantly more Tamils and has been more exposed to violence. Being a woman negatively predicts membership in the ethno-cultural cluster, which reflects the high proportion of women in the reference category (civic cluster; see Table 2). According to the same model, being Muslim or Tamil increases the likelihood of belonging to the ethno-class cluster and

being a woman decreases it. Again consistent with our analyses in the previous section, exposure to violence increases the likelihood to fall into the ethno-class cluster compared to the civic cluster. Finally, the likelihood of being part of the communal cluster compared to the civic cluster increases with being Muslim and a man but decreases with exposure to poverty.

This first model globally confirms our preceding analyses. It first shows that the relationships that we descriptively observed between exposure to conflict and poverty, on the one hand, and identity configurations, on the other, is statistically significant. Second, it shows that these relationships cannot be accounted for by individual's ethnic group membership (or age, or gender) since we included them in the model. Now, our remaining task is to disentangle individual and contextual effects of conflict and poverty in shaping identity configurations. Hence, in a second model (model (2) in Table 3) we added (spatially weighted) exposure to violence and poverty as contextual predictors, which significantly improved model fit ($\Delta\chi^2(8)$ = 29.26, p < 0.001). A quick look at Table 3 enables us to see that in all cases, contextual effects of exposure to violence or poverty replaced and cancelled the corresponding individual effect. Compared to the civic cluster, living in an area relatively more exposed to poverty increases the likelihood of being in the ethno-nationalist group and decreases the likelihood of being in the communal group. On the other hand, living in an area relatively more exposed to conflict increases the likelihood of being both in the ethno-cultural or ethno-class group compared to the civic group.

Table 3. Multinomial logit models of cluster membership (identity configuration; unstandardized coefficients; N = 1143; 43 contextual units)

		(1)				(2)			
		Ethno-nationalist	Ethno-cultural	Ethno-class	Communal	Ethno-nationalist	Ethno-cultural	Ethno-class	Communal
Within	Tamil	-4.17***	1.79**	1.29 *	0.26	-7.07**	0.67	0.11	-0.10
		(1.14)	(0.65)	(0.54)	(0.51)	(2.31)	(0.90)	(0.78)	(0.65)
	Muslim	-0.73	1.58(*)	5.03***	4.39***	-3.69	0.94	4.59***	4.86***
		(1.23)	(0.81)	(0.74)	(0.71)	(2.59)	(1.00)	(0.78)	(0.85)
	Age	-0.01	0.00	0.00	0.01	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.01
		(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
	Female	-0.11	-0.91***	-1.53***	-0.69***	-0.04	-1.02***	-1.61***	-0.64**
		(0.19)	(0.21)	(0.27)	(0.20)	(0.21)	(0.19)	(0.28)	(0.20)
	Moved	0.09	-0.05	-0.33	0.70**	-0.14	0.06	-0.22	0.60**
		(0.32)	(0.43)	(0.33)	(0.25)	(0.30)	(0.42)	(0.31)	(0.22)
	Poverty	0.84***	-0.41	0.17	-0.55*	0.31	-0.51	0.28	-0.11
		(0.21)	(0.37)	(0.32)	(0.25)	(0.20)	(0.34)	(0.31)	(0.20)
	Conflict	0.01	0.91*	0.83*	0.10	-0.02	0.38	0.11	-0.14
		(0.34)	(0.44)	(0.41)	(0.24)	(0.43)	(0.40)	(0.47)	(0.31)
Between	Poverty	-	-	-	-	7.44**	0.31	-1.22	-5.19***
						(2.80)	(2.22)	(1.31)	(1.46)
	Conflict	-	-	-	-	4.84	4.68*	5.61**	2.68
						(2.97)	(2.38)	(2.05)	(1.97)
Loglikelihood		-1375.88				-1275.41			
AIC		2815.76				2630.82			
BIC		2977.09				2832.48			

(*) $p < .06$ * $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$

5.4 Discussion

The general aim of this study was, in the context of post-war Sri Lanka, to examine the relationship between, on the one hand, individual and collective experiences of war and poverty and, on the other hand, particular definitions of collective identities. Analyses were based on survey data collected among a representative sample of the adult population of Sri Lanka in 2017, about eight years after the formal end of the civil war. In order to reach our general aim, we divided it into two distinct research questions: (1) what are the main ways of thinking about identity, or the main identity configurations? And (2) what are the individual and social experiences of war and poverty that are associated specific identity configurations, and especially identity configurations that fit a narrative of ethno-nationalist conflict? In the remaining of the discussion, we will discuss the findings pertaining to each question separately.

5.4.1   What are the main identity configurations?

Using a combination of MCA and cluster analysis, we extracted a typology of five identity configurations, or types of identity. A first important element is that only one of these five types was exclusively associated with an ethnic group, the others being ethnically mixed and that sense 'trans-ethnic'. Second, amongst these five groups we can clearly distinguish those for which the ethnic (and ethnic-related) identity markers played a defining role (ethno-nationalist, ethno-cultural, and ethno-class identities) from those for which it didn't (civic and communal identities). In other words, this typology indicates three different ways to understand how ethnicity shapes individuals' identity and two alternatives of 'ethnic-free' identities.

For each cluster in which ethnic(-related) identity markers had a central significance, the specific way they did was distinctive. For ethno-nationalists, ethnic along with national identity was *celebrated*. First, in the sense that respondents in this cluster were generally attached to, and glorified, their linguistic, national and ethnic group. In fact, they reported these three identity markers to be relevant to them in every possible way except for the dimensions that would give them a negative connotation (*i.e.* bases for threat and

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discrimination). Second, the dimension that most clearly distinguished this cluster – *i.e.* ethno-nationalism – was highly correlated with the total number of identity markers selected on all facets except threat and discrimination. This indicates that, for these respondents, embracing ethnic and national belongings as central aspects of themselves and their community didn't imply any trade-off or conflict with other kinds of group belonging. On the contrary, this cluster showed a distinct tendency to glorify their age group, gender, local community and community of origin in addition to their ethno-national group. In sum, these individuals celebrated their ethno-national identity as an essential part of who they are, seemingly without experiencing any constraints in navigating their multiple other identities. Given that this cluster was exclusively composed of Sinhalese respondents, it is likely that being a member of the ethnic majority was a condition to be able to celebrate one's ethno-national identity in such a constraint-free way. This cluster shows a similar pattern than a configuration identified by Freeman (2003) in a large sample of adult Sinhalese respondents during the civil war (in 1997). Using a range of identity markers similar to those presented in the present study, he asked participants to classify their different identity markers according their similarity and found a high clustering of race, nation and religion, suggesting a wide tendency to consider the corresponding identities as similar. He further measure social identification with the groups corresponding to each identity marker and found that considering race, nation and religion to be similar was positively associated with a higher level of identification across identity markers.

The ethno-class type is, in a sense, the mirror image of the ethno-nationalist type. First, because it is one of the most ethnically diverse: although dominated by Muslims, about one third of those respondents are Tamils and one fifth Sinhalese. But most importantly, because a distinctive feature of this cluster was *not* a particularly frequent attachment to their ethnic group or a sense of cohesion within it, but rather to experience their ethnic identity as *imposed from outside*, *i.e.* as a source of threat and discrimination. At the same time, the most distinctive feature of individuals in this cluster was to experience threat (and discrimination) based on their professional activity and economic situation as well. Considering the fact that this cluster has the highest proportion of individuals who report being self-employed, the picture that emerges is one of minority (Muslim and Tamils) traders that are the usual targets during ethnic riots (DeVotta, 2004; Jayawardena, 1970; Tambiah, 1996). Individuals in this

group seem to experience first-hand the climate intolerance against ethnic minorities which has been growing since about 2012 under the impetus of Buddhist militants (Aliff, 2015; Devotta, 2018; Silva, 2016).

Finally, the ethno-cultural type was mostly specific of Tamils located in the North, but with roughly one fourth of the cluster being composed of Sinhalese respondents. Like the ethno-class type, individuals in this group tended to experience their ethnic background as a source of threat and discrimination. Furthermore, threat and discrimination was also experienced based on language, which is perfectly consistent with Tamil experience, since the Sinhalese-Tamil political conflict crystalized around the issue of Tamil linguistic rights (DeVotta, 2004). However, contrary to the ethno-class type, individuals falling into the ethno-cultural cluster also typically found their ethnicity and language to matter in every other aspect of their existence. Thus, in contrast to the ethno-nationalists who can spontaneously choose celebrate their ethnic identity in a constraint-free way, individuals in the ethno-cultural type experience it as a source of threat and discrimination and the central structuring role of ethnicity in their lives seems to preclude them from giving a central place to any other group membership. But in contrast with members of an ethno-class who experience their ethnic identity only as imposed from outside, they seem to have *turned this source of threat and discrimination into a resource*. This pattern is coherent with the rejection-identification model (Branscombe, Schmitt, et al., 1999), which posits that members of disadvantaged groups will react to perceived discrimination of their group by identifying more with it, which provides them with a resource to buffer the negative effect of discrimination (see also Cobb et al., 2019; Ramos et al., 2012). What our ethno-cultural type further suggests, is that this process of turning a discriminated or threatened identity into a resource can happen in the aftermath of war violence and might typically be a collective rather than merely individual achievement. Indeed, in addition to reporting attachment to and glorification of their ethno-national identities, these respondents typically perceived their ethno-linguistic group to be cohesive and supportive.

Overall, these three ways of experiencing ethnic identities – as *celebrated*, *imposed from outside* or *turned into a resource* – illustrate what can be gained by treating social identities not only as outcomes of an intimate identification, but also as pragmatic consequences of how individuals are treated or anticipate being treated by others (Elcheroth & Reicher, 2017).

Indeed, assessing others' treatment of the self proved necessary to identify the distinctions between these three clusters.

It is important to note that, taken together, these three 'ethnic-related' clusters amounted to about 25 percent of the adult Sri Lankan population. In other words, the overwhelming majority of the population appeared not to consider its ethnicity to be especially significant in any way. The most obvious case is the *civic* type which – being located at the civic end of the *ethnic-civic* dimension – gathers individuals who report their political views and especially their social class to be their main sources of social identification and group cohesion. Moreover, these respondents interestingly detached their social identity based on social class from a professional activity, finding no particular relevance in the latter. This relative detachment from professional activity might reflect the fact that this cluster was the only one which was clearly gendered, with 63 % of female respondents and had the largest proportion of individuals in charge of home care (40 %). The maintenance of traditional gender roles thus seems to produce a distinctive experience among women in this group, whereby their class consciousness is disconnected from any self-defining economic activity.

Finally, the communal type was the most ethnically diverse, although Muslims were markedly overrepresented in it. But the empirical significance of this identity configuration derives mostly from the fact that it was the most frequent, defining alone more than one-third of the Sri Lankan population. Two major features define this cluster. First, their low score on the Ethnonationalism dimension – which highly correlated with the overall number of selected identity markers – indicates that these respondents were highly parsimonious when stating which identities were relevant to them and certainly avoided to select large-scale politicized identities. To give a bit of flesh, these respondents were the least frequent to report ethnic, linguistic and national attachment (i.e. 9.14 %, 4.86 % and 4 %, respectively). Second, the only politicized identity marker they were generally willing to endorse was their religion, which most of them glorified. However, this glorification of religion was combined with a reluctance to express any commitment to their ethnic identities, which suggests a certain distance from the politicized understanding of their faith. Moreover, their religion – along with their place of residence, to a lesser extent – appeared to carry a strong normative importance in their local community: it informed people's perception of each other, expectations of consensus and decisions of whom to support and talk about important experiences. The overall picture

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suggests a commitment to the religious group that has less to do with ethno-nationalist conflict than with a close integration within a local community that builds its cohesion through common religious beliefs and practices.

5.4.2 *What are the individual and collective experiences that are identity-defining?*

The second part of our findings can be swiftly summarized in three crucial points. First, the fact that ethnic categories play a central role in one's identity appear inextricably linked to dramatic experiences of war and/or poverty. Second, to each of the three distinct ways in which ethnic categories shape identity corresponds an equally distinct experience of war and/or poverty. Third, these distinct experiences are tied to a social context rather than to individual trajectories. In other words, they are *inherently collective* rather than individual.

With regard to collective experiences of war, we have seen that both the ethno-class and ethno-cultural identities were overrepresented in contexts relatively exposed by violence. This finding supports the basic contention that collective violence can force individuals to become aware of their ethnic identity (Elcheroth & Reicher, 2017). When considering that collective violence in Sri Lanka was systematically asymmetric – as shown (in Appendix B) by the strong negative correlation between contextual exposure to violence and the Generalization of Risk Index (see Spini et al., 2008) – it is further coherent with the finding that contextual exposure to asymmetric ethnic violence further entrench ethnic cleavages (Penic et al., 2017). Moreover, considering that both ethno-class and ethno-cultural groups tended to perceive their ethnic identity as exposing them to violence and discrimination, our findings support ethnographic observations in contexts of ethno-nationalist war (Macek, 2009) which indicate that systematic ethnic violence force individuals to become increasingly aware of their ethnic identity because it can make them a target.

A finding particularly worth emphasizing was that, for the ethno-class group, the connection between a specific war experience and their specific identity configuration proved to stretch across a remarkably long period (*i.e.* about 25 years). Based on studies of communities emerging out of disasters (e.g., Alfadhli & Drury, 2018; Ntontis et al., 2020), one would expect secondary stressors to be key factors maintaining the relevance of an emerging social identity across time. Our data suggests that threats of violence and discrimination on

an ethnic and professional basis might have acted as such stressors. Moreover, testimonies of Northern Muslims (Citizens' Commission, 2012) and qualitative studies of their experiences since their expulsion by the LTTE from the Northern Province until the present day (Surenthiraraj & De Mel, 2019; Thiranagama, 2011) suggest that the secondary stressors provoked by the situation of chronic displacement indeed maintained of the 'Northern Muslim' identity.

Contrary to the ethno-cultural cluster, and to what the literature on the resilience of 'disaster communities' suggests (Alfadhli et al., 2019; Drury et al., 2016), members of the ethno-class group didn't appear to have turned their sense of common identity into a source of identification, cohesion and social support. However, this finding might reflect a limitation of our measurement approach. Indeed, by presenting participants with a list of generic identity markers, identities that are not straightforwardly delineated by the chosen markers might very well remain unobserved. In the case of Northern Muslims, existing sources suggest that their social identity is defined by the experience of expulsion itself (Thiranagama, 2011) and by long-term practical effects of expulsion, such as living between their place of origin and their post-expulsion home among the host community (Surenthiraraj & De Mel, 2019). This possibility illustrates that, even though less constraining than common measurement practices, our measurement approach requires to be flexibly adapted to theoretical interests and specific research aims.

