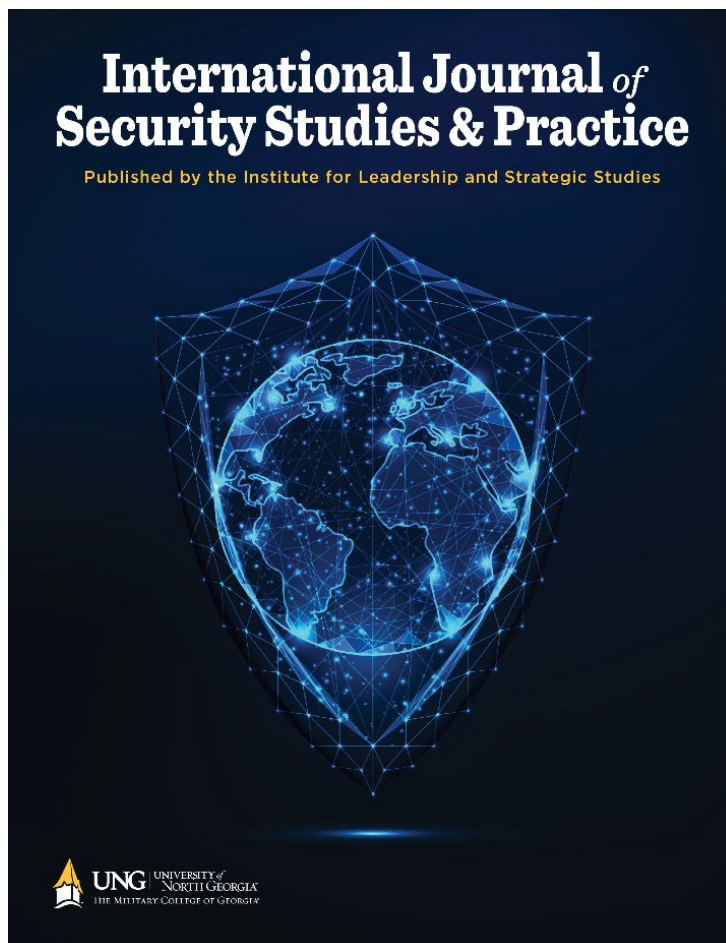


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**Towards a General Theory of Ethnic Conflict:
Explaining Identity and Violence in Chechnya**

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Abstract

The purposes of this article are to develop the beginnings of a general theory of ethnic conflict. Specifically, this paper examines and builds upon identity-based theoretical considerations, focusing on the relationship between ethnic group identity and deadly ethnic violence. It develops the theoretical connection more clearly between three identity-linked concepts including the securitization of ethnic identity; societal security theory; and ontological security theory. This paper argues that salient ethnic group identity acts as an underlying catalyst to deadly ethnic violence. Groups with salient identities often view their identity as a measure of security. Thus, any threat to a group's identity, either perceived or real, is a threat to the group's physical existence. The processes behind this connection are illustrated and examined. Understanding the nexus between identity and violence allows for further research testing the hypothesis that the more salient an ethnic group identity is, the more likely deadly conflict will result. This paper concludes with policy recommendations and possible solutions to identity securitization in Chechnya.

KEY WORDS: Ethnic Conflict; Ethnic Identity; Securitization; Ontological Security; Societal Security; Chechnya

Towards a General Theory of Ethnic Conflict: Explaining Identity and Violence in Chechnya

The purpose of this paper is to develop the beginning of a general theory of ethnic conflict within the realm of identity-based theory and propositions. Specifically, I examine the complex processes of how and when an ethnic group identity is likely to become an issue of security and violence. To do so, three main theoretical concepts are examined and contextualized, including securitization theory, societal security, and ontological security. This paper rests upon the proposition that the more salient an ethnic group identity is, the more likely deadly ethnic conflict will erupt between ethnic groups in contentious political arenas. In other words, the more strongly an ethnic group “recognizes” or “feels” its identity, the more likely deadly violence will occur when the group believes its identity is threatened.

Additionally, it argues that the more salient an ethnic group identity is, the more intense will violence be between groups in conflict. The theoretical justification centers on the idea of securitization theory, societal security as well as ontological security, building towards a general explanation of ethnic conflict. To demonstrate, this paper seeks to lay out how the process of a salient identity becomes an issue of security. Afterwards, a case-study is given involving the Russo-Chechen conflicts. The purpose of this case-study is to illustrate how the particulars of the theoretical propositions works within this particular case. It is the present author’s hope that more scholars will use other case-studies to determine whether or not the present identity-based theory of ethnic conflict can be more generalized within the ethnic studies literature. This paper proceeds in three sections. First, it provides the theoretical underpinnings of a general theory of ethnic warfare by conceptualizing and illustrating the nexus between three paradigms: societal security, securitization, and ontological security. Secondly, this paper examines the Russo-Chechen

conflicts as an instance of ethnic warfare where identity, as contextualized through the theoretical structure provided, played a remote and necessary cause of hostilities, and to the intensity of violence experienced. The case study focuses on demonstrating that identity matters for the conflict in Chechnya, and briefly describes the outbreak of hostilities, finally outlining how the theoretical lenses provided herein have shaped and continue to shape the Russo-Chechen relationship. It will not be a detailed case-study, but only a briefing on the importance of identity, and how it shaped the conflict. This paper's main point is to demonstrate that without a salient Chechen identity, conflict in Chechnya would have been less likely. Lastly, this paper provides policy implications through desecuritizing identity conflict expressed in ethnic terms. Additional recommendations on conflict mediation and conflict resolution are also provided.

Identity and the Causes of Ethnic Warfare

Before delving into an examination of the connection between identity and violence, ethnic group identity must be conceptualized. There exists a vast literature attempting to operationalize ethnicity, the ethnic group, and ethnic group identity. This current project does not wish to orient itself within this debate, and therefore, takes as its starting point Albert's (2012) conceptualizations. Albert describes ethnicity as an ordering principle that sorts individuals into ascribed categories, only differentiating people from others that do not share these characteristics. An ethnic group is a composite of individuals that recognize their common-shared ethnic markers, and therefore also recognize the otherness of individuals that do not share in these like traits. As will be further focused upon below, an ethnic group identity is created when one defines one's existence through sharing these ethnic group markers. As Albert explains, "One's existence is experienced through one's ethnic group" (Albert, 2012, p. 74). How do these concepts contribute to the causes of ethnic warfare?

Many scholars argue that having different ethnic identities does not necessitate violence. For instance, Buadaeng (2007) argues that “ethnic identity does not by itself lead to intergroup violence” (p. 74). Otherwise, all groups with different identities would constantly be in conflict. Pluralistic and liberal-democratic states disprove this simplistic proposition. Although these arguments certainly have merit, a more complex picture can be constructed that exposes flaws in these conclusions. A causal argument can be made if one distinguishes between remote and proximate causes of conflict. Stephen Van Evera (1994) explains that proximate causes are those causes that directly affect the odds of war whereas remote causes are the causes of the proximate cause, or background conditions necessary and required for their activation. This paper proposes that ethnic identity is a remote cause of war. This is not without theoretical grounding. As Cederman, Wimmer and Min (2009) write, “our findings show that ethnicity should not be discounted as an explanatory factor in the study of civil wars” (p. 114). The authors demonstrate how proximate factors lead ethnic group actors into armed conflict based on their ethnicity.

Wimmer, Cederman, and Min (2009) argue that ethnicity matters because the nation-state itself relies on ethnonationalism for political legitimacy. In other words, the state is ruled in the name of an ethnically defined people (p. 321). The present argument differs slightly from these analyses in that rather than ethnicity mattering, it is ethnic group identity that matters. However, since ethnic group identity forms from markers of ethnicity, the two arguments are akin. Wimmer, Cederman, and Min (p. 335) argue that ethnicity is important as a channel along which ethnic actors pursue power and prestige that eventually form factions to gain/keep control. Here, the meaning attached to ethnicity—identity—is the more appropriate variable as ethnicity, by itself, means nothing. Although, even here identity is not the direct cause. It is remotely responsible.

While remote, this paper argues that it is a necessary variable for ethnic conflict to occur, and links to conflict intensity as well.

Many theories in the literature exist as counter-arguments to the suggestion that identity or ethnicity has causal forces.¹ These scholars are correct to write off identity as *the* cause of conflict. They are wrong in arguing that identity has no substantial role in either causing violence or its intensity. It indeed has a significant role not only in creating the opportunity for conflict, but also by determining the intensity of violence. Although it can certainly be argued that other variables explain the intensity of violence, this builds upon that argument in suggesting that without identity, the intensification of violence is nearly impossible. This does not suggest identity as the sufficient indicator of intensity but only that it must exist. In other words, intense conflict is improbable without strong ethnic group identities. As Sambanis and Shayo (2013, p. 318) note, proximate causes, such as scarce resources, matter because of how they affect the role of ethnicity in conflicts; in other words, the processes and resources that effect ethnic identity are the causes of ethnic conflict. The more an external issue heightens ethnic group identity salience, the more likely is ethnic conflict, and the more intense the conflict is likely to be. Proximate causes are ubiquitous in the literature.

