

ABSTRACT: Every nation has at one point been a victim or oppressor of another, with the oft-maligned but sovereign state as the faceless wielder and instrument of power. The role of responsible political scientists is to describe such power relationships objectively, with considerations of the three dimensions of power outlined by Steven Lukes. This does not entail discarding the inherently relative terms “victim” or “oppressor” altogether, but rather, as is the goal of this essay, to address them in terms of national ontology and individual identity. Using the cases of integrative states such as the USSR and the PRC, which have denied the nationhood of their nationalist minority groups, it will be shown that in pursuing the legitimate state goals of national integration, states place weaker nations on clear trajectories toward extinction. When an entity which would prefer to exist disappears as a result of asymmetrical use of power, an objective, absolute victim is all that remains in its place.

Power and Objectivity in National “Victim” and “Oppressor” Narratives

Which nation faces the greatest threat, the greatest potential for victimhood: an island nation being swallowed by rising seas, a defiant but militarily weak nation at war, or a traditional or tiny nation enticed to modernize and join the over-arching nation of the state? Each faces an existential threat whose prevention may not be in the nation’s capacity. The first two, however obviously coercive, may be foreseen and prepared for; the last may be done with the nation’s willing consent, leading even to unconsciously gradual dissolution. Regardless of the cause, it will be argued here that any process of national extinction creates and cultivates an absolute, objective victim whose cultural loss humanity may feel even more strongly than the numerically greater loss of lives from larger, stronger nations. As in most arguments, comparisons of victimhood become untenable when supposedly objective statistics become politicized, and pushed to the extremes few would say that the end of a single indigenous tribe should be compared with, say, World Wars I & II. Different types of conflict and power are at work in war, however, and this essay will focus on less studied, less obvious forms of violence and victimhood.

In political science, power is undoubtedly of primary concern. To maintain claims of being a science, this eminently subjective concept whose various definitions are all problematic must be studied with ostentatious attempts at objectivity. Such objectivity, it can be presumed, elevates a scientific study above a merely polemic argument. Both use some degree of empirical evidence to support their claims, and while both ultimately support particular conclusions over others, the former is burdened with a much higher standard of evidence in addition to

being distant, even disinterested in its own conclusions. Such is the ideal and perhaps only way to maintain true objectivity, but in practice, especially at the discipline's primary unit of analysis, the nation-state, subjectivity and obvious normative preferences are virtually unavoidable. Every political scientist is a member of a nation, and until we constitute a nation in and of ourselves, every published conclusion and prescription will align with the interests of one nation or another¹. Unlike economists, whose claims to objectivity and utility rest on finding the most efficient solutions to problems, policy implementation and politics in general always create opposing interest groups locked in open or latent contestations of power.

This essay seeks to examine the highly unequal power relations of several nations and states, both from a comparative and international relations perspective, with special regard to whether any state can be seen as using its power "responsibly". In doing so, it will be necessary to paint each nation's relationship to other national actors in rather broader strokes than if treated individually. The thesis of this study is that "victim" and "oppressor" narratives are natural products of power relations, but that unless the weaker party is given normative preference in terms of "justice", the most lasting result of power's application will be either a sense of entitlement or a thirst for revenge².

In some cases, no amount of evidence will convince an oppressor of such a status, nor dissuade a self-perceived victim from seeking recompense for unjust wielding of power³. One role of responsible political scientists,

¹ I take a nation to be a group of people which considers itself to be one, and which makes claims to a territorial "homeland". As the topics of this essay are already too broad, I will try to avoid entering into theoretical debates such as whether nations are modern, perennial, or primordial. I do *not* mean to say that political scientists' work always supports the interests and positions of the nations in which they reside, though it is highly likely not only where research funding is provided. Rather, as highlighted in Terence Ball's article in Farr & Seidelman's volume, the more authoritative nature of political science utterances makes them irresistible targets for co-optation, selective use, and distortion in pursuit of these interests. Powerful actors read and use our work primarily for their own agendas; a scientist seeks only to illuminate empirical truths.

² For definitional clarity, two states (or any other actors, really) of relatively equal power might compete for domination over the other, using one's power against the other with great regularity, in a variety of arenas and amplitudes, but without ever creating a sense of victimhood. Many uses of power in such relationships may be considered "unfair" or illicit by the rival, provoke righteous indignation and serve as motivations to exact revenge of some kind. Today's dominator may well become tomorrow's dominated. Yet a victim, owing partially to an impossibility of real competition, is far more likely to appeal to a higher power and make normative claims of entitlement to recompense for egregious mistreatment (i.e. oppression). It should also be noted that any time an actor on a higher level of analysis uses its power on an actor of a lower level (i.e. state→minority group, state→individual, minority group→majority individual, etc.), the higher level actor is almost invariably declared an oppressor. Such categorical clarity is lost when considering the power of corporations, where in "1-factory towns" and developing countries it is highly debatable whether the government is the more powerful actor. State-corporate relationships contain both a probabilistic, objective component which can be disproven, in that states are the most powerful actors (almost always more powerful than corporations) and a normative component that they *should* be. Political science would be a different place were these not the case.

³ For definitional clarity, I take an oppressor to be an actor with highly asymmetrical power over another which uses this power irresponsibly. The most irresponsible thing an actor can do, and thus closest to objective oppression, is to remove another actor from existence, creating an absolute victim. A victim is the object of oppression or other damaging act beyond his/her/its control. Intentionality needn't be present to create victims,

historians, and other scholars, in such intractable cases, should be the presentation of evidence which may reduce future conflicts by highlighting how one's adversary in such relationships also plays or has played the opposite role in a different context. Within and between states, however, the only normatively defensible position for the scholar to take is to favor the objectively weaker party, lest she be taken as a tool of the greater power herself.

This essay examines normatively problematic power relationships involving obvious asymmetries to shed light on cases which might nonetheless be called a hard test of national victim and oppressor narratives' viability as objective and analytically useful. Two of its primary questions, asked from a pedestal of objectivity in both political science and the "global community", are 1. Can a micro-state oppress an empire? And 2. Can any pity be felt in a global community for the victimhood of a rising, imperial hegemon? In arriving at unsurprising negative answers, an attempt will be made to salvage objectivity in terms of ontology: the only objective victims are those whose victimhood coincides with their nonexistence. This will be explained in two conceptual sections and four short case studies focusing on the Russian and Chinese nations in the familiar roles of A's and, less so, long-suffering B's deserving of empathy, material and political concessions.