Considering exposure to poverty, the ethno-nationalist configuration was distinctly associated with areas exposed to poverty (when the shared variance between contextual exposure conflict and poverty is controlled for). This observation is consistent with research showing that ethno-nationalist grievances can emerge out of objective experience of relative deprivation (e.g., Cederman et al., 2011; Grant et al., 2017). Thanks to life calendar data, which enabled us to further examine the temporal trajectory of each cluster's exposure to poverty, we observed a very suggestive pattern. While not particularly deprived relative to other groups during the civil war, the poverty rate among the ethno-nationalists stagnated around one-fifth during the post-war years while rapidly dropping close to zero among all other clusters. This finding suggests that the ethno-nationalist individuals defined their identities in this particular way during the post-war years, out of a sense of being excluded from the economic benefits of post-war reconstruction. Their trajectory is most dramatically illustrated

when considered in relation to the ethno-class group. The two groups' poverty rates defined trajectories that crossed each other at two key points in time: at the beginning of the civil war (early 1980s), the ethno-class cluster faced a rapidly increasing poverty rate which turned this group into the most deprived by far; and exactly at the end of the war (2009), the poverty rate of the ethno-class group – along with all other clusters – started to drop dramatically, leaving ethno-nationalists in a new situation of relative deprivation that formed in less than a decade. Considering that the ethno-class cluster is mostly composed by minorities, such crossing paths suggests that the ethnonationalists might be particularly well-disposed to find xenophobic rhetoric constructing minorities as enjoying unfair privileges (see, for instance, Tambiah, 1996) to echo their concrete experiences. While our study didn't examine how identity configurations relate to intergroup attitudes, it would be particularly interesting to examine the role played by the ethno-nationalist group in the current climate of sweeping anti-minorities sentiments (Aliff, 2015; Devotta, 2018; Silva, 2016). In particular, it would be interesting to examine their adherence to the rhetorical trope of unfair minorities' advantages, and test whether such adherence underpins intergroup attitudes, political militancy and voting behavior.

It is important to recognize that our data are correlational and therefore precludes interpretation of observed relationships in causal terms. With regard to the relationship between contextual exposure to violence and specific (ethno-class and ethno-cultural) identity configurations, one could argue that for some reason violence specifically occurred in communities that already defined their identities in that way or would eventually do it without contextual exposure to violence. According to that argument, Northern Tamils – who were especially affected by the final offensive of the government against the LTTE in 2009 – would, for instance, happen to have been particularly exposed collectively to violence while having completely different reasons to define their identity through an ethno-cultural configuration. One of such reasons could be 'cultural', in the sense that Northern Tamil communities might have a more or less long history of giving a central place to their ethnic identity. Another reason might be that Northern areas used to be under LTTE control for some years (see Stokke, 2006), whose propaganda (Ramanathapillai, 2006) might have fostered a sense of identity centered around ethnic cohesion and victimization. If we consider the central defining role of perceived threat of violence based on ethnicity and language among the ethno-class cluster,

the 'LTTE control' explanation seem already more plausible than the 'cultural' one, since the latter doesn't provide any obvious explanation for this specificity. However, there two reasons that seem to rule out the 'LTTE control' explanation as well. First, being a Tamil doesn't predict membership in the ethno-cultural cluster once contextual exposure to violence is controlled for. Second, an examination of the map included in Figure 6 show that not all Tamil communities living in areas formerly controlled by the LTTE fall into the ethno-class configuration. In particular, respondents located in Jaffna – the most Northern district of the island – are all Tamils living in areas formerly controlled by the LTTE and generally define themselves in communal (67 %) or civic (26 %) terms, with only a tiny minority adopting an ethno-cultural (3 %) or ethno-class (4 %) identity. With regard to the association between the ethno-nationalist identity configuration and collective exposure to poverty, it is difficult to formulate a plausible alternative, non-causal, explanation.

Furthermore, results of multinomial regression analyses are contingent upon the choice of reference group. Hence, one could argue that our conclusions would be different had we choses another reference group. However, two arguments strongly support the validity of our conclusions. First, the choice of the civic cluster as a reference group makes theoretical sense given our interest in examining correlates of ethnic definitions of social identities. Indeed, across all the dimensions extracted by the MCA which were defined by ethnic-related markers, the civic cluster was the most consistently located on the 'non-ethnic' side. It was therefore the best candidate to provide a baseline in contrast to which ethnic definitions of social identities are compared. Second, multilevel linear regression analyses using dimensions extracted by the MCA as outcome variables lead to the same conclusions (see Appendix C). On the one hand, contextual exposure to poverty is positively related to scores on the ethno-nationalism dimension. On the other hand, contextual exposure to violence is positively related to scores on both the ethnic-civic and the ethnic constraints on social mobility dimensions.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

This thesis started with a very general question: *why is it that ethnic identities have had so much political significance in modern times?* In the introductory chapters, I have argued that this question calls for two distinct sets of answers. The first bears on the long-term and macro-sociological mechanisms that favored the association between ethnic distinctions and political stakes. These mechanisms are well-accounted for in the literature (Mann, 1993; Wimmer, 2002, 2012), which shows that the modern state emerged in opposition to 'alien' (i.e. imperial) rule and thus turned ethnicity into a criterion of state ownership. These processes have been discussed at length in the first chapter. I have identified two reasons why such answers are only part of the story, however. First, the fact that the ideological *zeitgeist* defines political legitimacy in ethnic terms doesn't tell us much about the subjective relevance that the majority of individuals attach to ethnic identities. Second, social change doesn't occur in a long-term, gradual and linear fashion, but rather through abrupt crises. For these two reasons, I have argued that the second set of explanations of the modern relevance of ethnic identities bears implies that we shed light on how individuals experience collective identities in context of societal crises. The three empirical chapters each contributed to this general aim in a specific way. It is now time to discuss the general conclusions that can be drawn from them.

In the first section, I summarize the thesis' most important empirical findings and discuss how they contribute to specific debates within the existing literature. In the second section, I broaden the perspective by discussing how the thesis contributes to and reframes existing theoretical debates about the relationship between (ethnic) identity, conflict and violence. Finally, the last section focuses on the methodological innovations applied in the empirical chapters and how such innovations offers concrete ways to better align survey research designs with current theoretical models of social identity and intergroup processes.

6.1 Empirical contributions: Complex identities in times of uncertainty

6.1.1 Beyond the primordialism-constructivism debate

I have shown that what organizes social scientific debates about ethnic relations is, at bottom, a social psychological question: *does ethnicity, as compared to other collective identities, inspire some sort of special attachment?* The primordialist position, typically identified with Herder (1784–1791/1966) and Geertz (1963/1973), suggests that ethnicity inspires an especially deep and emotional attachment. Individuals would thus systematically find it to be a central part of who they are. The constructivist, or instrumentalist, position, on the other hand, suggests that there is nothing inherently special about ethnicity. Individuals might be attached to their ethnic group, but not necessarily more than any other group they belong to, and can flexibly navigate their different identities according to circumstances in a more or less opportunistic fashion.

Perhaps the most basic, but no less important, conclusion that we can draw from the findings is that crude primordialism is not very plausible: if ethnicity somehow matters, it is *not* in the sense that people systematically find it to be the most central and significant aspect of who they are. In chapter 3, we looked at representative samples of 11 African countries, and found that ethnic identities were far from always paramount to the majority of the population. Even when they were, this could dramatically change in only a few years; and the general trend was that ethnicity tended to become *less* important to people over time. Bhavnani and Modownik (2009) found the same pattern also using the round 1 and 2 data of the Afrobarometer, but with an operationalization of ethnicity which excluded 'race' and religion (below, I discuss potential problems arising from this operationalization). Chapter 3 shows that the conclusions are virtually identical when we use a broader definition of ethnicity. Thus, the rate of respondents reporting ethnicity to be their most important group identity dropped by 45 % in four years in Malawi and by 34 % in only two years in South Africa. But the findings of chapter 4 and 5 are even more decisive in this regard. First, because collective identities were scrutinized with more sophisticated tools, thus giving us a more complete and fine-grained picture of how respondents experienced various collective identities. Second, because the findings come from Sri Lanka – and in the case of chapter 5, they are based on a representative sample of the adult population –, where explicitly ethno-

nationalist violence lasted for almost 30 years, until 2009. If one expects ethnic identities anywhere to have some kind of significance, Sri Lanka would arguably be a privileged place to look for. But there also the findings suggest otherwise. In chapter 4, participants were asked to select, among twelve identity markers, the three most important to define themselves; and only a tiny minority (less than 5 % of the total sample) selected their ethnic background. In chapter 5, within the five-fold typology of identity configurations we extracted from participants' answers, three of such configurations could be said to give a central role to ethnicity; but they gathered, taken together, less than half of the population (about 25 %).

Once crude primordialism is set aside, however, the findings put us face-to-face with the limits of a debate framed uniquely, or even mainly, in terms of intimate attachments. In chapter 4, we found that what systematically differentiated ethnic minorities members from members of the Sinhala majority were not intimate ethnic attachments, but rather *perceived norms* or *meta-representations* (Elcheroth et al., 2011) about ethnicity, *i.e.* representations about what others think of ethnicity. When asked what three identity markers were the most important for themselves, almost no participants – whether Sinhalese or minority group members – chose ethnic background as an answer. But when asked what three identity markers were the most important *for most Sri Lankans to* define themselves, only one out of 202 (0.5 %) Sinhalese participants picked ethnic background, whereas more than one third of Tamil-speaking participants did. The exact consequences of such minority-majority difference in terms of and intergroup attitudes and concrete behavior are not clear, and deserves to be examined in future research. Particularly noteworthy is the fact that perceiving ethnic background to be normatively important was only weakly related to perceived threat and discrimination (*i.e.* the fate dimension). But, at the very least, it suggests that ethnic minorities find ethnicity to be more consequential in their everyday life than members of the Sinhalese majority do. Such findings would gain much by being complemented with research based on open-ended interviews around the significance of identity markers. It could, on the one hand, shed some light on the origins of perceptions that ethnicity has such normative importance (*e.g.* concrete interactions, public symbols). On the other hand, it could elucidate what constraints – if any - such perception implies in everyday decisions.

A further demonstration of the crucial role of meta-representations in making ethnicity matter were the findings discussed in Chapter 5. We have seen that ethnic identity could be

celebrated in a seemingly constraints-free manner (ethno-nationalist configuration), *imposed from outside* as a source of threat and discrimination (ethno-class configuration), or *turned into a resource* when its being a source of threat and discrimination doesn't prevent communities to turn it into a basis for social identification, support and cohesion (ethno-cultural configuration). The last instance, in particular, shows the futility of opposing supposedly irrational ethnic attachments to individuals' instrumental and calculated use of their ethnic identity. Group identities are powerful resources for individuals' resilience and access to social support (Drury, 2018), sense of agency (Drury & Reicher, 2009) and well-being in general (Jetten et al., 2017). In that sense, developing a strong attachment for a social group is hardly an irrational thing to do, especially when external circumstances lock individuals within a stigmatized group, as argued by the Rejection-Identification model (Branscombe, Schmitt, et al., 1999; Cobb et al., 2019; Ramos et al., 2012).

The ethno-class configuration, where ethnic identity tends to relate to the self only as a source of threat and discrimination, suggests qualifications to the Rejection-Identification model, however. On the one hand, individuals in the ethno-class cluster typically reported being threatened and discriminated on professional, class and ethnic grounds simultaneously, but they tended to identify with their professional and class-based groups only, not their ethnic group. This suggests that, when discrimination is based on a conflation of several identity markers, marginalized groups' response is not completely determined by their objective experiences. Rather, they can demonstrate agency by selecting some group cleavages and not others as bases for identification and ingroup cohesion. Importantly, we wouldn't have been able to observe this form of agency empirically had we assessed individuals' self-positioning in relation to one group cleavage only (e.g. ethnic). This further illustrates my argument that the ambiguity of the social structure calls for research designs acknowledging that multiple group cleavages are available for individuals to make sense of objective experiences. On the other hand, the difference between the ethno-class and ethno-cultural configurations was not only about ethnic identification. Individuals self-positioning as ethno-cultural typically reported that their co-ethnics treated them as ingroup members (i.e. through support and pressure to agree) and that ethnic identification was both normative in their community and a basis on which one decides to talk about the past. This suggests that reaction to threat and discrimination should be regarded not only as an intra-individual

mechanism (i.e. group identification), but also as a collective accomplishment where identification with a social group is made viable by ingroup members treating us in ways that validate our internal sense of self and makes it practically relevant (see Hopkins et al., 2015; Khan et al., 2016). Future research on the Rejection-Identification Model might examine how such collective accomplishment is achieved.

6.1.2   Rooting complex identities in collective experiences

A major finding of the present thesis (reported in chapter 5) is that, in post-war Sri Lanka, identity configurations defined by ethnic markers were connected to collective experiences of victimization (*i.e.* violence or poverty). This in itself is an important finding: even in a context where ethnic cleavages have been heavily and continuously politicized since the colonial period until the present days (see Devotta, 2018), defining one's identity in ethnic terms turns out not only to be relatively rare (25 %), but also something that doesn't happen out of spontaneous bigotry. Rather, my results suggest that it is the outcome of living in areas heavily affected by armed conflict or poverty.

With regard to armed conflict, analyses presented in chapter 5 showed that the ethno-class and ethno-cultural configurations were overrepresented in areas highly affected by war-related violence. Previous research in the context of the former Yugoslavia have shown that collective guilt acceptance for atrocities perpetrated by one's ethno-national group (Penic, Elcheroth, & Spini, 2016) and intergroup trust (Penic et al., 2017) were the lowest in areas relatively more affected by asymmetric violence, thus suggesting a hardening of ethno-national cleavages in these contexts. However, these previous studies didn't directly examine how individuals define their social identities. Thus, our findings complement these previous studies by providing a highly detailed empirical profile of the identity configurations that tend to emerge in contexts exposed to asymmetric violence[42]. Two distinct configurations emerged out of the findings.

On the one hand, we have observed that individuals self-positioning as ethno-cultural were overrepresented in areas exposed to violence. Detailed analyses of this clusters' ethnic

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[42] Analyses examining the relationship between exposure to violence and the Generalization of Risks Index – which assesses the extent to which exposure to violence generalizes across ethnic boundaries – have shown that virtually all violence in Sri Lanka was asymmetric. These analyses are shown in Appendix B.

composition, location and experiences reported through the life calendar indicated that individuals with this identity configurations were mostly Northern Tamils located in areas that were the theater of extremely violent battles at the end of the war (2008-2009). These findings are consistent with research showing that collective identities emerge out of disasters because victims perceive that they share a common fate (Drury et al., 2016), and persist over time when secondary stressors maintain this sense of common fate (Alfadhli et al., 2019; Ntontis et al., 2020). In the case of our ethno-cultural group, the collective experience of the war appears to have fostered identification to and cohesion within the ethno-linguistic group. Furthermore, this identity configuration is clearly rooted in a continuous sense of victimization. To give a concrete idea, 66.5 % of individuals in this cluster reported that either their language or their ethnic background made them a potential target of violence (compared to 17.2 %, 15.9 % and 9.4 % in the ethno-nationalist, civic and communal clusters, respectively). Hence, these findings suggest that both the experience of asymmetric violence during the war and a continued experience of victimization in its aftermath contributed to create a sense of common fate and to foster group cohesion on an ethno-linguistic basis.