Most prominent discussions focus around misperceptions, rates of discrimination, political and cultural contexts, ethnic entrepreneurs, and societal structure. For example, Fearon and Laitin (2003) argue “ethnic diversity could . . . cause civil war indirectly,” (p. 82) but that ethnicity alone is not a sufficient explanation for fighting. Rather, they connect a country’s propensity for conflict

¹ See (Azar & Burton, 1986); (Deutsch, 1953); (Gagnon, 1994-1995); (Gagnon, 2013); (Geertz, 1963); (Hechter, 1975); (Kauffmann, 1996); (Newman, 1991); and (Tilly, 1978).

with “poverty, a large population, and instability,” which in turn may produce “intense grievances” (Fearon & Laitin, p. 88) along cultural divides. This project does not refute these arguments, but accepts them as valuable causes of ethnic conflict. In fact, it might be argued that the distribution of scarce resources or over raw materials is a proximate cause of ethnic violence. The present study does not disagree with this mechanism for the causation of ethnic violence. There is a missing element however, that this paper seeks to remedy. The difference is that identity herein is added as the remote variable of the causes of deadly ethnic violence. The proximate causes (scarce resources) would not trigger warfare if it were not for salient ethnic identity existing in the background. One can turn this argument around and propose, then, that contentious ethnic groups that do not escalate into violent conflict lack the necessary identity to do so, even if they have the proximate causes or necessary political opportunity structure. A violent conflict needs both and the more salient the identity, the more intense that conflict is. Another way to look at the puzzle of ethnic conflict is that ethnic group identity is a necessary though not sufficient variable for intense violence to emerge from contentious arenas. How does identity then, correlate to violence?

Societal security as first developed by the Copenhagen School concerns the relationship between social groups, their identity, and consequent security or lack thereof. It is a concept that attempts to explain the linkage between these three components. Buzan et al. (1998) explain that societal security is the sustainability of traditional patterns of language, culture, religion and national identity and customs. The concept of societal security was further articulated by Wæver et al. (1993) writing that it “concerns the ability of a society to persist in its essential character under changing conditions and possible or actual threats” (p. 23). Societal security concerns itself with the maintenance of group identity and the sustainability—while allowing for social evolutionary malleability—of said identity (Wæver, et al., 1993). It posits that individuals within

groups understand that their identity rests upon group understandings of that identity—whether conscious or not, and constructed—and that individuals bind their existential understanding to the sense of belonging created by the in-group identity.

The ethnic group rests inside the individual as a psychological fact that shapes an individual's belief and actions (Theiler, 2003). Identity becomes a fact when group members externalize their internal representation of the group by thinking, acting, and feeling within the group prototype. Accordingly, this social process allows identity to become real (Theiler, p. 263). Essentially then, “society is about identity, the self-conception of communities and of individuals identifying themselves as members of a community” (Buzan et al., 1998, p. 119). Security enters the equation when members perceive a challenge to group identity or to individualized markers of group identity such as language, religion, historical memories etc., and members begin to behave with some form of hostility towards the instigators of the perceived threat. Accordingly, societal security manifests itself when societies perceive a threat to group identity (Wæver et al., 1993, p. 23). The more salient a society's identity is, the more intense will any reaction be to threats (perceived or real) to that identity. As Saleh (2010) writes, “When national and religious identities are threatened, the effect on a ‘very large’ part of society can be intense” (p. 240).

For the purposes of the present analysis, society refers to the ethnic group and therefore the linkage to security implies a perceived threat by ethnic group members to their ethnic group identity. The ethnic group is the referent object for understanding the parameters of societal security, seeing that it is a large-scale collective identity functioning independent of the state (Buzan et al., 1998, p. 22). It is important to note that in this framework, the main unit of analysis for societal security are the politically significant identities. Although individuals act out security events and actions, the individual is not the unit of analysis for societal security. Individual identity

is premised, and therefore individual action based on identity—results from the larger context of group identity. The focus of analysis then, is on what caused individual or group behavior, which is ethnic group identity or more precisely, threats to that identity which causes insecurity. The ethnic group should thus be understood as a unitary actor when attempting to analyze security and violence, much as the state is viewed as a unitary rational actor through traditional security studies.

Viewed as such, ethnic group identity is equivalent to power resources of a state. In other words, just as one expects a state to posture itself offensively if its key interests are threatened, so too should one expect to see ethnic groups act similarly if group identity is perceived to be threatened. This argument is more broadly understood within the context of the ethnic security dilemma. Posen articulates that a group identity helps individual members cooperate to achieve their purposes. When individuals cooperate, “the whole exceeds the sum of the parts, creating a unit stronger relative to those groups with a weaker identity” (Posen, 1993, p. 30). This stronger ‘groupness,’ Posen argues, becomes an offensive tool of war. Within the Copenhagen School, societal insecurity develops once the ethnic group perceives a threat to its survival as a community (Buzan, et al., 1998, p. 119). Whatever constitutes a threat depends upon the specific ethnic group in question, and what the perceived threat attempts to target, or more precisely, what indicator of ethnic group identity is viewed as being under threat. The level of insecurity felt by the group is based upon how strong that identity indicator measures for the group, and how severe the threat against that indicator is. Identities can generate antagonism among group members, especially when identity is threatened. These identities can be intensely experienced because they form part of one’s self-esteem (Pettigrew, 2007, p. 34). In other words, if an ethnic group is threatened, oppressed, or alienated by another group, individuals are likely to experience lower self-images as a result. This may evolve towards collective action if the self-esteem does not improve as a result

of improved group status in a society. As Theiler (2003) stipulates, “Individuals seek to defend their group boundaries because . . . group belonging satisfies basic cognitive and emotional needs” (p. 264). This then, leads to the process of securitization.

To be securitized, an issue or event must be presented as an existential security threat and further, must be understood as such a threat by group members; the issue is likely to then be met with extreme security measures that are justified by the intensity of the threat (Buzan et al., 1998). In other words, an issue has become a threat because group members perceive that the issue or action is a threat. Securitization of the issue, for instance identity or threats to identity, actualizes only once the threat presents itself, the group agrees to the threat, and extreme emergency measures have been instituted that would not be justifiable in ordinary times. Securitization, especially of identity, is based upon the construction of the event or action as a threat (Hansen, 2006). An issue has literally been constructed by an agent to be viewed as an existential threat to the identity community.

Securitization is generally understood to be an intersubjective act of a securitizing actor acting towards a significant audience (Stritzel, 2007, p. 362). Stritzel builds on this basic understanding and seeks to further understand securitization as 1) the performative force of articulate threat texts; 2) their embeddedness in existing discourse and, 3) the position power of actors who influence the process of defining meaning (p. 370). The performative force is a product of linguistic and/or symbolic actions that articulate the actual threat through various mediums. These performative forces are viewed through the existing, mainly linguistic, discourse of culture and society, referring to interactions between the performative text and the larger discourse practices in which it is embedded (Stritzel, 2007, p. 371).

The point is salient for the present project because much of identity is based upon certain textualized products that have been historically constructed for meaning. Additionally, the text and associated discourse are refined and given more strength in society and culture based on power agents having positions that help provide meaning to the text—agents in positions of power that construct the meaning for the referent object being securitized: ethnic group identity for this paper. Stritzel (2007) writes that securitization should be understood as “a process of articulations creating sequentially a threat text which turns sequentially into a securitization” (p. 378). Identity is thus securitized by agents articulating those elements of identity linked eternally to the security or existence of the group. Thus, any threats to these elements of identity are seen as direct threats to the group’s existence. Ethnic group leaders and elites help reify this point. If accepted collectively by group members, identity has thus been securitized. Balzacq (2019) notes this more thoroughly in arguing that for something to be securitized, a legitimization game must unfold that is dependent upon an actors’ capacity to establish a collectively accepted reality. Thus, for an identity to be securitized, it must be at the same time, delivered properly by an actor seen as a legitimate power-broker, and must also be agreed to by the audience. Within this intersubjective sharing of a speech act or discourse, legitimacy of the narrative is bestowed (Olesker, 2018). Here, the securitizing move depends upon the audience subscribing to the threat presented (Balzacq, 2019, p. 334). In other words, “[T]hreats are not separable from the intersubjective representations in which communities come to know them” (Balzacq, 2019, p. 333). Precisely how is the relationship between securitization of identity and ethnic warfare correlated?

Brown (2007, p. 22) argues that once society is disrupted by some form of social change, groups can revert to their ethnic notions of identity to find safety and protection therein. Identity acts here as a self-securitizing safety net. Members cling to their ethnic traits which solidifies

individuals within group and alienates other groups who do not share in the specific securitized identity. Blame for society's ills are placed on individual's classified as "the other," and the "us/them" dichotomy is established. The "us" becomes salvific, the other is in Brown's conception, demonized; identities undergo ideologization (Brown, 2007, p. 24). Competition between the two groups begins and if the conditions are sufficient, ethnic conflict results. Korostelina (2007) supports the connection between identity and violence and suggests that identity salience correlates with conflict readiness. The more salient a core identity is of a particular group, and the more that identity dehumanizes out-group members, conflict readiness increases depending on the group's position in society.

