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Why do People Sacrifice for Their Nations?

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This article examines how national identification can become so powerful as to overcome considerations of self-interest and win a contest of altruisms with primary social groups in the name of an "imagined community." It develops a prototheory that draws on the insights of three competing theoretical approaches to nationalism: primordialist, instrumentalist, and constructivist. It explores a rational choice approach to nationalism, the limitations of which show the need to focus on how national leaders use emotional and metaphorical appeals to tie national symbols to the strong forces of primary group identification. Nationalist appeals work by focusing individuals on emotional imperatives or moral norms linked to the nation, thus preempting rational self-interest calculations and competing loyalties. The theory is consistent with current understanding of evolved human cognitive capacities and mechanisms of altruism, identifies specific rhetorical mechanisms, and suggests particular hypotheses about nationalist rhetoric.

KEY WORDS: nationalism; mobilization; war; national identity; altruism

Wars of national defense, national liberation, and national glorification call upon individuals to make sacrifices out of loyalty—sometimes even to give their lives—for what Benedict Anderson (1983) has called an "imagined community." To understand people's willingness to make such sacrifices, one must understand how they come to identify with nations and why, once identified, they develop loyalties strong enough to overcome or preempt considerations of personal well-being and competing loyalties to family, community, and other groups.

Within many nationalist ideologies, these questions are unproblematic. It is "natural" to identify as a member of one's nation because individuals have primordial attachments to their nations, cemented by ties such as ethnicity, language, race, culture, religion, community, and kinship. And it is "natural" to sacrifice for the nation because national identifications are very strong, espe-

cially when several kinds of ties (race, language, religion, custom, proximity) bind together the same group of people.

Many people, including members of political elites, accept this sort of simple primordialist theory of their attachments to their own nations and sometimes, by empathy, accept it for other people's attachments to their nations. Adherence to this view is so widespread that it has become encoded in the international norm of "national self-determination," which grants every "nation" a right to govern itself if it so chooses. This concept presumes that the members of a nation can be easily identified even if they are not the same as the citizens of any existing state. And it privileges nationhood over other kinds of group identifications by giving it special rights.

Despite the commonsense character of the belief that nationhood is "natural," the notion of primordial attachment to nations does not square with the evidence. Actual nations rarely have the homogeneity or the long histories this belief presumes. The vast majority of actual nation-states, including states that have acted on strong national feeling, are multiethnic, multireligious, multilingual, and/or multiracial, and many of them are of relatively recent origin. Beyond nation-states that explicitly recognize their multiethnic character in their laws and institutions, such as Belgium, Canada, and until recently, South Africa, are less obvious cases, including the United Kingdom, Russia, Spain, Iraq, Vietnam, and many others. Several of these nation-states are no more than a few generations old. If nation-states do not have the characteristics or histories that would give people strong, primordial ties to them, why do people identify with them, and why do the feelings sometimes get so strong that people give their lives?

There are three main classes of accounts of nationalism in the recent literature (Young, 1993). One is a modified primordialist approach that emphasizes the emotional ties of individuals to ethnic groups. Some versions focus on a presumed primordial need for shared identity that is fulfilled by culturally defined groupings (e.g., Geertz, 1973); others take a sociobiological tack and argue that ethnicity is an extension of a naturally selected tendency to favor kin (e.g., Shaw & Wong, 1989). A second type of account, sometimes called instrumentalist, emphasizes the value of nationality and ethnicity as organizing constructs for collections of individuals who share common interests and who need to mobilize for collective action (e.g., Enloe, 1973; Young, 1976). In this perspective, nationality is a marker of shared interest, a concept that is taken as unproblematic. The third approach, called "constructionist," emphasizes the socially created nature of nationality—and, for that matter, of shared interest. Constructivists point out that ethnic or national consciousness tends to arise during periods of crisis, such as rapid modernization, and tends to be "brokered" by intellectual entrepreneurs who create national histories, traditions, identities, perceived interests, and even languages (these arguments are presented by Anderson, 1982; Hobsbawm, 1964; Ranger, 1983; and Kiss, 1993, among others).

These three competing perspectives together contain insights that must be incorporated into any convincing explanation of national loyalty and nationalist sacrifice: national loyalty has deeply emotional and normative components; it involves a perception of collective interest; it is socially constructed and manipulated by national leaders; and it must, to be effective, outcompete both self-interest considerations and individuals' loyalties to other social groups. The challenge for theory is to develop an account that is consistent with all these valid insights. This article takes steps toward the development of such a theory.