On the other hand, the ethno-class configuration was also overrepresented in areas highly exposed to violence. Detailed analyses revealed that individuals in this cluster were mostly Muslims and – to a lesser extent – Tamils located in the Northeast. They had been particularly affected by violence around 1990, the year when the LTTE massively expelled Muslims from the Northern districts and perpetrated various acts of violence against Muslims in the East (e.g. The New York Times, 1990). Thus, these findings strikingly suggest that the current identity configuration of individuals in the ethno-class cluster can be traced back to war-experiences situated 27 years in the past (the survey was conducted in 2017). This is a highly surprising result given that the literature on 'disaster identities' indicates that such identities tend to vanish over time (Kaniasty, 2020) unless individuals establish institutions designed as reminders of the common experience (Ntontis et al., 2020) or secondary stressors maintain a sense of common fate among the victims (Alfadhli et al., 2019; Alfadhli & Drury, 2018; Ntontis et al., 2020). Several elements should be noted to make sense of this result. First, recent qualitative accounts of the current experience of Northern Muslims displaced in 1990 show that many of them still face secondary stressors that are highly specific to their original experience during the war (Surenthiraraj & De Mel, 2019). Second, there has been

since 2012 repeated cases anti-Muslim riots in Sri Lanka and a general climate increasingly condoning anti-Muslim discourse and violence[43] (Devotta, 2018). Such pogroms have been highly familiar in Sri Lankan history (they are ritualized forms of violence, to use Tambiah's (1996) formulation) and typically targets homes and shops belonging to minority groups, sometimes killing their owners. There is clear evidence that the systematic targeting of shops during these pogroms also aims at eliminating economic competitors (DeVotta, 2004; Tambiah, 1996), echoing Kalyvas's (2003) argument that the 'master cleavage' of ethnic conflict can be mobilized to settle local power struggles. It is thus significant that the ethno-class configuration corresponds to the highest prevalence of self-employed individuals and gives such a central place to professional and class membership. It suggests that the ethno-class identity configuration reflects these individuals' awareness that the present climate of increased anti-minority – and especially anti-Muslim – violence makes them vulnerable because of their ethnicity *and* their economic activity.

An important theoretical implication of this reasoning is that, if past experiences of victimization shape current social identities, they most likely do so in interaction with present circumstances. Thus, if collective experiences of violence that happened 27 years earlier are related to individuals' identity configuration today, it is probably because what happened in the past is used as a lens through which current circumstances are collectively interpreted. In this sense, connecting past collective experiences to current ones shouldn't be interpreted as implying that identities remain fixed through long periods of time. For instance, it is likely that members of the ethno-class cluster would have reported a very different identity configuration had we conducted a survey in 2011, before the anti-Muslim rhetoric started to become endemic in Sri Lanka.

Considering exposure to poverty, areas where it was the most prevalent were the places where the ethno-nationalist identity configuration was the most frequent. Analyses in chapter 5 have shown that this cluster was homogeneously Sinhalese and that, contrary to

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[43] As I mentioned in the preface, I experienced this rise of anti-Muslim sentiments first hand. I was in Kandy in march 2018 when anti-Muslim riots broke out in the city. The government declared a country-wide state of emergency, imposed a curfew in the district and deployed armed troops in order to enforce it. During the curfew, as I was discussing with the housekeeper of the place where I was staying (who was Sinhalese), he summarized his understanding of the incident in those terms: "Muslims are the problem. Wherever there are Muslims, there are problems".

other clusters, its experiences of poverty were not war induced (i.e. they were temporally unrelated with peaks of violence). Consequently, this cluster was the only one in which exposure to poverty stagnated at a substantial rate after the end of the war, while all other clusters saw their poverty rate drop close to zero. Hence, the predicament of this cluster at the time of the survey is highly consistent with an objective situation of relative deprivation (Runciman). This finding is thus coherent with previous studies indicating that ethno-nationalist grievances and mobilization can be rooted in experiences of relative deprivation (e.g., Cederman et al., 2011; Grant et al., 2017). Moreover, the fact that the ethno-nationalists became objectively relatively deprived only in the post-war period stresses the importance of considering the time dimension when examining inequalities between groups and illustrate the usefulness of life calendars as methodological tools for doing so (see Elcheroth et al., 2013).

6.1.3   Observing uncertain times: Ethnicity, volatility, and changing political norms

Qualitative accounts of ethnic armed conflicts (e.g., Gagnon Jr, 2006; Stoessinger, 2010) have noted that the initial cause of violent ethnic conflict can be authoritarian leaders imposing a violent course of action upon a mostly reluctant population. Hence, there is an important stake in understanding the process by which authoritarian leaders rise to power. In chapter 3, I have tested a hypothesis specifying a key mechanism in this process, which relied on the insights of the Spiral of Silence Theory (Noelle-Neumann, 1993) and the social representation approach (Elcheroth et al., 2011). More specifically, I argued that, while authoritarian views are usually counter-normative, periods where political norms become uncertain can open a window where more authoritarians perceive their views to be shared, dare to express them and further contribute to make perceived norms increasingly authoritarian. Moreover, I argued that, because collective identities organize individuals' perceptions of social norms (Elcheroth et al., 2011; Raudsepp, 2005), fluctuation of contextual ethnic salience should imply precisely this kind of uncertainty about the prevailing political norms (i.e. a volatile climate). Results have shown, first, that *volatile* subnational areas are places where people are more politically active than usual. This is already an interesting finding: it provides some support to the idea that contextual fluctuations of ethnic salience indeed open a window for change in political norms. Future research might further investigate

the underlying mechanism, for instance by examining whether contextual fluctuations of ethnic salience are related to perceptions of normlessness, or anomie (see e.g., Spini et al., 2018).

My main hypothesis in chapter 3 predicted that contextual volatility would selectively predict political expression depending on individuals' political views. In this regard, the results are too tentative to draw any strong conclusion. That being said, they nonetheless suggest some interesting conclusions which are illustrated by the findings related to acceptance of traditional authority. Coherent with my expectations, supporters of traditional authority talked more about politics in volatile contexts compared to stable ones. Interestingly, however, when considering political expression through the act of joining others to raise an issue, it was individuals *rejecting* traditional authority who were more expressive in volatile compared to stable contexts. This finding raises an important theoretical point: in contexts going through normative changes, individuals who perceive their views to go against the current might very well be reluctant to express it openly with friends, neighbors or colleagues, but this doesn't necessarily mean that they do not try to shape norms. They might actively mobilize a network of like-minded individuals, as the act of joining others plausibly suggests. In this sense, the processes of self-censorship described by the Spiral of Silence Theory (Noelle-Neumann, 1993) would offer only a partial picture of the processes involved in times of normative changes; a picture perhaps more readily applicable to contexts were individuals are particularly isolated and thus lack the collective resources to access like-minded others.

The overall picture that emerges from this study is that of periods of instability that open a window for social change, but the outcome of which is highly unpredictable. Furthermore, the findings suggest that research on mechanisms of normative changes – such as those based on the Spiral of Silence Theory – should systematically use various measures of political expressions in order to assess whether mechanisms of self-censorship or expression generalizes across different domains.

However, there are important limitations to the study presented in Chapter 3 that I haven't discussed yet. These limitations importantly qualify the conclusions that we can draw from the findings, and it is therefore necessary to acknowledge them. Most importantly, there is the issue of the direction of causality. In chapter 3, I have systematically interpreted

significant cross-level interactions between contextual volatility and individual political attitudes in models predicting political expression as suggesting that contextual volatility caused a selective expression of political views. However, it is equally possible that these findings reflect a causality flowing in the opposite direction: selective expression of political views might have caused a volatile climate (measured as the absolute change in ethnic salience). One could for instance reason that, if ethnic identities are associated with political norms (more or less authoritarian depending on the specific group), then changes in the public expression of authoritarian views might act as cue that these identities are more or less relevant for the public debate and hence change their salience. Which causal interpretation (if any[44]) is correct cannot be decided based on the data analyzed in chapter 3.

A second important limitation consists in having equated religious with ethnic identity in our measure of ethnic salience. While I justified this decision by arguing that religion can be perceived and politicized as an ethnic marker (e.g., in Sri Lanka, in Bosnia-Herzegovina or in Nigeria; see Bormann et al., 2017; Brubaker, 2015, Chapter 4), it is admittedly problematic to simply assume that religion is perceived as an ethnic marker in every context (see Frances Stewart, 2012). The ideal (but time-consuming) procedure would be to review the available evidence on the political significance of religious cleavages in each individual country included in the sample and use a country-specific operationalization depending on the conclusions of such a review. Another option would be to repeat the analyses while excluding religion from the index of ethnic salience and compare the results. With regard to the results reported in chapter 3, however, one could argue that conflating religious and ethnic identities in contexts where religion is not politicized most likely created noise (i.e. irrelevant variations in our index of volatility) and hence led to a more conservative test of our hypotheses than if not included.

A third limitation relates to my measure of authoritarian attitudes. In particular, it is debatable whether my treatment of participants who failed to contest traditional authority – measured with the item "*all decisions are made by a council of chiefs and elders*" – as authoritarians is appropriate. And this question is even more important given that two cross-level interactions observed in chapter 3 involved this specific item. An important problem with treating support for traditional authority as an authoritarian attitude is that there can be

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[44] One cannot rule out the possibility that both contextual volatility and selective political expression are both caused by a third variable not included in the research design.

perfectly good reasons for individuals to consider traditional forms of authority as means for emancipation from oppressive regimes. To take an example now familiar to the reader, the Buddhist Sangha (i.e. clergy) played an important role in challenging the alleged inferiority of the Sinhalese culture during the English occupation of Ceylon. More generally, 'cultural revival' has been a typical part of nationalist mobilization against imperial occupation (Hroch, 1985/2000). In this sense, it is perfectly possible that respondents in some countries perceived that decisions made by a "*council of chiefs and elders*" would serve democratic ends and hence were expressing the opposite of an authoritarian attitude when endorsing it.

6.2 Theoretical contribution: rethinking ethnic conflict and violence

We have seen that, if social scientists came to acknowledge that there is something 'special' about ethnicity, it is first and foremost because of *ethnic violence* (Brubaker & Laitin, 1998; Cederman & Vogt, 2017). Considering the horrifying violence that was unleashed in Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia in the early 1990s, the massive attention that ethnic relations have received ever since seems, in a sense, to flow from a perfectly self-evident perplexity. If we are so concerned about what ethnicity means to people, it is simply because our gaze goes where violence is, and violence happens to be there these days. But our perplexity is, perhaps, not so purely driven by the empirical world. In his seminal *Imagined communities*, Benedict Anderson (1983/2006) made a similar perplexity the starting point of his analysis of nationalism. What is so intriguing about nationalism, he observed, is that it makes it possible "for so many millions of people, not so much to kill, as willingly to die for such limited imaginings" (p. 6). By talking of "such limited imaginings", Anderson was of course referring to nations and used these terms to convey a precise, technical meaning: 'limited' because nations only include subsets of humanity, and 'imaginings' because the national community, as it stretches beyond compatriots we ever meet face-to-face, requires an act of imagination. But beyond its technical aspect, the phrasing carries a connotation that becomes clearer as Anderson goes on to make this conundrum the center of his inquiry: "[t]hese deaths bring us abruptly face-to-face with the central problem posed by nationalism: what makes the shrunken imaginings of recent history (scarcely more than two centuries) generate such colossal sacrifices?" (p. 6). There is something slightly dismissive about the words used to

describe nations – as "shrunken imaginings" stretching "scarcely more than two centuries" back – which serves to direct the perplexity of the reader not so much toward the killings and sacrifices *per se*, but rather toward the kind of loyalty that inspires them. In fact, Anderson makes it plain that violence would be less perplexing had it been inspired by different, ideologically more relatable, loyalties. It seemed troubling to him that, in the 1970s, Vietnam, Cambodia and China – "regimes whose independence and revolutionary credentials are undeniable" – waged wars that couldn't be interpreted "in terms of – according to taste – 'social imperialism', 'defending socialism,' etc." (p. 1), but were undeniably nationalist.

The kind of expectations that guided Anderson's interest for nationalism form a good basis to discuss some important theoretical contributions of this thesis. After all, the general shift from class-based (e.g., Davies, 1962; Gurr, 1970; Tilly, 1978) to ethnic-based (e.g., Gurr, 1993a; Horowitz, 1985/2001) accounts of political violence seem to follow the same logic underlying Anderson's question, only applied to an intra-state context. The contribution of the present thesis is to reframe the problem by providing two different sets of answers. The first set suggests that perplexity in the face of ethnic *conflict* is a bit overdone. My argument indeed suggests that frequent ethnic conflicts are a predictable outcome of modern historical developments. The second set of answers suggest that, when it comes to ethnic *violence*, perplexity should on the contrary be cultivated further: violent escalation corresponds to periods of instability, the outcome of which is highly unpredictable.

6.2.1   Why ethnic conflict is predictable

An important contribution of the present thesis is to contextualize contemporary ethnic relations and identities within a broader theory which accounts for the systematic political significance of these identities. This theory – largely taken from Mann (1986, 1993) and Wimmer (2002, 2012) – makes two essential claims. First, more often than not, contemporary nationalisms emerged in reaction to imperial occupation, which produced an objective correlation between 'cultural' boundaries, on the one hand, and social and political inequalities, on the other. As a result, nationalist movements typically entwined the struggle for popular sovereignty with that for national self-determination. The modern state that emerged out of this struggle thus defined a common ethnicity between ruled and rulers as a criterion for the political legitimacy of the latter. The second key claim is that this process

politicization of ethno-national identities across the world didn't operate only in a bottom-up fashion. The more new (powerful) nation-states were created, the more the nationalist ideological template became the norm at the international level and the more the emerging international community defined the nation-state as the legitimate form of government (Anderson, 1983/2006; Mayall, 1990).

