

# Book Review

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*The Roots of Ethnic Cleansing in Europe*. By H. Zeynep Bulutgil. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016.

Most individuals identify with multiple social categories: gender, class, age, religion, sex, and race, to name a few. Consequently, a recurring challenge for scholars of ethnic cleansing is to explain how ethnic categories become salient for violent politics and override cross-cutting forms of identification in the process. Enter H. Zeynep Bulutgil's important new book, *The Roots of Ethnic Cleansing in Europe*. Wide in scope, this book not only seeks to develop a coherent theory of ethnic cleansing for the entire European Continent during the twentieth century but also aims to extend the central thesis to sub-Saharan Africa as well. To do so, Bulutgil incorporates cross-national quantitative data and comparative historical case studies into her analysis, and she also examines positive, negative, and "atypical" cases, countering a long-standing tendency in studies of political violence to sample on the dependent variable of *violence* in a quest to explain how ethnic cleansing occurs (Luft 2015; Straus 2012, 2015). If it is not already clear, *The Roots of Ethnic Cleansing in Europe* is abundantly ambitious.

Bulutgil's central thesis is that ethnic cleansing emerges from an interplay of domestic and international dynamics. Within multiethnic states, divisions among politically dominant ethnic groups vis-à-vis minorities generate a bulwark against cleansing, since those who would rather cooperate with ethnic others prevent their more extremist coethnics from pursuing a violent agenda. Examples of nonethnic cleavages that foster cross-ethnic collaboration include social class and religion/secularism. Both of these preclude ethnic cleansing, Bulutgil argues, by providing a nonethnic source of alliance for members of dominant ethnic groups with ethnic minorities.

On the other hand, in the relationships between multiethnic states, Bulutgil argues that territorial conflicts can trigger the breakdown of domestic factors that prevent ethnic

cleansing by increasing the relative strength of dominant ethnic group members who desire to cleanse their state of ethnic others. For example, annexation may alter ethnic group power dynamics by increasing the political opportunities available to minorities through what Bulutgil terms "political promotion." In turn, pro-ethnic cleansing factions of dominant groups are likely to gain support from those who previously did not perceive ethnicity as salient cleavage for politics. Following this, and especially if annexation proves temporary or fails, the likelihood of cleansing increases.

Significantly, Bulutgil's two-layered theory that (1) non-ethnic domestic cleavages in multiethnic contexts obstruct ethnic cleansing, and (2) interstate territorial conflict weakens these barriers by raising the salience of ethnicity for politics hinges on the idea that ethnic groups are not repetitive across space. By this, Bulutgil means that ethnic hierarchies and the identity of the dominant group tend to vary from state to state. In contrast, social classes and religious groups tend to repeat across space. As a result, interstate war risks altering existing ethnic hierarchies but not other social identity-based groupings. According to Bulutgil, this territoriality of ethnicity explains why war both increases the salience of ethnicity and dismantles preexisting nonethnic domestic alignments.

A strength of Bulutgil's analysis is its combination of quantitative and qualitative methods and use of primary and secondary data to test hypotheses. In chapter 2, for example, she analyzes a new, self-generated cross-national data set on ethnic groups and their population shares in Europe during the twentieth century. Three variables for each layer of explanation are developed, theoretically justified, and tested using logistic regression. Bulutgil's findings support her argument, though perhaps the most powerful and important result is that "promoted group" (related to political promotion, above) increases the risk of ethnic cleansing by 71 times. Further, when analyzed in light of the variables "political competition" and "leftwing vote," which she classifies as domestic inhibitors, the probability of ethnic cleansing declines. Thus, considering both domestic and international dynamics in tan-

dem helps solve the puzzle of why ethnic group promotions have led to cleansing in some places (e.g., Germans in Central Europe after World War II) and not others (Germans in Alsace-Lorraine during the same time period).

In chapter 3, Bulutgil tests her argument's causal logic by diving deep into the history of four cases in three European contexts: Germans in Czechoslovakia, Germans in Poland and Ukraine, and Greeks in the Ottoman Empire. In chapter 4, she provides a detailed analysis of the ethnic cleansing of Muslims by Serb forces in the former Yugoslavia. Chapters 5–6 consider negative/atypical cases in Europe and the “relative absence” of ethnic cleansing in sub-Saharan Africa, respectively.

A detailed discussion of each chapter is beyond the scope of this review, so allow me to focus on chapter 4, in which Bulutgil applies her two-layered theory to explain how social relationships in 1990s Bosnia shifted from neighborly inter-ethnic relations to extreme ethnic polarization and cleansing in a few short years.

Bulutgil begins the chapter by acknowledging that Bosnia poses a challenge to her thesis that interstate territorial conflicts increase the likelihood of ethnic cleansing by heightening the salience of ethnicity while weakening domestic barriers to ethnic polarization. In Bosnia, ethnonationalist parties rose to prominence before the escalation of territorial conflicts and ethnic cleansing began at the start of the war without there having first been the kinds of wartime collaborations or ethnic dynamic changes that she earlier identifies as necessary for ethnic cleansing.

To explain Bosnia, Bulutgil merges statistical analysis of a cross-municipal data set with accounts by historians and anthropologists. She proposes that Bosnians voted for ethnonationalist parties because there simply was not another salient cleavage around which political mobilization could occur—45 years of communist rule secularized society and all but eliminated ethnic inequalities. Additionally, cleansing started early in the war because the ethnonationalist parties, the Serb Democratic Party (SDS) in particular, had already achieved prominence by the time the war began. Consequently, once Bosnia received international recognition of its independence in 1992, which followed from Croatia's independence in 1991, territorial shifts prompted the SDS to instigate the ethnic cleansing of Muslims so they could secure as much territory as possible for Serbs. There is a difference, however, between the ethnic cleansing campaigns of Muslims by Serbs in 1992 and in 1995, which also included the genocide at Srebrenica: the latter, according to Bulutgil, was motivated by revenge after two years of warfare that resulted in killings on both sides, while the former was motivated by the aforementioned security logic.

