DEMOCRACY IN THE 21ST CENTURY: DIVERSE ETHNIC IDENTITIES AS A NEW BASE FOR SOCIAL ORDER

by

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The last quarter of the twentieth century has witnessed an emergence of interethnic conflicts and a reassertion of ethnicity around the world. In a great many societies ethnic minority groups who previously appeared to have accommodated to their minority position in society have become politicized. In a survey of such groups, Ted Gurr (1993) has singled out 233 minority ethnic groups who are "at risk". By this he means groups that in the post-World War II period have either taken political action on behalf of their collective interests or have experienced economic or political discrimination, or both. Hence they are actually or potentially engaged in interethnic conflict. Each one of these groups is at risk of collective adversity. Of these 233 groups, only 27, or about 12 percent, have so far no record (in the sources he could find) of political organization, protest, rebellion or other form of intercommunal conflict since 1945. Further, he points out that out of 127 countries in the world that he examined, 75 percent had at least one, and many had more, highly politicized minorities. Gurr admits that these are conservative figures and gives references to other researchers. Two such researchers have identified 575 ethnic groups as being actual or potential nation-states, and one has estimated that there are as many as 3 to 5 thousand "nations" in the world (Nielsson, 1985; Nietschmann, 1987; Gurr, 5; Minority Rights Group, 1990).

Gurr (1993; 326-339) also tried to assess the viability of the 233 groups he studied. He developed a 1-5, weak to very strong, scale of group coherence and identity. Of the total sample, 60 percent of groups were classified as being either 4 or 5 on this scale, i.e., strong or very strong in their identity.

Another way of gauging the political significance of ethnicity is to look at main events taking place over a period of time. Thus, out of 295 events taking place around the world as recorded by the Statesman's Yearbook, 1993-94, 127,
or 43 percent of all the events in one year, can be counted as directly relating to interethnic issues. (I have included here both, events taking place among minority ethnic groups and events taking place among majority ethnic groups which bear on the question of identity, e.g., a nation's decision to join the European Community, excluding purely economic EC agreements). If one were to add to these events that are related to ethnic issues indirectly, the percentage would be well over fifty.

There are, of course ethnicity-related events that stand out clearly because the news about them are continuously reported by the media, as for example, the conflicts in ex-Yugoslavia, Rwanda, South Africa, Israel, Northern Ireland, Germany. But many interethnic tensions are either rarely reported on or not reported at all. The French-English conflict in Canada is only occasionally reported upon in the international media, that relating to the Canadian First Nations even less occasionally, and such issues as the Japanese-Canadian, Ukrainian-Canadian or similar demands, are rarely reported even in the Canadian media.

The question that I want to raise is twofold: (1) Does this present emergence of ethnicity in the political arena represent a new social phenomenon? Is there some new social configuration being formed? (2) What are the implications of this phenomenon for the future of nation-states and the international relations? Particularly, can we expect the consequence to be development of new political processes and structures or of new forms of democracy?

To answer the question as to what kind of social phenomenon is this reassertion of ethnicity, it is necessary to make a methodological distinction between looking for completely new aspects of a phenomenon and for aspects of the phenomenon that are not actually new, i.e., those that have existed before, but have not been explicitly recognized and intellectually articulated by observers or by the subjects of the phenomenon themselves.

My theory behind this distinction is that social change is precisely a combination of the two, i.e., of recognition and intellectual articulation of aspects of phenomena that might have existed for long, and an emergence of de facto new features of the phenomena themselves. In other words,
intellectual articulation of social reality becomes part of the social reality itself, and once it does so, it changes it.\textsuperscript{1}

My further postulate is that when a certain social process or aspect of a social phenomenon has existed for long but has not been recognized, it is difficult to find principles by which it can be readily understood and to find immediately effective techniques or establish institutional structures by which the problems connected with this phenomenon can be handled or solved. Note the inability of the Western social scientists to either foresee or to handle the interethnic conflicts in former Yugoslavia, former Soviet Union, Rwanda, and other countries, or even to foresee the race riots in a number of cities in the United States.

I want to focus on the following social phenomena that have existed for long time but whose full dimensions and significance have not been fully recognized and articulated and a fuller recognition of these phenomena will require further development of the democratic state structures. These are: (1) Latent interethnic conflict that had been built-in in the traditional concept and structure of nation-states; (2) The persistence of ethnicity in modern societies; (3) The trend or movement for recognition of particular group identities; (4) The trend toward greater participatory democracy.

**Interethnic Conflict and the Nation-State**

A close study of history will reveal that the process of emergence and establishment of virtually all nation-states has enwrapped in itself interethnic conflict. As a consequence, the structure of modern nation-states itself includes potential interethnic conflict. In many concrete cases, of course, this conflict would become actual. Virtually all nation-states are to a smaller or larger degree multiethnic. Even such states as Japan or Iceland that

\textsuperscript{1}According to this theory, all real social change is an evolutionary rather than revolutionary process. It consists of a combination of new knowledge and vision (ideology) and existing social group needs. The former impart new meaning to the latter and give rise to new social processes and structures, but as the former are propounded by specific social groups, they ipso facto create new needs for wider circles of social groups that make the original vision obsolete and require new visions. Since this is not the focus of this paper I will not develop this theory here.
are often given as examples of uniethnic states, include small percentages of other ethnic groups. Out of a total of 189 nation-states in the world listed in the World Factbook 1993-94, 150 include four or more ethnic groups within their boundaries, 29, three ethnic groups, 8, two ethnic groups and only 2, Iceland and Japan, list only one group. These are official statistics and are most probably quite conservative.