The point being that war is not inevitable and that actors are active agents in constructing violence. Also, in this case identity is viewed as fluid, being constituted by the process of securitization and the intersubjective context between text, discourse, and agents. Identities are constructed in a dichotomist way as "us" versus "the other" (Bilgic, 2013, p. 200) which creates the securitization necessary for conflict to erupt. What should be self-evident up to this point is that the object of analysis for the present project is ethnic group identity. Thus, rather than concentrating on the agent/structure relationship in causing violence, this paper analyzes identity difference as a cause for violence. For identity to have a positive correlation to the causation of violence and its intensity, the identity in question must be a "core" and/or "salient" identity (Phinney, 1991; Korostelina, 2007). For the ethnic group identity to be salient, it must be the identity to which ethnic group members are most committed (Korostelina, 2007, p. 52). In other words, it is more important than just their religion, work, gender, and other identities that an individual can have. Of course, which identity has more salience is up to the securitizing agent as well as the audience. Nevertheless, the identity in question must exist, even as a continuously

reconstructed and reconstituted entity. Importantly, regardless of how identity is constructed, once it is securitized, what are its effects on violence erupting, and on how intense that violence will be?

The process to deadly ethnic violence occurs as follows: an ethnic group identity being understood as essential to a group's ontological security is securitized through particular acts, actors, and processes, allowing for the group to feel physically insecure. Once the ethnic group identity is securitized and made the referent object for ontological security, it responds to this threat by taking actions that the group (or elites ostensibly representing the group identity) believe will secure its existence. Special notice should be given to the notion that the group identity, or certain variables of it, are the referent object within this contextual understanding. Evidence for shifting the referent object from the self to the ethnic group identity exists through such scholars as Pratt (2017), who argues that the security of the self is only conceivable within the context of durable social arrangements, what the scholar calls the relational view of ontological security. In this setting, the referent object shifts from the self to the social arrangement (Pratt, 2017, p. 81). When taking actions to secure the group, the 'other' is put into a position where it is under threat, either perceived or real based on the actions of the other participating ethnic group, and thus, responds in kind. At this moment, ontological security, made to feel threatened by securitization, evolves into a societal security dilemma.

Making the scenario more insecure is that every event, or securitized action, conflict, or instance of violence that occurs between the two groups becomes a reconstitutive part of their identities. It adds to the understanding that the other is an ontological threat to the self. Thus, the

individual believes oneself to be in a state of existential crisis, or physical insecurity, once group notions of collective identity have become securitized and are thus perceived by the self as insecure. As Janeczko (2104) writes,

When a man who identifies with not only a religious, but also an ethno-national group sees fellow members of the same groups deprived of something, he shares that deprivation, and his inability to move upwards in the system, closed relative to him, only reinforces his perception of deprivation, and leads to his further radicalization and isolation from the system. (p. 434)

Once an individual's identity is insecure, one acts as though one's physical self is insecure. A threat to the group makes the self feel threatened because the self depends on the group for its meaning. As Croft and Vaughan-Williams (2017) write, "the key elements of an ontological security framework are a biographical continuity, a cocoon of trust relations, self-integrity and dread, all of which apply at the level of the individual, and all of which are constructed intersubjectively" (p. 15).

This physical insecurity provokes collective action and mobilization based upon ethnic group identity. Rumelili (2013) articulates this moment as both physically and ontologically insecure, where "ontological insecurity refers to a state of disruption where the Self has lost its anchor of the definition" (p. 58); and physical insecurity is defined as a state of being where "the Self experiences concern about imminent harm, threat and danger, but also regards itself as inadequately protected" (p. 58). Actions manifested in this manner then, through the group, in an effort to make secure one's existence, contribute to the societal security dilemma. Each action by a group towards the other provides another embedded memory of the other as threat to self. If enough of these instances occur, an identity can be understood as essentially constructed opposed

to this other. In other words, “to be,” means “to be against the other.” The societal security dilemma is difficult to deescalate in these types of conditions because, “the continued reproduction of antithetical identity positions undermines political attempts to remove the perception of existential threat” (Rumelili, 2013, p. 53). This theoretical framework depends on the understanding of ethnic group identity creating or constructing the image of the self for the individual. If the self depends on the group for its existence, a perceived threat to the group becomes a physical threat to the self, which is the remote cause of conflict. Oppermann and Hansel (2019) provide context for this in writing, “The agency of actors depends on such ontological security because it stabilizes their cognitive environment and reduces uncertainty, which is a necessary precondition for purposeful behavior” (p. 83). Under proper conditions of a societal security dilemma then, certain proximate causes lead to deadly ethnic conflict; the salience of the identity in this type of scenario are also likely to determine the magnitude of violence experienced. As Lyall (2010) suggests, “[T]he effects of violence are often tied intimately to questions of identity. Violence—and, importantly, responses to it—can be viewed as expressions of identity . . .” (p. 18). This conflict scenario resembles Kaufman’s symbolic politics theory that suggests group fears and myths justifying hostility against another group leads to powerfully hostile mass attitudes (Kaufman, 2006, p. 48); for Kaufman, a leader then uses these fears, myths and mass hostility to mobilize action against the other. Thusly, the remote causes are symbolic politics, and the proximate cause is elite manipulation. Whereas in the present construction, ethnic group identity, which incorporates myths, collective memories and symbolic politics, is the remote cause of ethnic warfare and the proximate cause is case-dependent.

The present author argues that societal security and identity securitization are deepened if linked with the concept of ontological security. In other words, societal security is left incomplete,

or does not necessarily explain sufficiently the steps leading to ethnic conflict without an understanding of ontological security. Rumelili (2015) provides theoretical justification for this pursuit. The scholar notes that physical and ontological security are interrelated but separate from one another. One can be physically insecure but ontologically secure, and vice versa; however, one can also be insecure in both, creating the perfect storm for deadly ethnic violence. As Rumelili writes, “Ontological insecurity and physical (in)security reproduce one another. As actors seek ontological security . . . , they [mobilize] their physical [defenses] in the pursuit of physical security through representing the sources of threat as different and morally inferior” (p. 59). Steele (2008, p. 2) argues that states pursue social actions seeking to serve self-identity needs, even when these actions compromise their existence. Agents act therefore to secure or buffer their identity. Here security is recognized as one’s being; that which comprises a person, makes one’s identity, and thus, makes one secure. Having a sense of being, makes one secure. Any sense of the unknown, or any perceived challenge to one’s existence, becomes a security threat. Thus, one sees the process by which societal security is tightened through the prism of ontological security. A person is made secure by one’s sense of self based on identity markers. One feels secure because one “knows thy self.” In the context of the ethnic group, the sense of self is provided by the collective ethnic group identity. The self is made secure through the preservation of the ethnic group, which is manifested through the preservation of ethnic group identity. If the group is secure, conceptualized as lacking a threat to its identity, then the person is secure. Conversely, if there is a perceived threat to ethnic group identity, the group is insecure, and thusly, the individual is insecure. People fight because if a society loses its identity, it ceases to be a society (Roe, 2005, p. 43).

It is safe to propose then, that if a challenge or perceived threat presents itself to a group’s identity, individual members may act out aggressively against that threat in an effort to maintain

their existential being, known through identity. This is the identity-violence nexus: a threat to any identity variable is a threat to the entire group; and since an individual's security is bound to that group, the threat becomes an existential emergency. The group may then proceed towards war or other forms of deadly violence based upon the perceived threat to their existence. If this assumption proves logical, it is then safe to propose further that the more a group is attached to its identity, or, the stronger the group's identity is, the more violent will that group act to defend its identity. This proposition is not without ground in the literature. For instance, Pettigrew (2007) finds that identity matters for issues of both intergroup prejudice and violence. Those findings are based on individual survey data results but help provide the premises of the current project. Pettigrew's 2007 study demonstrates that the higher one's national identity, the more likely one is to have prejudices towards out-group members, and, the more likely they are to accept violence against out-group members. Sambanis and Shayo (2013) argue that a person's social identity affects one's decision on whether to fight, and what resources to contribute to fighting; the authors also suggest that if ethnic group identity is more salient than civic identity, for instance, the likelihood of fighting is increased (p. 296).

Some scholars argue that identities are malleable, and therefore analyzing them is a fruitless endeavor because they change so often. Recent research partially refutes this position, however. Denny and Walter (2014, p. 200) argue convincingly that ethnic identities are rather stable in nature and are less likely to change than other forms of identities such as class or political ideology. Because ethnic identities are stable, when conflict arises concerning ethnic variables, it is much harder to negotiate successful settlements of these disputes, especially when tied to ethnic territory. The authors conclude that "Members of ethnic groups will have greater incentives and opportunities to fight . . . than members of other types of groups" (p. 207). This conclusion is based

upon three factors: 1) the ways in which political power has historically been divided; 2) leaders' ease of mobilizing support to demand change, and; 3) the relatively non-fluid nature of ethnic identity. Additionally, it is important to note that although scholars argue identities are fluid and malleable, ethnic group identity has been shown to be remarkably stable over time (Korostelina, 2007). Further, in their seminal piece, Lake and Rothchild (1996, p. 46) write that in multiethnic societies, the farther apart policy preferences are between ethnic group members, the greater the violence necessary for one group to assert its will over the other will need to be.

