In February 2003, as news of American military operations in Afghanistan was giving way to speculation in the press about the looming invasion of Iraq, a multidisciplinary group of thirty-one scholars gathered in Pocantico, NY, to consider the continuing problem of sectarian, ethnic, and cultural conflict around the world. Brought together under the auspices of the Fulbright Foundation’s recently inaugurated New Century Scholars Program, the participants were actively engaged in individual research projects pertaining to the larger theme of political conflict from a broad range of perspectives. During the course of the program year, the New Century Scholars came together as a group on three separate occasions to exchange ideas and information, to discuss and update one another on the progress of individual research projects, and to participate in collaborative activities in smaller working groups, each one addressing a particular theme within the larger field of conflict studies. The current manuscript represents one such effort, a partial record of what has been a long, complex, and open-ended conversation about the role of identity in creating, averting, and assuaging conflict.

Our working group originally formed at the Pocantico conference as a loose caucus of New Century Scholars with a particular interest in the issue of identity as it pertains to conflict. The participants included a Hungarian historian, a Senegalese journalist, a Tibetan educational scholar, social psychologists from Ukraine and the United States, Thai and American anthropologists, and political scientists from Australia, Latvia, Pakistan, and the US.¹ Our individual research projects not only spanned the globe but also were arrayed in degrees

Notes for this section begin on page 11.
of discord, including cases in which long-term simmering conflicts had been successfully contained and even resolved; areas in which deadly riots, civil wars, and secessionist movements threatened to destroy the social fabric; and contexts in which widespread violence might have been expected to erupt yet failed to materialize. We also differed significantly in our methodological orientations, with some of us relying primarily upon survey data, some on texts housed in historical archives, and others almost solely on ethnographic interviews. Our hope was that these vast differences in experience, outlook, and training, when brought to bear on a single issue, would shed some new and helpful light on the problem of ethnic and sectarian violence.

Over the course of our program year, in face-to-face meetings and through electronic communication, we prodded, probed, and challenged one another to define and refine our ideas about the nature of identity and its relationship to social conflict. The chapters that follow can be read as a rough-hewn map of our collective intellectual journey, which originated with the shared agreement that the two main approaches commonly found in the literature on conflict and identity were wanting. These approaches are, first, that primordial group ties may give rise to conflicts that are intractable, irrational, and susceptible to being suppressed but never fully resolved; and, second, that while such conflicts may appear on the surface to be driven by ancestral religious or ethnic hatred, most internecine violence is fueled by economics. Primordialists posit that unlike class and interest group conflicts, cultural conflicts have a peculiarly intensive, affective, or emotional nature because they touch on a particular type of identity. As a result, primordialists frequently view the continuing violent “clash of civilizations” as inevitable.2 “Instrumentalist” or “economic opportunity” models, by contrast, are predicated upon the notion that the interests of the self, rather than the identity of the self, are at the core of collective disputes (Berdal and Keen 1997; Keen 1998). The range of our cases—which include ethnic and sectarian identities with long and established collective histories, as well as groups that are only just beginning to emerge—pushed us beyond primordialist models that portray conflict as the result of age-old animosities. With respect to instrumentalist models, we agreed that while economic factors can certainly exacerbate pre-existing tensions, not all intercommunal conflicts are essentially rivalries for scarce resources that employ ethnic, sectarian, or cultural divisions as tools for the pursuit of underlying economic goals. Our individual research clearly demonstrated that identity—apart from interest—does matter, although not always in ways that are easily quantifiable and readily processed by statistical models designed to predict and control for a variety of outcomes.