Aspiring to Objectivity, Yielding to Power. This section will recapitulate prominent positions in political science literature on the possibility of objectivity. It will also outline what Steven Lukes describes as the "three dimensions of power", which will be applied in the consideration of national narratives in the case sections.

It was stated in the opening section that both political science and the global community either pretend or aspire to greater objectivity than either the infamously active/compromised A or B could possibly manage. Perhaps the best the discipline can do is to follow the advice of Weber, Taylor, and others: that sources of bias be acknowledged and laid out rather than naively claiming to strike all value judgments from political analysis. Such a normative methodological position, advocated by behavioralists in the mid-20th Century, would categorically exclude the testimony of the most knowledgeable experts who become so by being members of A or B but also almost certainly harbor opinions and policy positions in favor of the same. Similarly, few outside The West would claim

and indeed victimhood is often, perhaps usually at higher levels of analysis, a side effect of more powerful actors pursuing their interests. The threshold of victimhood is generally crossed when the victim's powerlessness to change a damaging outcome is established.

that any global community exists which is not built upon Western values and spoken for by Western nations and leaders⁴.

For each power relationship analyzed in this essay, I will utilize Steven Lukes' conceptual framework on the "three dimensions of power", as it provides far more analytical flexibility and depth than a single definition. It is also useful for analysis of large, aggregated units such as states, whose monopoly over the legitimate use of violence generally assures them, within their borders, the ability to prevail in the first dimension (pluralist, open conflict) while vigorously exercising the second (agenda-setting and determination of who makes decisions) and third (shaping interests for the prevention of both latent and open conflict) with impunity if not inscrutability.

Each dimension will be considered in four highly asymmetrical power relationships. As I will argue throughout this essay, gross asymmetries of power are uniquely approachable from a more objective standpoint because 1. The sheer preponderance of A over B renders non-controversial the relative power of each, 2. The usually unavoidable problems of operationalization and precision in measurement are thereby much less relevant, and 3. The argument is insulated from the accusation that particular assessments of the power relationships are only the opinion of the author and cannot be certified except in open, thankfully rare, pluralist conflict.

Two books addressing vast, obvious power asymmetries which may be seen as models for studying latent conflict are John Gaventa's *Power and Powerlessness* and James Scott's *Domination and the Art of Resistance*. Levels of analysis in both of these books are primarily oppressed groups and their individual members, some of which could stake claims to nationhood within the wider U.S. nation. One would expect, in moving up to the level of nations and states, that claims of total powerlessness become more tenuous and difficult to prove with the kind of broad analysis possible here. Nonetheless, it will be shown that many of the same processes and relationships are present, while being arguably more "important" or consequential for global politics. As the power relations in the cases examined

⁴ My personal biases extend beyond being a resident of the West. My Latvian/Korean heritage undoubtedly affects my analysis of Asian regional hegemony. I hope it does not disqualify this essay from objectivity. With reference to the global community, I mean to say that it is often evoked for objective global consensus on an issue, while the relatively powerless often see themselves excluded from it.

here may be said to have been “reversed”, creating unusual and unexpected new relationships, potential relationships, and need for counterfactuals, national analysis will not use a framework of subaltern studies alone⁵.

As Gaventa’s book shows, the relationship between A and B becomes all the more intractable and hopeless for B when A is a “faceless” entity, in his case a multinational corporation, and in this essay, the state. Even when channels for resistance or open contestation are objectively available, as in elections or other potentially empowering collective action, the second and third dimensions of power combine or conspire with experience of past failures and ongoing threats to produce behavior resembling the “learned helplessness” of behavioral psychology⁶.

As Scott’s book shows, even where B is unable to bring latent conflict into open contestation, other acts of resistance may be observed and may lead to an accumulation of power (and courage) sufficient to do so in the future. Such observations “gradualize” seemingly spontaneous uprisings by oppressed groups throughout history and thus make an essential contribution to the study of power. The fact remains obvious, however, that the coercive nature and resources of the state, combined with the almost universally accepted norm of state sovereignty, paint a realistic picture of an absolutely powerful A within internationally recognized borders, able to realize whatever goal it deems important, at any given time. Absolute power does whatever it wishes, without concern for consequences to a B which may not even be recognized, whose interests may be completely ignored in pursuit of A’s, of the very highest priority⁷. In its absolute form, *power ceases to be relational*—there is only A doing as it pleases, in an objectively irresponsible manner explained by its failure or incapacity to consider, acknowledge, or perceive B’s rights, agency, or existence. It follows, then, that absolute power *over* B is the capacity to make B disappear. This disappearance, both

⁵ Full disclosure: I haven’t read any books or articles explicitly on subaltern studies, so a reader who has will likely find this essay woefully insufficient in such theories.

⁶ Especially at the higher levels of analysis examined here, B may never objectively be as powerless as, to use the terms of psychological experiments of the 1960’s, the dog who will be given electric shocks regardless of its actions or the baby with a mobile which does not turn. What is far more likely is that B will have been conditioned by past experience, especially failed attempts at contestation, threats, or lack of experience coupled with trust in A, either not to utilize its objectively existing power or not to realize such power exists. Such was seen when a dog given power to stop the shocks did not try to do so, and a baby accustomed to a stationary mobile was given one which could be turned but did not realize its new relationship. These experiments are discussed in the “learned helplessness” entry in that most powerful entity of knowledge, Wikipedia.

⁷ Such conditions may simply stem from states’ universal ordering of preferences that what is in the interest of the state (whether A or B, but usually A) is *objectively more important* than any non-state actor’s interests. It also follows, then, that every state has an interest in shaping perceived interests of all those below it not only to align with the state’s but to make them *want* to align, thereby usually aligning themselves without need for any overt exercise of power on the part of the state. This is a longwinded way of saying that nation-states want their entire populations to identify with the state because it makes aligning their interests much easier, even automatic.

in terms of being a relevant actor and often regarding actual existence, is the grounds for claims to absolute victimhood, discussed in the next section.