Roe defines the societal security dilemma as, "when the actions that groups take to secure their identity cause reactions in others, which, in the end, leave all parties less secure" (Roe, 2005, p. 73). In other words, a group perceives its identity under threat; it then acts to secure its identity. This process occurs through the act of securitization and is important towards leading to warfare through ontological security. The act of securing one's identity then creates insecurity in the other group. Albert (2012, p. 75) notes that identity is important because it provides the remote cause for collective action and ethnic mobilization. Stronger ties increase the potential for mobilization and the more mobilized, the likelihood of increasing the intensity of violence. Sambanis and Shayo argue that ethnic group members that identify more to their core ethnic identity can be thought of as ethnic "radicals or extremists" (p. 296). The more salient is their ethnic group identity, the more resources they are willing to devote to the cause and to a greater intensity of conflict. Thus, higher levels of ethnic identity salience lead to higher levels of conflict intensity. Although not considered a member of the societal security dilemma theory, Chaim Kaufmann (1996) sums the process of securitization and the societal security dilemma nicely. He writes,

The hypernationalist rhetoric used for group mobilization often includes images of the enemy group as a threat to the physical existence of the nation, in turn justifying unlimited

violence against the ethnic enemy; this threatening discourse can usually be observed by members of the target group. Even worse are actual massacres of civilians, especially when condoned by leaders of the perpetrating group, which are virtually certain to convince the members of the targeted group that group defense is their only option. (p. 144)

The process continues just as the traditional spiral model does and deadly violence occurs “if ultimately grievances are not adequately addressed through existing legal and/or political means” (Roe, 2005, p. 73). Bilgic (2013, p. 186) bases the societal security dilemma upon three points: 1) violence results from the dilemma depending upon how actors interpret the political structure in which they interact with others; 2) how actors conceive security and which tools they choose to adopt to achieve security; and, 3) identity is not exogenous to the politics of security. Ethnic conflict as a result of the societal security dilemma is a constructed event based upon group understandings of ontological security that has been securitized through the process described above to the point where violence erupts. It is a traditional spiral model where identity becomes a power resource. The remainder of this paper is dedicated to contextualizing the Russo-Chechen wars within the theoretical context thus presented.

The Case of Chechnya

By the time of the Soviet Union’s collapse, several factors were in play that would lead to conflict in Chechnya. First, Chechens had become “ethnically homogenized” by 1992 (Hughes & Sasse, 2016, p. 327). Additionally, relations between the Russia and Chechnya were defined by a legacy of colonialism and racial stereotypes (p. 327). In other words, much of each’s identity was formed in opposition to the other. For Chechnya especially, this allowed its identity to be easily made insecure in future relations. This is due to several key events during the 20th century. Firstly, and perhaps most importantly, the Soviet Union created Chechnya as an ethnic enclave under its

ethnonationalist territorial structuring known as ethnofederalism. Secondly, Chechnya had experienced a massive instance of ethnic cleansing, if not ethnocide itself, before and during WWII. Throughout the early to mid-1920s, the Soviet Army had pitched battles with “mountaineer” forces in Chechnya and Dagestan and as they began to pacify the region, the Soviet military attacked local traditions including Islam, and engaged in punitive raids, police denunciations, and blackmail (Dunlop, 1998, p. 40). For their part, Chechens engaged in repeated rebellions. As a result of repeated incursions of the Soviets into Chechnya and the Chechen insurgency, by 1923, at least 10,000 “mountaineers” were expelled into the lowlands (p. 42).

Forced disarmament was also initiated, which was particularly insulting to Chechnya because of its warrior ethos and extreme pride in handling weapons. Although a seemingly sensible policy, it could be viewed as a blow to group identity. It should be noted that during this era, Soviet forces began using the term “bandit” towards Chechens, which would become a denigrating term during the more contemporaneous wars (Dunlop, 1998). The securitization of certain variables of Chechnya’s identity are thus traced directly to the periods of ethnic cleansing during the 1920s. In 1925, a full-scale Soviet assault took place, where Soviet troops sealed off Chechnya and pushed through to the center on three sides, wiping out the “bandits,” disarming the population, and the region was Sovietized (Dunlop, 1998). After the initial Sovietization, Chechen forces engaged in sporadic armed incursion and rebellions from state rule; as a result, this period is noteworthy for Soviet military engagement against Chechen forces leading up to the start of WWII. Additionally, Chechnya did not escape Stalin’s great purges, but unlike most other regions in the Soviet Union, these purges were conducted with a backdrop of periodic rebellion and counterinsurgency by the Soviets (Dunlop, 1998).

In 1944, Stalin ordered the entire population of Chechnya to be deported to Central Asia as a supposed punishment for suspect collusion with Nazi incursions into Chechnya; however, historical evidence supports the analysis that Chechnya, in general, helped the Soviets prevent Germany's advance through the Caucasus, not the other way around (Dunlop, 1998). The deportation is a rather loose term for what was if not acts of genocide, certainly was a concerted effort at ethnic cleansing. Not only were Chechens forced to resettle, usually through trains bound for Kazakhstan and some to other Central Asian territories, but in some instances, mass killings occurred. In some regions, entire populations were murdered, including in one instance, the entire village of Khaibakh, ordered burned alive (p. 65). In total, about 500,000 Chechens were cleansed during Stalin's rule, with an astonishing 23.7% death rate; Dunlop expresses, "raw genocide by anyone's definition" (p. 70). Additionally, Chechnya was literally ordered wiped off all maps; cities were renamed from Chechen to Russian sounding names; and adjacent territories annexed areas of Chechnya's ancient homeland in an attempt to completely Sovietize it. Under Khrushchev, Chechens were allowed to return home but they continued to face state oppression at the hands of the Soviets. As Dunlop writes, "At the beginning of the Gorbachev era, the Chechens were a people with a formidable list of grievances" (Dunlop, 1998, p. 84). The experience of ethnic cleansing at the hands of the Russians provided context for Chechens that they could never be safe without an independent state. As Wood (2007) writes, "The Chechen Revolution of 1990-91 was in that sense not merely an ethnic backlash against Russian domination, but a push for sovereignty as the best means of collective self-preservation against genocide" (p. 41). Perhaps what should have been seen as a foreboding instance of self-ethnic cleansing, of the 50% or so of the Russian population making up Grozny, in 1991, over two-thirds decided to leave before the war commenced in December of 1994 (Lieven, 1998, p. 45). According to Gall and Waal (1998), Russians left because

the official economy in which they used to work had collapsed, and they were suddenly second-class citizens where they had been used to being the privileged class (p. 115).

Now that a brief history of animosities between the two sides has been provided, the case can be put into the identity framework outlined above. For the Russians, Chechnya is a highly romanticized region, full of mythology and history of collective combat and struggle. Some of Russia's most acclaimed literary names have written about the Chechens including Alexander Pushkin, Mikhail Lermontov, Leo Tolstoy and the playwright Alexander Griboyedov. Often these authors created an imagined Chechnya who were lone and noble fighters, and were symbols of mountain people's quest for independence (Shinar, 2019, p. 132). This account of the Chechens dates to at least the Caucasian Wars (1817-1864). Furthermore, one cannot understand the Russian-Chechen Wars of the late 20th century without understanding the legacy of antagonistic group histories from the Russian conquest of the Caucasus (Shinar, 2019). The group identities are shaped by this collective memory, on both sides, who remember the conquest of the Russians and the rebellions, riots, and resistance of the Chechens. Furthermore, Russia's constant victories over the Chechens created a deep sense of isolation and alienation; it threatened their sense of self: as Shinar explains, "Accepting Russian rule was to the Chechens more than losing freedom in the Western sense of the word: it was losing one's manhood and – more important – one's soul" (Shinar, 2019, p. 134). Echoing the essential oppositional identity to Russia, Casula (2015) explains that Chechnya's culture is partially defined as opposed to Russia's state authority (p. 713). Furthermore, Stepanov (2010) argues that historical memories and their political reactivation by national leaders has played a remarkable role in the Russo-Chechen conflict, though the scholar notes that these historical identities are not the causes of interethnic warfare in the Caucasus (p. 310).

Although it can be argued that “Chechenness” was an ethnonationalist construction, spurred onward by how the Soviet Union ordered its autonomous republics based upon the structure of ethnofederalism, elements of what would become Chechnya’s group identity existed for centuries before. Several identity indicators such as clan, religious and territorial variables helped shaped what would become understood as “Chechen” toward the end of the Soviet Union; once dissolved, it has been demonstrated elsewhere that, “Self-identification by ethnicity prevails among the native peoples of the North Caucasus, with Chechens having developed a particular strong sense of ethnic nationalism along with strong Islamic identity” (Souleimanov & Schwampe, 2017, p. 2620). Furthermore, Janeczko argues that even without the war with Russia, Chechens felt massive economic destitution and psychological isolation from the Russian federal government and thus left the Chechen population in a condition of fundamental deprivation. The feelings of insecurity and isolation from Russia, coupled with feelings of civic exclusion, allowed the “crystallization of Chechnya’s identity of victims of Russian aggression” (Janeczko, 2014, p. 434) having both ethno-religious and politico-economic dimensions, clearly indicating an us-versus-them framework.

