

Introduction

THIS BOOK EXAMINES the role of kinship and diasporas in the international system. Each chapter delves into different aspects of “the people,” understood as kin members who transcend the boundaries of states and who influence various facets of international and domestic affairs. The book examines the transmission of religion and culture across frontiers; the dynamics of conflict and its resolution, including the fate of diasporas; the competition among segments of the overall “people” inside and outside “homelands” for legitimate authority; the role of transnational financial flows among members of the kin community; and how the concept of collective security stretches beyond the state system. These overriding issues are examined through the lens of numerous case studies of kin community interactions and diaspora-homeland relations from a broad variety of theoretical and comparative perspectives. Special attention is paid to contemporary Jewish experiences, in many ways a paradigmatic case of the role of peoplehood and diaspora-homeland relations in international affairs.¹

Undoubtedly, modern nationalism—the idea that people with distinct characteristics should have the right to govern themselves in a territory believed to be their homeland—is tied to the Enlightenment and the evolution of the modern state since the eighteenth century. Yet the concepts of ethnicities, kinship, and the ties between “the land” and “the people” predate modern nationalism going back much farther. In the Jewish case, the Israelites under the united Davidic kingdom saw the land—“from Dan to Beersheba”—as a patrimony of Yahweh to his people. Steven Grosby writes that “the biblical nation is . . . a form of kinship, signifying recognition of being territorially related. As such, it posits the criterion of birth for membership that places the nation within the continuum of

forms of kinship. This recognition of kinship also implies possession and sovereignty over the land.”² And yet for many generations the idea of returning to the Promised Land was mostly a traditional myth related to the Jewish Covenant with God. In reality, prior to modern Zionism “none dared, and few greatly desired, to subject the matter of the Return to the Promised Land to pragmatic—or even philosophic—examination, it was the case too that for many centuries there was nothing in the actual condition of the Jews that especially impelled or encouraged any of them to do so.”³

Moreover, the biblical idea that Jews are irrevocably linked (*bnei Israel*) and mutually responsible manifests itself in religious tracts and in communal organization throughout Jewish history. The internal kinship bonds of family ties, common religious observance, language, various cultural practices, and so on were strengthened during much of Jewish history by external pressures that forced Jews to live apart and excluded them from broader society. Kinship ties were always the core of “Jewish politics,” but their definition and significance changed dramatically with the creation of the state of Israel. Not only did the state of Israel and its existential challenges become the target of Jewish diasporic mobilization, but the state itself emerged as a major actor on behalf of its kin, albeit not always to their liking. The state created and encouraged diasporic institutions that greatly affect the lives of Jews and their activism in the countries of domicile. This activism is especially intense in times of kinship peril in the homeland and abroad, as exemplified by global Jewish mobilization on behalf of Soviet Jewry during the Cold War.⁴

Robert Gilpin has written that, throughout history, “human beings organize themselves into political groups and are loyal to groups that inevitably conflict with one another. This political process will cease only when individuals fasten their loyalties on mankind as a whole. Except for saints and certain scholars with a more vivid imagination than the rest of us, this transformation in human consciousness has not yet occurred.”⁵ Indeed, kinship affinities and loyalties remain the hallmark of organized politics and conflict.

In many cases, membership is attributed by birth, rather than earned or chosen. Certainly religion, nationality, and even class are not fully chosen; race is even more primordial. Yet identities and kinship bonds are also liable to shift according to politics and the freedom of choice. Power structures in particular have tremendous impact on the definition of group membership, loyalty, and obligation. Just as inborn identities and kinship ties often defy political boundaries, political structures and in

particular sovereign power constantly redefine nascent identities. This process confuses the alleged division of humanity by Providence with the ever-changing designs by humans.

In the era of modern nationalism, when it comes to state-sponsored collective identities, two dynamics come into play. On the one hand, there are notions of shared blood, which traditional ethnofocal visions of kinship stress. On the other hand, there is the notion of blood shed for the state. Often blood spilt in defense of a state reinforces or is made to reinforce the notion of shared blood, as exemplified by the Nazis' *Volks-gemeinschaft*. Yet, in other circumstances, spilt blood can come to undermine and trump notions of primordial shared blood, thereby creating new focal points for patriotism and new concepts of membership. This has been especially evident in the evolution of American identity. Despite subscribing to older notions of kinship (such as Providence) and shared blood as forming the basis of the American people, early American leaders like John Jay in the *Federalist Papers* No. 2 already pointed to a much more flexible combination of loyalties. Echoing Shakespeare, Jay said that a sense of common blood could be supplemented by spilling blood, thus making heterogeneous peoples into a band of brothers.

