

## Nationalism, War and Social Cohesion

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**Nationalism, War and Social Cohesion**

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## Nationalism, War and Social Cohesion

Siniša Malešević

### Abstract

Most studies of nationalism and war focus on the direct causal relationship between the two. Whereas the naturalist theories see strong national attachments as a primary cause of war, the formativist approaches understand nationalism as an inevitable product of warfare. This paper challenges both of these leading interpretations by problematizing the nature of group solidarity in the large scale violent conflicts. The author develops an alternative argument that emphasizes the centrality of two institutional processes: centrifugal ideologization and the cumulative bureaucratization of coercion. The principal argument is that war does not create nationalism neither does nationalism generate wars. Instead the development of nationalism owes much to the macro historical institutional processes that have little to do with the actual battlefields.

**Keywords:** Nationalism, war, ideology, solidarity, violence, bureaucracy

### Introduction

Common sense suggests that in times of war social behaviour undergoes dramatic change. The presence of actual or perceived threat is often seen as having a direct impact on existing social relationships with the escalation of violence polarising groups involved in the conflict. The general assumption is that warfare inevitably fosters the emergence of

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3 strong national identities that also entail a lack of solidarity towards those who find  
4 themselves on the other side of the conflict line. Drawing on these generally accepted  
5 assumptions, much of contemporary social theory and research see nationalism and war  
6 as mutually interdependent. Despite the fact that scholars disagree on what comes first,  
7 nationalism or war, there is near unanimity on the view that the conditions of warfare  
8 inexorably increase national solidarity. In other words while some argue that excessive  
9 national bonds contribute to, or even cause wars, others see nationalism as an  
10 unequivocal consequence of warfare. Even those who are more wary of these  
11 assumptions such as Van Evera (1994), Comaroff and Stern (1995) and Scheff (2000) do  
12 not question the causality of this relationship and focus exclusively on the different forms  
13 of nationalist experience. For example Van Evera's (1994:5) central research questions  
14 are: 'What types of nationalism are most likely to cause war?' and 'What background  
15 conditions catalyze or dampen this causal process?'.  
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34 In contrast to these approaches I outline an alternative conceptual framework that aims on  
35 the one hand to challenge this taken for granted view, and on the other hand to engage  
36 more thoroughly with the processes through which micro level solidarity is  
37 organizationally transformed into macro level nationalist narrative. The key argument is  
38 that for the most part, nationalism is neither the product nor the cause of war. Instead, the  
39 relationship between the two is more complex, messy and often unpredictable. Rather  
40 than acting as an automatic and natural response under conditions of hostility and  
41 external threat nationalism is heavily dependent on long term organizational and  
42 ideological support, much of which has little to do with actual warfare. Far from being a  
43 self-evident and normal reaction to inter-group violent confrontation, national  
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3 homogenisation is often an untidy, contested and acrimonious process that relies on  
4 external structural factors. Among these factors two processes stand out: centrifugal  
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6 ideologization and the cumulative bureaucratization of coercion (Malešević 2010). The  
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8 argument is developed in two parts: first I provide a brief critical analysis of the leading  
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10 explanations that strongly tie social cohesion and nationalism to war and then I articulate  
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12 an alternative hypothetical model that focuses on the crucial role that ideology and social  
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14 organizations play in this process.  
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### 29 **Beyond Nature and Nurture: War and National Solidarity**

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34 Most studies that tackle the relationship between war, nationalism and group  
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36 homogeneity belong to one of two research traditions: they either see national solidarity  
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38 itself as a cause of organised violence, or alternatively they posit wars as principal  
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40 generators of nationalism. Whereas for one group of scholars – naturalists - cultural  
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42 difference is almost inherently linked to inter-group violence; for others – formativists - it  
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44 is the violence itself that creates such strong cultural and national bonds.  
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48 For sociobiologists such as Van Hooff (1990), Van der Dennen (1995), and Gat (2006)  
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50 the origin and escalation of warfare has a strong genetic basis. In this view organized  
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52 violence is rooted in aggressive dispositions that have evolved over million of years.  
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55 Thus, just as other advanced mammals, humans utilize wars as means of competition  
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3 over scarce resources and territory with a view of maximizing their reproductive  
4 potential. In particular attention is given to the behavior of advanced apes such as  
5 chimpanzees that rely on strategic planning to build coalitions which attack other  
6 chimpanzees. It is argued that in this sense apes resemble early humans, with both species  
7 engaging in 'primitive warfare' (Van Hooff 1990; Stanford 2001).

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15 In addition, since most sociobiologists see ethnic and national attachments as an  
16 extension of kinship, they conceptualize national solidarity as given, primordial and more  
17 or less automatic. Biological, and by extension cultural, similarities are in themselves  
18 understood as a principal source of group conflict. Thus for sociobiologists war is a  
19 product of human genetics, a kin-based violent competition deeply embedded in  
20 aggressive dispositions and utilized to maximize one's 'inclusive fitness'. Simply put, the  
21 likelihood of organized violent group confrontation stems directly from the group's  
22 inherent, genetically developed, ethno-national solidarity.