In particular, Russian collective consciousness was shaped by Soviet ideology that created a special dislike of Islam, in addition to its particular aversion to all religion (Shinar, 2019). For the Soviet Union, one could not be a Muslim and a Russian, but only a Muslim or a Russian. Thus, Russian identity was constructed as naturally opposed to Islam; thusly, for all ethnic groups in Russia that practiced Islam, there was automatically a sense of insecurity and alienation that one could not be a part of the civic nation (Russian) because of one’s religious beliefs and practices. In the Soviet-era, Chechens were second-class citizens, and generally not allowed to participate in higher positions within education and government (Shinar, 2019, p. 132). From this, Russian

understanding of Chechens transitioned from the romanticized versions of Pushkin and Lermontov to that of contemporary understanding, where the Chechen is thought of as dangerous, criminalistic, or an Islamic fundamentalist (Shinar, 2019, p. 133). Of course, the recent wars and waves of terrorist violence have helped shape these stereotypical views of Chechnya; and elite-manipulation by Russian leaders helped play a role in this identity construction. But the waves of violence and conflict would not have been possible in the first place without at least a rudimentary version of the enemization of the other's identity. Chechens tend to view their cause as ethnonationalist in nature, whereas Russia views it as jihadist; as Janeczko (2014) notes,

Many of the Chechens considered themselves secular freedom fighters, nationalist insurgents seeking to establish an independent secular state of Chechnya. To their Russian adversaries, they were and remain *jihadi mujahedeen*, *Wahabbi* guerillas seeking to lord over a regional *caliphate* imposing the harsh strictures of *shari'ah*. (p. 428).

With the collapse of the Soviet empire, a general sense of insecurity pervaded on both the macro and micro level, creating an identity war between the Russians and Chechens. (Shinar, 2014, p. 429).

Giuliano (2005) disproves the general assumptions that Russia's Muslim population is a coherent group based on religious identity, and that it shares a set of common political attitudes and preferences that stand in opposition to the Russian central state; from here Giuliano explains, it is commonly held that the move from anti-Moscow ideology to radical Islamism is a short step for Muslim believers. Although the scholar demonstrates that stereotypes generally held by each group to the other are constructed, Giuliano also notes that historical animosities and grievances between ethnoreligious groups and the Russian state have been the product of intellectuals' and political entrepreneurs' efforts to define and attain particular political goals (2005, p. 199). The

author takes as an instance, Djokhar Dudayev², the leader of Chechnya during its bid for independence, who often referred to the myth of Caucasian religious freedom fighter Shamil who led a resistance against Moscow in the 19th century; Dudayev attempted to link the contemporary bid for independence to Shamil's historic Jihad against Russia in a quest for ethnonationalist mythmaking and outbidding (Giuliano, 2005, p. 199). Furthermore, the delegitimization of a Chechen being considered even human, never mind a Russian, was eroded during and throughout the two wars. Individual Chechens were routinely the victim of racial epithets and slurs such as werewolves, apes, monkeys, cockroaches, bedbugs, bandits, and cattle, amongst others (Janeczko, 2014, 435).

Lawlessness in Chechnya during Dudayev's assumption of power resulted in rival Chechens laying claim to power. Some of these were criminals while others would become leaders of nationalist extremists and then radical religious extremists. These individuals rising to power led Russians to use inflammatory rhetoric such as calling Dudayev's supporters, "A gang terrorizing the population"; these same voices also recommended force to restore order (Wood, 2007, p. 51). For Russians, state propaganda referring to Chechens as "the mafia" and criminal bandits and thugs seemed to gain legitimacy with press reports that it was possible to buy anything in Chechnya, including weapons being sold in open-air markets (Knezys & Sedlickas, 1999, p. 29). Some of the outcry against banditry in Chechnya during the Chechen Revolution, and during Dudayev's rule more generally, would be securitized by Dudayev himself and put into the larger context of Russians hating Chechens; this then turned into the dilemma that Chechnya would never be safe unless it was sovereign. Public rhetoric and nationalist mythmaking cemented these

² There are various ways of spelling this name. For the purposes of the present paper, all quotes, instances, and references to will be changed without notice within quotes to Djokhar Dudayev, for consistency purposes.

sentiments. Dudayev seems to have equated his identity with that of the Chechen more generally: “In 1992 he said: ‘I lived with one dream: to escape the shameful condition of my people in which human dignity was humiliated’” (Gall & Waal, 1998, p. 84).

Although Giuliano is properly correct in noting that these animosities were conjured up by elite mythmaking, that is beside the fact. The stronger point is that existing in the background are these myths that only have to be conjured up in the historical relationship between these two groups. They are not perpetually cognizant at the individual level, but, through a proximate cause such as elite manipulation, can tap into pre-existing memories and ethnic identity markers that allow for an increase of ethnic group identity salience which evolves quickly into mobilization and in the case of Chechnya, ethnic conflict.

Although Beach and Pederson (2016) note the inherent difficulties in using counterfactuals as a methodology to disprove or demonstrate a causal mechanism at work, it may still be useful to engage in a one-off hypothetical counterfactual. Let us for instance engage in a particular counterfactual with Beach and Pederson’s points noted: would Dudayev’s attempts at mythmaking to increase popular support for independence have been possible if Shamil’s legend did not exist? It would be much harder to see Russia as the existential enemy and thus less likely to cause securitization of the ontological self without such latent memories. The counterfactual helps us note that it would be more difficult, but not impossible, in this case. Although constructed, identities are based on lived memory. Thus, stereotypes, along with “ethnic antagonisms, nationalist sentiments, and grievances,” that groups have toward one another should not be overlooked simply because they are constructed (Fearon & Laitin, 2003, p. 76). They must be taken as serious remote causes of conflict that can be exaggerated to create ethnic mobilization. To add rigor to this argument, Giuliano states that of various salient identities, ethnicity has served

most often as the basis for mobilization against the Russian state especially in the republics of Tatarstan and Chechnya (Giuliano, 2005, p. 200). As such, ethnicity should not be discounted but taken into consideration as a potential marker for securitization within Chechnya's ethnic identity.

Perhaps the most proximate cause of the Russo-Chechens Wars clearly rests with the disintegration of the Soviet Union, and Chechnya deciding to declare its independence after the Chechen Revolution in 1991. Although the wars in Chechnya have transformed into those of Islamic extremism, they began as ethno-territorial conflicts with an ethnonational character (Resvani, 2014). According to Resvani (2014), the Revolution in Chechnya does not fit classical definitions of revolution, but is rather closely aligned with the ascendancy of Djokhar Dudayev. Dudayev was elected to lead the Chechen National Congress in 1990, an organization that united several national and democratic forces. The official Chechen Revolution occurred when the National Congress stripped the Soviet head of power in the area, Doku Zavgayev. After, the National Congress called for presidential elections, and Dudayev was elected president in 1991.

The day after the election, Russia's Parliament declared the Chechen presidential elections invalid and Boris Yeltsin declared martial law in Chechnya. An arrest order for Dudayev was also issued (Knezys & Sedlickas, 1999, p. 20). A small detachment of Russian Interior Ministry troops occupied Grozny's airport, but were decisively defeated by Chechen forces. And the path towards large-scale war was laid. In Chechnya, more than at any moment, the forced withdrawal of Russian forces was met with popular national zeal; celebrations broke out especially in Grozny, the capital city, and people wore proudly their traditional clothes, performing the ritualistic *zikrs* (Sufi dance, hymns and prayers) and rallied with cries of "We are Chechens" and "This is our Country" (Johnston, 2009, p. 325).

It is at this moment where, for the Russians, state media and elected officials started to securitize Chechnya. The Russian media began to turn anti-Chechen and anti-Caucasian overall—blaming them for criminality in Russia and labeling them terrorists and Muslim fundamentalists (Resvani, 2014, p. 873). Dudayev, trying to cement his rule during the Revolution, started to draw more heavily on the Chechen past in order to securitize its identity against the threat from Russia: he made frequent reference to Chechnya's past religious and political men of legend, Shamil and Mansur, and began to instrumentalize Islam within Chechnya (Johnston, 2009, p. 334). Dudayev's speeches were full of Chechen folklore binding them as an ethnic group with Islam as a main point of focus and a constant reminder that Chechnya was in a "constant state of war" with Russia (p. 337). Dudayev was able to use nationalist rhetoric and crystallized Chechnya's identity as opposed to the other. As much as the Russian's securitized Chechnya, Dudayev self-securitized Chechnya's identity, making all Russians a threat—making the war a self-fulfilling prophecy.

As Tishkov (2004) writes, "In his Speeches, Dudayev always spoke of the Chechens' singular audacity, their superiority in battle, their supreme morale and other martial virtues, and warned of the Chechen temper and readiness to fight" (p. 82). After forcibly seizing government buildings and the radio and television studios, Dudayev publicly declared, "no one is going to determine how Chechnya is ruled anymore" (Tishkov, p. 62). Building on the collective memories of the past, Dudayev went so far as to create a memorial out of Chechen gravestones from cemeteries demolished after the 1944 deportation. The inscription read: "We will not weep; we will not weaken; we will not forget" (Wood, 2007, p. 45). Furthermore, on the eve of the First Russo-Chechen War, Dudayev stated, Russianness was worse than Nazism, and that Boris Yeltsin was leading a gang of murderers and the Russian regime was the "diabolical heir to the totalitarian monster" (Lieven, 1998, p. 69). Lieven notes that Dudayev kept Chechnya united, as much as it

was under his rule, “by keeping nationalist feeling and fears of the ‘country in danger’ at white-hot levels” and that Dudayev could only keep order in an otherwise anarchical Chechnya by acting as a “war leader in the context of mobilization against the ancient enemy” (Lieven, 1998, p. 76).