Victims and Oppressors, Individual Identities and National Existence. This section will explain how individual identity and national existence are used in this study to measure the inherently subjective concepts of power, victimhood, and oppression more objectively. Political scientists such as Rogers Smith suggest that a research agenda of “identity politics” is growing in an over-arching “problem-driven” approach to the discipline⁸. If identities themselves may be “politically constructed”, surely a status as a victim may often, even usually from the perspective of an oppressor, be self-ascribed for material or political gain, most notably for claims to the moral “high ground”. Yet for such construction to be possible and credible to neutral parties, there must also be objective and extreme conditions—if only as a baseline to compare what is obviously constructed—where identity connected to a nation or an injustice is true to all observers who accept the existence of these categories.

While binaries, especially involving large groups of people, are dangerous, this study rests on a pair of in/out (of identity group), 1/0 (of existence) distinctions which are too often imposed. I will assume that a person’s national identity is what he declares himself to be, in a neutral environment (i.e. in the absence of a perceived oppressor). It is assumed that even if released from an oppressive relationship, or given an inconceivably large sum of money, a person will not change his or her identity. In terms of third dimensional power, individuals would, if given an explicit choice, prefer to keep their national identities while attaining the material, security, and other benefits state A offers (often on an unacknowledged condition of changing individual identity). Coercive power may be used, and indeed often is, to change identities in terms of outward expression or internally over time, however it is questionable whether such efforts can ever be successful. Self-identity is always most powerful, always internal to the individual, but third dimensional power, when used successfully, may create changes to the nation that even the most nationalist members do not realize are occurring.

I propose that a group of people declaring themselves a nation and demanding rights based on this declaration should be given the benefit of the doubt in ontological terms. Additionally, and more normatively,

⁸ See his chapter in Shapiro and also an alternative version from 2004 in *Perspectives on Politics*.

determining the merit of nationalist demands must be a moderated dialog between all analytical levels. This means that individual national members, leading national, state, and international community representatives must establish objective measures to assess the desirability and practicality of granting demands on a case by case basis. Where the demands include an exclusive nation-state, it must be realized by the more powerful actors that if this conflict has been stated openly by a nation, dismissal of its demands—regardless of how dismissal is justified—will not make the demands cease. National demands addressed to states are likely the result of much deliberation, many years of accumulating “hidden transcripts” of resistance brought into open conflict with state authorities. After arriving at the point of declaring national interests, second and third-dimensional power costs of immobilizing this bias or redefining it rise exponentially as it is clear that the nation in question no longer aligns itself or its interests with the state.

How can the interests of nations, especially those teetering on the edge of non-recognition by relevant state authorities, be studied objectively with regard to the usually subjective narratives of victim and oppressor? To take a nation as a unitary actor is a fallacy, as each is made up of groups and individuals with widely varying policy preferences. Each member, however, can be presumed objectively to hope that one’s nation continue to exist, that one’s primary self-identity continue to be viable within one’s state of residence⁹. Where this condition fails, and where terminological and policy changes in the direction of erasure occur, victims are objectively created.

To declare oneself a victim is to say that one has no control over a particular outcome, that in producing a given outcome one was an object rather than a subject, an agent (or less contradictorily, a unit of analysis) without agency. To be a powerless B in an identity or existential conflict is to cease to be. Where a conflict involves such irreducible variables, B has a very strong—even *objective*—claim to victimhood, one in which the power of A is used to create outcomes that B may resist with all its might: non-identity or non-existence. Given the legitimate power of the state at A’s disposal, however, all of B’s might may not amount to an observable hill of beans. If A can achieve

⁹ This is *not* to say that every nation inevitably desires a state, even if this is seen as the best way to assert, establish, or protect national identity/existence. Secessionist movements do not capture entire nations. Individual members with lower national consciousness are both less likely to perceive threats to national identity/existence and less likely to go along with drastic “solutions” to them, such as secession. Both “true-believing” and instrumental Nationalists, by contrast, are highly likely to perceive such threats where there are none, or exaggerate policies unfavorable to the nation as threatening identity/existence.

this outcome, the non-identity as or non-existence of B (becoming A in either case), in the third dimension of power, all the better for A's avoidance of the term of "oppressor" and A's overall accumulation of power¹⁰.

If B ceases to be (as a total victim), it hardly constitutes an actor. Power then ceases to be a relationship; only A exists and does just as it pleases. It is relational to say that "A assimilated B into nation A" or "The state A removed the state B from the map." It is much less or even "non-relational" to say that state A integrated all members of its national population successfully. There is no B here because it is already presumed to be a component of A, and where A is a state its sovereignty bestows virtually a free license to determine who is and isn't a member of the nation aligned with A. To the extent that B is and wishes to remain a separate nation in an A which seeks to integrate it into A's nation, individuals of B are responsible for observable resistance within practical constraints. The most observable forms might be protest or exit (emigration); given the costs of such acts, however, everyday resistance will take the form of Scott's "hidden transcripts". Where such transcripts remain hidden in the mid-to-long term, however, A has its way.

There are many paths to national extinction, genocide and ethnic cleansing being only the most observable, violent examples of pluralist conflict mediated very poorly. Convincing individuals not to identify themselves as members of a nation¹¹ is much slower, one factor making it more difficult to observe. The other, and that in which second and third dimensions of power become the focus, is that it is quite easy to lose sight of insidious assimilative effects behind the guise of national integration, a legitimate ideal of all nation-states and one which all states work toward constantly. We enter our case study sections with both nation-building and nation-killing acts in mind.

The USSR in the Baltics. As the quintessential "Evil Empire" and "other", few Westerners (scholarly or otherwise) would argue that the Soviet annexation and rule of the Baltic republics of Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia was anything but an oppressive application of vastly asymmetrical power. Regarding national existence, the example of Latvia serves as an illustrative focus.

¹⁰ Unless the concerned scholar or pesky journalist is trained in observing resistance to third-degree power, that is. I would argue that "de-naturalizing" such relationships by writing about or otherwise drawing attention to them is the mark of both professions' responsibility.

¹¹ If this is to occur, it must be seen as a process, the first step in which is self-identifying as a part of state A's nation. The concept of integration does not require renunciation of a B identity but rather hopes and expects that over time, the B identity becomes less salient, at least relative to identity as a member of the over-arching nation. Integrative nation-state A may even see the empirical study of this, as with surveys and interviews, as undesirable because such studies inevitably alert B's to these long-term processes and may thereby rekindle nationalist sentiment.