This theoretical framework has important implications for how to understand contemporary ethnic conflicts. First of all, it invites us to take a quite long-term historical perspective in order to shed light onto them. If ethno-national identities often emerged out of experiences of foreign occupation, then making sense of the current boundaries of exclusion implied by these identities requires an analysis of the social processes and interpretations developed during the critical period of their emergence. For instance, the rise of Nazism in Germany is typically (and correctly) interpreted as a reaction to the Versailles Treaty and the Great Depression (e.g., Wilde, 2020). However, the fact that a widespread interpretation of Germany's predicament at the time was an anti-Semitic conspiracy theory which would become central to Nazi propaganda (the so-called 'stab-in-the-back myth'; Kolb, 2005) isn't intelligible without considering that the access of Jews to civil rights occurred under French occupation in many German states (around 1812) and was interpreted by contemporary nationalists as part of an alien conspiracy to undermine the German *Volk*. Similarly, the current anti-Muslim propaganda and violence in Sri Lanka is very hard to make sense of without proper historical contextualization. Indeed, propaganda diffused by extremist Buddhist organizations (such as the *Bodu Bala Sena*; see Silva, 2016) claims that the Sinhalese people faces the imminent threat of Sri Lanka becoming a Muslim country. And given that Muslims constitute about 9 % of the total population against 75 % of Sinhalese, the success of this kind of propaganda appears quite astonishing. And again, making the success of such an objectively irrational propaganda intelligible requires us to consider the critical period when Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism took shape. Two related points are especially important to consider. First, as Sinhala nationalism first emerged as a challenge to Christian missionaries' attacks on Buddhism, early nationalists put a great emphasis in the myth that Sri Lanka was the first Buddhist kingdom and that it had been the sacred mission of the Sinhalese to defend it against foreign invaders for millennia (based on the Mahavamsa chronicles; see Bretfeld, 2018; Gunawardena, 1985; Ramanathapillai, 2012). Second, a combination of local

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religious disputes and economic interests of the rising class of Sinhalese capitalists motivated early nationalist ideologues to depict Muslims (especially the merchants) as evil aliens taking advantage of the Sinhalese people (see section 1.2.2).

While the preceding examples will inspire us a strong moral repulsion (and rightfully so), taking a long-term perspective suggests that it is counterproductive to let our political leanings too hastily explain the jingoistic tendencies of ethno-nationalism away as mere irrational impulses. Rather, the key question we ought to ask, is how the crudest forms of ethnic exclusions and violence can possibly be portrayed as virtuous acts (Reicher et al., 2008). And I argue that the answer is to be found in the emancipatory role that nationalism has played historically. Indeed, nationalism has been the most important ideological vehicle for the achievement of civic equality and democratic rule (Hermet, 1996). And as nation-states are established, values and symbols of the struggle for popular sovereignty are likely to be commemorated as things to be cherished and protected. They can then be invoked in a decontextualized fashion in order to justify exclusionary attitudes or policies. In France (even though considered the prototype of a society rooted in a 'civic' form of nationalism), for instance, the 'value' of secularism (*i.e. laïcité*) originated as a principle aimed at protecting atheists and religious minorities from persecution from the catholic Church. Ironically, the same principle of secularism was used to justify the prohibition of religious symbols in public schools in 2004, a policy which – although formulated in universal terms – ostensibly targeted the Muslim *Hijab*, objectively participated in the economic exclusion of Muslim women and increased their perception of discrimination (Abdelgadir & Fouka, 2020).

As Micheal Billig (1995) convincingly argued, even in societies where nationalism appears to be marginal, individuals' daily life is filled with subtle reminders that they live in a world of nations and instills the belief that nations are a given of social life. While this constant rehearsal of the 'naturalness' of the nation usually goes unnoticed, Billig argued that it actually makes individuals ready for nationalist mobilization when a crisis comes. Transposing Billig's analysis to the present discussion, I would argue that the same kind of inquiry should be applied to identify how ethnic definitions of nations and citizenships are produced in everyday life. In the second chapter (section 2.3.1), we have seen how in Israel this mechanism is conspicuous: state-sponsored commemorations of the Holocaust are collective performances that imply an ethnic definition of national identity (see Klar et al., 2013).

6.2.2 Why ethnic violence is <u>unpredictable</u>

Another essential contribution of this thesis is to give a central role to periods of social and political instability in explaining how political conflicts defined in ethnic terms escalate into full-blown violent confrontations. An important implication of this argument is that we shouldn't be too hasty in abandoning our initial perplexity in the face of ethnic violence, believing that we straightforwardly understand the motivations underlying individuals' behavior during violent outbreaks. When the focus was on class cleavages, debates on political violence already opposed explanations based on grievances (Davies, 1962; Gurr, 1970) to those stressing the opportunity structure (Tilly, 1978). As expectations that violence should break out along class lines was reconsidered, these explanatory mechanisms were not, leading to a discussion which posits such transparent and clear motivations for taking arms as greedy opportunism or 'legitimate' grievances (Cederman & Vogt, 2017). Currently prominent explanations still interpret ethnic violence in terms of such transparent motivations, such as resentment of having one's group excluded from political power or deprived economically in comparison with other groups (Cederman et al., 2010, 2011; Wimmer et al., 2009; Wucherpfennig et al., 2016). Postulating such straightforward motivational mechanisms, however, fits rather uneasily with our inability to predict violent escalation with much precision. Indeed, even the most sophisticated statistical models considering all structural predictors identified in the literature happen to perform very poorly in forecasting actual violent outbreaks (Cederman & Weidmann, 2017). It is a key implication of my analysis in terms of 'turning points' (see section 1.2.3) that this difficulty in accurately forecasting violent conflicts is less to be blamed on our failure to grasp how humans generally react to objective circumstances of opportunity/inequality than on the intrinsic unpredictability of the process of violent escalation itself.

Relatedly, many authors have argued that we should clearly distinguish the social and psychological processes involved in non-violent intergroup conflict from the dynamics violent confrontations (Brubaker & Laitin, 1998; Elcheroth & Spini, 2011; Gurr, 1993b). Grievances based on intergroup inequalities can certainly, through experiences of relative deprivation, explain non-violent ethno-nationalist mobilization such as voting for a separatist party (e.g., Abrams & Grant, 2012; Grant et al., 2017). But voting or demonstrating is one thing, and taking arms quite another. There is some evidence that killing is deeply aversive to most humans

(Littman & Paluck, 2015). For instance, interviews with WWII combatants show that they often found tactics to avoid shooting the enemy, such as deliberately firing above enemy lines, even when faced with enemy fire (Grossman, 2014). Individuals who cross the line by entering violent groups most likely find themselves stuck in a vicious cycle, where the reasons that make them indulging in violent acts can have very little to do with what initially made them cross the line (Littman & Paluck, 2015).

Independently of what explains the formation and commitment to violent groups, living in a context torn by sustained violence profoundly change how people experience their identities and the logic underlying individual choices. A crucial factor determining such change is individuals' awareness that one of their group membership puts them at risk of being a target of violence (Elcheroth & Reicher, 2017). Findings in chapter 5 are not only coherent with this point. They further show that this awareness can persist for years after the violence formally ends: ethno-cultural and ethno-class identities were the only configurations overrepresented in contexts relatively exposed to violence and also the only configurations partly defined by individuals' perception that their ethnic identity made them potential targets of violence. While communities characterized by an ethno-cultural identity had generally appropriated this identity and turned it into a source of identification and cohesion, individuals fitting in the ethno-class type experienced this sense of threat independently of how they actually identified with their ethnic group. In the context of the former Yugoslavia, ethnographic evidence similarly shows that the war forced individuals to constantly base their everyday decisions – for instance, about who to trust or expect help from – on ethnicity, independently of the importance they intimately attached to ethnic distinctions (Macek, 2009). Similarly, patterns of resettlements during the Yugoslav wars show that individuals' resettlement decisions were dictated by their religious affiliation independently of how they were actually committed to it, as measured by actual religious practice (Gauthier & Widmer, 2014). In general, such findings indicate that in order to understand processes of social change in contexts torn by violence, we cannot simply assume that social-psychological mechanisms underlying collective behavior in peace-time are applicable. War-time decision-making is not business as usual, so to speak. Rather, studying intergroup relations in (post-)war contexts implies to study how people think about and enact their group memberships when they become aware of their own *vulnerability* (Elcheroth & Spini, 2014).

If collective violence is such a 'game changer', it might be worth trying to clarify whether different types of violence have different social consequences. In this regard, Sandra Penic and her colleagues have made an important contribution by showing, in the context of the former Yugoslavia, that collective violence tends to worsen intergroup relations when it disproportionally affects members of one conflicting group (i.e. asymmetric violence) while, on the contrary, collective violence fosters inclusive intergroup attitudes when it is blind to the boundaries politicized by the conflict (Penic, Elcheroth, & Spini, 2016; Penic et al., 2017). An important question given the theoretical approach defended in this thesis concerns the specific features of violence that are likely to produce periods of instability or, on the contrary, to reinforce stability. In chapter 2 (section 2.1.3), we have encountered an instance of the stabilizing effect of violence in the testimony of James Baldwin. In his case, racial violence – or rather the mere anticipation of it – served to reinforce the institution of segregation by forcing African-Americans to be constantly aware of their skin color and expect a violent backlash if they trespass the boundaries defined by this racist legal framework. Considering the examples of violence fostering instability we have encountered in the introduction, and the identity-defining war-events identified in chapter 5, the most striking difference appears to lie in both the (larger) scale and (greater) rapidity. Whether we consider the expulsion of the Northern Muslims by the LTTE (Citizens' Commission, 2012), the brutal end of the civil war in 2009 , or the outbreak of the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina (Macek, 2009), all these events broke relatively rapidly and at such a massive scale that direct testimonies typically leave the impression of something properly apocalyptic.

If we shouldn't overestimate our understanding of people's motivations, we should similarly reconsider our tendency to assume that particular identities determine people's behavior. To come back to Anderson's (1983/2006) interrogation, his perplexity not only illustrated that we can be wrong when expecting certain identities to drive violence, but also that such expectations owe as much to the ideological narratives prevailing around us as to empirical facts. In the case of Anderson, his perplexity seems to derive from the fact that nationalist violence directly with expectations based on ideological narrative of the Cold War, which still prevailed at the time. But after more than three decades of sustained scholarly attention to ethnic violence, we might have lost our initial perplexity and developed expectations that violence should follow ethnic lines. But we have seen (section 1.2.3) that

periods of collective violence are also periods were the definition of identities can drastically change in very short amounts of time in a manner that is extremely sensitive to objective circumstances and prevailing narratives. Since the definition of the 'sides' is systematically at the heart of intergroup conflicts (Elcheroth & Reicher, 2017), there is much to be gained in taking some distance with widely available narratives and making the transformation of identities during periods of instability a systematic focus of empirical inquiry.

Taking such a distance implies that we pay attention to the prevailing ideological narratives and show some skepticism towards the labels that they define. When reviewing the trajectory of research on the 'prejudiced personality' (see section 2.2.1), we have seen that researchers sometimes came to believe that labels defining contemporary ideological enemies (e.g. 'fascists', 'communists' or 'totalitarians') actually had an objective essence located in a flawed personality. When we turn our attention to today's political context, the 'ideological foes' have changed, but the not necessary the lack of skepticism toward the associated labels. Military interventions of Western powers have been, for two decades, routinely elaborated into an overarching ideological narrative about 'War on Terror', which can now be drawn upon to justify all sorts of political decisions (Nadarajah & Sriskandarajah, 2005). In such a context, one is struck to find psychological research that identifies 'terrorism' or 'radicalism' that connects such labels with a key personality trait (*i.e.* need for personal significance) and cooperate with the Sri Lankan government in a 'deradicalization program for LTTE terrorists' (Webber et al., 2017).

6.3 Methodological contributions: uncovering complex identities through surveys

If there is one single recommendation for future research on intergroup conflict to be taken from this thesis, it would be the following: *whenever possible, the group identities that researchers use to explain some collective outcome should be uncovered through empirical inquiry and studied in interaction with one another*. This recommendation is especially relevant for social psychological research. Social psychologists have accumulated an impressive amount of knowledge about the consequences for intergroup conflict of individuals' identification with a particular group (Roccas & Elster, 2012), of different forms of identification with (Leidner et al., 2010; Penic, Elcheroth, & Reicher, 2016; Roccas et al., 2006,

2008) or different definitions of (Livingstone & Haslam, 2008) the ingroup and, of identification with multiple groups perceived as more or less different (Roccas & Brewer, 2002; Schmid et al., 2013; Xin et al., 2016), to mention just a sample. Social psychologists are therefore in a privileged position to shed light on the determinants of individuals' attitudes and behavior in contexts where particular identities are politicized. But in order to examine the consequences of particular definitions of group identities, one needs to establish how they are defined in the first place. The alternative is to posit a pre-defined set of social categories and assess the consequences of endorsing them. But, by leaving the consequences of alternative definitions of identities unobserved, such an approach precludes us from any certainty that our observations actually explain a given collective outcome. The best solution to this problem, I have argued, is to derive the relevant social cleavages inductively instead guessing what they are.

In that sense, the most important methodological contribution of this thesis is to propose a concrete procedure to do precisely that. More specifically, the measurement and analytic approach developed in chapter 4 and further elaborated in chapter 5 was designed to empirically extract the different definitions of social identities that co-exist within a particular sample. The inductive orientation of this approach is made possible by relaxing the constraint imposed by researchers' *a priori* assumptions about the particular social categories that are relevant to consider. Instead of framing measurement items with pre-defined social groups, respondents are presented with a range of identity markers and can decide for themselves whether or not each one constitutes a relevant aspect of their social identity. The first thing to note in this regard is that constraint is a relative notion here: the range of potentially relevant identity markers is virtually infinite and selecting a subset among them necessarily involves *a priori* assumptions as well. Thus using such an inductive tool doesn't exempt researchers from identifying identity markers that are plausibly consequential for a given outcome in a given context. The list of identity markers used in chapter 4 and 5 is certainly not meant to be fixed, but can rather be flexibly adapted to meet the demands of a particular research question and context of study. A particularly promising way to proceed, although practically demanding, would be to (partially) constitute the list of identity markers based on preliminary open-ended interviews and/or ethnographic observations specifically focusing on the social cleavages that structure everyday experiences at strategically chosen

locations. Another key novelty of this measurement approach to social identities is to assess how respondents perceive identity markers to matter not only from their own perspective, but from relevant others' perspective as well. This specificity proved particularly essential to distinguish different ways in which ethnicity can become central to individuals' social identity, especially in relation to violence.

Importantly, the empirical typologies and underlying dimensions identified in chapter 4 and 5 are *relative* constructs, that is, they locate individuals within a space defined by other individuals' position. This means that, in order to ensure that the typology ecologically valid, one needs a sample that is as close as possible to be representative of a *consistent social system*. In that sense, a great strength of the findings presented in chapter 5 is their being based on a representative sample of the adult population of Sri Lanka. Since the dimensional analyses used to extract a dimensional space where the position of an observation is defined by the position of others, analyses performed only on fragments of a social system might exclude important reference points and hence produce a dimensional space that does not reflect the most structuring oppositions in the system. Working with a nationally representative sample, on the other hand, we can have some confidence that the dimensions we extract are readily interpretable as the main oppositions the structure societal debates.