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34 While sharing the central premise that strong ethno-national bonding precedes violent  
35 confrontations, the historical variant of this argument pays less attention to genetics and  
36 more to the historically documented cases of ethnocentric warfare. In the view of some  
37 military historians, cultural difference in itself is a potent generator of collective violence.  
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43 Drawing in part on Sun Tzu's (1971) philosophy of war which emphasizes the strategic  
44 benefits in knowing the cultural background of one's enemy a number of influential  
45 historians argue that war is a direct product of ingrained cultural homogeneity. For  
46 example for Keegan (1993:46), rather than being a Clausewitzian extension of politics by  
47 other means, war is 'the perpetuation of a culture by its own means'. In his view war is an  
48 expression of culture and as such its occurrences and character are determined by the  
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3 different ethno-cultural, national and civilizational traditions. In this vein he describes  
4 post 9/11 warfare as the continuation of 'older conflict between settled, creative,  
5 productive Westerners and predatory, destructive Orientals' (Keegan 2001). Although  
6 other military historians generally do not go that far in deducing organized violence from  
7 inherent 'civilizational' divides, many tend to identify strong national identification as a  
8 principal source of warfare. Modern wars in particular are seen as the direct product of  
9 strong national bonds. For example for Schmitt (1958:7) denial of national self-  
10 determination was a principal cause of the WWI.

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12 Despite the fact that naturalism contributes to our understanding of the universal genetic  
13 propensities of human behaviour and is useful in emphasising the historical versatility of  
14 warfare, it is in itself unable to provide a plausible explanation that links war, nationalism  
15 and social cohesion. Even if one overlooks the reifying, essentialist and groupist  
16 discourse of most naturalist analyses, which is occasionally combined with explicit  
17 orientalist imagery, it is apparent that naturalists have difficulty in explaining the social  
18 mechanisms of national cohesion. Rather than tracing the dynamics of social action and  
19 identifying the processes through which homogenisation is achieved most naturalists take  
20 group solidarity as given. Instead of probing and problematizing group solidarity they  
21 assume that biological and/or cultural resemblance will inevitably result in organised  
22 social action. Nevertheless as sociologists have demonstrated on numerous occasions  
23 (Weber 1968, Brubaker 2004; Malešević, 2006) there is no automatic link between  
24 cultural or biological similarity and collective action. In other words, declaring oneself to  
25 be Vietnamese or German does not mean that a particular individual will instinctively act  
26 in concert with other individuals who share the same national designation. Rather than  
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3 being a simple impulse that stems from cultural or genetic resemblance, social action  
4 entails active and prolonged political mobilisation. Furthermore, as only a small number  
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6 of cultural and biological practices can be successfully mobilised, the entire process of  
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8 nationalist mobilisation implies arbitrary selection of cultural or biological traits. For  
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10 nations to become real social actors it is essential that a simple category designation is  
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12 organizationally and ideologically transformed into a conscious, politicised and active  
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14 group (Brubaker 2004; Malešević 2006).  
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20 The second problem with the naturalist argument is its inability to differentiate between  
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22 the large scale sociological process that is warfare and the micro psychological and  
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24 biological stimuli that may or may not be involved in wars. While there is no doubt that  
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26 human beings share much of their emotional and behavioural repertoire with their  
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28 evolutionary predecessors such as fear, anger, or aggression and engage in hostile  
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30 contests, none of these are either sufficient or necessary for war. Since war is a social  
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32 institution that involves violent conflict between two or more social organizations often  
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34 underpinned by conflicting ideological narratives and political goals, it operates  
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36 according to a very different logic to that of animal hostility. Rather than relying on  
37  
38 simple aggressive impulses, warfare entails rigorous discipline, instrumental rationality,  
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40 regulated division of labour, meticulous organization, and a great deal of emotional  
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42 restraint. In most cases war is the exact opposite of the unimpeded aggressive rage  
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44 present in animal disputes: no army tolerates undisciplined and aggressive individuals  
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46 and most successful military machines have consisted not of 'Alfa males' but of highly  
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48 trained, skilled, obedient and well organised soldiers. As technologically advanced wars  
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50 demonstrate, one's physical robustness, innate hostility or anger are more impediments  
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3 than advantages on the frontline. Instead what is needed are skills, knowledge and  
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5 discipline in the use of science and technology to operate complex machinery such as  
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7 stealth airplanes, radars, to navigate long distance missiles, submarines, unmanned drones  
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9 and so many other technological devices. Simply put, war is nothing like a personal  
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11 vendetta or a violent aggressive quarrel between two wolves; it is a highly complex,  
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13 historically contingent and socially embedded process that requires organizational and  
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15 ideological reinforcement (Collins 2008; Malešević 2010).  
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20 The third and most problematic aspect of the naturalist argument is the implicit  
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22 assumption that differences in culture or biology are by themselves a source of violent  
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24 conflict. Warfare is seen to be a ubiquitous phenomenon linked to the universal struggle  
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26 of ethnic groups, nations, states, empires or civilizations over power, resources, territory  
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28 and status (Keegan 1993). However if there was any direct causality between violence  
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30 and cultural/biological diversity we would live in a world of rampant and inexorable  
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32 warfare. However, as archeological evidence indicates, for most of our unrecorded  
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34 history humans have lived in very small, loose, egalitarian and nomadic networks of  
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36 bands that rarely exceeded fifty people and were mostly incapable of and unwilling to  
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38 engage in protracted feuds (Service 1978, Fry 2007). Despite the abundance of cultural  
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40 and biological diversity that characterized the life of early humans, there is no  
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42 archeological evidence for warfare among the nomadic foragers and very little for the  
43  
44 simple sedentary tribes (Textor 1967, Eckhardt 1992, Fry 2007). That is, the origins and  
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46 expansion of warfare are not linked to human diversity. Moreover any attempt to infer the  
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48 existence of national solidarity on the basis of genetics alone is bound to fail as all claims  
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50 to common kinship and shared descent for the large scale entities that are nations cannot  
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3 be other than metaphoric: seventy five million Germans could not possibly share the  
4 same ancestors. Hence rather than being fixed and given, primordial entities, nations are  
5 dynamic, contingent and changing historical creations. Therefore the naturalist argument,  
6 in both of its versions, cannot provide a coherent account of the relationship between  
7 nationalism, war and social cohesion.  
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### 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 **The Formativist Alternative** 19