I find it convenient in searching for a convincing explanation to begin with an extreme instrumentalist view—the theory of rational choice. This theory presumes that, far from having primordial ties to a nation, people have no social ties at all. They identify only with a group of one—the autonomous individual—and act to promote their own self-interest as best they can given the information at hand. This theory is as implausible psychologically as the theory of primordial ties to a recently invented social institution such as the state. But by seeing what can and cannot be explained by a thoroughly affectless and asocial theory, we can get a clearer idea of what functions emotion, social ties, and social construction must perform to forge national loyalties strong enough to motivate people to give their lives.

A RATIONAL CHOICE MODEL AND ITS LIMITATIONS

The proponents of rational choice theory do not claim that it is psychologically accurate, only that individuals act *as if* they were autonomous self-interest maximizers. Such a presumption seems at first quite poorly suited to explain the phenomena of nationalism, which are to all appearances the result of collective motives rather than individual ones. But pure individualism can account for collective action if it can show how coming together as a group in fact gains for individual members something more than they could attain without the group. It can even account for the strong norms that sometimes govern nationalist behavior if it can show that the norms are an efficient way to enforce behavior that benefits the members.

A rational choice account of nationalism has been offered by Russell Hardin (1992). Hardin suggests that autonomous individuals might identify with a national group as a matter of coordination. People sometimes stand to gain by identifying with a group that can provide collective benefits in which they share. It may not matter which group one chooses to identify with, if only a sufficient number of people agree to pick the *same* group. Hardin illustrates the point with the example of supporting local sports teams. By being fans, people gain a pleasant group feeling, topics of conversation, and other such benefits—but only if they support the same team. It matters little which team gets the fans' alle-

giance. Identification of this sort does seem to be rational in terms of self-interest, but only as long as it does not present large costs. However, national or ethnic identification is often costly, for example, when a group is suffering discrimination or oppression at the hands of a more powerful group or when it is facing the likelihood of violent conflict that will threaten some of its members. In those cases, rational choice theory would seem to predict that people will avoid identifying with such a group unless it offers individualized (“selective”) incentives (Olson, 1965) or somehow convinces potential members that they stand to benefit more than they risk. So a rational choice account of national identification seems to require that potential members perceive a gain (even if small) from identifying.

Rational choice theory suggests two mechanisms that might explain why individuals support nations by helping to provide collective goods, such as national security, from which even noncontributing group members can benefit. First, there might be a net benefit to individuals from supporting the group on each occasion when it requests support. This condition seems particularly unlikely to obtain when the group requests a serious personal sacrifice such as service in war. Second, people may support a group even when it is not in their self-interest because on the average they gain more from following a simple rule of thumb—to support the group and sometimes suffer—than from calculating self-interest on each occasion and always paying the costs of doing the calculation (e.g., Simon, 1990). This mechanism is more plausible, but becomes less so as the requested contribution rises. At some point, such as when a young man is asked to serve in a wartime army against a superior foe, the personal threat becomes so obvious that even a cognitively lazy follower of rules of thumb will notice that supporting the group is not in his self-interest. Yet young men often volunteer to serve in armies that are likely to suffer heavy casualties.

Although rational choice seems less than plausible as an account for extreme individual sacrifice, the approach is fruitful in that it makes a number of nonobvious predictions about group loyalty and willingness to contribute, some of which seem consistent with historical experience. This section discusses these predictions and then goes on to address some phenomena of nationalism that rational choice theory does not predict and that seem inconsistent with its precepts. I then proceed toward a theoretical account that can explain sacrifices for nations better than the extreme individualism of rational choice but without accepting the extreme and historically implausible collective psychology presumed by a simplistic primordialist analysis. My account draws on the key insights of constructionism, primordialism, and instrumentalism by focusing on the ways national leaders’ actions and rhetoric can construct emotional and moral ties to the nation and create a sense of common interest compelling enough to overcome self-interest and competing group loyalties.

Some Nonobvious Hypotheses from Rational Choice Theory

Rational choice theory presumes that the incentive structure facing a group that includes an individual—that is, the structure of shared threats and opportunities—will affect that individual's identification with the group and willingness to contribute to it.

Threat increases identification and willingness to contribute. In case of collective threat, members of a group, or those who would be considered members by others who are threatening the group, stand to lose as individuals if the group loses. They therefore stand to benefit if the group can be defended against the threat, so rational choice theory implies that they will identify and contribute.