As Giuliano notes, the outbreak of the first Russo-Chechen War concerned the “right of the Chechen people to establish an independent nation-state” (Giuliano, 2005, p. 215). This of course, was not done in isolation. Events lead up to this quest for self-determination; mainly, this paper argues that salient ethnic group identity served as a remote cause for warfare; identity markers were securitized by Chechen and Russian elites, building upon selective use of historical and collective memories of past atrocities and animosities between the two sides. The event itself was made possible by a further action, however; the fact that Russia organized some of its territorial units into ethnically defined republics. As Zürcher (2002) notes, “The legacy of the socialist ethno-federalism proved to be especially prone to conflict. When the empire broke down, the Chechens reacted by declaring their independence” (p. 184). Zürcher continues that the situation was conditional on the fact that the Chechens had a highly developed sense of otherness in relations to the Russians, remembering the Tsarist wars and Stalin’s deportation of the entire Chechen people to Kazakhstan (p. 184). For Janeczko (2014) there is no doubt that above all, the causes of war between Russia and Chechnya are shaped by identity. The scholar writes, “The wars in Chechnya were waged, above all else, as identity conflicts” (p. 446). There is ample evidence that suggests although Chechnya is now relatively peaceful, it could still be in a societal security dilemma. Re-securitizing identity variables is likely in the near future especially if Ramzan Kadyrov is removed from power, or Putin’s stipends to Chechnya decrease.

In examining the Second Chechen War, Lyall (2010) finds that insurgent violence within Chechnya is conditional on the ethnicity of the soldiers conducting mop-up (*zachistka*) operations

in Chechnya. In other words, whether or not Chechen insurgents responded with insurgent or terrorist attacks against Russia or its Pro-Russian Chechen forces depended upon the ethnicity of those individuals' during *zachistka* raids. The scholar finds that there is a 40% decrease in the number of insurgent attacks for operations conducted only by Chechens, compared to Russian only raids (p. 2). Additionally, Lyall finds that Chechen counterattacks were much quicker when initial raids were conducted by Russian operators only. Although his evidence on joint operations—which resemble Russian only raids—muddies the waters a bit on the importance of ethnicity within this conflict, Lyall still concludes, “Evidence from Chechnya suggests that the patterns of insurgent violence are conditional on the identity of soldiers who ‘swept’ these villages” (Lyall, 2010, p. 18).

This threat to the Chechen “self” exists as of the present writing. Yusupova (2018) argues that President Putin accumulated more power for the presidency and in so doing, devolved further Russia’s legacy of ethno-federalism and re-centered the government; further, Putin has exerted a political drive for the cultural homogenization of Russian citizens, instigated by his national state agenda. However, as has already been articulated, the Chechen understanding of the Russian state has been constructed with an understanding that one cannot be a Muslim and truly be considered a Russian at the same time. Where does this leave the Chechens? According to Yusupova, ethnic minorities in Russia have resulted to private, grassroots cultural nationalism (Yusupova, 2018). The author claims that ethnicity is, “becoming important again precisely because of Russia’s shift to a market economy and the successful path of Chechnya to extended autonomy” (p. 625). Considering Soviet identity and the evolution to Russian identity, Chechnya has always been considered the other, failing to “comply with the cultural and political model proposed. They remained utterly different and hence excluded” (Casula, 2015, p. 703).

Kramer (2005) remarks that, “the rampant abuses by Russian security forces in Chechnya, especially the systematic round-ups of Chechen males . . . , have reinforced the deep antagonism that many Chechens have come to feel toward Russia.” The author continues, “It is therefore not surprising that calls for revenge against Russia under the traditional Chechen code of law, known as *adat*, have gained increasing salience in Chechnya” (p. 215). Casula (2015), in analyzing photographs of the Second Russo-Chechen war published in state-associated newspapers, captures a moment of identity construction and otherness, representing the strong Russian soldier as opposed to the weak Chechen terrorist or “criminal-bandit.” As evidence to support the identities of the two groups being essentially opposed to one another, and hence, a crucial variable in the history of violence between the two peoples, it is vital to quote at length:

[I]n this depiction two Chechen ‘outlaws’ seem utterly defeated. They squat deeply in front of their captors on an open field, in front of a military jeep with open front and rear doors. Their legs are torn into an awkward angle. The men are stripped to the waist, blindfolded, barefooted, and handcuffed. The impression of total defeat is reinforced by the overwhelming physical appearance of the two fully armed Russian soldiers guarding them: one of them is extremely tall and heavy, standing directly in front of and above one of his captives. The latter seems to be at his total mercy. In contrast to the heavy physical look of the soldiers, the prisoners are small and skinny, bent forward into a submissive posture. Hence, this is the depiction of a physical victory of the strong against the weak, of a successfully applied violence. (Casula, 2015, p. 712).

Modern Day Chechnya

At the time of the Second Chechen War, Russia was still a fledgling democracy. Central to determining the character of its future state composition was the resolution of the conflict with Chechnya. Foreign policy for Russia, as with many states, was a continuation of internal politics wherein augmenting the power of war hawks, promoting war culture, and undermining civil and political rights set the tone for its longer-term development. As early as 2002, the Duma began pursuing state censorship via provisions in the Law on the Media (Akhmadov, 2003, p. 486).

In the succeeding decades, Russia has constructed a multi-hundred-million-dollar propaganda machine while instituting authoritarian restrictions on the internet and cracking down on the few remaining independent news outlets and bloggers left within its borders (McIntosh, 2015, p. 300). Concurrently, it has employed this propaganda to enable it to repeatedly intervene in the affairs of neighbors such as Georgia and Ukraine, former eastern bloc states like Estonia, and even western targets such as France and the United States. If the free flow of factual information, enabled by a free press, is a necessary component of democracy, then modern Russia no longer possesses this quality (McIntosh, 2015, p. 300).

The decades also provided no lasting resolution for the Chechen conflict. By 2005, Russian armed forces had largely won the main military campaign in Chechnya. However, this led Chechen extremists and their allies to resort to larger-scale and more monstrous terrorist attacks on soft targets, as had been the case with the Dubrovka Theatre in 2002 and the school in Beslan in 2004 (Hill et al., 2005, p. 100). With key actors within Chechnya worried by the growth of this extremist jihadi element, Russian President Vladimir Putin opted to form an alliance with Ahmad Kadyrov, and later his son Ramzan, granting Chechnya semi-autonomy in exchange for peace (Gilligan,

2015, p. 266). This alliance has persisted to this day, but remains under perennial stress. The salience of identity is key to understanding this stress.

Currently, Chechen identity is defined by three discourses. The first is the legacy of moderate nationalists that gave rise to a generation of Chechens versed in civil society and human rights. The second is the officially sanctioned ideology of Sufi Islam that now monopolizes the public and private spheres. This factor regulates social behavior and helps eliminate political competition, thereby making it one of Kadyrov's chief governing tools. Finally, the third discourse is that of radical jihadists that continue to promote Wahhabism and incite violence, providing a pretext for campaigns of collective punishment by Kadyrov's security forces (Gilligan, 2015, p. 266).

In the case of the first, the absence of justice in Chechnya is its most significant obstacle to progress as there is a tremendous sense of bitterness in society and a demand that crimes against civilians committed by the military and security forces be investigated and stopped (Matveeva, 2007, p. 8). For instance, in 2003 Colonel Yuri Budanov was exonerated of the rape and murder of an eighteen-year-old Chechen girl on the dubious grounds of insanity. A year later a similar exoneration was given to Ministry of the Interior (OMON) troops involved in the killings of local administration officials near Dai village. A consequence of such impunity was the sporadic fighting and bombings of forested areas near settlements and the abductions of villagers by federal soldiers (Matveeva, 2007, p. 9).

Another is the continuance of Chechen rebel groups that seek redress for these crimes and see Kadyrov as little more than a Russian collaborator. Most recently, this division was demonstrated when Kadyrov announced Chechnya's aid to Russia's invasion of Ukraine by posting a video purporting to show his soldiers engaging Ukrainian troops in a street fight in the

Ukrainian city of Mariupol. Not long thereafter, several videos were posted online showing Chechen separatist rebels engaging Russian troops in aid of Ukraine (Hodge, 2022). One reporter could not help but notice the increasing visual similarity between current-day Mariupol and Grozny after it was leveled during the Second Chechen War (Hodge, 2022). Kadyrov's alliance with the Kremlin has provided his security forces with impunity for human rights violations while forcing him to overlook the actions of Russian soldiers in his borders. Consequently, forces aligned against Kadyrov and Moscow now found an increasingly receptive audience within Chechnya. Here it should be noted that Kadyrov most likely fights for Putin because of the power he is given in order to aid the Russia regime. However, other Chechens view Kadyrov as being "unChechen" by aiding Russia in Ukraine. Thus, for those Chechens fighting on the side of Ukraine, they are still fighting the Russo-Chechen conflict but within the territory of Ukraine. Their ethnic identity is more salient and they remain loyal to the notion of a Chechen ethnic-nation. For Kadyrov, his motivating factors appear to be power, prestige and money. Additionally, he promises these incentives to those Chechens that fight with him in Ukraine. This of course is not an ethnic war for these Chechens. It is either a war of mobilization in those cases where Chechens are drafted into Putin's military as a part of The Russian Federation. For those Chechens fighting on the side of Ukraine, however, it is a continuation of their identity wars against Russia and against other Chechens they view as traitorous to their ethnic cause.