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22 Much of mainstream social theory and research remains focused on turning the naturalist  
23 argument on its head: nationalism and intensive group solidarity are not the cause of war,  
24 but the outcome of prolonged inter-group violent confrontations. In other words, national  
25 attachments are seen not as cultural or biological givens but as historical creation, often  
26 born through collective experience of violence. The formativist argument is most  
27 consistently developed in the neo-Durkhemian and rational choice perspectives. Despite  
28 the fact that both positions concur with view that the national homogenization is a  
29 product, not the source, of warfare, they disagree on how this process operates.  
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41 For rational choice theorists the intensive bonds of national solidarity originate in the  
42 instrumental rationality of individuals (Hechter 1995; Fearon 1995; Laitin 2007). Rather  
43 than being a basis of social action, cultural and biological similarities are viewed as  
44 individual assets deployed for one's economic self-interest. The outbreak of war  
45 undermines the existing market situation and creates an environment of insecurity and  
46 instability. In such an environment, where key resources are in short supply, the  
47 dynamics of competition can dramatically change, leading toward the greater  
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3 appreciation of shared action. Thus a greater national solidarity stems directly from the  
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5 co-ordinated self-interest of agents that tend to utilize their shared cultural markers with a  
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7 view of maximizing utility benefits for the entire group. In this context even very  
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9 destructive wars can be profitable, as on the one hand they generate intensive national  
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11 solidarity that was lacking before, and on the other hand such newly found national bonds  
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13 can lead towards economic re-organization of the political structure. As Laitin (2007:22)  
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15 argues: 'civil war is profitable for potential insurgents, in that they can both survive and  
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17 enjoy some probability of winning the state. If there is an economic motive for civil  
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19 war... it is in the expectation of collecting the revenues that ownership of the state  
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21 avails'. Hence for rational choice theorists, national solidarity neither precedes nor  
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23 governs individual action. Instead, in a war situation individual agents make rational  
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25 choices to exploit shared cultural markers for individual benefit and in this process  
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27 unwillingly foster the creation of intensive national solidarity.  
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34 In stark contrast to this view, neo-Durkhemian analyses downplay individual rationality  
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36 and emphasize collective affectivity as decisive in explaining the relationship between  
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38 war, nationalism and social cohesion. Drawing indirectly on Durkheim Smith (1981,  
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40 2009), Hutchinson (2005, 2007) and Marvin and Ingle (1999) analyze the processes  
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42 through which nations are historically articulated as sacred communities. In particular  
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44 they stress the role myths and collective memories of 'blood sacrifice' and 'glorious  
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46 dead' play in creating enduring national identities. The central focus is on historical  
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48 collective interpretations of inter-group conflicts which establish the boundaries between  
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50 culturally defined entities. For Smith (1981), warfare is one of the most important  
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52 creators of ethno-national historic consciousness. Although he acknowledges the  
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3 importance of shared struggle and the presence of external threat for the increase in group  
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5 internal cohesion, this in itself is not enough to forge intensive long term national  
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7 consciousness. Hence what matters more is the collective representation and  
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9 commemoration of past wars. It is through the rituals and practices of collective  
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11 remembering of national martyrs that nationhood is maintained and national solidarity  
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13 reinforced. In this sense, nationalism operates as a civil religion that entails periodic  
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15 worships of totemic, sacrificial, symbols, the presence of which helps establish the  
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17 normative universe of national communities. The commemorations of 'glorious dead' set  
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19 up moral parameters for the behaviour of future generations and in this process  
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21 perpetuate a strong national bond grounded in ethical responsibility towards the  
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23 ancestors.  
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29 The formativist alternative is a much more persuasive attempt to explain the link between  
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31 nationalism, war and social cohesion. It provides a broader, more synthetic and complex  
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33 answer that moves away from the biological and psychological analogies towards social  
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35 and political processes such as instrumental rationality and the historical sociology of  
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37 cultural representation. However, this approach still suffers from the three pronounced  
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39 shortcomings: it conflates social action on the micro and macro level; it overemphasizes  
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41 the integrative quality of warfare; and it takes rhetorical claims of sacrifice and killing at  
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43 face value.  
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48 When formativist researchers state that the presence of external threat automatically leads  
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50 towards greater national cohesion, their argument essentially represents an attempt to  
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52 apply the logic of psychological studies to the macro historical level. The general view is  
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54 that large scale collectivities operate in a similar way to that of the micro groups and the  
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3 individuals interacting in experimental laboratory conditions. Both rational choice  
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5 theorists and neo-Durkhemians posit social solidarity as a universal, trans-historical and,  
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7 for most part, uniform phenomenon. While for neo-Durkhemians, the mechanical  
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9 solidarity of resemblance can replace the organic solidarity of interdependence, with an  
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11 ethnic *conscience collective* growing into an articulated national identity, for the rational  
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13 choice theorists all solidarity presumes the preexistence of individual self-interest.  
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15 However to properly understand the relationship between nationalism and war it is  
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17 crucial to analytically distinguish between the behavior of individuals in laboratory  
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19 conditions, micro interaction in small, face to face, groups and the organizationally  
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21 mediated social action in the large scale entities that are nations and states. Although  
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23 psychological studies from Milgram (1974) and Zimbardo's (1971) early experiments to  
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25 more recent research (cf. Druckman 1995) have demonstrated convincingly how easily  
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27 individuals can act cruelly to conform to authority, such studies have proved inadequate  
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29 in explaining the dynamics of micro-group interaction.  
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36 While there is near consensus on the view that anonymous individuals are more likely to  
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38 act violently against other distant and anonymous individuals, even short periods of  
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40 social interaction significantly diminish the potential for cruel behavior. In other words as  
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42 Collins (2008:1-7) argues and amply documents much of human violence is deeply social  
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44 in character. Rather than focusing on violent individuals, the researcher's attention should  
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46 be on the violent situations 'which shape the emotions and acts of the individuals who  
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48 step inside them'. In a similar vein rather than being an exclusive propensity of  
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50 individuals, solidarity too is generated through social mechanisms which are neither  
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52 necessarily normative nor instrumental. The key point here is that there is a substantial  
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3 difference in the way in which social bonds are created and maintained at the micro and  
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5 macro group level. The decades of thorough research on the behavior of soldiers on the  
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7 battlefield has revealed that despite official pronouncements that glorify a soldier's  
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9 commitment to die for his nation, state, ideology or religious doctrine, most of those who  
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11 made the ultimate sacrifice have done so for a much smaller group: their family, close  
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13 friends or their regimental comrades (Henderson 1985, Bourke 2000; Collins 2008). In  
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15 this sense, most forms of genuine durable solidarity entail a substantial degree of micro-  
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17 level contact and face to face interaction. In contrast to the neo-Durkhemian image of  
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19 nationalism as a form of synchronised and all embracing collective effervescence, that  
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21 arises automatically and fills all the pores of a particular society actual macro cohesion  
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23 requires the organizational integration of thousands of micro solidarity networks.  
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29 Secondly, most formativist accounts overemphasize the integrative potential of warfare.  
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31 While there is no doubt that the presence of a direct and real threat might stimulate shared  
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33 feelings of fear, insecurity and anxiety thus fostering the need for a greater cooperation  
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35 and closer attachments, these feelings and needs do not necessarily materialize. The  
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37 history of warfare provides us with numerous examples when the presence of a palpable  
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39 threat acted not as a catalyst for national unity but as a source for its disintegration. For  
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41 example during the War of the Pacific (1879-1884) and the Mexican-American War  
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43 (1846-8) the governments of the attacked states were able neither to galvanize popular  
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45 support nor to generate funds to pay the troops: 'While the Chilean armies were marching  
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47 on Lima, Peruvian finance minister Quimper suggested a small tax on capital to pay the  
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49 troops in the field. These measures were defeated... as the U.S. army marched towards  
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3 Mexico City in 1847, the government frantically negotiated with the church and domestic  
4 lender for funds' (Centeno 2002:157-158).  
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8 In direct contrast to the view that warfare inevitably enhances national homogeneity, one  
9 can pinpoint the cases of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century Balkans and South America  
10 as well as contemporary Africa where the extensive proliferation of wars did not result in  
11 advancing greater national cohesion (Herbst 2000; Centeno 2002; Gerolymatos 2004).  
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14 Similarly the argument that places emphasis on the cohesive power of war  
15 commemorations neglects the contextual, and hence often manipulative, character of  
16 these events. Rather than being a spontaneous and automatic popular reaction, the  
17 collective worship of national martyrs and 'our glorious dead' entail elaborate  
18 organizational and ideological underpinning. The monuments, cenotaphs, triumphal  
19 arches and war cemeteries have to be built and maintained by the state; grand public  
20 ceremonies require a great deal of organizational work, and securing public receptiveness  
21 necessitates prolonged and effective primary and secondary socialization. As the example  
22 of pre- and post WWII Japan illustrates well, it is not war itself that encodes which events  
23 and actors will be celebrated and commemorated, but the post-war political and cultural  
24 environment which moulds who, what, when and how will be honored and remembered.  
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27 Although the Yasukuni Shinto shrine built in 1869 before the WWII served in part as a  
28 monument for the glorification of militaristic nationalism and the Japanese empire from  
29 1945 onwards, it has acquired a more religious and pietistic role (Nelson 2003).  
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32 Finally, in their attempt to link the rise of national solidarity to war experience,  
33 formativists exaggerate the role of bloodshed and sacrifice in forging strong national  
34 attachments. Both rational choice theorists and neo-Durkhemians see willingness to die  
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3 and kill for one's nation as the most reliable indicator of intense national solidarity. For  
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5 neo-Durkhemians this is a sign that individuals are well integrated into their nations  
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7 whereby strong national identities often act as a surrogate for religion. In Smith's and  
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9 Hutchinson's view intensive national bonds provide meanings and help individuals deal  
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11 with the question of one's inevitable mortality. For the rational choice theorists,  
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13 willingness to die for others is a form of exchange in which individual autonomy is  
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15 traded off for solidarity. In Wintrobe's (2006:41) view, since nation is perceived as a  
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17 'solidarity multiplier', one is able and willing to make the ultimate sacrifice or kill others  
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19 through the instrumentally rational pursuit of 'feeling of belonging-ness to a group'.  
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23 Although, as available research shows, self-sacrifice and joint participation in the killing  
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25 of other human beings do help create exceptionally strong bonds among soldiers on the  
26  
27 battlefield and in other small scale groups such as gangs, terrorists, or insurgents, this  
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29 process does not translate so well at the macro level (Grossman 1995; 2004; Collins  
30  
31 2008). For one thing, even in total and protracted wars, most individuals are unlikely to  
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33 take part in combat and in modern warfare even the soldiers who fight rarely have the  
34  
35 opportunity to see the enemy face to face and shoot at them. For example, out of 2.8  
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37 million soldiers who were sent to the Vietnam War, only 300,000, that is around 10%,  
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39 took part in actual battlefields with an even smaller number killing and dying in close  
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41 combat (Gabriel 1987:26-30). As, since the introduction of the cannon onto the  
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43 battlefield, much warfare is fought at long distance the possibility of bonding through  
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45 killing and dying has become remote even for the soldiers let alone civilians.  
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49 Furthermore since both self-sacrifice and killing go so much against the normative  
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51 universe of ordinary upbringing in nearly all social orders, these practices are extremely  
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3 difficult to perform and most individuals avoid them at all costs. The recent research  
4 makes apparent that the majority of front line combatants prefer to misfire, shoot in the  
5 air or not shoot at all rather than to aim at and kill enemy soldiers. Even the most  
6 experienced soldiers dread close range killings (Grossman 1995, Bourke 2000 and  
7 Collins 2008). The situation is nearly identical with one's willingness to die as once they  
8 reach the battlefield most soldiers become overwhelmed with fear with trembling, violent  
9 pounding of the heart, vomiting, cold sweat, urination and soiling one's pants a fairly  
10 widespread practice (Grossman 1995; Collins 2008). If, even for soldiers on the frontline,  
11 both sacrifice and killing for the nation remain rare and exceptional events, they are  
12 highly unlikely to have a decisive impact on the development of national cohesion among  
13 those who are far away from the battlefields. To sum up, the onset of war and the  
14 presence of external threat do not automatically translate in the greater national cohesion.  
15 In order for this to happen, other social processes have to be at work. Let us briefly  
16 sketch what these processes are.  
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### 41 **Moulding Social Cohesion: Ideology, Social Organizations and Nations**