When the threatened group is a nation-state, the prediction is that a foreign attack or military threat leads to stronger identification with the nominal nation of the nation-state and increased support for the regime in power. This prediction seems plausible, and even the exception can help prove the rule. When the United States entered World War II, national solidarity increased sharply, with one notable exception—the rejection of Japanese-Americans, many of whom felt patriotically American, but were commonly identified by their fellow citizens with the enemy.

When the threatened group does not control a state, the predictions are slightly different. One is that discrimination by the dominant nation in a state can strengthen minority ethnic identification or even bring a new national identity into being. This prediction describes a fairly common dynamic, and seems to be supported by the history of Zulu, Tamil, and Palestinian nationalisms. By predicting that national identities emerge from oppression, rational choice theory demonstrates its ability to account for identities that are not voluntaristic in the sense of arising from processes within the set of potential group members.

The theory also predicts that discrimination leads oppressed groups to mobilize. Support for this prediction is harder to find. Discrimination seems to be a predisposing factor, but not a sufficient condition for mobilization. Many down-trodden groups fail to mobilize against an oppressive state so long as they have stable expectations about the regime in power (Scott, 1976; Goldstone, 1989). Revolt seems to depend on either a violation of expectations that worsens a group's situation or an increase in the probability that collective action will be successful. Rational choice theory easily explains why an increased likelihood of success leads to mobilization, but does not readily explain why an oppressed group that could gain from acting collectively would fail to do so except when its status declines further.

For the most part, however, the prediction that threats lead to heightened group identification and increased contributions seems consistent with historical experience. Rational choice theory, despite its radical individualist assumptions,

seems capable of predicting the emergence of group consciousness and collective action under some circumstances.

Opportunity increases identification and willingness to contribute. The logic of this hypothesis is exactly the same as the logic for the case of common threats. When the opportunity arises for a national group that lacks control of a state to increase its autonomy or power by acting collectively, rational choice theory predicts increased identification and mobilization. The collapse of the Soviet Union seems to supply dozens of confirming examples. As the central, multinational state weakened, nationalist movements sprang up in all the so-called national republics, and then in nationally identified regions within the republics. Identification with the multinational state was providing decreasing benefits, and it may have appeared to many that identifications with regionally dominant nationalities could offer greater benefits. Willingness to contribute to these national identity groups was evident in the creation of volunteer militias to defend them from the central state and from other national groups.

Rational choice theory implies similar predictions when opportunities arise for a nation-state, but these are not so well supported. It predicts that when a multinational state has a growing economy or an opportunity for imperial expansion, identification with the nominal nationality should strengthen at the expense of national minority or other group identifications, and people should become more willing to sacrifice for the state. This logic suggests that ethnic conflict declines in multiethnic states as a function of prosperity, and that citizens, including members of ethnic minorities, willingly join in their state's expansionist adventures. There is some evidence that ethnic conflict is inversely related to economic prosperity, such as the famous negative correlation between the number of lynchings in the American South and the price of cotton, but no evidence that minority groups trade in their identities for those of the majority when times are good. In the case of political opportunity, the evidence tends to disconfirm the prediction that people coalesce around a nation-state seeking expansion in the way they do around one facing threat. The so-called rally-round-the-flag phenomenon, in which U.S. presidents gain a short-term boost in popularity after taking military action, is stronger when the action is taken (or presented) as a response to armed attack than when it is perceived to have other motives (Russett, 1989). Rational choice theory could account for a moderate difference between responsiveness to threats versus opportunities by adopting the utility calculus of prospect theory (Kahneman & Tversky, 1979), in which people are risk-averse for prospective gains but relatively risk-seeking when facing losses. But if economic expansion or the prospect of imperial gains does essentially nothing to promote national solidarity, rational choice theory has a serious problem.

Another problem for rational choice theory lies in the apparent asymmetry

between nations with and without states. A cursory reading of history suggests that the opportunity for a non-state nation to acquire state power has a much greater effect on identification and mobilization than the opportunity for a nation-state to expand. If this is correct, something other than expected utility must be operating.

Phenomena Not Predicted or Accounted for by Rational Choice

People resist changing their national identities, even when they can expect to benefit. Rational choice theory fails to explain people's unwillingness to adopt the favored identities of a conquering power. Consider recent events in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. Despite benefits made available to those who identified with dominant national groups, people passed on their ancestral identities as Ruthenians, Ossetians, Azeris, and the like for generations with little hope of collective gain. In some cases, such as those of Turks in Bulgaria and Hungarians in Romania, people held on to their identities in the face of active or acute discrimination. Ethnic groups and their languages and customs do become extinct as a function of conquest, migration, modernization, dispersion, and genocide, but they are remarkably resistant to such threats, as the histories of Jews and Armenians attest.