In 1939, before joining the Soviet Union, Latvia was an ethnic nation-state of which a clear majority, 77%, were Latvian¹². World War II and Soviet annexation led to a great deal of death and flight among the native population, and by 1959 this percentage had shrunk to 62%. Russian immigration and the effects of Soviet rule further reduced the size of the Latvian nation in its own land to 52% by the late 1980's. Furthermore, Russian had by that time become more than the language of economic and political elites. Decades of education in the Russian language was well on its way to being the first language of Baltic and other Soviet socialist republics. The matter of whether an ethnic nation can be the foundation of a nation state in its name with less than half of the population is dubious at best, and the matter of percentages will be taken up again in a following section. The minimal evidence here only intends to show what most in the West have taken for granted, that the Soviet Union posed a serious threat to the national existence of its smaller, non-Russian components. By Barrington's account, "national extinction" was a real possibility for the Baltics, and most of the progress toward such an outcome was simply the concomitant of legitimate national integration into the state of the USSR¹³.

In terms of A's and B's, annexation into the USSR meant both the end of the Baltic states' existence and a serious threat to existence of their nations. In individual terms, one's core identity must have come under question as state government taught the population to consider themselves Soviets rather than Lithuanians, Latvians, and Estonians. In the third dimension, it was very much in the interests of individuals in these nations to learn Russian well, as this could result in upward mobility economically, politically, and socially. This effect, rather than openly oppressive language bans on the Latvian language, led to the results of a national language survey which found that by 1989 in Riga "only 17% of Latvians used Latvian in opening conversations with strangers [36% countrywide], while 96% of Russians...used Russian."¹⁴

Those who call the USSR's presence in the Baltics an "occupation" do not concede the fact of being annexed, a point which Stanislav Chernichenko contests fiercely, repeatedly, in the Russian journal *International Affairs*. For Chernichenko, and presumably most Russians, the Soviets acquired consent of these states for annexation into the

¹² See Barrington, 1999, pg. 189 for the downward progression of these percentages.

¹³ That the Soviet Union formed an ultimately unsuccessful "civic" based on an ideology as opposed to an ethnic nation has strong implications for national integration in other states. As an American, one hopes that democracy is a more effective uniter than communism and also that the quality of U.S. democracy improves so that it may continue to unite us.

¹⁴ Study originally cited by Juris Dreifelds, taken here from Chinn & Kaiser, pg. 115.

USSR, as this process was legal under international law in the era. It is difficult to imagine “consent” to the end of a state under any condition other than military threat, and the lines between power dimensions become blurred in this act. That consent was coerced is conceded, but irrelevant due to annexation’s legality at the time. As a leader for the post-independence section, he states:

The persistence with which the official circles of Latvia and Estonia (along with a number of scientists and press writers) are defending the claim that the Baltic area was occupied in 1940 is simple to explain. If it wasn’t occupied, how can they justify the “squeezing out” of the Russian-speaking components of Latvian and Estonian societies and all kinds of discriminatory measures against them?¹⁵

Consent to annexation combines first and third dimensions uncomfortably: the Soviets desired the appearance of Baltics acting freely in their own interests, and given the threat of bloodshed up to the point of annihilation, consenting to what they perceived (and continue to perceive) as occupation may well have been in their objective interests in terms of national survival. In order to preserve the nation, the state had to go. Rather than debate Chernichenko on the unique state of international law in the interwar period or the obvious point that consent under duress is not consensual, I wish to take from Chernichenko that he and the Russians now see Baltic state policies, as legitimate as those in the Soviet era, as oppressive. A similar section on oppression via individual identity and national existence threats follows.

The PRC in Tibet and Xinjiang. Similar to the previous relationship, for Westerners, rule of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in its westernmost regions is generally viewed by the West as oppressing Tibetans’ and Uyghurs’ rights to national self-determination. Members of the Han Chinese *ethnic* nation, who constitute what most people think of as Chinese, see the relationship as constructing a *civic* Chinese nation which is based on citizenship in the PRC¹⁶. There is scholarly consensus that the CCP uses economic development as a third dimensional enticement for all its 56 nationalities to join in this construction, while warning against the foreign interference and dangers

¹⁵ Chernichenko, 2004, pg. 117

¹⁶ Zhao’s *A Nation-State by Construction* is indispensable for understanding this process. A civic nation based on citizenship alone can hardly be cohesive, however, and the CCP faces a quite herculean task of convincing these nations that the Chinese nation is working in their lands for the benefit of Uyghurs and Tibetans, a condition which must precede identification as Chinese. The greater role of communist propaganda in peripheral territories than in the increasingly capitalist and mono-ethnic interior is evidence that the legitimizing effects of the CCP’s claim to protecting the Chinese nation are much less resonant in the PRC’s periphery.

inherent in any nationalism which is not explicitly pro-China¹⁷. Again, after a few brief points, this section will be shortened due to familiarity in the West.

While few scholars agreed with the Chinese position that Tibetans and Uyghurs were content with their “autonomous” situation in the PRC, even fewer could have predicted that both would stage massive, mass uprisings in consecutive years¹⁸. These two data points are highly significant, making the CCP’s claims all the more suspect. That these were both not signs of discontent but rather the work of foreigners stirring up trouble is thoroughly unconvincing, except perhaps to a Han nationalist who also sees ingratitude for all of the CCP’s accommodative policies toward both groups¹⁹. The challenge for the Western scholar, given the rash of pluralist conflict which was nonetheless almost non-observable due to (ongoing) media restrictions, is to analyze this case in a way which does not completely alienate a Chinese audience. With more space here and more access to the populations there in the PRC, one expects a compelling case study could be made of how, in the decade or so leading up to each cyclical outburst of “pluralist conflict”, hidden transcripts of resistance were gradually amplified. Whether a product of foreign interference, general discontent, or part of ongoing resistance to threatened national extinction, not even the mass media (with its notoriously short attention span) would call these events spontaneous.