*The Roots of Ethnic Cleansing in Europe* demonstrates Bulutgil's profound skill in combining diverse methodological tools with theoretically oriented substantive analysis. Nevertheless, several issues remain that I found myself returning to time and again throughout the book, unable to settle on an answer.

First, it is surprising that a book on ethnic cleansing in Europe during the twentieth century, with ethnic cleansing defined as “any event in which an organization that has the capability to use coercion in a given territory permanently deports and/or kills a substantial part of an ethnic group that lives within their territory” (6), hardly discusses the Holocaust. True, Bulutgil does examine Jews and Roma in Germany as an atypical case (161–65), but even then, she stops after describing how it was that the Nazis were able to secure political control of Germany. There is no account of their decision to expel and murder Jews and Roma once they rose to power; it is simply asserted that once the Nazis obtained control, domestic obstacles against cleansing were removed (164). The omission of the Holocaust and especially of violence against Jews beyond Germany is important because any theory of ethnic cleansing in Europe during the twentieth century should either be able to account for the Holocaust or explain how it falls outside the scope of the argument. The Holocaust fits Bulutgil's definition of ethnic cleansing neatly; it is unclear to me why, then, the expulsion and murder of Jews throughout Europe during this same time period is only briefly discussed.

Second, the omission of the Holocaust matters because in the other cases Bulutgil examines—Czechoslovakia, Poland, Hungary, Bosnia-Herzegovina—tens and hundreds of thousands of Jews were murdered with the assistance of local governments and civilian collaborators, and this violence was a precursor to the cleansing that is analyzed. About Ukraine, for example, Bulutgil notes that Ukrainian men worked alongside Germans in massacring Jews—97% of the total Jewish population of Volhynia was killed by October 1942—before the massacres of Poles by Ukrainians and Ukrainians by Poles even began. In the section on Hungary, she writes that Germans and Hungarians collaborated to deport Hungarian Jews to their deaths, but the emphasis is on the ethnic cleansing of Germans from Hungary from 1944–50, not the 70% of Hungarian Jews killed just prior. How can we understand the dynamics that led to ethnic cleansing in these latter cases without seriously considering the cleansing that had already occurred?

Finally, the omission of the Holocaust highlights a third concern that bears on the theory of ethnic cleansing put forth in this otherwise powerful and important study: the changes in classifications of various social groups over time. For example, it is possible that Bulutgil does not consider Jews an

ethnic minority in Europe for the purposes of this project, though they are listed as such in appendix 2.1 for Germany and Romania, and it is worth noting they constituted a smaller percentage of the overall population in these countries than in Poland or Hungary before the Holocaust. But then again, Jews, like other minority groups, could at different times and by different people be perceived as an ethnic minority, a religious minority, or even a class-based minority, as demonstrated by the concept of Judeo-Bolshevism during the first half of the twentieth century. Also, Hitler racialized Jews in Germany through the Nuremberg Laws (that is to say, tied Jewish identity to myths about biology), which were subsequently implemented in different variations throughout Europe in the 1930s and 1940s. Thus while it makes sense for Bulutgil to identify ethnicity, religion, and class as three forms of social classification that can generate political alignments, in reality, ethnicity is far more complex. Depending on the time and place and on the actors whose perceptions matter, ethnicity can include religion (as with Muslims in Bosnia, for example), or be seen as tied to class, or be distinctly racialized. For an argument that hinges on the idea that domestic religious or class-based ties that cut across ethnicity inhibit ethnic cleansing, it can sometimes feel as if these theoretical categories are too neat.

As for future work, it would be interesting to see more research that seriously considers Bulutgil's ideas about the benefits of economic inequality for preventing the likelihood of ethnic cleansing. Indeed, Bulutgil seems to suggest that without economic inequality there is a greater chance that people will align with ethnonationalists. Remove religious/secular divides, too, and there is simply no other choice but to vote along ethnic lines. And yet throughout history, we have seen how economic inequality makes some people less likely to work with ethnic others and more likely to find ethnonationalism appealing, including calls to prohibit, limit,

and remove ethnic minorities. An important question, then, would be when and under what circumstances are competing social cleavages such as class or religion likely to reduce ethnic conflict? When and under what conditions are they are likely to merge such that particular ethnic groups become classified and perceived as economic threats or religious-values threats, increasing the likelihood of cleansing? These are necessary questions that Bulutgil's theory opens for consideration, inspiring new ideas for future analyses.

*The Roots of Ethnic Cleansing* is a welcome contribution to the literature on ethnic cleansing. Scholars and students alike will find creative and useful ideas in this book. In particular, Bulutgil draws attention to the relationship between various social categories and how domestic and international dynamics alter their salience, bringing new answers to the recurring question of how it is that people come to align along ethnic cleavages for violent purposes. The phenomenon of ethnic cleansing has been scrutinized so many times that one might feel that there is nothing significant left to say, but Bulutgil's novel arguments provide inspiration for thinking about ethnic cleansing anew. Her analytic care is evident throughout the book, and the effort pays off; in a very crowded field, *The Roots of Ethnic Cleansing* extends the frontier of scholarship on this cruelly perennial—and all too human—manifestation of inhumanity.

## REFERENCES

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