It might be that conquered peoples hold on perversely to a subordinate national identity as a response to the dynamic of threat, being risk-averse even for symbolic losses, when the rational self-interested choice would be to switch identifications. But national identities also persist when something can be gained by changing and the old nationality is not under threat. After emigration, national identities commonly last for generations even though rational choice theory implies that people who move to another country will change their national identifications as readily as people who move to another city change their favorite sports teams. Millions of U.S. citizens educate their children in the customs and sometimes the languages of their non-American ancestors, even at considerable expense, in the absence of threats. Such communities of hyphenated-Americans seem to be acting not for tangible benefit, but out of identification—as if their old national identities have intrinsic value. The phenomenon has an emotional tone that the rational choice formulation misses.

Nationality has a stronger influence than other identities even when the expected benefits of contributing to the nation rather than to another group are highly uncertain or negative. Conflict between identities arises most clearly when a nation-state makes claims on citizens to put national goals ahead of those of class, ethnicity, race, family, or other identity groups. The paradigm case is war mobilization and the most outstanding example is probably the willingness of so many soldiers to fight and die in World War I. Later, during the outbreak of

World War II, there was considerable debate in the black community and in class-conscious labor unions in the United States about the benefits to those groups of supporting entry into the war. After the country entered the war, both fell strongly behind the war effort. Why? The U.S. government did not offer concessions to blacks or labor to gain their support. Labor, in fact, was called upon to suspend strikes in the interest of the war effort. Members of these groups seem to have reassessed their self-interest with little rational basis for doing so. It is as if the attack shifted their identification at least temporarily from their racial or class groups to the nation, so that it was the nation that provided the identity in whose name people took action.

Of course, it was in the interest of the state to persuade people to adopt the national identification and accept its demands (Posen, 1993). The puzzle is that nationalist appeals are so successful in wartime. They even succeed with groups that have the greatest likelihood of receiving a negative net benefit from war by virtue of receiving most of the dangerous battle assignments and less than an equal or fair share of any benefits that accrue to the state. Nationalist appeals seem to succeed with such groups even if the state makes no promises of more equitable distribution after the war is over.

Leaders trying to mobilize support for national collective action appeal more to emotions than to self-interest. The leaders of states act as if they believe that emotional appeals are more powerful than rational ones, especially in periods of war mobilization, when rational self-interest calculations are likely to weigh most strongly against contributing to a national goal. The obvious conclusion is that leaders make emotional appeals precisely to preempt or override self-interest calculations that might be unfavorable to national goals.

People and groups often miscalculate their interests so as to overestimate the expected benefits to them from nationalist programs. Some examples illustrate the point. At the outbreak of the Falklands/Malvinas War of 1982, nationalist appeals in both Britain and Argentina generated great outpourings of patriotism and support for the nation-state. Yet Argentina had little to gain and Britain little to lose, except symbolically. How could analyses of self-interest have produced such great surges of support in both countries unless there was systematic miscalculation in at least one?

In the dissolving Soviet Union of 1991, the proliferation of nationalist movements was not, in my estimation, always consistent with rational expectation of gain. Armenian collective self-interest, for example, might have been better served by the status of a Russian protectorate than by independence. A strong argument for this position could have been made from 20th-century Armenian history, but this argument carried little weight in Armenian politics. Similarly, in the United States, the Puerto Rican Socialist Party has long advocated independence. When a leftist Puerto Rican academic argued in the 1970s that

Puerto Rico might be better off economically in its present status as a protected commonwealth than as an independent nation-state, the response within the party was not to question the author's self-interest calculations, but his loyalty. In sum, people motivated by nationalist sentiments and leaders of nationalist movements tend to distort, ignore, or simply reject available information pertinent to collective self-interest when that information might argue against pursuing nationalist programs. Such behavior is not rational.

The four phenomena of resistance to new national identities, nationalism in the face of negative expected benefits, preference for emotional over rational appeals, and distortion of information give strong evidence of a component to nationalism that ignores and sometimes contravenes individual self-interest, and even the collective interest of nationalistic groups. Moreover, rational choice theory makes unrealistic presumptions about human cognitive capacities. Rather than calculating self-interest (or group interest), people who accept national identifications seem to use a much more rapid response mode, and one that sometimes yields different results. Rather than reasoning, they seem to respond emotionally. By what mechanisms might these things happen?