The concept of “identity” is hotly contested, not only within contemporary politics, but within scholarly discourse as well. In a semantic history of the concept, Gleason (1983: 930–931) laments that within three decades of its introduction to the social-scientific vocabulary in the 1950s, the fact that “the term can be legitimately employed in an number of ways” invited its slapdash application by scholars, quickly transforming this “ubiquitous and elusive”
term into “a cliché…. [I]ts meaning grew progressively more diffuse, thereby encouraging increasingly loose and irresponsible usage. The depressing result is that a good deal of what passes for discussion of identity is little more than portentous incoherence.” More recently, Brubaker and Cooper (2000: 1) argue that the term “tends to mean too much (when understood in a strong sense), too little (when understood in a weak sense), or nothing at all (because of its sheer ambiguity).” Accordingly, they propose for the sake of conceptual clarity that the term be abandoned altogether in social analysis. While as a group we also encountered considerable difficulty with the concept in our collective deliberations and individual research projects, we agreed with Charles Tilly (2002: xiii; 2005: 209), who proposed instead “that we get identity right.”

We soon recognized that moving beyond this rudimentary consensus would require us to stake out some common ground capable of anchoring our collective deliberations. At our second face-to-face meeting in Belfast, we began by laying out a common framework upon which to build. Jim Peacock, the leader of our working group, put together a series of queries designed to elucidate areas of agreement between us, as well as key points of contention for our group as a whole. His questions focused on five issues fundamental to our collective research. First, we strove to clarify our individual working definitions of ethnic and sectarian identity in ways that seemed useful to both our individual research projects and our collective discussions. Second, we sifted through those concepts as a group in order to assess the conceptual strengths and weaknesses of our working definitions, highlighting the core characteristics of the terms in our common vocabulary. Third, we reflected on those circumstances under which multiple identities seemed to co-exist without violence, looking for common trends among those cases. Fourth, we also compared cases in which the tensions between identities seemed to fuel violence, again searching for patterns among them. Finally, we considered how such violence might be stopped: what types of intervention might have an impact, at which point(s) in the cycle, and to what end.

David Brown, a political scientist who has written extensively on the related problems of ethnic identity, conflict, and nationalism, bravely volunteered to draft a document that would reflect the majoritarian trends in our collected answers to these core questions. His initial draft, produced midway through our program year, served as a touchstone document for our working group members as we headed out to the field to pursue our individual research projects. From our various locations, as our research unfolded, we continued to challenge, embroider upon, and test the limits of his model, a fuller and more nuanced version of which appears in his chapter in this volume.

This early draft—which we collectively referred to as our “manifesto”—drew conceptual distinctions between various forms of nesting identities, proposing that while ethnic and religious identities rely upon myths of common kinship/ancestry and “cultural sameness,” civic or political identities “rely instead upon visions of a common future.” The document noted that the existence of multiple
overlapping or intertwining identities inhibits collective violence and promotes social cohesion; however, particularly intense conflicts of interest pressure individuals with diverse, fluid identities to valorize their loyalty to one interactive community over another, prompting social fragmentation into mutually antagonistic identity-communities. The successful resolution of such conflicts, we theorized, ultimately rests not in elaborately crafted power-sharing arrangements, but rather in the depolarization and reintertwining of identities.

Yet even as our draft “manifesto” served to highlight common ground among us, it also revealed key differences between our projects and perspectives. First, it quickly became clear that our case studies were evenly divided into studies of identities currently in conflict, on the one hand, and those in which conflict had been kept at bay, on the other. Thus, our collective deliberations stretched to include, for example, the causes of separatist movements in southern Senegal and the Thai-Burmese border, as well as the relatively pacific polities of contemporary Germany and Singapore. Second, while ethnic and sectarian identities emerged in some of our cases primarily as elective systems of personal affiliation, in other contexts, highly politicized stereotypes or labels were coercively imposed on individuals and groups who might have sought to define themselves rather differently, if given the power to do so. This division had important implications, not only for our collective understanding of how social identities worked at the individual level, but also for the relations of power that enveloped them. Finally, whereas our original draft drew no firm distinction between ethnic and sectarian identities, those of us researching movements that were distinguished at least in part by their religious beliefs or spiritual practices argued that such cases were shaped by very different sets of dynamics. Much of our subsequent discussion centered on these divides and on coming to terms with the limits imposed by our “manifesto.”

