have heretofore reliably provided services (stable temperatures, recycling and purifying water, disease resistance that comes from genetic diversity, etc.) essential to the flourishing of human and nonhuman life. The scientific community itself is often divided when attempting to predict the evolution of these systems. Evidence is often patchy, theories of causal mechanisms divergent, and disciplinary protocols difficult to reconcile. In addition, questions of justice—questions of responsibility for the current situation, of the fairness of distributing risk differentially to various populations—inevitably arise. What principles and procedures should guide us in such situations?

Precautionary Politics argues that applying the precautionary principle is not just a matter of policymakers invoking a decision rule, like a judge implementing mandatory sentencing laws. The basic principle of precaution is that where uncertainties are substantial and potentially adverse environmental impacts serious, caution is necessary. Precaution in practice, however, is complicated. In the GMO (genetically modified organisms) case, European authorities convoked multiple scientific committees and extended their disciplinary membership in novel directions; insisted on refined experimental protocols; organized new types of public consultations; developed new rules to enable better monitoring of long-term impact; and worked cooperatively to modify procedures for handling disputed evidence. Precaution is anything but a matter of absolute, a priori judgments (including my own). Rather, it inspires a new type of politics invented in response to humanity's unprecedented environmental predicament and the uncertainties surrounding it.

Cultural Contestation in Ethnic Conflict. By Marc Howard Ross. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007. 384p. $91.00 cloth, $34.99 paper.
doi:10.1017/S1537592709090215

— John T. Sidel, *London School of Economics*

Amid the steady stream of quantitative and game-theoretical studies of conflict published in recent years, Marc Howard Ross's *Cultural Contestation in Ethnic Conflict* comes as a welcome reminder of the ineffably human dimensions of conflict and violence around the world. His panoramic account of ethnic conflict goes beyond the establishment of statistical correlations and the modeling of "iterated games" to trace the complex processes by which conflicts emerge, escalate, and unravel, as well as the role of culture and identity in these processes. Making sense of ethnic conflict, Ross shows, requires an understanding of *meaning*—of how symbols, rituals, places, and events evoke emotions, inspire narratives, and inform identities in diverse settings around the world. The research agenda he pursues and promotes is thus in no small measure ethnographic and interpretivist, focusing on the (inter)subjective (self-)understandings of participants in ethnic conflicts, rather than the ostensibly objective conditions under which conflicts unfold.

The book's major theoretical contribution lies in Ross's discussion of what he calls "psychocultural dramas"—"conflicts between groups over competing, and apparently irresolvable, claims that engage the central elements of each group's historical experience and their identity and invoke suspicions and fears of the opponent" (p. 25). Such dramas are "polarizing events about non-negotiable cultural claims, threats, and/or rights that become important because of their connections to group narratives and core metaphors central to a group's identity—precisely the kinds of events in which cultural expressions play a leading role" (pp. 25–26). Psychocultural dramas "produce reactions which (a) are emotionally powerful; (b) clearly differentiate the parties in conflict; and (c) contain key elements of the larger conflict in which they are embedded. As psychocultural dramas unfold, their powerful emotional meanings link events across time and space, increasing in-group solidarity and out-group hostility" (p. 80). Borrowing from the eminent anthropologist Victor Turner, Ross suggests that psychocultural dramas follow a clear plot structure: "*breach* of social relations or norms, mounting *crisis, redressive* action, and *reintegration* or *recognition of schism*" (p. 80). He notes, however, that the conclusions to these dramas vary considerably, and he voices hope that these contingent dramas can be crafted, through more inclusive rituals and symbols, to promote conflict management, reconciliation, and the bridging of differences.

Ross introduces and elaborates these arguments clearly and carefully in the book's first three chapters, spelling out precisely what descriptive and explanatory claims he is—and is not—making, and how they resonate with existing scholarship in the disciplines of anthropology, sociology, and political science. Across seven subsequent chapters, he examines case studies covering a wide range of cultural focal points and geographical contexts for a broad spectrum of ethnic tensions and conflicts: *rituals* (i.e., parades) in Northern Ireland, *language* in Québec and Catalonia, sacred *public space* in Jerusalem since 1967, gendered *bodily practices and modes of expression* (i.e., the headscarf issue) in France, *monuments, museums, and memorials* in South Africa, and *symbols* (i.e., the Confederate flag) in the American South. Covering diverse modes of cultural expression in various kinds of conflicts across several continents, this book stands as a landmark study of the role of culture in ethnic conflict.