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48 To argue that the strong national bonds are neither the cause nor the consequence of war  
49 does not mean to suggest that the two phenomena are completely unrelated. The onset of  
50 war usually influences most aspects of everyday social life where the patterns of  
51 solidarity rarely stay unaffected. However, the social origins, direction, intensity and  
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3 duration of social solidarity can never be taken for granted. In particular it is wrong to  
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5 simply assume that the large scale collectivities act similarly to individual agents or  
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7 micro groups. There is nothing natural and automatic in the formation of group solidarity,  
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9 and particularly not for such gargantuan social entities as states and nations. In this  
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11 context the mere presence of an external danger is unlikely to mechanically translate into  
12  
13 greater national homogeneity. Instead the construction of social cohesion at the macro  
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15 level is for the most part a historically contingent, messy and complex process involving  
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17 events, actions and practices that often have little or nothing to do with the actual  
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19 battlefields. The fact that in the modern age, wars are often satiated with widespread  
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21 nationalist enthusiasm does not mean that one phenomenon is caused by the other nor  
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23 that one is bound to trigger the other. Rather, I argue that a better understanding of how  
24  
25 national cohesion is achieved requires re-focusing our attention to the origins and  
26  
27 workings of two historical processes that shape this relationship: centrifugal  
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29 ideologization and the cumulative bureaucratization of coercion (Malešević 2010). In  
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31 what follows I outline a conceptual framework that theoretically explores the impact of  
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33 these two processes on the development of national cohesion in the modern era. The aim  
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35 is not to formulate an alternative causal theory of the relationship between nationalism  
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37 and war but, more modestly, to critically examine the role social organizations and mass  
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39 ideologization play in forging an 'illusory correlation' between these two phenomena.  
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### 53 **Ideology as a Mass Phenomenon**