Many of the core elements that appear in this initial draft document are further elaborated and refined by David Brown in his contribution, the first chapter of this volume. In his own work, Brown proposes that while three distinct but intertwining types of national identity (“civic,” “ethnocultural,” and “multiculturalist”) hold nation-states together, it is the “civic” conception of the nation-state as a moral community that performs the crucial role of the buffer between the other two, thereby mitigating the potential for ethnic conflict. These overlapping visions of national identity may become disentwined, he argues, when the disparate interactive communities that comprise the nation-state are disrupted by any number of factors and incumbent elites are no longer able to maintain their legitimacy. When such interactive communities begin to ideologize the source of such disruptions, Brown notes, overarching civic attachments may erode, raising the likelihood of overt ethnic conflict.

In his response to the group “manifesto,” social psychologist Tom Pettigrew chose to focus on the meaning of ethnic identity at the individual level. Defining identity as “those aspects of the self-concept that derive from an individual’s knowledge and feelings about the group memberships the person shares with
others,” he explores survey data on prejudice and discrimination against immigrants in the European Union, using rigorous statistical analysis. Like Brown, Pettigrew envisions social identity as potentially comprising several nested levels of affiliation: membership in a minority or majority group, citizenship in the nation-state, and an overarching identification as a citizen of the European Union. His research in chapter 2 correlates more inclusive identities with higher levels of tolerance and lower levels of overt violence, suggesting that more universalistic identities (like those described in Brown’s chapter as “civic nationalism”) serve to blunt the negative effects of narrower forms of nationalism. In chapter 5, Pettigrew reconciles the research of political scientists, which shows that as the threat posed by an out-group population to an in-group increases (presumably as its numbers increase), prejudice against the out-group increases, with the findings of social psychologists, which demonstrate that contact between groups (which also presumably increases with population) reduces prejudice. His research reminds us that much has been learned about the patterns of prejudice in the last half-century: some means of defusing inter-group distrust, such as integration in housing, the workplace, and everyday activities, are now known to be effective, notwithstanding apparent paradoxes.

Karina Korostelina, also a social psychologist and the author of chapter 3, offered the most voluntaristic definition of identity, arguing that it was both the “function and result of choice: in the world of different ‘social offers’ of political, ethnic, national, and sectarian identities, people can choose the most useful or attractive one.” Combining a method similar to Pettigrew’s with a conceptual framework that bears some resemblance to Brown’s, she employs surveys to measure how the readiness to fight associated with a salient ethnic identity is affected by the ways in which members of two competing ethnic minorities in the Crimea understand Ukraine’s national identity. She finds that Crimean Tartars, a relatively small minority whose historical collective experience is rooted in the multiethnic Ottoman Empire, are more accepting of the dominant position of other groups within the contemporary Ukrainian state. The more numerous and powerful ethnic Russians, by contrast, expect to maintain the level of ethnic dominance they historically exercised in both Crimea and Ukraine. Like Brown and Pettigrew, Korostelina concurs that the widespread adoption of a more inclusive, civic concept of group identity may reduce the potential for conflict in Crimea and Ukraine, but she also discusses two other ways of thinking about the nation, one which seems to increase the belligerence of powerful minorities and decrease the aggressiveness of weak minorities, and another associated with readiness for violence among weak groups and less inclination for conflict among stronger ones.

Kwanchewan Buadaeng’s chapter traces the remarkably fluid identity of a single ethnic group that spans an international border. Her research illustrates how the historical processes of colonization and modernization in Burma and Thailand produced very different identities among the speakers of Karenic languages and their descendants in the two states. In Thailand, 450,000 Karen
are but one of several “hill tribes” who subsist in relatively simple and isolated rural communities. By contrast, the roughly four million Burmese Karen have mobilized a military force that has waged a secessionist war against the central state for about five decades. Buadaeng finds that the dissimilar manners in which Burmese and Thai state elites sought to construct unique Karen identities allowed the Karen different opportunities to contest national identity and jockey for higher collective status, and created different, new symbolic spaces within which Karen leaders have acted politically. Citing Appadurai’s (2000: 162) observation that “nationalism and ethnicity … feed each other, as nationalists construct ethnic categories that in turn drive others to construct counterethnicities, and then in times of political crisis these others demand counterstates based on newfound counternationalisms,” she shows how, over time, the ethnic identity of the Karen has interacted with and reacted to the respective nation-building processes of Burma and Thailand.