In an important sense, I have only scratched the surface of the possibilities offered by such an inductive approach. An important step forward should be to test how such inductively extracted identity configurations perform in predicting key conflict-related outcome. Chapter 4 already provided some clues of that different identity configurations related to different political stances with regard to conflict memories. Such findings, however, are hardly decisive. The logical next step, I suggest, would be to relate inductively extracted identity configuration to voting intentions during periods of decisive political controversies. More traditionally, examining relationship between identity configurations and intergroup attitudes would be enable us to assess their predictive relevance for future intergroup conflicts. Furthermore, such endeavor would certainly be informative on how to interpret the identity configurations themselves.

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Appendix A

Supplementary material for Chapter 3

Content of the war memories vignettes

Table A1. Content of the vignettes

Label	Vignette
1. Attacked at home	*I remember how one afternoon enemy combatants attacked our village. People were in their homes, eating their food and doing house work as usual, when suddenly gunshots started. Neighboring houses were attacked simultaneously, while people scrambled to escape. There was much bloodshed that day. It changed our lives forever.*
2. Collectively expelled	*In our village we lived amidst sporadic warfare between the multiple armed groups. One day the families of our ethnic group were asked by one of the armed groups to evacuate our homes and leave the district permanently. We had to leave behind our homes, belongings, and properties on which we had lived for many generations before. The request came suddenly and we had to leave within one week. When we inquired as to why we were being sent out, we were merely told that they were following orders from their leaders and that no one knew why these orders were issued.*
3. Staying near frontline	*Following enemy attacks on our village, we collectively decided to stay in our village bordering the enemy territory. We knew that if we retreat, every village after ours will retreat as well. Therefore, with great risk to our lives, we stayed on. We developed strategies like staying in our village during day and hiding in the forests during the night. It was important that we protected our village against being taken over by the enemy, for the sake of our children and future generations.*

4. Helping the displaced	*After the enemy had attacked my parent's village, many families escaped and had no place to stay anymore. These people where then helped by other villagers to find a place to stay. Some stayed at my parents' home, although we had only a small house, and we couldn't afford to feed them all. But we looked after them until the villagers found them alternate places to reside, where they would be safe from further enemy attacks.*
5. Divided by an army attack	*In my village, we used to live united and peacefully for decades among people from different religious background. We jointly celebrated each other's holidays and played sports together. But when their army came to the village and attacked us, they did nothing to help us. Some of them even aided the soldiers in finding members of my group. I will never forgive their betrayal and cowardice.*
6. Hiding the persecuted	*During the war we supported villagers who belonged to the other ethnic group in many ways. There were times when our soldiers would come to search for them. During those times we would dress them as our own people, pretend they were one of us, and include them in our cultural practices. Soldiers would search our village but would not be able to identify them so they would leave.*
7. Radicalised by morning	*I joined an armed movement as I was angered by the death of my sister who was killed in a bomb attack by another armed group. I wanted to act on my grief and anger. I trained to fight with the movement I joined and soon I started participating in various armed actions. We attacked them to retaliate for the suffering that they caused to us. I found that my anger had some release.*

8. Blackmailed by combatants	*My husband bore arms because he wanted to fight for our people. When I inquired if he would be allowed to leave, I was told that we would have to make a payment. I didn't have any money with me so I pawned jewelry to come up with the required amount. However, I was not successful in securing his release. Later when a female community member became vocal about such issues, she was disappeared as well.*

Supplementary analyses: spill-over effect

Our spill-over hypothesis suggests that, when language appeared to have a strong normative importance, the violent politicization of this identity marker increased perceptions of threat and discrimination based on other identity markers as well as on language. This argument rests on the assumption that *normative importance* of language predicts perceived threat and discrimination (at least partially) independently from intimate importance of language.

In order to disentangle their effects, we conducted linear regression models predicting respondents mean levels of perceived threat/discrimination (results were identical when analysing perceived threat and discrimination separately, so we averaged them and report the results for this average score). When both intimate and normative importance of language are introduced as independent predictors (model *(1)*), normative importance still significantly predicts perceived threat/discrimination (β =0.41, t(389)=3.29, $p<.05$). Moreover, when we include the interaction term (model (2)), the latter is significant (β=-0.61, t(389)=-2.26, $p<.05$). Simple effects analysis reveals that normative importance of language positively predicts perceived discrimination/threat only for participants who didn't choose language as important for themselves (β=0.59, t(389)=4.01, $p<.05$; see Figure). These results clearly show that normative importance of language increased perceptions of threat and discrimination *based on other identity markers than language*; otherwise we would only observe an effect of normative importance for respondents who chose language as important for self-definition.

Table A2. Regression models of perceived threat and discrimination.

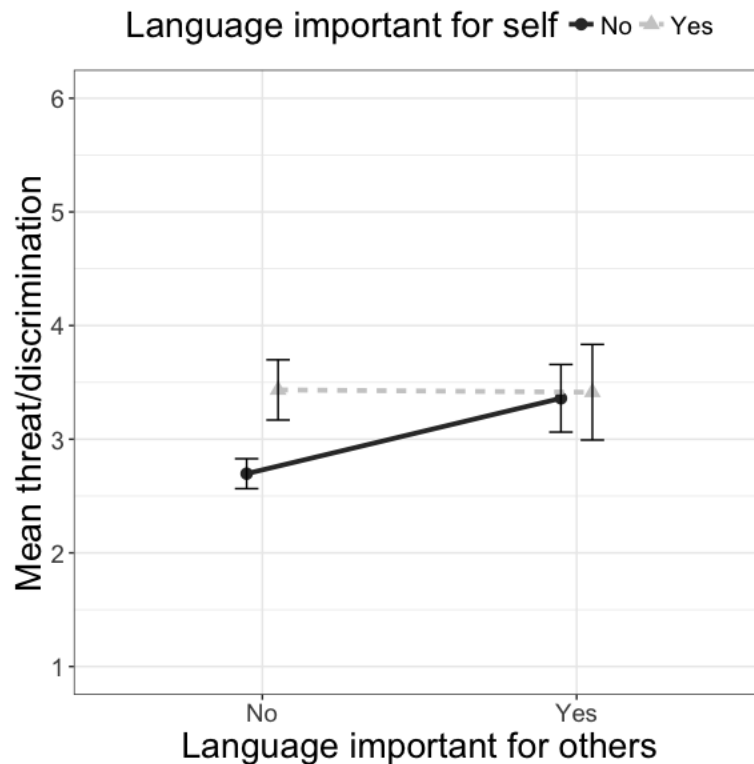|	(1)		(2)	
	β	Std. Error	β	Std. Error
Intercept	-0.19**	0.06	-0.22***	0.06
Language important for self	0.51***	0.12	0.66***	0.14
Language important for others	0.41**	0.12	0.59***	0.15
Important for self * Important for others	-	-	-0.61*	0.27

Figure A1. Simple effects of choosing language as important for others on perceived threat/discrimination as a function of the choice of language as important for self.

Supplementary analyses: Selection of identity members as a function of linguistic group and cluster membership

To analyse how the commitment dimension relates to linguistic group membership in a more fine-grained manner, Figure A2 displays the rate of respondents within both groups who selected each category as relevant either for self or for others, with categories arranged along the *x*-axis in order of increasing loading on the commitment dimension (from left to right). It appears that the categories ranking on this dimension almost perfectly reflects their ranking according to their likelihood of selection by Sinhala-speaking respondents ($r_s(12)=0.97$, $p<.001$). The pattern tends to more erratic for Tamil-speaking respondents and the corresponding relationship appears even reversed ($r_s(12)=-0.64$, $p<.05$).

Figure A3 further displays the likelihood of selecting each identity markers as important for self and others as a function of cluster membership.
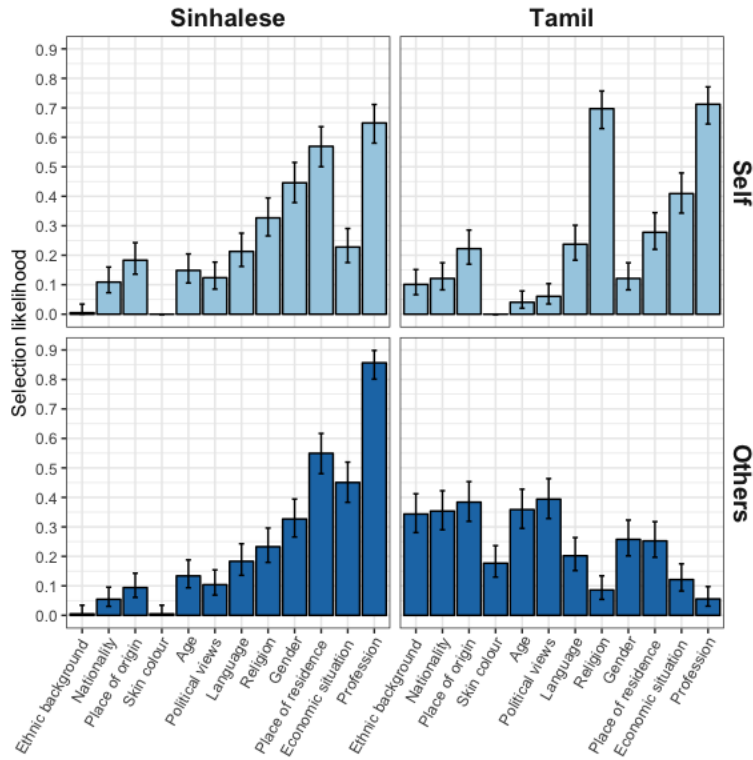
Figure A2. Likelihood of selection of each identity marker as important for self-definition (dark bars, top panels) and as normatively important (light bars, bottom panels) depending on respondents' language.
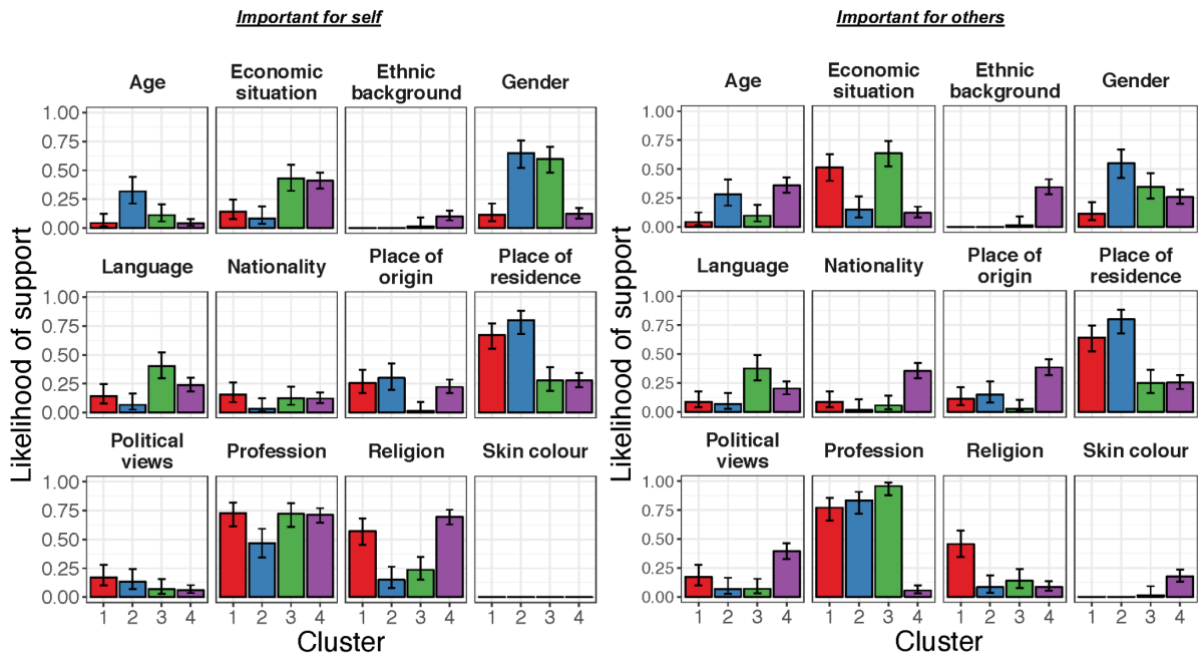

Figure A3. Selection likelihood of each identity as self-defining (left panel) and normative (right panel) by cluster.

Two important findings emerge from a more detailed analysis of the relationship between conflict experiences and the fate dimension. First, a linear regression model shows that the effect of conflict victimization on fate is moderated by linguistic group membership (β=-0.23, t(396)=-2.83, $p<.01$). While having faced a least one conflict victimization experience predicts a lower score on the fate dimension among Sinhalese-speaking respondents (β=-0.33, t(396)=-2.52, $p<.05$), the relationship is in the opposite direction among Tamil-speaking respondents (β=0.47, t(396)=3.39, $p<.001$; see Figure A4).
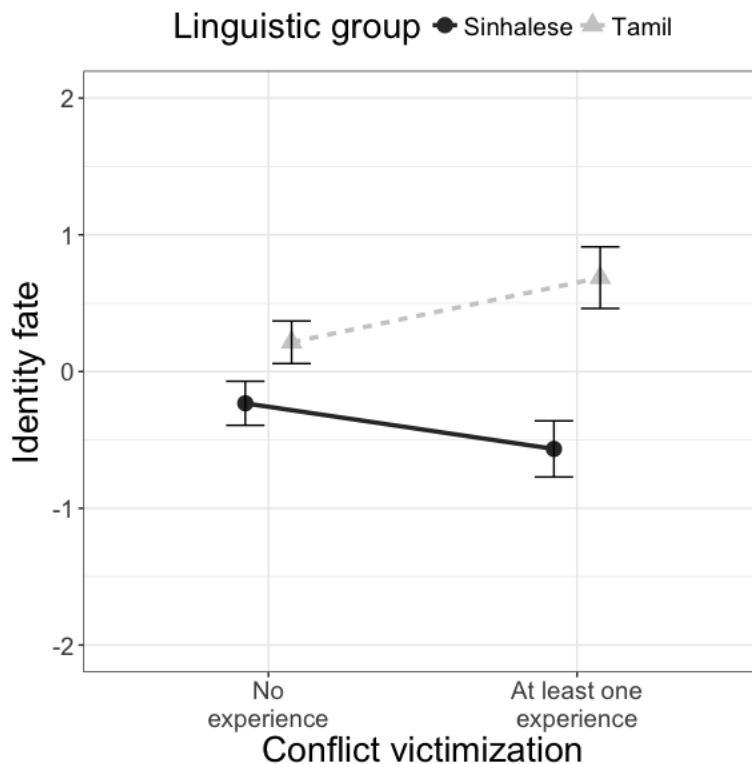

Figure A4. Simple effects of conflict victimization experiences on scores on the dimension of fate depending on linguistic group membership.