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There is nothing obvious in expressing solidarity with one's co-nationals. As students of nations and nationalism have extensively documented for much of our history, an individual's sense of attachment rarely expanded beyond the locality and close kinship networks (Weber 1978; Hobsbawm 1990; Breuilly 1994). Even when nationalism emerged as a fully fledged ideology in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century it still, for most part, remained a preserve of the cultural, economic and political elites and some middle class groups influenced by the philosophies of Enlightenment and Romanticism (Leerssen 2006; Hroch 1985). It took hundreds of years for nationalist discourse to become a widespread phenomenon, a trans-class ideology shared by an overwhelming majority of populations throughout the world. Since normative ideological doctrines were largely a creation of cultural and political elites, and have slowly and gradually permeated different layers of society, relying in the process on the structural power of various social movements and organizations, I call this process a centrifugal ideologization (Malešević 2010: 8-11). The fact that this phenomenon originates at the top of social pyramid does not suggest that the process itself is top-down, one dimensional. Instead its prevalence and intensity are determined by the active participation of various social agents: not only state institutions such as the education, mass media, military, police and administrative agencies but also social movements, civil society networks and family units.

While the pre-modern world relied on the legitimizing power of myths and religions, the modern era necessitates the emergence of coherent and all embracing ideological doctrines able to maintain a hold on millions of largely independent individuals. The classical sociologists from Ibn Khaldun, Toennies, Marx, Weber to Durkheim