Buadaeng’s chapter marks a shift in our collective research to address the question of ethnic and sectarian identities that are at least partially constructed by a dominant group and then imposed upon another. This theme is developed more fully in chapter 6, written by Badeng Nima, who conducted a series of interviews among Tibetans living in northwest China. The responses he received to a range of questions regarding the current social, economic, and political situation of the Tibetan people revealed considerable collective concern about the manner in which the Chinese educational system has undermined the Tibetans’ status as an ethnic minority within the People’s Republic of China (PRC). Economic opportunities are generally afforded to those ethnic Tibetans who complete mandatory schooling, but the existing curriculum structurally recognizes only the interests and beliefs of the majority Han Chinese. Badeng describes some of the more recent educational innovations that have attempted to make space in the curriculum for traditional Tibetan cultural beliefs. He concludes, however, that such practices remain the exception in the PRC rather than the rule, and that current policies continue to exert serious social and political strain on traditional Tibetan communities.

By contrast, the Singaporean state has been more successful at negotiating the delicate balance required to craft public policy that is multicultural by design. In chapter 7, Jim Peacock and Wee Teng Soh observe that although Singapore’s governing People’s Action Party has attempted to standardize both ethnicity and religion—essentializing their qualities into something measurable, manageable, and therefore less frightening than the threat posed by Singapore’s majority Muslim, majority Malay, poorer neighbors to its richer economy and its very mixed but majority Confucian, Christian, and ethnic Chinese population—harmony may be more the result of organic interaction than of social engineering. Like patches of crabgrass (though perhaps a better analogy would be wildflowers) disrupting a manicured lawn, ethnic mixes, religious movements, and art projects flourish in a society famed for its regularity and conformity.
Whereas the case of Singapore represents social harmony by (or, Peacock and Soh suggest, despite) bureaucratic design, Hamadou Tidiane Sy, a Senegalese journalist, explores the evolution of a separatist movement in his country through the interweaving of cultural, ethnic, and economic interests. Despite extensive field research among the rebel groups of the Casamance region, the cause of the insurrection, even the moment that the conflict started, is unclear. In chapter 8, Sy traces several possibilities and discusses how Senegalese came to speak of the region—and of one of its many ethnic groups, the Diola—as rebellious by nature. While there are differences, as well as a history of discrimination, the question, why did this group but not another develop a distinct collective identity and begin a decades-long armed struggle against the central Senegalese state? remains. Sy finds that in the midst of ongoing secessionist conflict, the Diola identity that emerged can be described neither as “primordial” nor “constructed,” but rather as the ideologized, politicized result of a process he refers to as “identitism.” Identity, once set in motion, can take on a life of its own, and war in particular can deepen divisions between people who were once neighbors.

In chapter 9, my research on qigong sects in contemporary China raises similar issues about the creation of sectarian identities that are imposed by central-state officials who seek to control and eliminate social practices deemed undesirable. While the quasi-spiritual practice of qigong enjoyed unprecedented popularity in the PRC during the 1990s, once groups of practitioners began to press for political recognition, Chinese authorities reacted by branding such groups “evil heretical sects” and marginalizing their members. As the crackdown widened and intensified in 1999, the process of violent repression served to craft new sectarian identities among those who continued to practice Chinese qigong. The group commonly known as Falun Gong responded to such pressures by retreating to the Internet, where they managed to construct a viable community of faith in virtual reality. From their base in cyberspace, Falun Gong practitioners continue their struggle to maintain and reshape their own collective identity, contesting official representations of the group as inherently subversive. In this case, a sectarian identity created by central-state officials and coercively imposed upon a target population has spurred a transnational social movement—under the guise of what I refer to as “cybersectarianism”—that actively seeks to undermine state authority.  