TOWARD A THEORY OF NATIONALIST MOBILIZATION

Self-interest is one of the strong forces of human behavior. It is primordial in an evolutionary sense: the ability to learn from individual experience—to change behavior on the basis of its consequences for one's well-being—has strong survival value and has presumably been favored by natural selection. Humans excel at learning, an ability that has enabled the species to adapt to rapid change and to survive in a wide range of environments. And an evolutionary purpose is served by the strong emotions aroused by threats to survival.

I propose that for nationalist appeals to overcome self-interest, they must draw on a strong force at least as deeply rooted as that of self-interest. As we have seen, nationhood is not a primordial condition, so national identity per se does not qualify. Following others (e.g., Hinde, 1989, 1993; Ross, 1991), I propose that nationalism gets its force by drawing on a primordial sociality (e.g., Campbell, 1983; Fiske, 1990; Dawes, 1991)—a tendency to identify with, learn from, and favor groups to which one has strong emotional ties. The connection of social bonds to national identity is accomplished by a process of social construction. My argument is based on several claims: that group (not national) identification is a primordial condition; that group membership and identification can exert strong forces on behavior, even in modern societies; and that when influence agents for nationalism succeed, they do so by eliciting identification with the nation and linking it to emotions and norms associated with membership in primary groups.

Group Identification is Primordial

This strong claim is based on two considerations. The first is that human groups are primordial: Small bands were the main units of social organization during some three or four million years of hominid evolution until about 12,000 years ago, when they were supplemented or supplanted by larger units such as city, ethnic group, and state. The second is that individuals have probably always identified strongly with primary social groups. People tend to imitate and learn selectively from fellow group members and to form strong emotional attachments to members, the group, and its symbols.

The second point is supported by analysis of the forces of biological and cultural evolution and by a broad range of social science data. Even a sociobiological perspective, which usually admits group-oriented behavior only as a self-interested concern for close kin, supports the primordality of social groups that include nonkin. According to the concept of inclusive fitness (Hamilton, 1964), natural selection favors behavioral predispositions that promote the survival and reproduction of an individual's close kin—which may include psychological mechanisms such as group identification and emotional ties to family. For the predispositions to evolve, however, there must be a mechanism by which individuals recognize close kin. The arguments for a human ability to recognize blood kin directly (e.g., Shaw & Wong, 1989) are not convincing (Johnson, 1986; Ross, 1991), and one is forced to conclude that such an ability has not evolved (consider, for example, that adoptive parents and children commonly develop close emotional ties despite lack of blood relationship). Instead, humans evolved other recognition rules that have identified kin fairly accurately over the evolutionary history of the species, but did so by the use of proxy attributes, easy to recognize and usually correlated with kinship. The key indirect mechanisms are association, in which those with whom one has had close contact become objects of attachment, and similarity (what Johnson [1986] calls phenotypic matching), in which people with similar physiognomies, behaviors, or ideologies become objects of attachment. Although sociobiologists may see association and similarity as mechanisms for recognizing and favoring kin, they function even more effectively for recognizing and favoring members of primary social-cultural groups (Johnson, 1986; Hinde, 1989). Their direct effect is to promote the survival and reproduction of members of primary groups or racial or cultural categories. In fact, it may have been more adaptive in terms of inclusive fitness to evolve such rules of group recognition than to have evolved means of direct kin recognition. This is because the survival of individuals in small bands depends much more on nonkin who are reliable providers of child-rearing, health care, food supply, defense from threats, and other vital services than on blood kin who have left the band. As Hinde (1989) has pointed out in this context, exogamy was common among band societies and ensured the presence of a consider-

able number of nonkin in any individual's band. In sum, natural selection seems to have favored the evolution of behavioral and emotional predispositions to maintain primary social groups, even at some cost to the individual.

Forces of cultural evolution (Boyd & Richerson, 1985) strengthen these biological tendencies. Social groups, once formed, can gain an adaptive advantage by transmitting knowledge and behavioral rules culturally, through imitation and teaching (e.g., Boyd & Richerson, 1985; Simon, 1990). The prevalence of such transmission is supported by social science data showing strong and pervasive human propensities for social learning, for collections of strangers ("minimal groups") to exert social influence on individuals and to form strong loyalties (e.g., Brewer, 1979; Messick & Mackie, 1989; Sherif, 1966; Sherif, Harvey, White, Hood, & Sherif, 1961), and for individuals to overvalue members of their own groups relative to nonmembers (for a recent review of this literature, see Druckman [1994]). These propensities provide a basis for altruism toward group members.

How Altruism Works

A deep-seated human propensity for altruism is not sufficient to explain the willingness to sacrifice for nations because nations are imagined communities, not the sort of primary group within which altruism evolved. To understand how nationalism can draw on the capability for altruism to overcome self-interest and preempt other group identifications, one must first understand the mechanisms that activate altruistic behavior.