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4 comprehended well how the profound structural difference between modernity and its  
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6 historical predecessors: far greater impersonal and blasé relations, individual autonomy,  
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8 the general shift from normative to more utilitarian relationships, the emergence of an  
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10 elaborate and advanced division of labour, the weakening of broader kinship bonds at the  
11  
12 expense of contractual arrangements and the ever increasing rationalisation of social  
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14 action. Hence, one of the central problems in modernity is how to develop and sustain  
15  
16 solidarity among millions of autonomous and impersonal individuals who are unlikely to  
17  
18 ever meet over nine-tenth of their co-nationals.  
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22 This also has a direct impact on individual behaviour in times of war: whereas in the pre-  
23  
24 modern world an attack on the village would quickly galvanise unity among those who  
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26 know and trust each other and who find themselves under clear danger, the involvement  
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28 of a large state in an overseas military adventure might have no impact at all, or could  
29  
30 even act negatively, on the social cohesion of its citizens. Thus unlike bands, tribes,  
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32 chiefdoms, city states and empires, modern nation-states require a different form of social  
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34 cement to hold its citizenry together. I argue that it is centrifugal, mass, ideologization  
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36 that provides this cement as, when successful, it acts as an organizational surrogate for  
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38 genuine social solidarity. In other words, to generate and maintain a degree of social  
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40 cohesion within the nation-state, it becomes necessary to attempt to replicate the intimacy  
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42 and trust of the face to face interaction on this macro level. Paradoxically and  
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44 indicatively, nationalist rhetoric insists on the warmth and emotional cosiness of  
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46 communal and kinship-like ties at the very moment when such ties are in the process of  
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48 disintegration. As Gellner (1983: 124) astutely put it nationalism inverts reality: 'it claims  
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50 to defend folk culture while in fact is forging a high culture; it claims to protect an old  
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3 folk society while in fact helping to build up an anonymous mass society'. Despite the  
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5 strenuous attempts of nationalist ideologues and state authorities to portray an  
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7 uninterrupted continuity between the pre-modern and modern forms of group  
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9 attachments, nationalism is a profoundly different and historically novel phenomenon  
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11 (Mann 1993; Hobsbawm 1990; Breuilly 1993; Malešević 2006). In contrast to rigid  
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13 medieval status hierarchies where one's feeling of solidarity and group loyalty rarely, if  
14  
15 ever, expanded beyond and below one's social rank, and where for overwhelming  
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17 numbers of individuals one's entire social universe coincided with one's village of birth,  
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19 modernity entailed dramatic increase in both territorial and social mobility.  
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24 Although this centrifugal process of ideologization is rooted in concrete structural  
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26 changes such as the standardization of vernacular languages, the growth of large scale  
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28 public educational systems, a dramatic increase in literacy, state centralization, the  
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30 expansion of military draft, and the availability of cheap, nation-wide, mass media  
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32 (Anderson 1983, Gellner 1983, Mann 1993), its successful proliferation also entails the  
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34 ongoing, and almost never ending, political mobilization of civil society, family and other  
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36 local networks. To generate a shared feeling of attachment which would incorporate  
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38 millions of autonomous and anonymous individuals, it was essential to bind the  
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40 thousands of pockets of micro-solidarity into a coherent and believable macro-nationalist  
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42 narrative. Since solidarity is a fragile 'commodity' that requires permanent affirmation  
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44 and reinforcement, it is much more easily achieved through direct face to face interaction  
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46 and physical contact (Collins 2008) than through symbolic projections of 'an image of  
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48 one's communion' (Anderson 1983). In the modern era of anonymous and cold  
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*Gesellschaft*, where there is little genuine warmth of *Gemeinschaft*, it is ideology that acts as a principal provider of ontological security for large number of individuals.

It is not only that centrifugal ideologization ‘invites the masses into history’ (Nairn 1977:340), but it also keeps them there by maintaining an enduring ideological scaffolding through the institutions of modern state and though civil society groupings.

As Billig (1995) has noted, much of this ideological support is articulated through the practices and ideas of banal nationalism. That is, the strength of nationalism is better gauged by its habitual pervasiveness than by its venomous outbursts and rallying calls: a hot, emotional, ‘red in tooth and claw’ type of nationalism, is an intense but rare and transitory phenomenon, while cold, ordinary and routine nationalism is stable and enduring. Centrifugal ideologization is so pervasive precisely because it is encored in unnoticeable, ordinary and taken for granted processes and events: the routine, tacit and everyday rhetoric of mass media, educational institutions, advertising, political speeches, entertainment, administrative orders, stamps, bank notes and even meteorological broadcasts. Both Barthes (1993) and Bourdieu (1990) have demonstrated convincingly that much ideological power is generated through normalization and enhabitation: what is seen as obvious, normal and natural is rarely questioned. The idea that a nation, class or race are self-evident and objective forms of being entails the existence of what Bourdieu (1990) calls doxic experience: the deep-founded, acquired, almost unconscious values, beliefs and practices. Thus centrifugal ideologization normalizes and naturalizes nationhood as a fundamental cognitive category and an essential social practice.

Nevertheless what is missing in Billig’s account are the social agents who are not simply objects of ideologization but are active participants in this process. Weber (1978),

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3 Simmel (1990) and Elias (2000) have all emphasized the role of rational self-disciplining  
4 as crucial for modernity. Whereas for Weber, Calvinism was the true predecessor of  
5 ascetic ethics, 'methodical control' and eventually rationalization of one's life, for  
6 Simmel modernity promotes calculability: because human actions become centred on  
7 long term goals they are more prone towards utilitarian behavior and the internalization  
8 of social constraint. Similarly, Elias emphasizes the changing character of interpersonal  
9 conduct, with focus on the control of one's emotions, bodily functions, table manners and  
10 forms of speech. This personal conditioning is integral to the process of centrifugal  
11 ideologization as it gradually helps project internal social hierarchies outside of one's  
12 society. By internalizing values and practices associated with being a good and  
13 responsible German or Pole one is able to symbolically raise one's own prestige at the  
14 expense of the excluded Other. In other words by embracing a routine nationalist  
15 narrative large sections of the population are in position to tie their own social status to  
16 that of their nation, while simultaneously denying such exceptional qualities to other  
17 (potentially adversary) societies. In this sense, nationalism is almost the exact opposite of  
18 pre-modern forms of prejudice: rather than being dependent on the sporadic and arbitrary  
19 emotional outbursts of hatred that could relate to any individual and loosely defined  
20 collectivity, it entails implementation of relatively systematic, coherent ideological  
21 blueprints that depend on the utilitarian and value rationality of masses. Bauman (1989)  
22 clearly demonstrates that there is a qualitative difference between the sporadic outbursts  
23 of anti-Semitic, religiously and mythically inspired, rage that characterized the traditional  
24 world and the methodical, efficient, almost scientific and highly regulated ideological  
25 enterprise of the 'final solution'. Nationalism operates most competently through habit  
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3 and routine of cold and calculated rationality not through sudden eruptions of  
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5 uncontrolled emotions. Hence centrifugal ideologization involves both the institutional  
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7 proliferation of ideas and practices as well as subjective self-disciplining, both of which  
8  
9 make ideology, and in this case nationalism, a normal, mundane and self-evident  
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11 discursive practice shared by a large majority of people. Simply put, rather than being a  
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13 creation of warfare nationalism develops long before any sign of upcoming inter-state  
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15 violence.  
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### 22 **Social Organizations and National Cohesion**