A rather different transnational sectarian effort is described in the final case study. In chapter 10, Mohammad Waseem contends that Western nations have invoked a discourse of difference that has reified Islam as utterly alien by emphasizing classical Islamic religious texts over the contemporary social context, by conflating religion and politics, and by assuming that religious identity is inherently primordial, never instrumental. His research on Pakistan demonstrates that it is the modern ruling elite in that country that has engaged, mobilized, promoted, co-opted, and strengthened the religious establishment so as to exclude mainstream liberal forces from political power. In Pakistan,
Waseem argues, religious identities are balanced by other types of identity, some of which are rooted in exchange networks, the mutual recognition of common law and property rights, and even dissent against authority. He proposes that the adoption of specific policies would broaden the participation of heretofore silenced groups and reinvigorate a constitutional tradition inherited from Britain.

In the conclusion, Patrick Inman and Jim Peacock return to an issue debated by the group at length: how do religious identities differ? Their response, based on the insights of Max Weber and the social philosopher Charles Taylor, moves in a very different direction from that of Brown, whose opening chapter suggests that winner-take-all ethnocentrism, divide-the-spoils multiculturalism, and principled civic nationalism compete for the loyalties of citizens and control of the state. Inman and Peacock begin by asking, what is identity? They answer, with Taylor, that it is at root an orientation to good, a moral framework that is acquired like language in childhood, requires dialogue with others to persist, and defines communities much as do languages or other markers of culture. Asserting that the core problem is to facilitate communication between identity groups, they propose that ethnic and sectarian identities—instead of being set aside as marginal to the modern world, as irrational primordial remnants to be superseded by civic virtue—can function as Weberian ideal types. These types provide a basis for the analytical comparison of the aspirations and horizons of identity-based groups and serve as a heuristic device to direct our attention to important clues concerning the ways in which collective violence may be triggered or intergroup accommodation may be reached.

I should say a word about a chapter that is missing from this book. Balázs Szelényi was a key participant in our group’s discussions. An essay he shared with us on the historical dimensions of ethnic identity among three German minority groups in the Austro-Hungarian Empire—the Saxons, the Zipsers, and the Schwabs—helped us all think about the mixture of choice and destiny that gives birth to identity (Szelényi forthcoming). He traced the respective passages of these groups through German democratization in the late nineteenth century and their reactions to the rise of National Socialism. The Saxons, he demonstrated, strove to maintain a distinct cultural and sectarian identity within the empire; the Zipsers, by contrast, voluntarily abandoned their native dialect to become better citizens of the Magyar polity; and the linguistic diversity among the Schwabs frustrated the emergence of a unique collective identity until the founding of the German state. These rather different conceptions of belonging presented Nazi authorities with a wide range of issues as they sought to incorporate these three distinct ethnic experiences under the umbrella of National Socialism. Szelényi found that while the “triangular configuration” for each of these ethnic groups had an impact on their collective responses to Nazification, it was the socioeconomic status of each group within the host country that was most decisive. His discussion of this case influenced the development of several essays in this book, and his efforts
as the Webmaster of our group’s discussion board allowed us to work together in spite of being spread across four continents.

Despite the complex differences that divided the members of our working group, it is worth noting that some broad patterns of agreement emerge in our case studies. Three possible relationships between collective identity and conflict are reflected in our research. First, some of our cases explore sub- or transnational ethnic and sectarian divides that undermine national and civic identities, leading to the breakdown of national unities. This pattern is first described in general terms in Brown’s chapter. In such cases, we found that the evolution of particularistic ethnic or sectarian affiliations can fuel regional or civil wars that pull nations apart from the inside, but often involve agents or forces operating largely from beyond national borders. Similar dynamics are noted by Sy in his chapter on the Casamance conflict in southern Senegal, as well as by Waseem in his study on the emergence of radical Islam in Pakistan.