Second, it appears that among Sinhalese respondents the effect of conflict victimization on identity fate is explained by other variables. When including the experience of carrying a weapon and the number of economic hardships in the model in addition to the number of conflict victimization experiences, the latter does not predict scores on the fate dimension anymore (β=0.01, t(192)=0.08, *n.s.*). Furthermore, paths analyses conducted with the *Lavaan* package for R (Rosseel, 2012), shows that the effect of conflict victimization on fate is mediated by both the experience of having carried a weapon (β = -0.17, *IC* = [-0.29, -0.06]) and by economic hardship experiences ((β = -0.22, *IC* = [-0.39, -0.05]; see Figure A5).
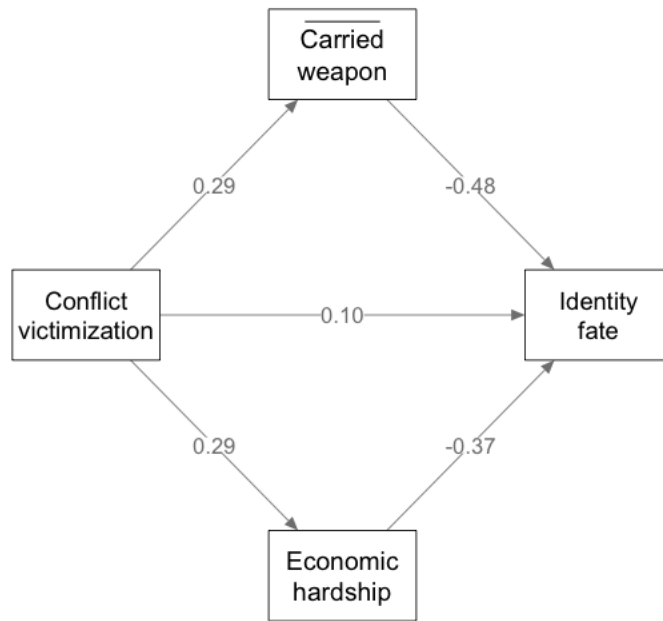
Figure A5. Path diagrams showing indirect effects of conflict victimization on the fate dimension through the experience of having carried a weapon and economic hardships experience.

Table A3. Distribution of ethnic and religious groups in DS Divisions covered in the present survey according to the 2012 official census

District	DS Division	Ethnic groups				Religious groups				
		Sinhalese	Sri Lank. Tamil	Indian Tamil	Sri Lank Moor	Buddhist	Hindu	Muslim	Roman catholic	Other Christian
Ampara	Uhana	99.93	0.06	0.00	0.01	99.61	0.04	0.02	0.13	0.21
	Ampara	98.74	0.41	0.02	0.31	97.16	0.33	0.73	1.23	0.54
	Irakkamam (Eragama)	6.58	2.38	0.11	90.92	6.59	2.48	90.89	0.01	0.02
	Akkaraipattu	0.45	0.08	0.07	99.37	0.44	0.15	99.37	0.02	0.02
	Alayadiwembu	1.06	97.57	0.30	0.11	1.06	85.48	0.12	8.83	4.52
	Damana	99.50	0.09	0.02	0.35	99.02	0.09	0.39	0.33	0.18
Matale	Pallepola	92.36	2.24	1.69	3.67	92.08	3.62	3.70	0.40	0.19
	Yatawatta	83.31	3.46	6.66	6.48	82.95	8.90	6.53	1.24	0.38
	Matale	62.30	16.03	2.44	18.63	61.27	16.67	19.15	1.93	0.97
	Ambanganga (Korale)	75.22	7.54	16.74	0.48	74.88	23.10	0.49	0.86	0.67
	Raththota (Rattota)	71.97	6.94	16.97	3.88	71.38	22.33	4.09	1.21	0.98
	Ukuwela	64.76	5.11	9.29	20.52	64.30	13.07	20.84	1.24	0.54

Appendix B

Supplementary material for Chapter 4

Choice of spatial weights for the contextual indicators of violence and poverty

Figures B1 and B2 show the effect of spatial weights on modeling the contextual impact of violence and poverty, respectively, with different distance parameters (*i.e.* points of inflexion of the kernel function which are referred to as bandwidth): 0, 10, 20, 30, 40, and 50 km bandwidth. As the bandwidth increases, the spatial distribution of both indicators is 'smoothed' into more coherent patterns. This process contributes to correct the sampling error in addition to modeling spatial dependencies between areas. However, both figures show that the increasing bandwidth produces a loss of local differentiation. 20 and 30 km bandwidth appear to form a good compromise between local differentiation and smooth distribution of the indicators.

Figure B3 shows the correlations between contextual indicators of violence based on our sample and the number of conflict events in the area according to the UCDP conflict dataset as a function of the bandwidth used to compute spatial weights (Sundberg & Melander, 2013). The increasing correlations show that the correction of sampling errors results in a gain of convergent validity, but the gain stops at 20 km.

Figure B4 displays correlations between contextual indicators of violence and poverty as a function of spatial weights. These correlations indicate that, as the bandwidth increases, indicators of exposure to violence and poverty become increasingly redundant. Furthermore, this redundancy starts to substantially after 20 km bandwidth.

Overall, these analyses suggest that 20 km constitute a satisfactory compromise between convergent validity (of the indicator of exposure to violence with the UCDP data) and divergent validity (between indicators of exposure to violence and poverty).
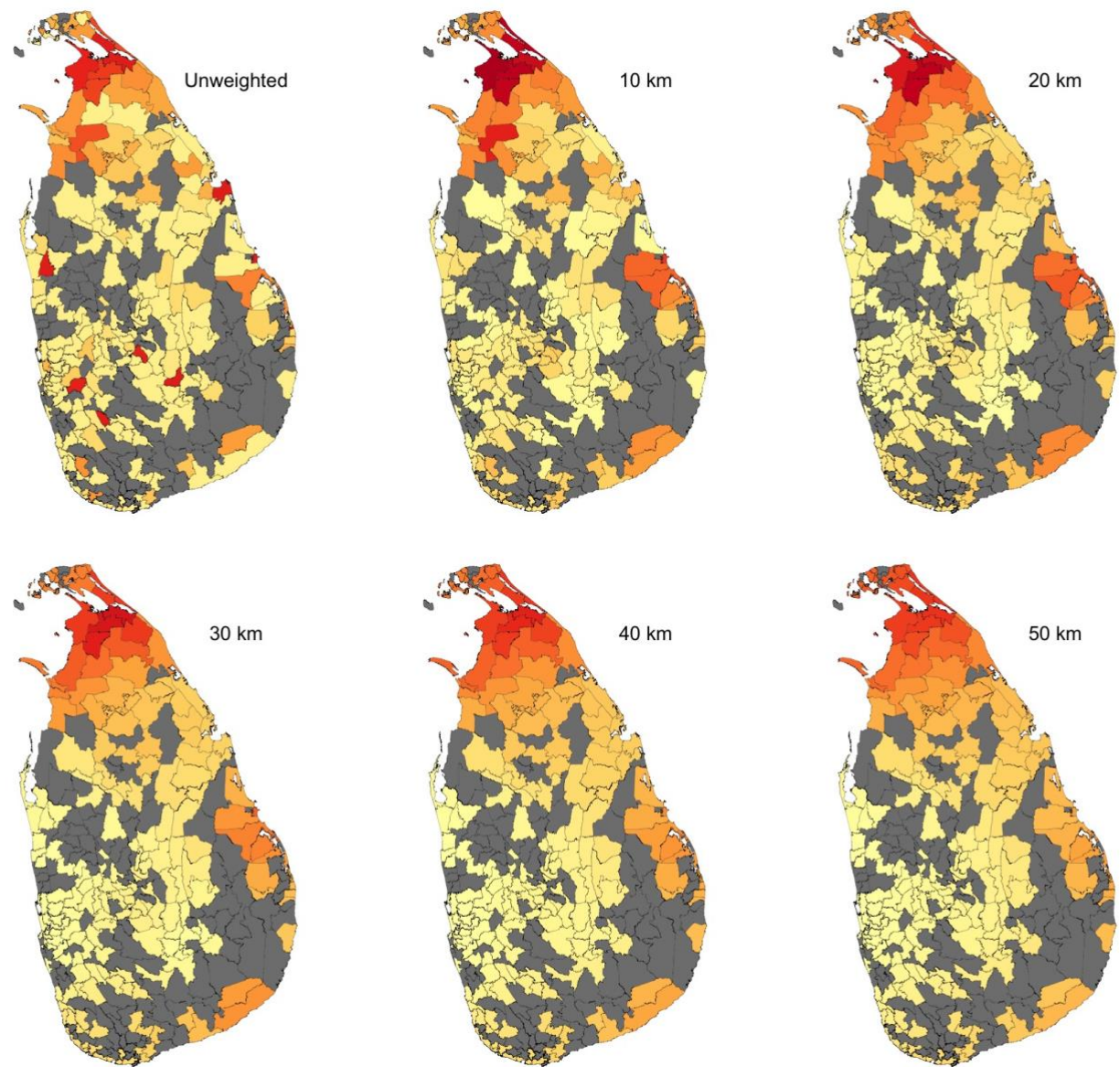
Figure B1. Modelization of contextual exposure to violence as a function of different bandwidth used for computing spatial weights.
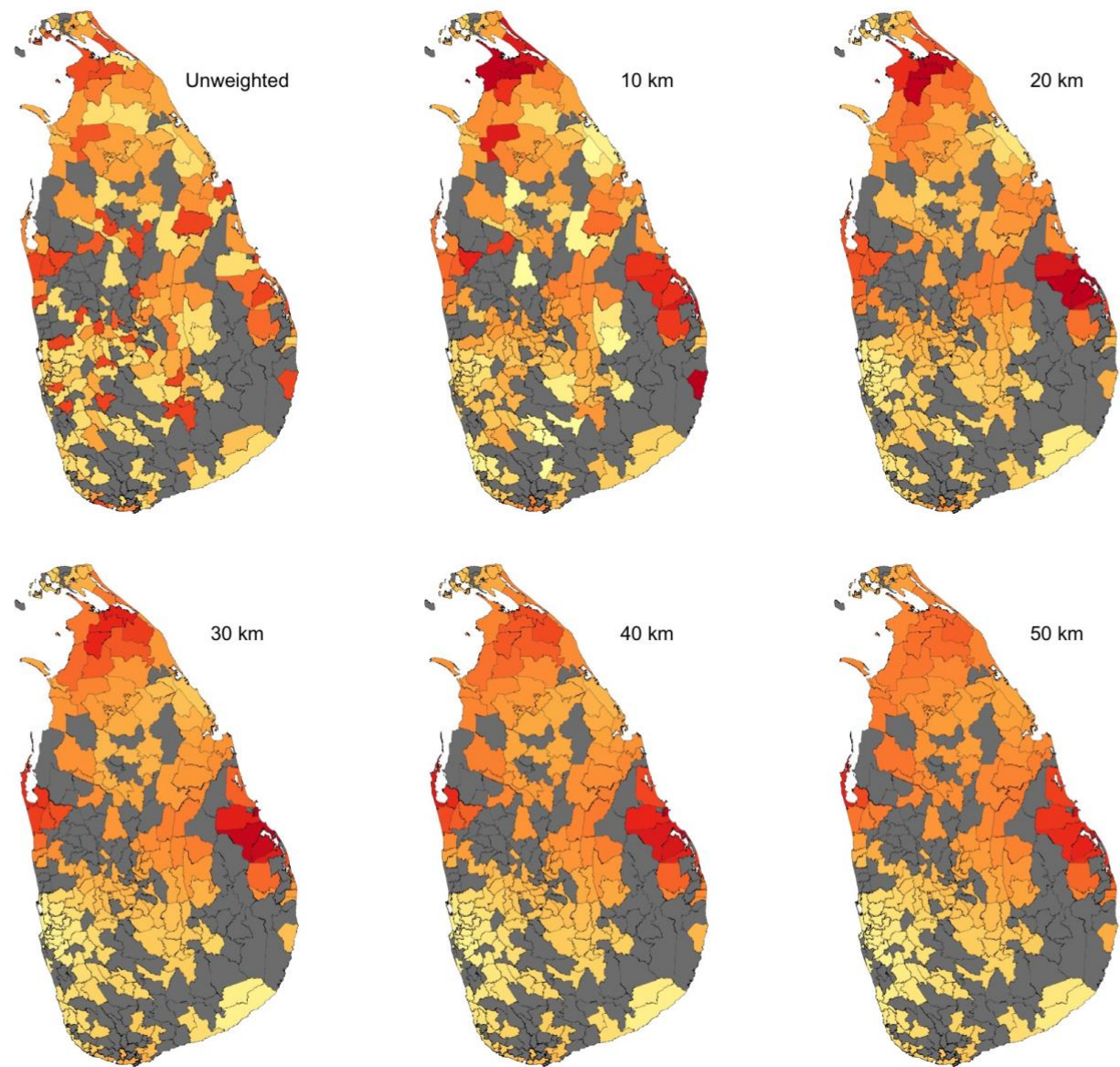
Figure B2. Modelization of contextual exposure to poverty as a function of different bandwidth used for computing spatial weights.
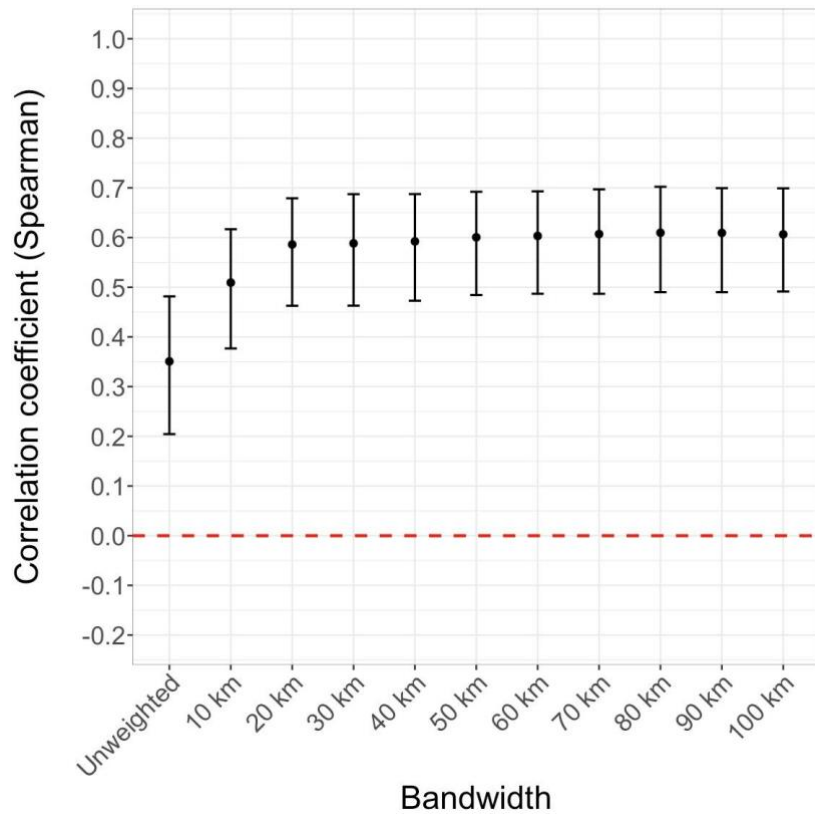
Figure B3. Correlations between contextual indicators of violence based on our sample and the number of conflict events in the area according to the UCDP conflict dataset as a function of the bandwidth used to compute spatial weights (spearman's rho; error bars indicate 95 % bias-corrected bootstrapped confidence intervals, Sundberg & Melander, 2013).
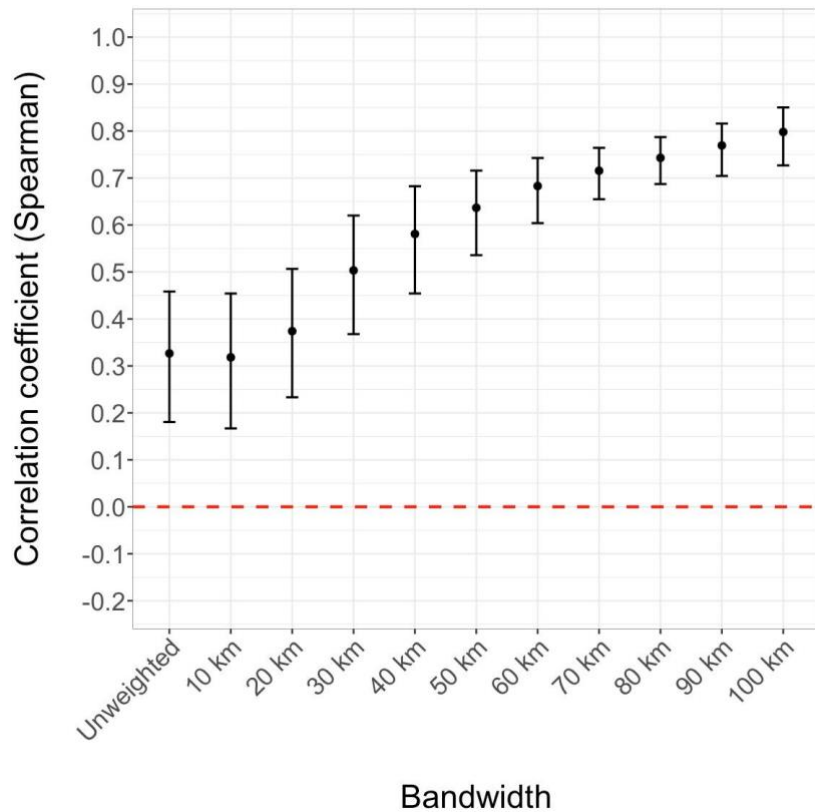
Figure B4. Correlations between contextual indicators of violence and poverty as a function of spatial weights (spearman's rho; error bars indicate 95 % bias-corrected bootstrapped confidence intervals).