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27 Centrifugal ideologization is a potent historical device for the transformation of micro  
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29 level solidarities into macro level nationalist narratives. However, its very existence and  
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31 expansion depend heavily on the workings of concrete social organizations. Since Weber  
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33 (1978) it has become apparent that complex social orders operate much better when  
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35 patrimonial and nepotistic traditional authority is replaced with the legal and instrumental  
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37 rationality of bureaucratic rule. The gradual historical shift from traditional forms of  
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39 domination based on the personal whim of rulers towards those rooted in the impersonal  
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41 rule of abstract laws was crucial in legitimising modern social orders. However, what is  
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43 often neglected in this sanguine diagnosis of modernity is the fact that the bureaucratic  
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45 form of organization is no less domineering than its traditional counterparts. On the  
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47 contrary, its operational effectiveness and its historical success are grounded in its  
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49 coercive character. Not only are modern administrative organizations profoundly (albeit  
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51 transparently) hierarchical, with clearly defined divisions of labour and responsibility, but  
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3 they are also able to successfully and legitimately enforce mass obedience on a scale  
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5 traditional authorities were never able to achieve. By privileging knowledge, instrumental  
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7 efficiency and institutional teleology, bureaucratic organizations have proved capable of  
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9 imposing strict discipline, social control and organizational loyalty. The fact that  
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11 bureaucratic organization is nominally articulated as open to social mobility, meritocracy  
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13 and transparency, makes it more coercive rather than less, as disobedience to such a  
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15 legitimate authority is swiftly reprimanded and punished with little resistance. In contrast  
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17 to common sense views that see modernity, and in particular bureaucratic organization of  
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19 rule, as less coercive than its historical predecessors, the opposite is the case. All  
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21 bureaucracy entails discipline and all discipline presupposes control and acquiescence.  
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23 Nevertheless, what is central to note is the gradual and constant expansion of bureaucratic  
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25 power. The coercive reach and penetration of social organizations has been on the  
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27 increase over the last 10,000 years with the last two centuries witnessing a dramatic  
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29 escalation (Malešević 2010: 92-120). Once modern social organizations managed to  
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31 monopolize the use of violence over vast and clearly demarcated territories, they were  
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33 also able to swiftly mobilize and recruit entire societies to confront competing social  
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35 organizations that, in turn, maintained hold on their own societies.  
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44 Consequently, the proliferation of bureaucratic control was decisive in changing the  
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46 character of violent confrontation. While in earlier epochs violence was macabre and  
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48 gruesome but largely limited in scope in the modern era morbidity has been replaced by  
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50 surgical efficiency, evidenced in spectacular increase in mass slaughter. For example, as  
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52 Eckhard's (1990) meticulous study demonstrates, the global war casualties go hand in  
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54 hand with the expansion of state power: whereas in the combined 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries  
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3 all war deaths amounted to no more than 60,000 people, in the joint 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup>  
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5 centuries this figure leaps to nearly 8 million dead. However the last two hundred years  
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7 and in particular the 20<sup>th</sup> century represent the pinnacle of mass killings with 19 million  
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9 war casualties in 19<sup>th</sup> century and 111 million in the 20<sup>th</sup> century alone. All of this  
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11 indicates that the bureaucratization of coercion is a cumulative historical process whereby  
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13 the increase in strength, size and reach of social organizations is paralleled with the rise  
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15 of their destructive potential. Since warfare is not, as sociobiologists would have it, an  
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17 inter-group feud written large but a highly coordinated violent contest between two or  
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19 more social organizations, as these organizations grow and expand, so does war. Hence  
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21 the gradual increase in the rationalisation of social action has its pronounced dark side: as  
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23 the infrastructural and bureaucratic capacities of states spread and grow and as social  
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25 organizations became more complex, pervasive and instrumentally rational, their malign  
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27 propensities increase.