A second pattern finds that nation-states can and do construct and impose identities from above. Buadaeng, for example, explores how Burmese and Thai elites applied very different understandings of group identity to the Karen peoples that inhabit their shared border region, setting in motion a process by which the Karen have redefined themselves rather differently in each state. In some of our case studies, authorities use identity markers to selectively mobilize state forces against their own subject populations, defining target groups from within their midst in an attempt to control, subdue, or even eliminate specific types of people. As reported in my chapter on qigong sect members in contemporary China, I found that state officials selectively labeled certain practices and beliefs as “feudal superstition” and then as “evil heretical sects,” finally outlawing certain groups and targeting their members for punitive treatment. In such cases, while group identities may undermine national unities, the nation-state emerges less as a victim of separatist impulses and more as the primary instigator of social violence.

Finally, it is important to stress that our collective research finds evidence that not all ethnic, sectarian, and political memberships cause conflict. A third pattern that emerges in our collective work demonstrates that some collective identities can actually reduce conflicts instead of triggering them. For example, Pettigrew’s survey research, conducted in Germany, finds that a strong personal identification as a citizen of the European Union correlates with lower levels of prejudice against out-group members. Karina Korostelina finds similar connections between the prevalence of multiple, nested identities and low levels of intergroup conflict in Crimea.

The case studies assembled in this volume impart two lessons for those interested in understanding how and why collective violence emerges from ethnic, sectarian, and cultural divides. First, as a group we were struck at how deeply imbricated the processes of social violence and social identity often are, as well as how multifaceted the connections may be. While some identities may indeed reduce conflict, others clearly incite, foster, and sustain protracted
conflicts in ways that merit further exploration. We conclude, therefore, that there is no single, simple, modular connection between identity and violence. It is perhaps only by close observation on the ground, carried out by researchers deeply situated in the linguistic, cultural, and geographic contexts of violent and potentially violent situations, that the contours of a broader understanding can begin to emerge. And when it does, we believe that a careful attention to shifting identity issues in context can uncover markers of escalating or declining levels of political violence that may suggest potential avenues and opportunities for intervention.

Second, our collective research is driven by the shared conviction that while economic, political, and geographic factors certainly play contributing roles in violent conflicts, identity is not wholly reducible to any one factor, or any set combination of factors, and is therefore worthy of consideration in its own right. A bottom-up grassroots examination of violent and potentially conflict-ridden situations shows that, indeed, identity matters—and that it matters profoundly to those most immediately affected by social violence. Whereas much of the literature on the subject of ethnic, sectarian, and cultural conflict is predicated upon the notion that violent conflict represents an aberration in social and political life, we propose that conflict is not extraordinary but instead grows out of the more quotidian practices and ordinary behaviors that characterize everyday life. As Duffield (1998) noted: “If we wish to examine conflict we must begin by analyzing what is normal. Or at least, those long-term and embedded social processes that define the conditions of everyday life. The purpose and reasons for conflict are located in these processes. From this perspective, political violence is not different, apart or irrational in relation to the way we live: it is an expression of its inner logic.” Likewise, we also propose that the seeds of the successful resolution or avoidance of intergroup conflict grow directly from the often mundane conditions of everyday life and the lived experience of individuals inhabiting several interactive communities.

As recent international developments have shown, political action and intervention in conflict situations are most successful when policymakers are able to track back and forth between a broad-based understanding of the few shared themes and patterns present in a variety of cases, while at the same time remaining attentive to the “distinctive” and even “idiosyncratic” features of a particular context in which action or intervention may be required. The totalizing and “world-making” capacities of violence defy any straightforward attempts to reduce them to quantifiable variables in the quest for prediction and control. The inherent flexibility of such a two-pronged approach, while admittedly not easy to codify into a single set of standard operating procedures or action agendas, nonetheless holds more promise for the creation of effective and positive responses tailored to fit the needs of complex and evolving situations.