What, then, of the book's weaknesses and limitations? Political scientists working in the mainstream, positivist tradition may dismiss Ross's arguments as lacking in causal power, failing to provide a clear, coherent, or compelling explanation for highly divergent outcomes across a set of cases for which little can be "held constant" and even less can be "scientifically" claimed. But Ross anticipates this kind of critique from the outset, and the abundant evidence

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he presents of conflict dynamics exceeding or eluding a narrowly interest-based mode of analysis should undermine the confidence of even the most hard-bitten, cold-blooded "rationalist." The author, after all, does not dismiss contextual, institutionalist, and interest-based accounts as *wrong*. Rather, he describes them as *incomplete* for explaining the intensity and longevity of many ethnic conflicts: They fail to explain "where interests come from in the first place," "how interests get defined" in specific contexts of conflict, and the selection of "ways to pursue them" (p. xiv).

Ross's approach, however, can be questioned from a rather different perspective. In the casting of his "psychocultural dramas," he chooses not individuated "rational actors" but rather "ethnic groups," whose allegedly deeply, broadly shared identity makes it possible—and arguably necessary—for him to construct narratives out of phrases like "most Catholics," "most Catalans," "Muslims were outraged," "for Afrikaners." Ross acknowledges this problem early on: "[W]e readily employ collective nouns to talk about large groups that are internally differentiated and often have more trouble acting collectively than the term 'group' implies. We write 'Israelis think . . .' when it is the case that what we mean is 'a good number of Israelis, perhaps, an overwhelming majority of Israelis think. . . .' But if we put in all the qualifying language to capture internal variation in every sentence a manuscript would quickly be unreadable" (pp. 19–20).

Ross's reliance on such assertions is not simply stylistic, however. The entire structure of his narrative relies, grammatically, as it were, on the nouns he has chosen—Catholics, Protestants, Catalans, Québecois, Israelis, Palestinians, Afrikaners, American "whites"—as well as the verbs that follow: "Catholics soon felt," "Protestants see it," "Catalans have long seen themselves," "Muslims believe," "Jews consider," and "many French believe." Without these noun-verb combinations, the various case studies in the book simply do not make sense.

As building blocks for these narratives, such formulations are based on a set of underlying assumptions. Caveats and qualifications aside, Ross describes ethnic groups as enjoying a high level of "groupness,". "Catalans," for example, "are a people with a strong national identity defined around language, culture, and a shared history with premodern roots, features that [Anthony] Smith finds in many national identities" (p. 138). Ross thus understands "identity" as largely given, as relatively "thick" and "full" in depth of sentiment and breadth of coverage, and as essentially successful in producing persistent collectivities in politics. Identities are achieved, assumed, enacted, and enjoyed by Catholics and Protestants, Catalans and Québécois, French secularists and Muslims, Palestinians and Israelis, Afrikaners and American "whites," Culture is rich and successfully reproduced, and there is meaning and coherence to the narratives that shape people's understanding of themselves and the world they inhabit. Out of this cultural, ethnic, and narrative coherence and fullness come, seemingly spontaneously, strongly held feelings and beliefs.

Against these assumptions underlying Ross's humanist, liberal-pluralist, interpretivist account, a poststructuralist approach to questions of identity and conflict offers a critical counterpoint and analytical alternative. Here identities—ethnic and otherwise—are never fully achieved, and are instead always haunted by a sense of incompleteness, inadequacy, and accompanying anxiety. Indeed, it is precisely this "lack" around which identities are organized, constituted, and reconstituted. Ethnic conflict—including violent conflict—is constitutive of ethnic identities, rather than the other way around. Thus, Allen Feldman (1991) has shown how the onset of "The Troubles" impelled resegregation and reaggregation of sectarian identities in Belfast in the late 1960s and early 1970s, just as John Bowen (2006) has revealed how *l'affaire du foulard* has enabled the reinvention and redeployment of *laïcité* in France over the past two decades. Thus, poststructuralist scholarship examines not only how identities inform conflicts but also how conflicts—violent and otherwise—produce identities themselves.

Viewed from a poststructuralist perspective, moreover, identities are never articulated or experienced in isolation from social relations of inequality, exploitation, and domination. Identities are always formed in the perceived gaze of higher authorities, on whose abiding recognition they continue to depend. Identities are thus not so much "horizontally" shared as "vertically" imposed and maintained; they operate as languages and logics intertwined with domination. Seen in this light, ethnic conflict is not so much "about" conflict between already constituted and antagonistic ethnic groups but about tensions, contradictions, and threats within the structures of authority around which ethnic group identities are themselves organized. For example, Paul Brass (1997, 2005) and Ornit Shani (2007) have shown how anti-Muslim violence in India has unfolded in contexts when and where the structures of inequality and domination *among Hindus* have faced powerful challenges and threats. Thus, poststructuralist scholarship on conflicts apparently unfolding "between ethnic groups" stresses the role of conflicts and tensions within the highly stratified structures of authority and domination that constitute these "groups" in the first place.