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29 This is best illustrated by analysing social orders which are commonly seen as  
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31 underdeveloped and less modernized, such as Rwanda in 1990s. Despite popular  
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33 perceptions which saw Rwandan genocide as a continuation of pre-modern tribalism, its  
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35 preparation and execution owe a great deal to the cumulative bureaucratization of  
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37 coercion and to centrifugal ideologization. Firstly no pre-modern rulers possessed  
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39 technology, social organization or ideology to implement mass killings on such a scale  
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41 and at such a speed, but more importantly, were it not for the proliferation of profoundly  
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43 modernist principles and practices, it is highly unlikely that Rwandan genocide would  
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45 have happened at all. The genocide was a systematic and highly organised event that  
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47 relied on pre-existing bureaucratic machinery and well articulated ideological blueprints.  
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3 By the late 1980s Rwanda boasted developed road and communication networks, good  
4 education and health system, a stable economy with low inflation and miniscule foreign  
5 debt, relatively high literacy rates, an extensive, well run and largely non-corrupt  
6 administrative apparatus (Prunier 1997, Hintjens 2001, Taylor 1999) all of which gained  
7 her the reputation of being 'the Switzerland of Africa'. More importantly this was a  
8 remarkably centralised and ordered state with 'chillingly purposeful bureaucratic control'  
9 (Oplinger 1990:260) very disciplined civil service and a political culture that encouraged  
10 'systematic and unconditional obedience to authority' (Prunier, 1997: 141).  
11 Consequently, the execution of genocide was conducted with utmost speed and efficiency  
12 coordinated from the highest political and bureaucratic authority (Reyntjens 1996:245).  
13 Rather than being an irrational explosion of uncontrolled and emotional butchery the  
14 killing was highly organized, controlled and directed 'by the civil servants in the central  
15 government, *prefets*, *bourgmestres* and local councilors' (Prunier 1997:247). As  
16 Mamdani (2001:144) convincingly demonstrates 'the administrative machinery of the  
17 local state was key to organizing the series of massacres that constituted the genocide'.  
18 Thus the proliferation of violence in modernity entails reliance on the disciplinary effects  
19 of social organizations. It is modern bureaucratic machines that make systematic killing  
20 possible by discouraging disobedience and by transferring responsibility to higher chains  
21 in the hierarchy.

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48 However, the cumulative bureaucratization of coercion can not operate successfully  
49 without centrifugal ideologization. It is mass ideologies that provide justification and  
50 ethical comfort for all those enveloped by the bureaucratic machine. The cold and  
51 routinized character of everyday nationalism, generated by processes of centrifugal  
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ideologization synchronizes with the indifferent, unemotional and highly instrumental moral codes of bureaucratic organizations. Just as banal nationalism does not require battle cries and exuberant outbursts of hatred but is encoded in almost invisible repetition and routinization of nationalist symbols and practice, so modern social organizations privilege and prioritize orderly obedience, delegation of tasks and detached professionalism over passionate and impulsive commitments for a specific cause. Bureaucratic organization bestows a coercive environment where social action is routinized and trivialized, while centrifugal ideologization imprints meanings on these processes and in this way provides the glue that holds the nation-state together. Since everyday, banal nationalism is nothing but a habitual expression of loyalty to a concrete social organization (i.e. nation-state), it is bound to operate according to a logic which mirrors other forms of bureaucratic ethics. In particular this means that it provides a teleological blueprint that on the one hand allows for the smooth operation of social organizations and on the other, galvanizes routinized popular support for the actions of these social organizations. As Rwandan example shows, the trigger that transformed the cumulative bureaucratization of coercion into genocidal action was centrifugal ideologization. From the colonially imposed, fixed and mutually exclusive ethnic categorisations, through the Hamitic ideology of Tutsi supremacy, to the Hutu Power counter-ideology codified in the Bahutu Manifesto of 1957, it was popularized ideological doctrines that paved the way for organized slaughter (Hintjens 1999; Mamdani 2001). Hence, despite its relative economic underdevelopment, Rwanda was a society with high levels of cumulative bureaucratization of coercion and extensive centrifugal ideological penetration.

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3 Therefore rather than causing war or being a cause of war nationalism remains a highly  
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5 autonomous phenomenon with its own dynamics, a dynamics that has been and remains  
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7 shaped by two long term historical processes – cumulative bureaucratization of coercion  
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9 and centrifugal ideologization. Although these two processes can not possibly account  
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11 for all aspects of relationship between war and national homogeneity it seems highly  
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13 unlikely that social orders which operate under low levels of bureaucratization and  
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15 ideologization can in times of war easily transform local solidarities into an all embracing  
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17 nationalist discourse. As European history shows so well, excessive violence requires  
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19 elaborate social organization underpinned by believable popular ideologies: whereas  
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21 medieval warfare was a prerogative of small group of aristocrats engaged in the highly  
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23 ritualistic brawls with few casualties and no support from the wider (peasant) population,  
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25 the modern era gave birth to total wars that involved the mutual destruction of millions of  
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27 highly organised and ideologically mobilized citizenry. Hence the outbreak of war and  
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29 the presence of external threat do not automatically translate into greater national  
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31 solidarity: the escalation of virulent nationalism owes much to its organizational and  
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33 ideological embeddedness.  
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## 46 **Conclusion**

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50 Although much of contemporary social theory and research posits a strong and even  
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52 inexorable link between nationalism and war these two phenomena in fact exhibit much  
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54 more autonomy. Despite conventional views that associate the outbreak of war with the  
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3 automatic eruption of nationalist euphoria there is nothing inevitable and natural in this  
4 relationship. Rather than being a direct and instinctive extension of kin solidarity  
5 nationalism is a complex social process that relies on continuous organizational and  
6 ideological support. Similarly, neither is war an augmented, aggressive crowd tussle but a  
7 highly organised and ideologized political confrontation involving antagonistic social  
8 organizations. Hence to understand the relationship between war and nationalism it is  
9 paramount to look at their structural origins, both of which, I argue, have been shaped by  
10 long term processes – cumulative bureaucratization of coercion and centrifugal  
11 ideologization. It is the historical development of these two macro processes that has a  
12 decisive impact on whether the break-out of a particular war will result in a greater  
13 national homogenization. Following this hypothetical model it is argued that a greater  
14 bureaucratization of social order and a more pervasive ideological penetration of society -  
15 involving both the institutional spread of ideas and practices as well as subjective self-  
16 disciplining - are more likely to create conditions for stronger nationalist homogenization  
17 in times of war. The next step is to empirically verify or falsify this theoretical  
18 framework.  
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