This brings one to the second discourse surrounding Chechnya's identity. Kadyrov's political narrative is "grounded in a rejection of Salafism" (Gilligan, 2015, p. 267). It is important to note, however, that Kadyrov's disdain for Islamic fundamentalism does not appear to arise from any contempt for its doctrines. Instead, it arises more from a "fear of the threat that the Islamic insurgency poses to his authority and his standing in the eyes of the Russian leadership" (Gilligan

2015, p. 267). Such explains Kadyrov's arbitrary approach to Islamic doctrine and its mixture with the promotion of an ideology promoting Russian nationalism (Gilligan, 2015, p. 267). His mandates are carried out by a group known as the *Kadyrovtsy*, known for meting out Islamic justice and frequently cited as being responsible for some of Chechnya's worst human rights abuses. In fact, in 2006, Human Rights Watch documented eighty-two cases of the group illegally detaining and torturing citizens (Matveeva, 2007, p. 9). Starting in 2017, the organization also began documenting growing abuse against Chechnya's LGBTQ minority group, noting that in February 2017, "Chechnya's law enforcement and security forces launched an anti-gay purge. They rounded up dozens of men on suspicion of being gay, held them in unofficial detention facilities for days, humiliated, starved, and tortured them. They forcibly disappeared some of the men" (Vasilyeva, 2017). Others were returned to their families barely alive from repeated beatings. Publicly exposed as gay, Chechen authorities encouraged their families to perform honor killings (a practice legalized and encouraged when Ramzan Kadyrov assumed power) (Vasilyeva, 2017). The European Center for Constitution and Human Rights (2021) reports that it received evidence of at least 150 instances of this treatment.

As recently as February 2021, Human Rights Watch updated its reporting to note the case of two gay men that fled Chechnya fearing persecution over posting anti-government comments on social media. The men were eventually apprehended by Russian police and returned to Grozny, where, at last report, they were being held in a detention center awaiting trial on bogus charges of aiding an illegal armed group (Knight & Lokshina, 2021). It also notes an earlier uncovered case of a man that fled to Canada, where officials investigated claims that he was lured into a meeting using a gay dating app whereafter he was berated for his sexual orientation (Knight & Lokshina, 2021). Kadyrov employs his incredibly inconsistent application of Sharia law as a way in which

to enable violent state repression. This serves both his own goal of making Chechnya the center of the North Caucasus' Muslim community and Russia's goal of using the LGBTQ community as a scapegoat for its nationalist social agenda (Gilligan, 2015, p. 267). This is to say that "Kadyrov is engineering public identity through forced Islamization, manipulating culture for political ends, and marginalizing the Russian constitution" (Gilligan, 2015, p. 271).

The final discourse points out that "socioeconomic problems are breeding instability and radicalism" (Hill et al., 2005, p. 100). After decades of repression and attempted genocide by the Soviets and over a decade in which Grozny was leveled twice, economic development and general stability has come slowly to Chechnya. Consequently, "radical Islamist influence has risen since the mid-1990s, when militant groups entrenched themselves in the region. The growth of militancy has only been exacerbated by the heavy-handed reaction of authorities" (Hill et al., 2005, 100). In other words, poor development has provided a breeding ground for extremist ideology, which has only grown because of the extremely violent way in which Kadyrov and his security forces have responded to rebel groups and other undesirables. Over time, as the international jihadi movement has sought to exploit the Chechen conflict for its own ends, independence has increasingly become just one issue amongst many. Today, the link between Chechen separatist groups and jihadists is as much a financial relationship as it is an ideological one.

Kadyrov's relationship with Russia has sought to counter this effect. After all, in post-war Chechnya, unemployment estimates were often as high as eighty percent (Matveeva, 2007, p. 4). To this end, "Russia has fed millions of dollars into the region for reconstruction and social services" (Gilligan, 2015, p. 267). The relative stability of the Kadyrov regime has created an atmosphere wherein "safety concerns are no longer a massive deterrent to business and private life" (Matveeva, 2007, p. 4). A public transportation system has been re-established between

Chechnya, Dagestan, and Ingushetia, allowing for increased trade. Finally, Moscow has initiated a “low-interest credit program to help with the reconstruction of housing and small-business development” (Matveeva, 2007, p. 5). At least amongst some in Chechen society, this increase in development has led to a sense of adaptation to the Russian federal system which rebel groups vehemently oppose. This is an important note because prior conflict with Chechnya had the effect of radicalizing Russian society by increasing the influence of the Russian security services and the military. This is to say that Russia’s failure to resolve the Chechen conflict radicalized not only the Chechens, by pushing them closer to jihadi forces, but also its own people, by providing a scapegoat which its military could exploit politically (Akhmadov, 2003, p. 487). Modern-day Chechnya is a state of war weary citizens torn between two equally violent forces. Only through reform and the adoption of democratic values can Russia hope to promulgate a lasting peace in Chechnya.

Conclusion and Discussion

This paper has sought to demonstrate the connections between identity and violence. It has done so by examining the process of the securitization of identity with a case-analysis of the Russo-Chechen conflicts. The case-analysis is not meant to be an empirically process-traced model of conflict nor an attempt at establishing clear causal links. Rather, it seeks to demonstrate clearly that identity in Chechnya matters, that it has been securitized on both sides, and as a result, conflict always looms. It is clear that both sides exist in a societal security dilemma and that this exists because of the securitization of the ontological self. Although Chechnya seems relatively calm at present, the flames of ethnic conflict still simmer in the background. Despite the Putin administration spending billions of Russian Rubles (Slider, 2008) in an attempt to modernize the Muslim republic, there has not been any attempt to ameliorate the juxtaposition of identities. It can

be argued that both sides see the other as an ontological threat; and that when an authoritarian leader such as Kadyrov no longer is in charge of Chechnya, or Putin in Russia, or when money from Moscow stops flowing through Grozny, the conditions are already sufficient for the reemergence of large-scale violence.

Violence still exists in Chechnya, though now, it is generally state-sponsored and overlooked by Moscow. The eradication of the LGBTQ+ community in Chechnya (Brock & Edenborg, 2020; Moleiro et al., 2021; Scicchitano, 2019) and the massive international attention garnered by these events (Diamantis, 2019) demonstrate the connection between violence and a threat to identity. It can be argued that to some in Chechnya, traditional Chechen identity is opposed to same-sex relationships, and as such, is “threatened” by this particular community. As violence has been used against the LGBTQ+ community to eradicate a perceived ontological identity threat by those in government, one can postulate that the same methods of societal protection will be used against any threat posed by any, “the other”. As this paper illustrates, Russians perpetually constitute “the other” for Chechnya, and to the Russians, Chechens are still deprived of full identity recognition. Evinced the point that Chechnya is still situated within a societal security dilemma is that although they have been living technically under the Russian state authority, customary law and Sharia remain vital de facto systems of law; according to Lazarev (2019), it is the history of conflict between the two sides that has caused many Chechens to reject state-sponsored justice³ (p. 668). Furthermore, with the pledge to ISIS recently taken by the

³ It must be noted that while the regional government in Chechnya seems to prefer traditional law over the State, Lazarev notes that the conflicts in Chechnya have altered the gender structure, allowing more empowerment to Chechen women who generally prefer the state authority for many issues of justice over the more traditional notions of justice in Chechnya.

Caucasus Emirate, and with the war-experiences children of Russo-Chechen conflict veterans have gained in Ukraine (Souleimanov, 2014) and Syria (Wilhelmsen, 2020), there is an entire generation with access to more readily available weapons and training skilled in warfare and eager to assert autonomous identities through whatever means necessary.

A major step in diminishing the brutal effects of conflict in Chechnya is the desecuritization of the region. Hansen best describes the core concept of desecuritization by writing, “the move of an issue out of the sphere of security” (Hansen, 2012, p. 525). It can be seen here that desecuritization is not an aspiration that is aimed directly at wholly solving any region’s conflicts, but rather an essential first step to help foster a setting where open hostilities are not the first response to possible disagreement. This section is dedicated to identifying a few mentalities that must be adopted by both Chechen and Russian communities in order for proper desecuritization to take place.

The first hurdle for Chechen and Russian relations is a reevaluation of everyday practices and governmental policy that create an ethnically based barrier between the two cultures. Hansen (2012) writes, “Desecuritisation is, in short, performative: it must instantiate the non-threatening identity of the Other for desecuritisation to be possible” (p. 533). Proper desecuritization is not simply two peoples or two governments publicly agreeing they are no longer enemies, but it is a series of actions and continued discussions in order to build up trust between two separate ethnic communities to the point where armed conflict is no longer a likely response. It is important that a new culture of trust is built because it is not typically hatred that keeps groups from arriving at a continued peace with one another, but fear about the unknowability regarding the motivations and intentions of outside ethnic groups from one’s own (Van Willigen, 2010, p. 137). In order for both groups in the Russo-Chechen conflict to feel adequately respected and incentivized to continue

positive culture building activities, any governmental policies that place negative ethnic and cultural barriers between them must be reevaluated. This can include disproportionate policing within Chechnya, obvious outside manipulation of governmental institutions, and institutionally advocated violence by one side against the other. If there is to be any hope of desecuritization, which is the first major step in a lasting peace, these things must be addressed by the governmental bodies of Chechnya and Russia.