Finally, viewed from a poststructuralist perspective, belief is not simply what one believes one believes; following Freud, meaning operates according to logics that are largely unconscious and unacknowledged—if not vehemently disavowed—by subjects themselves. "Fanaticism," Carl Jung famously wrote, "is always a sign of repressed doubt," an insight confirmed by recent studies of religious violence. Thus, while Ross sheds considerable light on ethnic conflict through the prism of "psychocultural dramas," it is worth noting alternative, perhaps counterintuitive, but potentially insightful readings of such dramas quite different

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from those promoted in this impressive and important new book.

Response to John T. Sidel's review of *Cultural Contestation in Ethnic Conflict*

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— Marc Howard Ross

John T. Sidel's thoughtful review of my book raises two important, intertwined issues that I focus on here: the nature of group identity and the differences he sees between interpretivist and poststructuralist accounts of ethnic conflict. He offers two views of ethnic groups: One argues that strong identities and a sense of groupness precedes, and forms the basis for, conflict, and the other asserts that identities are necessarily incomplete, inadequate, and accompanied by anxiety, and that conflict is constitutive of ethnic identities. He attributes the former position to me while suggesting that I ignore the latter.

In establishing this apparently clear dichotomy, Sidel avoids several important issues in the study of ethnic politics and conflict. One is that while scholars increasingly understand ethnic identities as contingent, partial, and constructed, actors in conflicts are generally essentializers who see identities as objective, enduring, and fixed. Consequently, people involved in ethnic conflicts use the language of group cohesiveness, unity, and fixed boundaries, whereas scholars recognize important ways these shift over time and how external pressures and events and within-group differences rarely produce group unity across time and space. Moving between these two frames is a problem in analyzing ethnic conflict, and not only in my work. Scholarly language including Sidel's when he writes about the Chinese, Christians, and Muslims in Indonesia—as well as that of key political actors—suggests substantive within-group agreement and coordination in the name of the group that is at odds with empirical evidence.

One answer to the problem of group definition turns on what it is exactly that groups share. My answer is that people share an identity, often heightened or even formed as a result of conflict, that is primarily emotional and indeed a ready source of deep fears and perceived threats. Substantively, it is probably the case that the values and practices that people believe they hold in common with co-ethnics are often greater than what is actually shared. In addition, within identity groups there is contestation over who is the "true" defender of the group, and within-group boundaries often harden over such questions. My culturalist framework emphasizes that identity groups share a common framework for interpreting the world but not necessarily agreement on specific values or practices. Politically, then, the challenge to ethnic politicians is to transform this perceived shared identity into collective action, and as Sidel points out, often this is achieved following conflict or in response to events.

Behind Sidel's position is the argument that there are clear-cut differences between interpretivist and poststructuralist accounts in their approach to identity and conflict. Ironically, this reification of categories is precisely what Sidel has accuses me of doing. Yet emphasizing interpretations makes no claim that identities necessarily precede actions, nor does it deny the importance of emotion and unconscious dynamics. Contingent context and authority structures surely frame conflicts, but saying this as Sidel does hardly settles the questions about how and why participants invest great energy, emotion, and resources in them or how cultural frames affect the intensity of conflict by defining what is at stake for the presumed group.

Riots, Pogroms, Jihad: Religious Violence in Indonesia.

By John T. Sidel. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press. 304p. $57.95 cloth, $21.00 paper.
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— Marc Howard Ross, *Bryn Mawr College*

Indonesia is a country that seems to violate a number of widely held assumptions that comparative political scientists hold. For example, under Suharto's 30-year rule, corruption soared, but so did economic growth. In *Riots, Pogroms, Jihad,* John Sidel offers another false generalization for consideration, namely, that despite the rise of ethnic and religious violence in the world since 1990, the widespread religious violence experienced in Indonesia since the mid-1990s is not best understood as part of a global trend. Rather, he argues that "such broad-brush accounts offer little to illuminate the specific modalities of religious violence observed in Indonesia or to help examine the discernable but seemingly inexplicable shifts . . . in the forms, targets, processes of mobilization, and consequences of this violence in successive periods" (p. 11).

Sidel's argument is that while ethnic and religious identities certainly matter in explaining religious violence, what is especially crucial is how and when they matter in linking microlevel perceptions and identities to political organization, opportunities, and collective actions whose forms shift over time. Religious violence, he argues in his detailed and carefully constructed account, results from heightened states of uncertainty and anxiety when identities and their boundaries are unclear and undergoing possible redefinition. Interests also matter, not in a direct causal manner as in most rational choice explanations but only as they interact with shifting identities.

Sidel considers three distinct forms of religious violence in Indonesia since the mid-1990's—riots, pogroms, and jihad—and seeks to explain the origins, locations, participants, and motivations behind each. To do this, he offers a very detailed account that requires a reader's careful attention, developing an explanation that begins with the constellation of relations during Dutch colonial rule that produced postcolonial alignments and led to the

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