Altruistic behavior seems to come from deep emotional bonds to primary groups and from socially transmitted rules or norms. Both of these mechanisms are probably involved in the process of eliciting national loyalty. The normative mechanism is better understood than the emotional one. All human groups and societies develop systems of obligation, duty, and morality that they transmit culturally. These systems provide simple behavioral rules that elicit group-oriented behavior from group members and that, if well designed, have survival value for group members. They have the power to overcome individual self-interest, as is evident from the existence of altruistic behavior attributable to norms, obligations, and morality. The success of these forces in preempting self-interest calculations is probably due in part to the fact that it is easier to follow rules than to make utility calculations; a process of classifying situations and following situationally appropriate rules is probably more consistent with the evolved cognitive capacities of the human species and with recent understanding of decision processes than one of exhaustive utility calculation (see Dietz & Stern, 1993a; Payne, Bettman, & Johnson, 1992).

Altruistic rules or norms obviously have their greatest value for group sur-

vival when group-oriented behavior provides an advantage over egoistic behavior and when self-interest calculations would argue against altruism. Groups gain an adaptive advantage by developing and teaching rules and norms that prescribe altruism and proscribe selfishness under those conditions. Such rules confer the greatest survival value for a group when they preempt self-interest calculations by group members, that is, when members act altruistically without reflection.

For example, one of the strong rules of group behavior prevalent in many societies is that members have a moral obligation to help other members who face threats of harm. The social-psychological literature on altruistic behavior shows that people can be induced to make sacrifices if they come to believe that: (a) someone else stands to be harmed if nothing is done, and (b) their personal contribution can make a difference in the outcome (Schwartz, 1977). Experimental research demonstrates that appeals emphasizing adverse consequences to others and personal responsibility induce in people a sense of moral obligation strong enough to get them to donate money, blood, and bone marrow (Schwartz, 1977).

The literature is not explicit about which groups can take advantage of the dynamic of moral norm activation. In the experiments, common group membership is implicit, and the presumed common group is that of fellow humanity. It would seem to follow that to activate moral norms, an influence agent need only to appeal to a vague "we-ness" of the group, show the danger, and ask individual members for contributions each is particularly able to make. Group members then make contributions altruistically; that is, the moral imperative outweighs or preempts considerations of self-interest.

The emotional mechanism of altruism is most evident when people risk their lives to save kin, neighbors, or even strangers in danger, donate kidneys to relatives (Simmons et al., 1977), or throw themselves on hand grenades to save their comrade soldiers. They seem to do such things without even so much reflection as one would need to recall a social rule, let alone make a calculation of self-interest, and their actions appear to be more affectively loaded than the cognitive processes of calculation or rule-following. Although it is difficult to study such phenomena systematically, this sort of behavior seems to occur most often among people tied together by strong emotional bonding experiences: cooperation in combat or captivity; close association in primary groups, especially in childhood or in competitive situations; a shared experience of social or political oppression; and so forth. These are the kinds of experiences that have shaped social groups throughout human evolutionary history, and I would speculate that many of these experiences evoke the same emotional bonds, including deep protective impulses, that normally form between biological or adoptive parents and their children. The likely mediating emotional state is empathy (Eisenberg & Miller, 1977; Piliavin & Charng, 1990). Groups that are tied together by such experiences reinforce the ties by developing altruistic norms and

transmitting them to new members who may not have undergone the group-formative experiences.

In sum, altruism works in groups that have a strong emotional basis for cohesion or that have succeeded in establishing behavioral norms that prescribe altruism under certain circumstances. It follows that national leaders may be able to elicit nationalist altruism if they are able to mobilize strong emotional bonds or altruistic norms in the nation's name.

How Leaders Elicit National Altruism

As already mentioned, the problem for national leaders is that the groups they want to mobilize for war are not much like the primary groups in which altruism evolved. In a band society, emotional ties are restricted to one small group, and sacrificing for the group is likely to be enforced by empathy and group norms, as well as being adaptive in terms of inclusive fitness. In complex modern societies, however, people have ties to many groups, each of which at times provides essential services. Mobilizing modern citizens for war creates a conflict of altruisms between the nation and other groups. When a nation-state asks people to go to war, it is often demanding a contribution or sacrifice at the same time that other groups to which citizens belong are demanding that the contribution or sacrifice not be made. For the national effort to succeed, national identity must overcome other group identities.