Providence has been pleased to give this one connected country, to one united people; a people descended from the same ancestors, speaking the same language, professing the same religion, attached to the same principles of government, very similar in their manners and customs, and who, by their joint counsels, arms and efforts, fighting side by side throughout a long and bloody war, have nobly established their general liberty and independence.

This country and its people seem to have been made for each other, and it appears as if it was the design of Providence, that an inheritance so proper and convenient for a band of brethren, united to each other by the strongest ties, should never be split into a number of, unsocial jealous and alien sovereignties.⁶

The fact that shed blood often matters more than the blood of birth was always the hope of modern diasporic Jews who sought to demonstrate their ardent patriotism to their countries of domicile in the face of innate suspicion and anti-Semitism. Thus, shortly after Frederick William III of Prussia finally approved an edict of emancipation that in theory made Jews full citizens, Prussian Jews disproportionately volunteered in the German war of liberation against France. Jewish elders encouraged this outburst of patriotism, "for it was indeed 'a heavenly

feeling to possess a fatherland! What rapture to be able to call a spot, a place, a nook one's own upon this lovely earth. . . . Hand in hand with your fellow soldiers you will complete a great task; *they will not deny you the title of brother for you will have earned it.*"⁷

Scholars have long devoted tremendous attention, both theoretical and empirical, to the "constructedness" and fluidity of such bonds. However, hitherto too little attention has been given to the processes by which these identities are shaped or the raw materials with which such ties are activated. In particular, authors have insufficiently explored the influences of kinship across frontiers and the theoretical implications for international relations theory.

Many questions arise in discussing transnational kinship ties and their political ramifications. For example, where do the bonds of affinity come from? How have they changed over time? How are they transmitted? How do they manifest themselves in political behavior? How does this affinity translate into (political) voices, particularly when in competition with other influences and motivations that shape political allegiance and activity? What are the processes at work? What do kin communities and members owe to one another, and on what basis? What are the long-term trends, and are we witnessing today truly groundbreaking events? When a kin member saves another in a foreign land, what is the significance to each? Are such acts merely part of a grand bargain—for example, every Jew and individual Jewish community looks out for the other's welfare—or is there greater meaning and relevance?

An exploration of these questions enables scholars to better integrate identity concerns as an important element of the study of international relations. This book illuminates the complex interrelationships and ties within ethnonational communities and the far-reaching effects of those relationships on group identity and political outcomes. It highlights the elastic nature of national interest, as defined by constituencies inside and outside the state. It also improves our understanding of how international- and domestic-level forces combine to produce foreign and domestic policy.

Kinship elements have been largely neglected in traditional international relations scholarship, which bases its understanding of state behavior on limited assumptions about a state's identity and interests. *Realist* theorists argue that states are interested primarily in security and therefore search for power, while *liberal* theorists argue that states are concerned also with gains in wealth and other goods. As an increasing proportion of violence within and between states has centered on issues of

communal identity rather than power and wealth, international relations scholars have struggled with the nature of national identity and how it shapes states' understanding of their interests. *Constructivist* insights are the most hospitable to this type of analysis, but they are not necessarily the only option for understanding how identity affects interests. This book argues that when it comes to probing the notion of peoplehood, identity may be the primary interest.

By recognizing that “the people” transcends state boundaries and that identity-focused competitions within and between states engage the attention and interests of kin communities that may reside far from the arena of “homelands,” this book develops an alternative framework for understanding these dynamics. The importance of “the people” shows that identities are neither fixed and dependent on material factors nor entirely subjective, contingent, and shifting. Many of the ethnonational groups studied here do shift their self-conceptions, and consequently their politics and self-images, in response to geographic separation, life in different types of societies, and other separate experiences. Yet, at the same time, they retain certain objective components of a coherent collective identity: shared history and memory, folkways, and, most important, the objective reality of a territorial homeland. *The homeland* serves as the physical embodiment of the shared national identity, and its political and territorial fate has profound implications for the subjective identity of the diaspora and the transnational community. Thus, both subjective and objective factors combine to shape national identity and transnational communal politics.