Interpretations of contextual indicators of violence and poverty

In order to better interpret our contextual indicators of exposure to violence (and poverty), we further computed a generalization of risk index (GRI; see Spini et al., 2008) which assesses the degree to which victimization generalizes across group boundaries (or, if small, selectively affects individuals based on their group membership). An examination of the scatterplot displaying the relationship between conflict and conflict GRI shows that virtually no area is high on both conflict exposure and conflict GRI. In other words, contextual violence in Sri Lanka should be interpreted as systematically *asymmetric* (see Penic et al., 2017), *i.e.* as affecting individuals selectively as a function of their ethnic group membership.
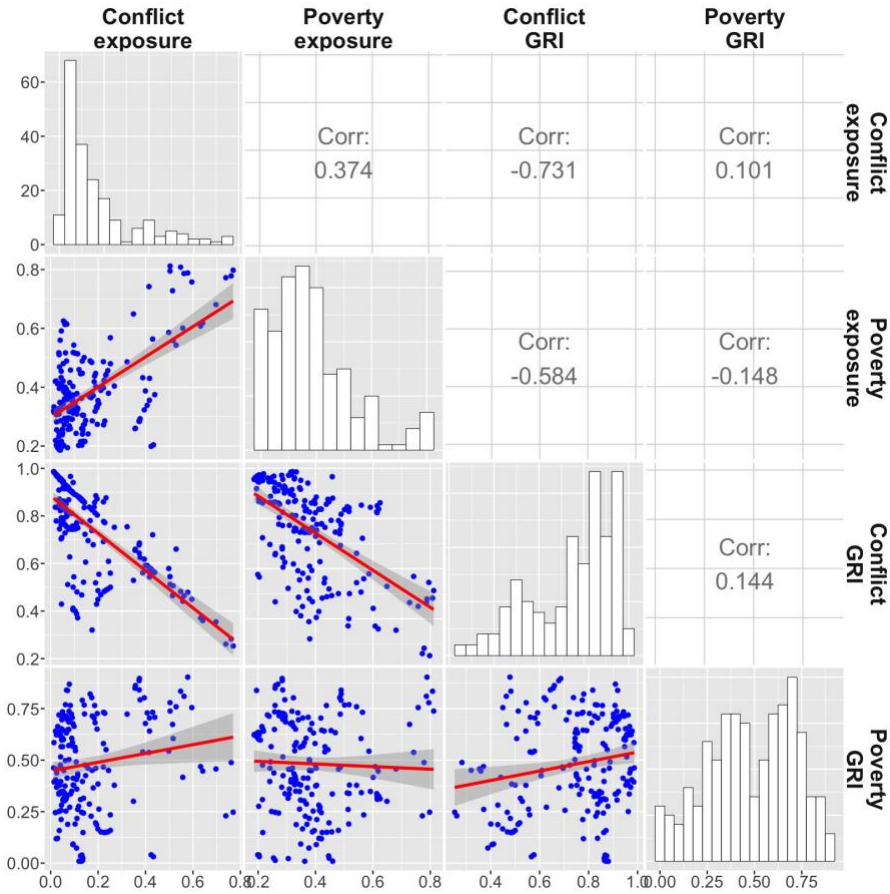

Figure B4. Correlation matrix between contextual indicators of exposure to poverty, violence, and generalization of risks (GRI) of violence and poverty. The diagonal displays distributions.
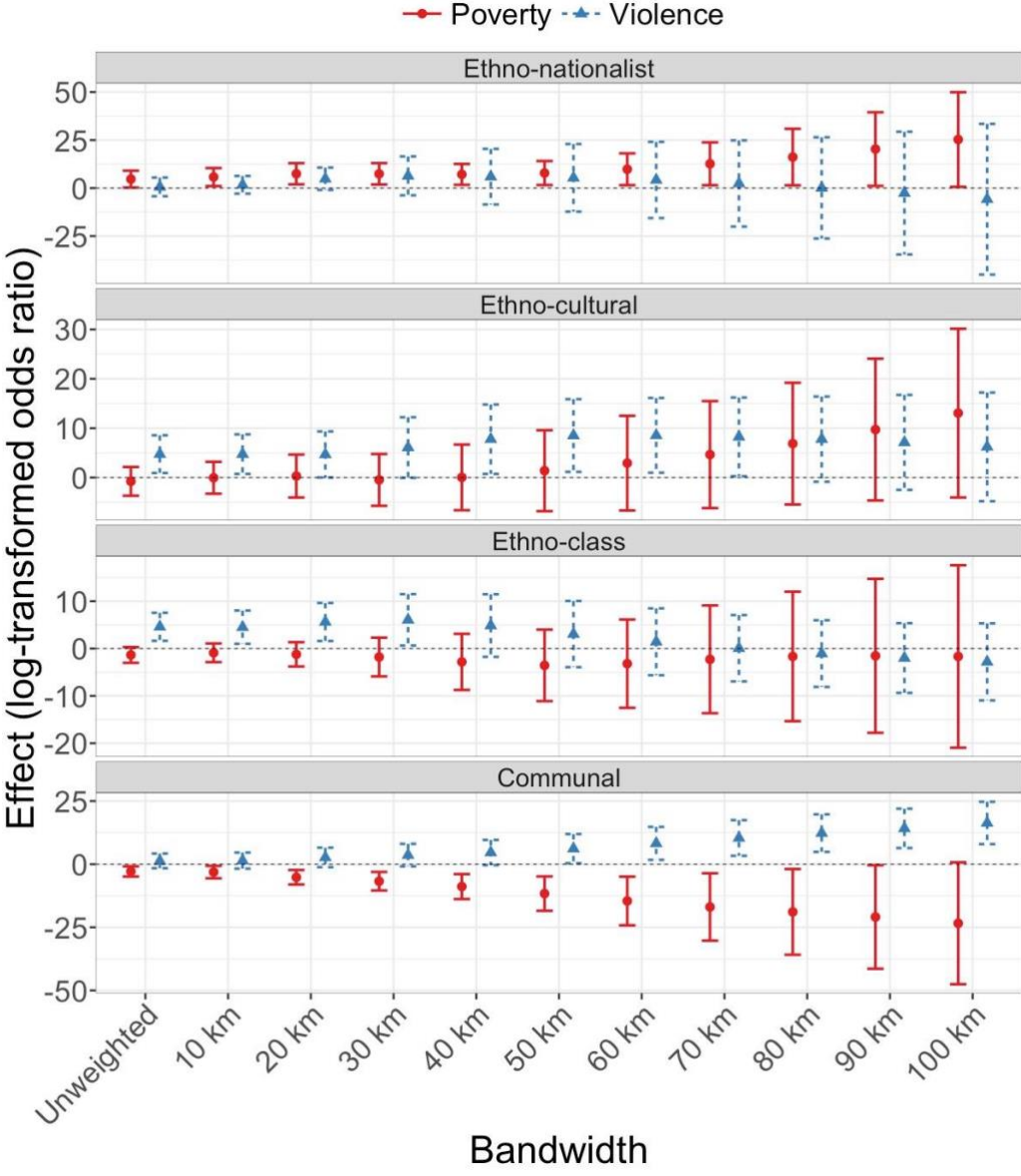
Figure B5. Coefficients of contextual indicators of violence and poverty for different multinomial multilevel regression models as a function of bandwidth.

Appendix C

Defining the number of clusters (Chapter 5)

When using the procedure described by Charrad and colleagues (following the 'majority rule'; Charrad et al., 2012), results systematically suggested that the minimum number of clusters was the best (i.e. two clusters if the minimum is set at two, three if the minimum is set at three, etc). This most likely reflected the fact that by far most of the variance in the MCA was explained by the first dimension, which implies that scores vary more strongly on the first dimension compared to others (for the ethno-nationalism dimension, $SD = 0.36$, while for other dimensions $0.17 < SD < 0.22$). Thus, indices of clusters' validity would heavily penalize clustering based on other dimensions to the extent that it is at the expense of neat clustering on the first dimension. Given our theoretical interest in dimensions defined by ethnic markers, blindly following the algorithm is thus problematic since it would lead to only differentiate two identity configurations, based exclusively on the dimension of ethno-nationalism.

In order to reach a clustering solution which is theoretically useful, we constrained the algorithm to assess the best solution between four and ten clusters (*i.e.* setting four clusters as the minimum in principle allows at least one cluster being distinct from others on each dimension discussed in Chapter 4). Again, the majority of indices (eight indices) suggest that the minimum number of clusters (*i.e.* four clusters) is the best solution; and the other most suggested solutions are five clusters (suggested by five indices), and six clusters (also suggested by five indices). Figures C1 and C2 shows the clusters' location for each of these solutions on the dimensions extracted by the MCA.