Why do people so often choose the nation as their object of altruism? I presume that choosing the nation in a contest of altruisms does not always provide an evolutionary advantage over choosing other groups. Even if it did, evolution provides no mechanism for choosing nations over other groups (or, in the case of conflicts between a nation-state and a national minority, one nation over another), and rational calculations—if people performed them—would not be clairvoyant about the sequelae of war for various groups. People's choices among altruisms are less likely to be made on grounds of inclusive fitness than on some combination of emotional reactions and social influences. It becomes the task of a leader mobilizing people for war to find ways to manipulate those forces so as to socially construct the nation as an object of "primordial" attachment.

One way is to develop and then exploit direct emotional ties to the nation and its symbols. This approach can require a long-term investment in parades, holidays, and other collective events that classically condition positive responses to national symbols like flags and military uniforms (Johnson, 1986). States certainly make such investments; their survival in the population of nation-states may create a selection pressure to do so (Posen, 1993). And individuals certainly feel empathy for soldiers they have never met, and for their families. But I question whether occasional classical conditioning is a strong enough force to get large numbers of people to sacrifice their lives.

Another effective way to capture emotions is to tie the idea of the nation to the emotionally powerful experiences of individuals. This occurs readily when large numbers of individuals have suffered discrimination or punishment on the grounds of their ethnicity, or in ways that they can readily attribute to ethnicity. Such experiences, as already noted, are common in the genesis of national identities and may be even more common in national historical myths; it is reasonable to expect that such experiences create a powerful sense of group identification, especially when they threaten to repeat themselves. The recent conflicts involving Serbians, Croatians, and Bosnian Muslims in the former Yugoslavia are a potent case in point: nationalists "explain" current events in terms of remembered experiences such as Serbian-Croatian conflict during World War II and powerful national myths dating as far back as the Battle of Kosovo in 1389.

A national identity can also "win" a contest of altruisms by tying itself symbolically to the groups to which people have the strongest and most primordial ties: family and community. These are the groups that have the deepest roots in human evolutionary history, arouse the strongest empathy, and exact the most stringent obligations from members—it is for these groups that people are most likely to sacrifice their lives. The genius of nationalism as a social invention is to equate the nation symbolically with family and community and to use that equation to generate emotions and elicit behavior that is against self-interest and the interests of other groups with which people identify—including, ironically, families and communities.

The symbolic ties of nation to family and community have been frequently noted. National ideologies typically describe the nation and the associated characteristics of members with metaphors of kinship: "mother tongue," "fatherland," "Croatian blood," "the sons of Ireland," "our German brothers in the Sudetenland," and "our people" are a few phrases that come quickly to mind. Metaphors of community are also common: "defending the homeland," "the Jewish community," "protecting a neighboring country," "common European home." A function of such metaphorical equations is that people who come to see their fellow nationals as kin or members of a tight community feel empathy for them and sacrifice for them as they would for real kin or community members, even to giving their lives. I propose that this mechanism of symbolically equating the nation with social groups to which people have deep emotional ties is one way nationalism gains its amazing power to preempt self-interest and the claims of other identity groups.

Yet another way that national identity can "win" over other identities involves personalizing nations. If nations are equated with individuals, international relations are interpersonal relations, and subject to the moral rules that apply to primary social groups. For example, if a personalized nation violates the rule against causing harm to an innocent other nation, third nations that can prevent or

redress the harm have a moral obligation to help, in a metaphorical extension of the Schwartz norm-activation model. More to the point, citizens of such a third nation who accept such a personalized account feel that their nation is morally obligated to help and feel personally obligated to contribute by advocating intervention and supporting a war effort. There is evidence that people do apply such personalized moral normative reasoning in forming opinions about the obligations of corporations and governments (Stern et al., 1986).

Lakoff's (1991) analysis of the roots of the overwhelming U.S. popular support for the Persian Gulf war relies on personalization of governments. He claims that a U.S. government-sponsored international relations "fairy tale" that equated Iraq with villain and Kuwait with victim (represented, for example, in the image of the "rape" of Kuwait) was effective in convincing U.S. citizens to back their country in taking the role of hero. Lakoff claims that an alternative fairy tale was tried by the Bush administration, with Iraq as villain and the U.S. as victim ("cutting off our oil lifeline"), but was not convincing. The metaphorical equation of nations with fairy-tale characters is rooted in powerful cultural myths and neatly bypasses claims of identities other than the national: in the fairy tale, when a nation is the villain, only a nation can be the hero, so individuals can act on their sense of moral obligation only through their national identification.