Chapter 1 provides an analysis of the logic of the international system based on nation-states. Theoretically, this system should lead to the gradual elimination of transnational loyalties, intranational divisions, and stateless communities. Paradoxically, however, global realities indicate that the reverse is true, with these phenomena becoming more and more prevalent internationally. The discussion offers a comprehensive analytical framework that models the complex relationships among diaspora formation, secessionist and irredentist drives, and the existing nation-state system. A central concern is the formation and disintegration of different nation types (*ethnofocal* or *ideofocal*) and the inner logic of different regime types (democratic or authoritarian).

Chapter 2 explores how financial transfers from diasporic communities to recipients in the homeland are a prime vehicle for fostering changes in collective identities. It provides a conceptual framework for the analysis of these identity-related flows by identifying the various

components of national identity, specifying the major channels for the exercise of diasporic influence, and describing the fluctuations of this impact. It shows how, through financial flows, diasporas may be an important stimulus for identity shifts in their homeland and how such flows impact the changing role of the state in the international system.

Chapter 3 deals with the transmission of culture and religion across frontiers through the prism of the Jewish experience and current polarizing Israeli Kulturkampf. From the perspective of conflicting visions of Jewish identity, the interaction between Jewish-Americans and Israel and the evolution of this relationship over time point to how the arena of struggle between secular and religious conceptions is inherently transnational. Reciprocal influences permeate debates among the Jewish people inside and outside “the homeland,” Israel, in a process that constitutes the arena in which overall notions of collective identity are formed. This chapter also argues that the growing dependence of diasporic Jewish identity on Israel is fully compatible with attempts to develop a new indigenous Judaism that builds on religious innovations within the American diaspora. Expanding on the theme of evolving Jewish identity, the chapter also assesses the new thinking on Jewish security, both inside and outside the state of Israel, since the collapse of the Oslo Peace Process and in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. The two dominant diaspora-Israeli interactions concern Jewish security and identity, both of which must be analyzed with respect to internal Jewish dynamics (among Jews qua Jews) and external factors affecting Israel and the other countries of domicile. As a result of all of these influences, the content and significance of identity issues are always elastic, contingent, and shifting.

Chapter 4 examines how diasporas function as a distinct third level between interstate and domestic politics in peace negotiations. As the analysis shows, transnational kin communities can have a significant impact on the sovereign decision making by homelands with respect to peace and war. Those in the diaspora are necessarily influenced by the values and experiences of their states of domicile, leading to incongruities of perception between those in the homeland and those abroad. This situation can create complicating cleavages, internationalizing previously domestic political coalitions and agreements.

Chapter 5 concludes by incorporating the study of kinship and diasporas into international relations (IR) theory. It does so by focusing on diasporas as independent actors who actively influence their kin state’s foreign policies. Such influences can best be understood by situating

them in the theoretical space shared by constructivism and liberalism, two approaches that acknowledge the impact of both identity and domestic politics on international behavior. It also maintains that the exploration of diasporic activities can enrich both constructivism and liberalism. First, diasporas' identity-based motivations should be an integral part of the constructivist effort to explain the formation of national identities. Second, diasporic activities and influences in their homelands expand the meaning of the term *domestic politics* to include not only politics *inside the state* but also politics *inside the people*. For the liberal approach, this is a "new fact." Finally, it contends that the extent of diasporic influence on homeland foreign policy is determined by three components that make up the balance of power between homelands and diasporas, buttressed with examples taken from the relations between the newly established Armenian state and the strong Armenian diaspora as well as between Israel and diaspora Jews.

Although the chapters uphold the centrality of the nation-state and the power of sovereign governance, they also show how issues pertaining to the kin community as a whole inside and outside national borders may be as critical for the formation of modern collective identities and international relations. This analysis also produces a much more precise understanding of collective identities, a concept that has long suffered from imprecise and intuitive definitions.