A major shift in the past year has been the phasing out of minority language education in Chinese public schools, a policy change which, for being obviously in the second dimension of power, has generated spontaneous, observable resistance.²⁰ Where previously the CCP’s policies for preservation of minority culture could be accused of preserving only the apolitical aspects of culture, such as colorful song and dance which are truly ubiquitous in the PRC, impinging upon language rights is objectively oppressive, a crucial step toward national extinction. If speaking

¹⁷ Again, in third dimensional terms, protection of the Chinese nation and economic development are interconnected pillars of the CCP’s legitimacy, in the eyes of the PRC’s population. This does not differ from any other state, though its interpretations and explanations of the national interest are highly controversial, even among its ethnic Chinese nation.

¹⁸ As accurately noted by Wikipedia, the “Tibetan unrest” in 2008 consisted of dozens of peaceful protests throughout “Greater Tibet”, including portions of three provinces other than the Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR), though media understandably focused on the largest, in Lhasa, which erupted into ethnic violence. The riots of 2009 were confined largely to Xinjiang province’s capital, Urumqi, and the level of violence and number of deaths may spur another ongoing “victimhood Olympics” and competing body counts of the kind described in the “China as Victim” section. Similar events have occurred in the past, since the PRC formed, in regular intervals.

¹⁹ A view shared by many Han Chinese is that Tibetans and Uyghurs, foremost among “favored” minorities, receive disproportionate economic investment (whereas poor Han must migrate to support themselves), indefensible religious promotion (“Why do they need and keep building all those monasteries and mosques with government money?!”), and preferential procreation policies allowing them to have more than one child (“Soon there will be more of them than us!”).

²⁰ There could be little better example of agenda-setting or setting the terms of debate than restricting the *language* in which future debates will be conducted. See Wong’s article in the *New York Times*.

the national language is to be equated with having ties to nationalism—culture with a political consciousness which the Chinese state understandably seeks to limit—this is evidence that the third dimension of power is no longer sufficient to accomplish integrative state goals. Notably, however, the government explains the policy in third-dimensional terms: in order to achieve economic success in China all citizens need to speak Chinese well.²¹

Astute readers will interpose at some point how one knows when a nation has become extinct, perhaps demanding an example in history. It is indeed necessary to show that such phenomena have occurred in the modern era for my notion of “absolute victimhood” to be possible, especially as a side-effect of states pursuing their perceived interests. China again serves as the state which provides an exemplary case, that of the Manchurians who ruled China for centuries under the final dynasty, the Qing, even having great success in “Manchurianizing” the empire, not to mention expanding into the Tibetan and Uyghur homelands over their reign. Over the course of the 20th century, in what would make a more focused essay than this one, the nation became a plaything of great powers, embodying what the Chinese saw as backwardness and weakness, a nation in need of help from imperial Russia and Japan. And by the turn of the 21st century, the Manchurian language is on the verge of actual extinction.²² We will return to the Qing in the section on China’s victimhood.

Ethnic Russians in the Baltics, Post-USSR. In the words of the secretary general and press secretary of Estonia’s Fatherland and Freedom Party²³, interviewed for Barrington’s 1999 article on citizenship policies in the Baltics, “How can one million people discriminate against 150 million?” Phrased more generally in the terms of this essay, can exponentially smaller and less powerful groups oppress an empire? The short answer is of course that they themselves cannot, but within the state, inherently empowering some while oppressing others, the relationship must be examined less polemically.

²¹ As much as I would like to communicate better with Chinese minority groups, whose Mandarin is often atrocious or nonexistent, I would much rather allow them to exist for future generations of Westerners to orientalize and exploit!

²² See Lague’s 2007 article in the *New York Times*. Chinese people with whom I have discussed the Manchurian case question whether the Manchus could ever be considered a nation. That they have a homeland, Manchuria, is indisputable, but whether they at any point considered themselves a nation is open to debate. I myself consider them one of the earliest examples of an expansionist nation, in that they were able to form a military force and overthrow the Ming Dynasty, in 1644. It is worth noting that, over the next centuries, the Manchurians had great success in changing Chinese hairstyles and other superficial cultural identifiers to Manchurian, but while Manchurian became the language of the elites (leaving behind literally tons of virtually indecipherable Qing imperial documents), Manchurian writing and speech did not penetrate deeply into Chinese culture, as such would have been too great a task for pre-modern powers of persuasion.

²³ This and the first case were to include an interview with my great uncle, a former member of Latvian parliament, but he has been of late too busy jetsetting around Europe to Skype.

Perhaps unfamiliar, even virtually unknown to all but political scientists and the actors themselves, the exceptionally exclusive citizenship policies of the contemporary Baltic republics, especially Latvia and Estonia, are seen by many ethnic Russians in these territories (and certainly by Russians elsewhere) as unfair and effectively oppressive. As reported by the *New York Times* in October of 2010, a Russian rights lawyer notes that “even today, children born to Russian speakers do not get automatic citizenship unless the family can trace its residency in Latvia to before World War II.” Except in the case of actual threat to national existence, such policies would indeed be difficult to defend in any democracy, let alone one in the fervently pro-human rights European Union. Whether retributive for past oppression under the USSR, a prophylactic against Russian recapture via voter registration, or a genuinely needed policy to protect a nation (and state) under existential threat, what is the responsibility of the objective political scientist who wishes to study this unlikely phenomenon of role reversal from victim to oppressor? More background information can be given for this case.

Barrington describes the period immediately following independence as one in which the threat to Latvian and Estonian national existence was still palpably felt. This led to highly “exclusive” citizenship policies, especially in Latvia, where a slim majority claimed the right to a state of its own. For years following 1991, Latvia had “a policy without a law” in terms of naturalizing its 7-800,000 Russian speakers, in that they very much preferred that Russians emigrate rather than apply for citizenship in their ethnic nation-state. When a law was finally implemented, at the behest of a concerned EU which did not want to admit an oppressor, it required that all applicants pass a difficult Latvian language test.²⁴ Many fewer applicants applied than were expected—one can imagine the attitude of a quasi-colonialist group forced to learn the language of the subaltern played a role—until Latvian citizens, with the state, became members of the EU.²⁵ The soft power of an international organization

²⁴ Laitin’s seminal book on Russians in the “Near Abroad” frames the language issue more in terms of “unusually” strong third dimensional “incentives” for Russians to learn Baltic languages, or “assimilate linguistically”. On pg. 217, “the resoluteness of the titulars to abjure Russian, the economic returns for learning the Baltic languages, and the lack of any strong status constraints all favored linguistic assimilation for Russians living in the Baltics.” Laitin also notes the reversal of “embarrassment” Russians now felt “whenever opening their mouths in front of Latvians”. He also cites anecdotes of a misdirected deportation of a Belorussian to Russia, a defiant Russian school teacher who asks why a biologist needs to learn Latvian and is told that Latvian language skills are necessary to be an intellectual. Much like the Soviet state previously, the Latvian state seems convinced of the righteousness of exercising this kind of third-dimensional power for the legitimate goal of national integration, while the targets of the integration are much less so, displaying signs of reluctance and outright resistance and defiance.