Other personalizations can have similar emotional effect. For example, international events are sometimes portrayed as threats to national dignity or pride (with the implication that the nation must assert its "manhood" by violence if necessary). Nations or their leaders are characterized as bullies, outlaws, or madmen, also evoking personalized obligations to act that can only be met by national action. The personalization mechanism, in which only nation-states can be actors, begins to address one of the major riddles of nationalist mobilization—why people put aside the interests of real families and communities in favor of imagined ones.

CONCLUSIONS

My prototheory of national loyalty and sacrifice attempts to respond to the valid insights of three competing theoretical approaches to the politics of collective identity in a way that is consistent with the nature of evolved human cognitive capacities and mechanisms of altruistic behavior. The nascent theory has some other potential advantages as well. It rejects the twin implausible notions of primordial nationality and primordial individuality. Unlike rational choice theory, it offers an account of the evident emotional power of nationalism. Unlike the theory of primordial national identification or older invocations of "group mind," it suggests plausible mechanisms for nationalist emotionality, rooted in evolved human predispositions. Unlike both of these theories, it begins to specify condi-

tions under which emotionality wins out over rationality, collectivity over individualism, and national collectivities over other ones. It shows how nationalist rhetoric helps create a perception of shared interest without making the unreasonable presumption that collective interests are self-evident. In addition, by including the moral norm-activation process, it makes sense of the apparent fact that nationalist appeals are more effective in the face of threats than opportunities: threats of harm, but not opportunities, elicit moral obligations and protective emotions. Its speculations about cultural evolution and the uses of metaphor are plausible and testable.

My account argues that nationalism does not so much “trump” other identities, as Hardin (1993) puts it, as it *preempts* both them and egoistic rational calculation. When nationalist appeals work, the claims of other identities and the possibility of calculating self-interest are simply not noticed. Emotional appeals and the rhetorical techniques of metaphor and personification create a “frame” in which the difficult question of how an individual should act in relation to a problem of international relations is simplified and reinterpreted in terms of emotional ties and moral obligations to family and community. This framing has three effects. Cognitively, it focuses individuals’ attention on a small subset of all the consequences of the choice to sacrifice for the nation or not, and thus makes the choice set simpler, while also biasing it toward the nation (for further discussion of focus effects on expressed preferences, see Dietz & Stern, 1993b). Affectively, it focuses the individual on emotional ties that create a strong demand for action and a justification for not calculating self-interest. And in terms of identification, frames that equate nations with individuals or primary groups draw attention to the nation, rather than other social entities, as the object of individuals’ emotions and obligations.

This account sheds light on the conditions for successful mobilization when the obligations of group membership are ambiguous or conflicted concerning whether to go to war. For example, in U.S. mobilization for World War II, the obligations to the national “family” were subject to interpretation. The “father” of the country had once enjoined it against “entangling alliances,” suggesting an obligation limited to defending the national borders. The Roosevelt administration, which favored entering the war, was not able to gather sufficient public support until a clear threat—the Japanese attack—created conditions favorable for activating feelings of moral obligation to the nation and dramatically shifted public opinion overnight.

Finally, the account generates a number of testable hypotheses about the role of rhetoric in nationalist mobilization. For example, it predicts that elites seeking support for war will increase their use of nation-as-family and nation-as-community metaphors and de-emphasize mention of differences between subnational groups. It also predicts the kinds of personalized descriptions of nations that will appear as part of a mobilization effort. It predicts that public debate

about entering a war will tend to focus more on issues such as whether potential allies are appropriately characterized as family members and whether a “victim” nation was or was not “innocent” than on rational considerations such as the probability of victory. And it predicts that mobilizers’ rhetorical appeals to such nonrational considerations as family, community, national pride, formative experiences from national myth, and international victimization will be particularly insistent when most people’s rational calculations would not favor war, for instance when publics fail to see national interests at stake, when the outcome of a war is uncertain, or when victory is unlikely.

Of course, this account of nationalist loyalty and sacrifice is incomplete. It does not speak to the question of when state leaders or other interest groups will desire to mobilize a nation for war and it only begins to suggest how variations in nationalist ideology might affect their choices. It does not specify the historical or political conditions that make individuals susceptible to believing the metaphors of nation as person or family and thus capable of having their emotions aroused by nationalist rhetoric that asserts the same obligations to the nation that people accept to primary groups. And it offers little insight into what makes people accept metaphorical equations of particular nations with particular interpersonal roles. But it may be enough that it focuses attention on the specific processes of social construction that generate emotional support for war efforts, suggests some possible mechanisms, and raises questions for further analysis.

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