Figure C1. Positions of clusters on two dimensions extracted by the MCA based on different clustering solutions. In the clustering solution retained in chapter 5, purple triangles correspond to the *communal* configuration, orange squares to the *ethnocultural*, and red circles to the *ethno-nationalist* one. Ellipses assume a multivariate *t* distribution.
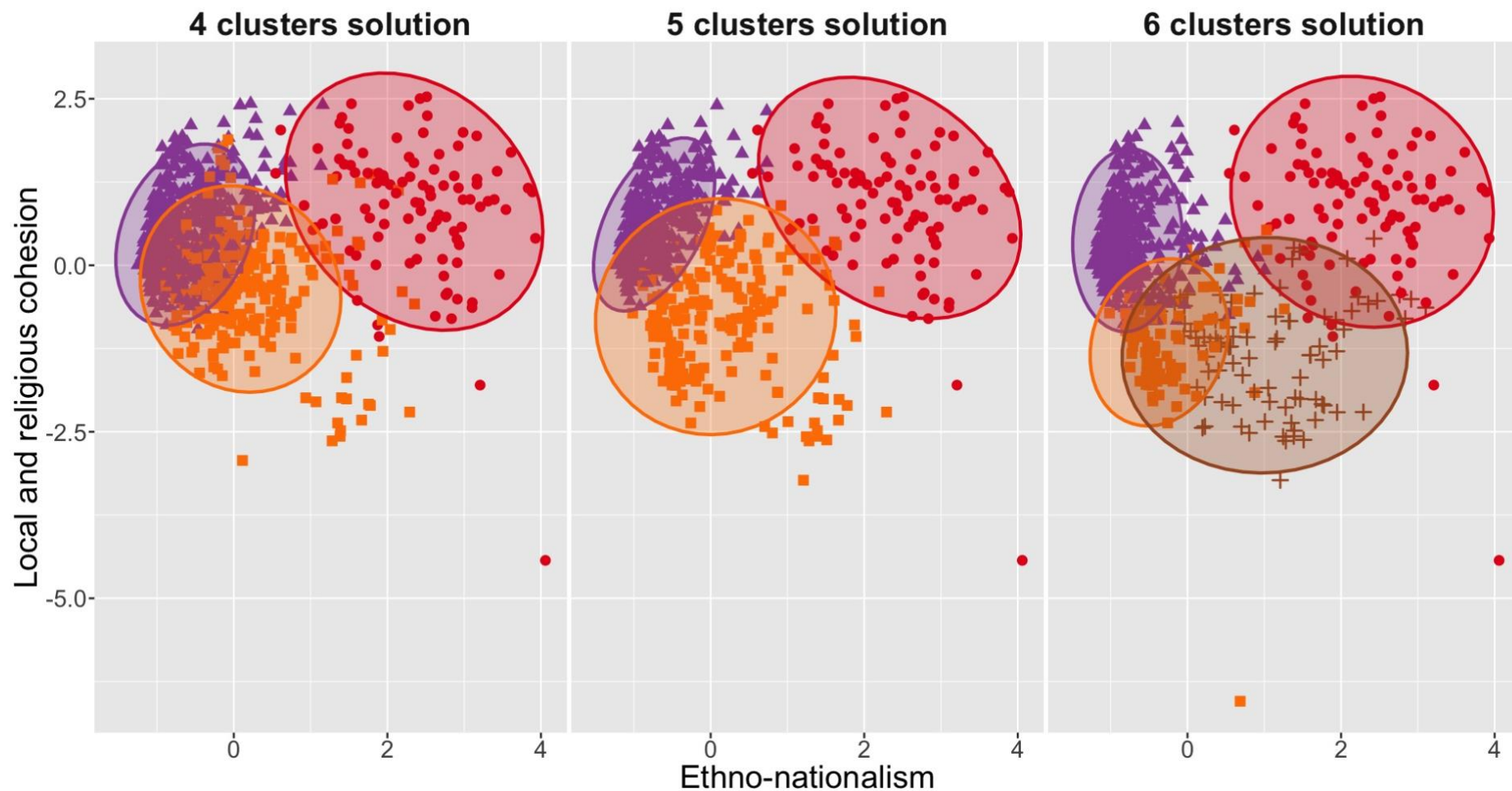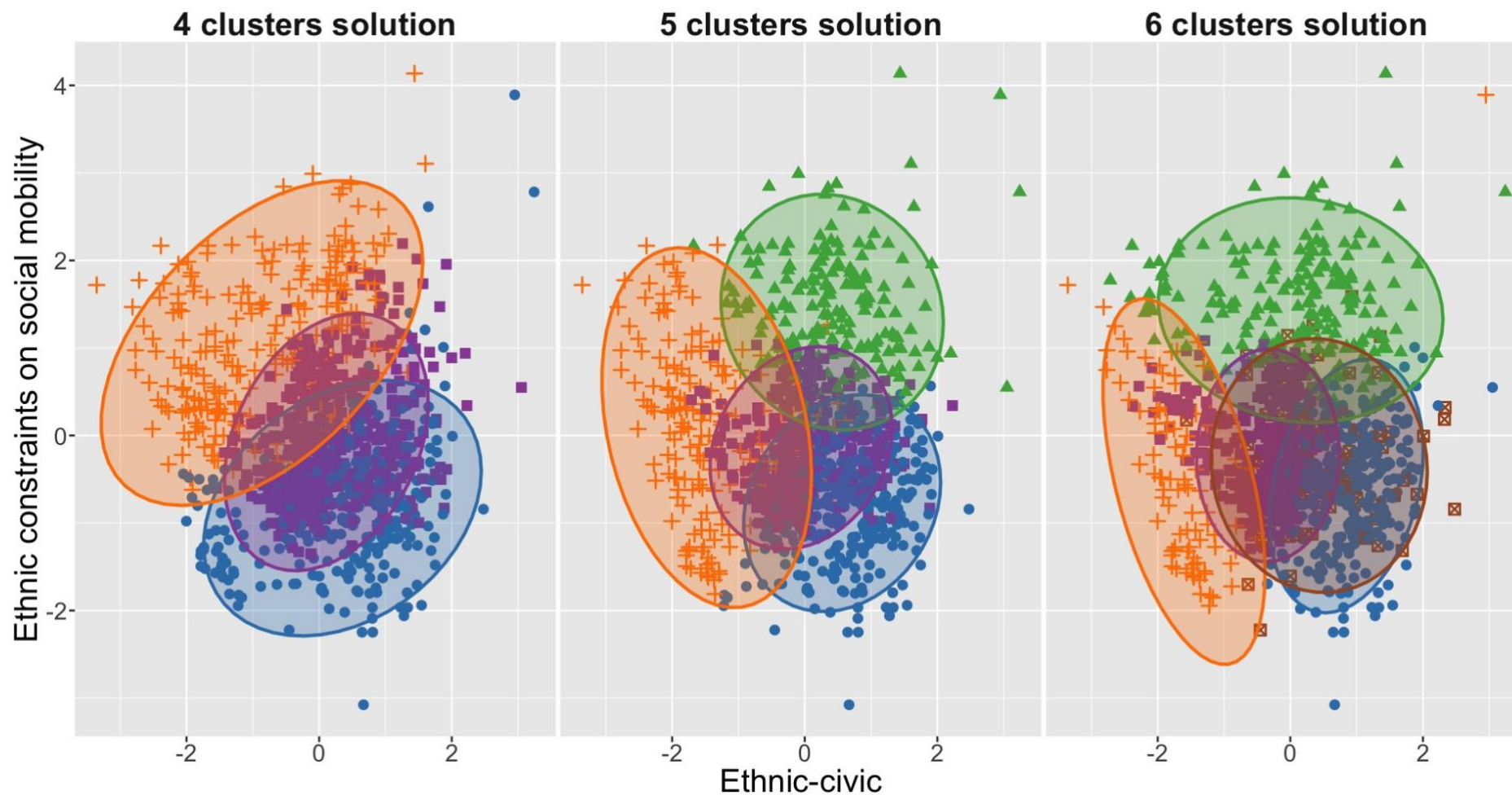
Figure C2. Positions of clusters on two dimensions extracted by the MCA based on different clustering solutions. In the clustering solution retained in chapter 5, purple squares correspond to the *communal* configuration, orange crosses to the *ethnocultural*, blue circles to the *civic*, and green triangles to the *ethno-class* one. Ellipses assume a multivariate *t* distribution.

When comparing the four-clusters solution with the one retained in chapter 5 (i.e. five clusters), the most important difference is that the former solution doesn't distinguish between what we have termed ethno-class and ethno-cultural identity configurations (see figure C2, compare left and middle panel). In order to assess how retaining this solution would affect our conclusions, we fitted the same multilevel multinomial model as the one shown in Table 3, chapter (model 2), using the membership in one of the four clusters as the outcome. The cluster formed by blue dots in Figure C2, left panel (*i.e.* the closest to our civic identity configuration) was defined as the reference group. The only different conclusion compared to our results is that contextual exposure to violence only predicts membership to the orange cluster.

When comparing the six-clusters solution with the one retained in chapter (i.e. five clusters), two notable changes occur. First, a new cluster (*i.e.* the location of which is not easily identifiable with that of any cluster in the five-clusters solution) is distinguished. The only feature makes this cluster distinct from all others, is that it occupies an intermediate position on the dimension of ethno-nationalism (see Figure C1, right panel). On the theoretically-important dimensions shown in Figure C2, the six-clusters solution doesn't provide more information (compared to the five-clusters solution) since the brown cluster clearly overlaps with two other clusters (blue and purple). Second, compared to the five-clusters solution, the six-clusters solution drastically reduces the number of individuals within the orange cluster (*i.e.* our ethno-cultural identity configuration; from n = 191 to n = 98, a reduction of 48.69%). Detailed examination of the clusters' frequencies and ethnic compositions shows that participants classified as ethno-cultural in the five-clusters solution mostly transfer to the new (brown) cluster, the purple and the green clusters when a six-clusters solution is adopted. In order to assess how retaining this solution would affect our conclusions, we fitted the same multilevel multinomial model as the one shown in Table 3, chapter (model 2), using the membership in one of the six clusters as the outcome. Again, the cluster formed by blue dots in Figure C2, right panel (*i.e.* the closest to our civic identity configuration) was defined as the reference group. In this case, the conclusions differ substantially. First, contextual exposure to violence is now unrelated to membership in the orange cluster whereas exposure to poverty is. Furthermore, exposure to violence is related to both the red and the purple cluster. Otherwise, the conclusions are essentially similar. However, and while it is not obvious from Figure C2, it is noteworthy that the reference cluster (in blue) is highly different in the six-

clusters solution compared to the five-clusters solution: 27.6 % of individuals in the reference cluster in the six-clusters solution were part of another cluster in the five-clusters solution (mostly from the communal group). Moreover, 35.15 % of individuals in the reference group in the five-clusters solution are now spread in other clusters in the five-clusters solution (largely in the brown and purple ones).

Supplementary analyses

Given that the conclusions of the main analyses based on the six-clusters solution deviate from the conclusions we reached in chapter 5, I decided to perform additional analyses in order to further assess the validity of my conclusions. Based on the position of the five clusters identified in chapter 5 on the four dimensions extracted by the MCA, I derived hypotheses about the relationship between each dimension and the contextual indicators of war and poverty. These hypotheses are based on (1) the position of the clusters on the dimension that distinguishes clusters the most and (2) the relationship that we observed between membership in each cluster and contextual indicators of war and poverty. If these hypotheses are confirmed, this should make us more confident in our conclusions since we would reach the converging conclusions through analyses directly based on the dimensions extracted by the MCA, and thus independently of our choice of clustering solution. All these hypotheses were tested using multilevel linear models, one for each dimension defined as the outcome. All models included a random intercept which varied across DS Divisions (i.e. contextual units).

Luckily, the position of the fives clusters that I identified in chapter 5 suggests that our findings about the relationship between cluster membership and contextual indicators of violence and poverty can be straightforwardly translated in terms of relationships between the same contextual indicators and dimensions extracted by the MCA. More specifically, an examination of Figure 5 (chapter 5, p. 225) clearly shows that

(1) the Ethno-nationalist cluster corresponds to a high score on the ethno-nationalist dimensions, while the Communal cluster corresponds to a low score on the same dimension. Given the membership in the ethno-nationalist cluster was positively related, and membership in the Communal cluster negatively related, to contextual exposure to poverty, results in chapter 5 would be supported if *the ethno-*

nationalism dimension is positively related to contextual exposure to poverty (H1). Table C1 shows that it is indeed the case (b = 0.10, p < .05).

Table C1. Multilevel linear regression models predicting the dimension of *Ethno-nationalism*.

		(1)		(2)	
		b	Std. Error	b	Std. Error
Individual	Intercept	0.18***	0.04	0.19***	0.04
	Tamil	-0.34***	0.04	-0.36***	0.04
	Muslim	-0.46***	0.03	-0.47***	0.03
	Woman	0.00	0.01	0.00	0.01
	moved	-0.00	0.02	-0.00	0.02
	Poverty	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.02
	Violence	0.01	0.02	0.01	0.02
Contextual	Poverty	-	-	0.10*	0.04
	Violence	-	-	0.02	0.04
Fit	AIC	-227.16		-232.91	
	BIC	-181.78		-177.46	
	Log-likelihood	122.58		127.46	
	Deviance	-245.16		-254.91	
	$\chi^2(2)$	-		9.76***	

(*) p < .06 * p < .05 ** p < .01 *** p < .001

(2) The ethno-cultural cluster is most distinct from others by its negative score on the ethnic-civic dimension. Given that membership in the ethno-cultural cluster was positively related to exposure to violence, results in chapter 5 would be supported if *the ethnic-civic dimension is negatively related to contextual exposure to violence (H2).* Table C2 shows that it is indeed the case (b = -0.08, p < .01).

Table C2. Multilevel linear regression models predicting the dimension *Ethnic-civic*.

		(1)		(2)	
		b	Std. Error	b	Std. Error
Individual	Intercept	-0.01	0.03	-0.03	0.03
	Tamil	0.06*	0.02	0.08**	0.03
	Muslim	-0.03	0.02	-0.01	0.02
	Woman	-0.01	0.01	-0.01	0.01
	moved	-0.00	0.01	0	0.01
	Poverty	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01
	Violence	0.01	0.01	0.02	0.01
Contextual	Poverty	-	-	-0.03	0.03
	Violence	-	-	-0.08**	0.03
Fit	AIC	-1134.4		-1145.8	
	BIC	-1089.1		-1090.3	
	Log-likelihood	576.22		583.88	
	Deviance	-1152.4		-1167.8	
	$\chi^2(2)$	-		15.33***	

$^{(*)} p < .06$ * $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$

(3) The ethno-class cluster is most distinct from others by its positive score on the ethnic constraints on social mobility dimension. Given that membership in the ethno-class cluster was positively related to contextual exposure to violence, results in chapter 5 would be supported if *the* ethnic constraints on social mobility *dimension is*

positively related to contextual exposure to violence (H3). Table C3 shows that it is

indeed the case (*b* = 0.04, *p* < .05).

Table C3. Multilevel linear regression models predicting the dimension *Ethnic constraints on social mobility*.

		(1)		(2)	
		b	*Std. Error*	*b*	*Std. Error*
Individual	Intercept	-0.04*	0.02	-0.03	0.02
	Tamil	0.09***	0.02	0.06**	0.02
	Muslim	0.16***	0.02	0.14***	0.02
	Woman	-0.09***	0.01	-0.09***	0.01
	moved	0.02(*)	0.01	0.02	0.01
	Poverty	0.02*	0.01	0.02*	0.01
	Violence	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01
Contextual	Poverty	-	-	0.02	0.02
	Violence	-	-	0.04*	0.02
Fit	AIC	-1199.8		-1204	
	BIC	-1154.4		-1148.5	
	Log-likelihood	608.89		612.98	
	Deviance	-1217.8		-1226	
	$\chi^2(2)$	-		8.18*	

(*) *p* < .06 * *p* < .05 ** *p* < .01 *** *p* < .001

(4) Finally, the Local and religious dimension identifies commonalities between clusters

that have on opposite relationship to contextual indicators: on its positive side,

membership in the ethno-nationalist cluster has a positive relationship with contextual exposure to poverty while membership in the Communal cluster has a negative relationship with the same contextual indicator. On the negative side of the dimension, the ethno-cultural cluster has a positive relationship to contextual exposure to violence while the civic cluster is the reference category. Hence, to be coherent with our results in chapter 5, *the local and religious dimension should be unrelated to contextual indicators of violence and poverty (H4)*. Table C4 shows that it is indeed the case.

Table C4. Multilevel linear regression models predicting the dimension *Local and religious cohesion*.

		(1)		(2)	
		b	Std. Error	b	Std. Error
Individual	Intercept	0.04*	0.02	0.05*	0.02
	Tamil	-0.17***	0.02	-0.17***	0.02
	Muslim	0.01	0.02	0.01	0.02
	Woman	0.00	0.01	0.00	0.01
	moved	0.02*	0.01	0.02*	0.01
	Poverty	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01
	Violence	-0.01	0.01	-0.01	0.01
Contextual	Poverty	-	-	-0.00	0.02
	Violence	-	-	0.01	0.02
Fit	AIC	-1447.4		1443.9	
	BIC	-1402		-1388.5	
	Log-likelihood	732.71		732.96	
	Deviance	-1465.4		-1465.9	
	$\chi^2(2)$	-		0.51	

(*) $p < .06$ * $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$