What we take away from our work together, and what we hope the reader comes to share, is an appreciation for the usefulness of several different approaches to the study of identity and of intergroup violence. Our essays
make use of a wide range of disciplinary approaches and methodological tools to explore more fully the complex linkages between conflict and identity. We recommend to policymakers and the citizens and denizens of divided societies alike a similar eclectic, heuristic approach to understanding cultural differences. As our concluding essay argues: “Ethnic and sectarian conflict challenges everyone involved—minorities, majorities, those who control the state and the institutions of civil society. To find ways to resolve such conflicts, it is necessary for all to react creatively, to understand what is at stake for each identity, and to create new identities that bridge yet respect the old, lest mutual distance fuel prejudice and violence.”

Notes

1. Our Latvian and Hungarian colleagues are the only group members who did not contribute an essay to this volume. We are grateful to Mihails Rodins for his contributions to our discussions, which deepened our understanding of the sense of identity as defined by social psychology. Balázs Szélényi’s contribution is addressed later in this introduction.

2. Clifford Geertz (1973: 259) defined the primordial attachment as “one that stems from the ‘givens’ … of social existence: immediate contiguity and kin connection mainly, but beyond them the givenness that stems from being born into a particular religious community, speaking a particular language, or even a dialect of a language, and following particular social practices. These congruities of blood, speech, custom and so on, are seen to have an ineffable and at times overpowering, coerciveness in and of themselves. One is bound to one’s kinsman, one’s neighbor, one’s fellow believer, ipso facto; as the result not merely of personal affection, practical necessity, common interest, or incurred obligation, but at least in great part by virtue of some unaccountable absolute import attributed to the very tie itself.” More recently, Horowitz (2002) has used the term “primordialism” to denote arguments that posit that ethnic bonds are ineffable, explained by a myth of common ancestry—part and parcel of the collective memory of a particular group.

3. Tilly’s recent work (2002, 2005) proposes that group identities are best understood by studying their interactions. In the approach he recommends (2002: 72), the focus is on “connections that concatenate, aggregate, and disaggregate readily, form[ing] organizational structures at the same time as they shape individual behavior. Relational analysts follow flows of communication, patron-client chains, employment networks, conversational connections, and power relations from the small scale to the large and back.” He suggests that we not “treat identities as characteristics of individual consciousness” but instead define them as a set of relationships and study them in terms of “four components” (2005: 7–9, 209):
   1. a boundary separating me from you or us from them
   2. a set of relations within the boundary
   3. a set of relations across the boundary
   4. a set of stories about the boundary and the relations
This method requires a degree of detachment that in most cases was not appropriate to the goals of this book. Our intention was to demonstrate that identity as experienced by Europeans, Tibetans, Singaporeans, Karen, Pakistanis, and others can be a trigger for violence or a bulwark against it, and to suggest means of studying and analyzing those experiences.

This does not mean that relational analysis is unimportant. Both Buadaeng and Thornton make use of it in their case studies. Part and parcel of the scientific study of prejudice from Allport forward, relational analysis is at the heart of several of the nomological approaches to identity that Inman and Peacock discuss in the conclusion. It is also central to their analysis of cultural conflict in terms of ethnic and sectarian ideal types of group identity. If they do not consider any objective approach to the study of cultural conflict sufficient, however, it is because some means of promoting conversation and intersubjectivity that cuts across the boundaries of identities is also required. Their contention on that point mirrors our group’s experience of working across the boundaries between disciplines.

4. The Internet has provided both threatened and resurgent identities with symbolic space. For the former, see, for example, the Karen nationalist Web sites cited by Buadaeng. For the latter, and a particularly cogent reflection on how the Internet and human rights discourse interact to alter once-isolated groups, see Niezen (2005).

5. According to Rogers Brubaker (1996), an ethnic minority’s position in a given society is largely defined by three interrelated factors: the ethnic minority’s relationship to its host country, whether the minority has a home state to defend its interest and the relationship of that group to its home state, and, finally, the relationship between the home state and the host state.

References