A major obstacle that consistently appears to block any efforts of desecuritisation is the possible backtracking that can occur after negotiations have already reached an agreeable conclusion. Ethnic conflict, in regard to the Chechen and Russian issues, demonstrably served as an integral igniter in current ongoing issues, but uncertainty plays an instrumental role in allowing the conflict to continue. Menninga and Prorok (2021) write, “Because negotiating with a disingenuous opponent would be politically and militarily costly, combatants use observable information to learn about the severity of the commitment problem” (p. 411). This commitment problem is present in any sort of negotiation, but the odds of groups returning to peacefully reconvene after having been betrayed or having been a part of a deal that fell apart in the past are drastically lower than if de-escalation were to occur (p. 418). This problem becomes especially difficult for Chechen and Russian peoples due to the ethnic nature of the conflict. Russian involvement within the government and police force of Chechnya shows many Chechens that their cultural “battleground” is still under attack in many respects, and this will not lend much credibility to future negotiations (Menninga & Prorok, 2021, p. 413). In concordance with the commitment problem, any sort of positive negotiations that could be found between the two groups would have much less staying power due to perceived aggression from the Russian government against Chechnya. Desecuritisation cannot properly occur if any information that is given in good faith

during negotiations in order to quell uncertainty, is then used immediately after by one side to gain an advantage over the other. Chechnya and Russia must be willing to consistently commit to any sort of negotiated accords in order to not further broaden the gap of mistrust that exists between the two groups.

Due to the long and violent conflict, a deep mistrust between the two ethnic groups has formed. This mistrust stands directly in the path of any desecuritization efforts and, unless properly addressed, will act as the catalyst for even more brutal conflicts in the future. A possible avenue that can be taken is the use of third-party moderators in order to help de-escalate the situation to a level where actual, more productive negotiations can take place. Given the deep history between Chechnya and Russia, there is no doubt that past negotiations have not seen a substantial amount of commitment thus far and while good faith actors may currently exist, given past precedents, there do not exist many incentives for individuals to return to the negotiation table. But, third-party groups, that can be trusted by both sides of the ongoing conflict, have been shown to radically increase the chances of combatants to return for negotiations, despite past grievances (Menninga & Prorok, 2021, p. 421). Even so, it is unlikely that even an appropriately chosen third-party could productively moderate negotiations between the two groups without major foundational changes in the way the communities interact with each other. Kelman (2010) though, offers an alternative in the form of unofficial and non-binding pre-negotiations that he describes as “workshops” (p. 390). These workshops are based around using academics as a third-party substitute and are conducted with the intention of allowing a small group of prominent political actors from both sides of the conflict to discuss their grievances openly for the purpose of discovering each party’s perspective regarding ongoing disputes (Kelman, 2010, p. 397).

These meetings are confidential, they are not filmed or recorded, and the ground rules of the workshop prohibit the academics from becoming too involved in the content of the discussion besides acting as a facilitator. This workshop model has been utilized by Kelman (2010) in his work regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and its lack of use he regards as a major contributor for the debacle of the Camp David summit in 2000 (p. 392). A major characteristic of these workshops is to validate the national identity of both parties in an attempt to clear the path to more proper negotiations down the line. Kelman writes, “The mutual acknowledgement of the national identity of the other and willingness to accommodate it- which I see as the first step towards reconciliation- can only take place in a context in which the identity of one’s own group is affirmed” (2010, p. 411). The ethnic animosity between the Chechnya and Russia runs extremely deep and only once both groups recognize the validity of the other’s existence can the pathway to desecuritisation be fully opened. Again, it must be noted that this argument rest on the notion that although Chechnya seems relatively peaceful right now, it is not. And to avoid future escalation of force, the current recommendations should be incorporated and encouraged by the international community.

The following are a number of measures that have not been implemented in Chechnya, but have seen success elsewhere. Additionally, it is the present author’s hope that other scholars of ethnic conflict apply the theory as presented here to other cases to see if it indeed, is a generalizable theory of ethnic conflict, or, if it is just an explanation of the specifics of the Russo-Chechen conflict. One policy recommendation that could assist in healing the rift between Russia and Chechnya is to assess successful peace treaties between violent gangs. There is a strong correlation between conflict between gangs and conflict between ethnic groups. As expounded previously, individuals recognize their identity in conjunction with that of their group’s understanding of

identity. A crucial aspect of a gang's identity, and a prevalent reason for violence, is intergroup conflict as members "define their group in opposition to other gangs" (Papachristos et al., 2013, p. 420). For Chechnya, Russia's policy is one of othering, vilifying, and employing brutal military campaigns (Hughes & Sasse, 2016), and Chechnya's Dudayev sought "secession, conflict, and confrontation with Russia" (Sharafutdinova, 2000). Warring between gangs and between ethnic groups can be linked to an "us versus them" mentality, and those prejudices are often accompanied by a prolonged history of conflict and anger. Fearon and Laitin (2003) observe that "policies to redress grievances...could be important to resolve ongoing conflicts" (p. 88), and there is precedent for peace between gangs that have undergone securitization

Importantly, some gangs have revealed it is possible to move forward and leave such a storied past behind. One successful peace treaty undertaken between rival gangs was the Watts truce, involving the Bloods and the Crips, which was modeled on the 1949 Armistice Agreements. The truce was brokered between gang and community leaders in Los Angeles just before the 1992 riots and, despite rising tensions and violence within the city, the agreement held (Beech, 2022). This approach requires leaders of the state or local communities to come together with the goal of decreasing violence. Moving forward from a destructive past requires a willingness to learn better ways to move forward. Sharafutdinova (2000) asserts "a better understanding of...the conditions facilitating conciliatory and inclusionist ethnic policies is vital if crises like the one in Chechnya are to be prevented" (p. 20). Though it may not be possible to halt violence altogether, a concerted effort to honor such a treaty has shown that a period of peace is possible. It is during this time that the door for other policy recommendations, such as multicultural education, could open, leading to sustained reconciliation or cease-fires.

A final recommendation is to consider the value of multicultural education in helping to overcome prolonged ethnic tensions. Learning is a “key engine in social development. It contributes to transformation by changing behaviors and attitudes toward violence and toward the police and legal system” (Strapacova, 2016, p. 64). The school system is often the only “institution available to society to make broad, intentional, and formal changes to its psychological repertoire” (p. 64). As a consequence of these factors, education may serve as a mechanism of influence over a younger generation that did not directly experience ethnic conflict and can, therefore, more easily focus on constructing a peaceful future (Strapacova, 2016, p. 64).

Between 1997 and 2002, at least ten thousand people were killed in ethnic violence in Indonesia (Nakaya, 2018, p. 118). In the state’s West Kalimantan region, where more than 50,000 people experienced incidents of ethnic violence, multicultural education was implemented to address conflict between the state’s Dayak and Madura ethnicities. This type of instruction seeks to help students understand prejudice construction, authentic culture, social discrimination, and equity among ethnic groups, thereby helping them to develop positive racial and ethnic attitudes (p. 119). For instance, research on this particular implementation of multicultural education found that amongst the Madura, learning the Dayak worldview by studying the meaning of tattoo motifs and making ethnic language dictionaries helped students reflect on their negative images and experience making tools to improve respect for, and understanding of, other ethnic groups (p. 133). While the study’s author notes several areas of possible improvement regarding trauma sensitivities and knowledge construction, the data helps validate the contention that multicultural education is valuable because it helps students develop an international perspective while also retaining their own culture (Nakaya, 2018, p. 133). Put another way, this type of education helps students expand their sense of identity to include other ethnicities as part of a national construction.

Such education is designed to interrupt processes by which injustice-based perspectives are transmitted intact from one victimized generation to the next, ensuring that peaceful future development will be almost impossible to guarantee (Strapacova, 2016, p. 57). This is to say that multicultural education can help prevent primordialist views from taking root, wherein “ethnic divisions and tensions are presented and approached as unalterable products of natural inheritance” (p. 59). More troublingly, primordialism seeks to shape public opinion so that “conflict is seen as flowing from essential differences between ethnic groups, not amenable to explanation and not able to be resolved, resulting in the inevitable emergence of further interethnic clashes” (p. 59). This is to say that identity is seen as both static and salient. When supposedly incompatible identities do not change but are of utmost importance, conflict is apt to follow. In the aftermath of the Yugoslav Wars, primordialist views resulted in a continually divided education system in Kosovo. Serbian and Albanian children in this system “are in no way integrated and, crucially, may hear entirely different perspectives on recent historical developments without realizing there are two sides to the story” (Strapacova, 2016, p. 65). In other words, because ethnically heterogeneous students in Kosovo schools are taught nothing positive about each other, it becomes increasingly difficult for them to work towards peace and reconciliation. Consequently, Kosovo has remained for decades in an unsustainable peace where each ethnic group is more interested in constructing a salient national identity and myth for its people than in undertaking the difficult task of cooperative nation building (Ingimundarson, 2007, p. 96).

Over-time primordialist views holding that identity is static will fade away as more areas of cooperation become available as understanding is built between groups formerly in opposition. Without attempts at desecuritization of the other, which neither side seems willing to implement or even ponder, Chechnya will remain susceptible to conflict with Russia. Both sides have been

constructed to securitize the identity of the other, believing that the very existence of the other represents an existential threat. Without proper attention given in policy arenas to identity, and the resolution of identity conflicts, the international system should expect more violence to erupt in Chechnya and throughout other regions of the world where ethnic group identity looms large.

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