²⁵ Cara, pg. 28, confirms that “[a]fter Latvia became a member of the EU, citizenship applications grew within a couple of months. EU citizenship seems to be perceived as more valuable than just Latvian.”

effectively changed the interests of the previously reluctant Russophones, who also bristled at strict Latvian-first language policies in public schools.

Even within highly ethnic nationalist states such as Latvia, oppression of a large number of ethnic outsiders cannot continue indefinitely. Over time, the government made concessions to its Russian speakers, careful to frame them in terms of their liberal democratic values, wisdom, and magnanimity, rather than what they probably were: conformity to EU standards and fear of Russian backlash, both internal and from the east. Olga Cara's 2010 article notes that the 2004 law allowing Russian schools has raised the number of adolescents who both speak Russian as a first language and do not identify with the Latvian state, in effect, countering the ongoing efforts at integration. Up to the present day, a pro-Russian coalition came very close in 2010 to gaining a majority in Latvian parliament, on the platform of rescuing the recessed economy by mending ties with Russia (while likely undoing as many as possible of the "69 differences in political, social, and economic rights between citizens and non-citizens, making Latvia an 'apartheid state'."²⁶). Whether the coalition's aims to redefine Latvians' interests in terms of economics or its creepily contrived name, "Harmony Center", is a better example of third-degree power in action, this essay will not judge.

In further consideration of language and identity, it is worth noting the considerable lengths the Latvian government went to preserve two nearly extinct languages, Livonian and Latgalian. This would be evidence that Latvians' experience as a small, oppressed minority, has made them sympathetic to most of its minorities—just not its former dominators. This effect, I would argue with more space, is greater than the effects of being a liberal democracy.²⁷

²⁶ Latvian Human Rights Committee co-chairman as quoted in Barrington, 1999, pg. 165.

²⁷ This is to say that democracy is not a solution to minority/majority relations, especially in new democracies which tend to over-appreciate its "majority rules" tenet. Nor is it agreement with Daniel Bell's counterintuitive and mildly offensive article suggesting that authoritarian states deserve credit for their sensitivity. One can imagine a similar situation in an independent and democratic Tibet or East Turkestan, in which the sizable Han minorities in these territories would be treated with a tinge of vindictive scorn, while smaller minorities such as the Yugu, Dongxiang, and other small, stateless nationalities would be accommodated with highly visible effort. The mere possibility of a pro-Russian party coming to power in the Baltics is, however, something quite inconceivable in the Chinese case—Tibetans and Uyghurs controlling the People's Congress—or the American for that matter—Native Americans taking over Congress. In the latter two cases, the impossibility is due mostly to the minuscule proportions of the populations these oppressed minorities constitute; an oppressed minority member as chairman or in the executive branch, by contrast, are at least imaginable (if espousing majority-friendly policy positions), though highly improbable.

The worst any Baltic state could do in the role of A with regards to its Russian minority B would be to eliminate it, either by assimilation, ethnic cleansing (forced emigration), or genocide. Putting aside whether small, newly democratic states would be capable of such normatively prohibited acts on a totalitarian scale, it should be noted that neither the international community nor the state of Russia especially would allow any such outcome. As the history of humanitarian intervention has repeatedly shown, sovereignty falls precipitously in sanctity when such processes are identified. Supposing that it were possible and realized, the nation of Russia would be ever-so-slightly smaller, but the state of Russia would not be affected by any existential threat. In absolutely objective terms, then, no microstate can possibly make a victim of an exponentially larger nation. As Barrington's article aptly notes, however, ethnic Russians cannot currently and may never be more than Latvian-speaking Russians with citizenship—never members of the Latvian nation.

In the mode of a transition from Russia to China, and the consideration of whether regional great powers can still be victims, it is worth noting that Russia as a whole continues to face far greater challenges than its ethnic minorities in the Baltics. On a variety of indices, from Transparency International to Freedom House, Russia's performance is seen as underperforming even among peer states in Eastern Europe.²⁸ The 2010 film, *Vlast (Power)*, portrays a state so insecure of its grip on power that it has taken to arbitrary incarceration of its own billionaires. Harpers Index in 2009 revealed that 43% of Russia's population still believes the U.S. is bent on its "complete destruction", so while the Baltics may be incapable of such a threat, their hegemonic protector continues to project it, despite America's best efforts to create new and bigger enemies elsewhere. And perhaps of greatest concern, Bruce Gilley's 2009 study of regime legitimacy, based on aggregated data from the World Values Surveys and thereby making strong claims to measure this crucial but problematic concept objectively, ranked Russia *dead last* among its 72 polled nations.

The People's Republic of China, by contrast, is ranked as a highly legitimate "overperformer" for an authoritarian state. As the next section will argue, much of China's legitimacy, and rising power, can be traced to the decreasingly communist regime's commitment to rectifying a deeply felt sense of victimhood among its population.

²⁸ Corruption is undoubtedly a key component of these problems, and as Putnam's work in southern Italy shows, governments seen as crooked are much less able to implement policy, extract resources from the population, etc. From a domestic perspective, these internal problems are largely under state control (i.e. it's much harder to claim victimhood of external forces) and greatly reduce state power if unresolved over time.

What claims of victimization does the predicted challenger of U.S. global hegemony make, and where have they been validated or rejected?

China in the 21st Century International System. Most consequential of the relationships for the future of international relations is the rising power of the Chinese state and the deep, widespread sense of victimhood among the younger generations of its population. As described by Peter Hays Gries in *China's New Nationalism*, the PRC of Mao Zedong was founded on an inspiring “victory narrative” in which the Chinese people had stood up to the forces of imperialism to form a new, proud nation. The victories continued throughout the next three revolutionary decades as the Chinese won the War of Resistance to U.S. Imperialism (The Korean War), survived the “hard times” of the Great Leap Forward, and fended off countless other threats to victory, peaking internally against domestic threats to Maoism in the Cultural Revolution. Among the generation born after 1980, as the legitimizing ideology began to shift from communism to nationalism²⁹, the concept of the “hundred years of humiliation” became the foundation of a more salient narrative of victimhood at the hands of the West and Japan.³⁰

The shift in emphasis must be seen as instrumental, a highly successful use of the third dimension of power to shape national identity and interests in strengthening the nation so that it could never be so victimized in the future. The threat of greatest concern was no longer came from counter-revolutionaries, but as with most states, past oppressors and any state seen as being “anti-China”. History textbooks included more graphic detail of war atrocities, cultivating both a sense of victimhood and thirst for victory among China’s “angry young men”.³¹ Again, a politicized numerical illustration, typical of numerous ongoing debates involving China, may lend this section more credibility:

The marked rise in the numbers of war casualties that appear in Chinese assessments of the war [of Anti-Japanese Resistance/WWII] reflects the emergence of the victimization narrative. Immediately following the war, Chiang Kai-shek’s Nationalist Party announced that Japan had killed 1.75 million Chinese. After it came to power in 1949, the CCP declared that 9.32 million Chinese had been killed. That figure stood for many years, reflecting the

²⁹ (decisively so in the 1990’s, amidst economic growth and the 1989 pro-democracy movement’s participants being framed as hating their own country)

³⁰ If I thought there was any place for anecdotal evidence in this essay, I would confirm the newness of the victimhood narrative in China by noting how much most 20-30 year-old Chinese people I know, including close friends, dislike Japan. I doubt their parents, despite being temporally closer to WWII, are nearly so concerned. If I couldn’t get an elite Latvian, though, I’ll spare the reader my friends’ xenophobia.

³¹ See Wang’s description of China’s “Patriotic Education Campaign”.

Maoist suppression of victim-speak in favor of a heroic narrative. In 1995, however, Jiang Zemin raised the casualty estimate to 35 million, the current official Chinese figure.³²

Peter Hays Gries claims that the sentiment of victimhood peaked around 1997, with the retrocession of Hong Kong, the publication of Iris Chang's *The Rape of Nanking*, and a dramatically accusative film on the Opium Wars which contrasted greatly with a previous film from the "victory narrative" era portraying a heroic Chinese official standing up to the British. A recent query in the PRC's most popular search engine, *Baidu*, yielded 1,700,000 results for the 百年国耻 *bainian guochi* (hundred years of humiliation), and the phrase still appears on government sites such as the official newspaper of the CCP, the *People's Daily*. The sense of victimhood is undoubtedly behind much of the anti-Japanese, anti-any country seen to disrespect China protests of the past decade, an essential ingredient of contemporary nationalism, and a motivation to make China strong again.

Can the "China as victim" narrative gain traction outside its borders? One might expect that most states and populations have generally "moved on" after oppression and conflicts which occurred in the century preceding the second World War, and indeed, the PRC in the international arena focuses less on itself and more on a platform of solidarity among the global South³³. Ongoing U.S. attempts to frame China as a currency manipulator, effectively oppressing the world economy, may be seen, should consensus on this be reached, as a the tipping point when other states begin to see China as less a beacon of hope for developing countries and more as one of the dominant core states.³⁴

³² Gries, pg. 80.

³³ See Kurlantzick's book for a persuasive and underappreciated account of soft power to make friends in the developing world. In using this third dimensional power to build a positive image as a champion of the third world, China may be making open conflict with the developed world, especially the U.S., more likely as states increasingly side with "non-interventionist" China in global conflicts or adopt its authoritarian model of development. Alternatively, it would be nice if we used this competition to reinvigorate our global use of soft power, living up to our ideals and the ideology we spread around the world. With more knowledge, I would have liked to compare the use of third-dimensional, interest-shaping, "positive" incentives in international relations—certainly preferable than force—to what I've described as insidious use of it in the comparative/domestic sense, in which it is seen as economically beneficial to join the oppressor nation by learning its language instead of one's own. Another day, another paper, perhaps.

³⁴ Wallerstein's world systems theory presumably is more widely accepted in its self-described periphery, so if China is ever seen as flaunting its economic and military might like the U.S., poor countries might conceivably view the turning point in such a way.

War losses, “punching” of teachers by students³⁵, and other tragedies aside, one should at this point guess that China does not rank highly in the terms of objective victimhood outlined here. Many of its past oppressors might describe their exercise of asymmetrical power as necessary to open an autarkic market, an unfortunate misunderstanding of paternalistically benevolent intentions to help China develop, merely resulting from the vagaries of imperial legality in the modern era or the “self-help realism” of the “international anarchic system”. In terms of threats to national existence, perhaps no power imaginable could exterminate 5,000 years of continuous Chinese civilization, and this fact may wholly disqualify China from objective candidacy for victimhood while desensitizing it to those nations actually in the grips of such threats. After all, what is the relative loss to humanity if a nation of a few million goes extinct versus the coerced “decentering” of the world’s most populous one? If all people are created equal, does not a killing of a greater number constitute a more egregious act of absolute oppression and victimization?

The objective scholar must respond that any use of violence will create victims, as perceived by themselves and most of those not inflicting the violence. But the violence will have to be justified in some way, and in the act of justifying something which has created victims, objectivity is lost. The real victims are those who objectively have no voice, no agency, because they are put out of existence by some form of power.

It hardly need be mentioned that a China which is strong domestically will not collapse like the USSR, granting independence to Tibet and Xinjiang (or East Turkestan as the separatist movement prefers to call the region). As national integration grows via western migration of the Han majority nationality, the PRC makes the increasingly true claim that these territories are inseparable from China, lest there should occur a post-independence ethnic cleansing and reversal akin to the Russians in the Baltics.

Conclusions. What can be said objectively about the power relationships in each of our national cases? Do the terms “victim” and “oppressor” have any place in an objective narrative when it is the nature of the state to be simultaneously, asymmetrically subjected to power and to exert it over sub-national groups?

³⁵ Japan’s transgressions against China, especially at the end of the 19th century, are variously framed in hierarchy-upsetting terms such as this, as the “little brother” beating up the eldest, as disrespecting grandparents/ancestors/etc.

To the extent that higher levels of analysis are inherently more powerful, they have more choices for how to address latent and open conflict³⁶. Thus, even where the relationship between A & B is grossly asymmetrical, it is far more difficult to defend a “victim” label if B is an entire nation or a state. Difficult, but not impossible, I have argued, especially where national identity or existence is the irreducible conflict of concern. Throughout the world, almost all states have at some point claimed to be the victim of some great injustice, and indeed the world is a less than fair place. From a safe, scholarly distance, it is necessary to diminish such claims based on the fact that states especially are clearly in the role of A in their domestic contexts. Ascribing blame to foreigners, especially for transgressions imagined, exaggerated, or long past, is primarily a method to shift public attention from domestic use (or catastrophic misuse) of sovereign state power, especially where such use presents cause and opportunity for dominated sub-nations to “test the limits” of the integrative state’s determination.

My proxy for absolute, objective national victimhood (national extinction) is possible, but only third dimensional power can achieve its most essential precondition: individual members of the nation must choose to prioritize other things over national identity. In the last stages of a successful process, individuals will no longer give their identity in nationalist terms, in the national language, and given their alternative priorities, are unlikely to perceive the extinction as having any victims. Only scholars remain to mark the passing of nations, lacking first nationalists, native speakers of the national language, anyone who can speak the language, and finally the absence of individuals who use a particular label as an identifier. It is hoped that this argument neither vilifies states for pursuing national integration—which in the long term achieves assimilation—or justifies extreme nationalism, though such interpretations are inevitable.

Nations can exist without nationalists, who are usually created in response to a perceived threat, or to right a past injustice. Preventing a perception of threat, usually by third-dimensional shaping of national interests in non-nationalist terms, ensures that a nation will be passive in the face of threats which exist but are not perceived as such. For states espousing any level of Marxist ideology, any nationalist interests are themselves the symptoms of “false consciousness”. Whether or not a nation’s highest interests are materialist—and I have argued that national

³⁶Using all three dimensions of power, these can include prevention of latent conflict becoming open, suppressing open conflict so that it returns to a latent stage, compromising to find resolution to open conflict, ignoring and/or denying the existence of both forms.

existence is yet higher—a developmental state is by definition obliged to convince its entire population that economic development underlies all state action.

Less controversial than my previous claim on the dispensability of nationalists, nations *cannot* exist without individuals who identify themselves as members of a nation. What may otherwise appear to be mere word games in terms of whether one is a member of a nation, nationality, or mere ethnic group, takes on paramount importance as to whether a nation has been subdued out of existence, neutralized, victimized absolutely. While it is normatively desirable to frame national conflicts in other ways than “my nation is right; yours is wrong”, denying the existence of nations is a first step for integrative states to realize the nonexistence of otherwise competitive nations as a fact. The change in the Chinese government’s translation of 民族 *minzu* from “nationality” to “ethnic group” should thus be seen as a second-dimensional attempt to reframe the terms of discussion minority rights in the PRC.³⁷ The term can also refer to a nation, with rights to self-determination, but reduction from the neutral term to one of a mere group of people sharing a race and/or culture, in removing any connection to the base word of “nationality”, has grave implications for whether minority nations have any such rights at all. Even before the semantic switch, however, it has always been more productive to discuss policies toward minority nations in terms of tangible effects, explicitly ending well before secession.

Members of nation A are notoriously inept at perceiving hidden transcripts of resistance, and many may actually believe otherwise disingenuous statements that minor, rebellious acts are the work of “a few bad apples.” Such blindness of A and second-degree power over B explains why airing of suppressed grievances often and almost inevitably takes the form of “surprising” or “spontaneous” violence. Any state which wishes to avoid violence or the “oppressor” label should take heed of scholarship suggesting that integration, while an intermediate policy to which every sovereign state has a right, has a friendlier counterpart in accommodation. It achieves the primary concern of keeping the state and the vast majority of the nation intact, and very rarely is it called “insidious”. Accommodation involves asking moderate B’s whom one would not expect to fear national extinction in the absence of an actual

³⁷ This change is noted in Millward’s 2007 history of Xinjiang, also notable for the derogatory terms used by in the Uyghurs’ language to describe Han Chinese, as part of their ongoing “hidden transcript” of resistance. The Chinese word, as with translation in general and especially of semantically loaded modern terms into ancient languages, encompasses all three terms (perhaps more) without exclusive equivalents. Political scientists in China probably study the concept in a radically different way, not simply for remnants of Marxist dialects in academia.

threat, how their lot can be improved, how the threat can be attenuated if not eliminated. Protecting language rights, the keys to individual and national identity, would likely be a baseline request, passionately defended by all nations.

Where inherently subjective passion is allowed, even encouraged by political scientists such as Theodore J. Lowi³⁸, must be in the love of a “well-rounded argument”—not in a position on either side of one. Everyone, not only scholars, must be vigilant against states’ and other actors’ use of less visible, higher dimensions of power which tells us what we want, what we should care about, and why. Any argument which ignores or categorically delegitimizes the opposition—and there is, objectively, always opposition—is not using the power of persuasion, but power itself, irresponsibly.

I suspect that this essay has tried to say too much, about too many things, with too little evidence, achieving no more objectivity or credibility than Chernichenko’s articles on the big, bad Baltic states. His may be representative of the opinion of a hundred million Russians, while similar articles written by Chinese nationalists could make even greater claims to truth on grounds of believers’ numerical strength. Neither, however, yet claims to speak for the “international community”, as do the West and the U.S., however hypocritically for our past and ongoing transgressions.³⁹ Whether or not such an entity even exists, we who exercise greatest power over it (in all dimensions) say that national self-determination is a highly ordered preference of all A’s and B’s, even occasionally over the sovereignty of the A’s which contain the B’s. To deny it is not far from denial of national identity and existence altogether—and I put the question to any reader whether being forced out of existence does not qualify, objectively, as victimhood.

³⁸ In Farr & Seidelman, especially his conclusion on pg. 394: “one must love politics...I do not speak for the passion of ideology, though I don’t count it out.”

³⁹ In simply discursive terms of third-degree power, how our “Manifest Destiny” has triumphed over the overall period known as “The Great Dying” by Native Americans is certainly one for the history books. No American political science paper considering national extinction can ignore probably the most “successful” example of absolute victimhood as a bi-product of nation-building.

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