Table 1. gives percentages of total populations within a country that constitute one, usually dominant, ethnic group. The total of 255 countries includes nation-states and various territories that are units in themselves, but belong to a nation-state. The data show that there are only 61 countries in which the largest ethnic group makes up 90 percent or more of the entire population. In 99 countries the largest ethnic group makes up between 75 and 89 percent of the population, in 51 countries it makes up only between 50 and 74 percent of the population and in 44 countries it constitutes less than 50 percent of the population.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>% of Total Population</th>
<th>No. of Countries</th>
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<tr>
<td>Over 90</td>
<td>61</td>
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<tr>
<td>75-89</td>
<td>99</td>
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<tr>
<td>50-74</td>
<td>51</td>
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<td>25-49</td>
<td>29</td>
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<tr>
<td>0-24</td>
<td>15</td>
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<td>Total:</td>
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The point here, however, is that even highly multiethnic states, have been established and run by one dominant ethnic group even if it was smaller in size than the population of the other ethnic groups in the country. This highlights the historical process in which typically one ethnic group becomes the most active unit in nationality development and nation-state building and becomes the dominant, "majority", group within a territory, to whom other
ethnic groups within this territory come to be subordinated. There has been a number of ways in which, historically, one ethnic group would emerge as dominant and others as subordinate. Whichever the historical route, the result has been a structure of ethnic stratification in which one ethnic group (sometimes two) would be perceived to be superior to others not only politically but also culturally and psychologically. The significant fact is that the group on the top, i.e., the majority or dominant group, imparts its own cultural characteristics to all major national institutions. It is the elite of this ethnic group that forges and becomes the "mainstream" of society. The other ethnic groups are expected to assimilate into the mainstream culture or alternatively become isolated and at best remain part of the total society as "exotic" groups. This fact has remained in multiethnic societies as a latent source of interethnic tensions and at certain points in history produces open conflicts or major splits.

What is interesting is that in the past the scholars themselves have accepted this dominant, mainstream, conception of the nation-state and, like the mainstream elites, have defined it not as part of the nation-state's structure but as a problem for the existence of the nation-state. In a famous report on nationalism by a Study Group of Members of the Royal Institute of International Affairs (1963: 255-63).in England, published in the late 1930's and republished in the early 1960's, the authors, including such scholars as Morris Ginsberg and T. H. Marshall, define a nation as being distinguished from all other groups by certain "clear characteristics". Among these they include a common language, a common ancestral origin, a distinctive national character (including "habits of thought, ideals, temperaments, codes of social life and practice"), a common religion. The authors comment on these characteristics:

There are several reasons for thinking that such distinction is essential to the nation. Indeed, the fact of distinction by the possession of various individual qualities, which are of such a sort that powerful emotions can gather round them, does almost more than anything else to mark a group definitely as a nation. The characteristics in question, shared by the members of the group in contrast to all who are not members, act as the links which enable these members to realize that they have material interests in common, and cause them to draw together with one another when those interests are threatened. For that reason, it is quite as important that the characteristics are not shared by
members of other national groups as it is that they are shared by members of the national group to which they are attached (253).

The Study Group went on to state that the presence of various national minorities within a nation-state present a grave problem for both the state and the student of nations. The Group assumes that such diversity is essentially divisive because it undermines loyalty to the state and hence makes the state ineffective in maintaining a strong position in the world or in pursuing effective social policy at home.

From the perspective of the past history, particularly the past fifty years, it should be obvious that this analysis of ethnic diversity is incorrect. In both world wars the great diversity of ethnic groups in the North American states not only did not undermine the loyalty of the different ethnic groups to the state, but was a source of these countries' strength. Even in the European context such multiethnic states as the United Kingdom, Switzerland, Belgium did not fall apart on account of ethnic diversity.

The Study Group also went on to evaluate a set of measures that would speed up assimilation of diverse ethnicities into the nation-state. Interestingly, they criticize toleration as a sole measure to bring about unity, but point to the Soviet Union as offering a positive way of creating strong common interests by means of a common acceptance of one, common, ideology. They offer this as an example of the state making the nation. Again from the perspective of 1994, such faulty analysis becomes obvious, particularly the Study Group's inability to appreciate the fact that the Soviet Union was never a single nation-state, but an empire. In fact, history rather seems to show that many highly multiethnic states have been overall more stable than many states with little ethnic diversity.

More recently, scholars have become more aware that the traditional nation-state idea does have difficulties with the question of minorities, yet none seem to have suggested a viable democratic structural change that would move toward an effective answer to the issue. In a perceptive essay, William H. McNeill (1986: 83-85) points to modern national states that have accepted foreigners as part of the liberal tradition, but raises doubts as to whether these liberal principles will survive the impact of a world in which vast differences
of skills, culture, wealth and physical appearance interact. Trying to avoid preaching apocalyptic disaster, he nevertheless asserts that social strains and frictions are almost sure to increase within nations playing host to different ethnic groups and sporadic resort to riot and even wholesale murder is likely.

He states:

The peculiar balance between homogeneity and diversity that a few west European nations were able to strike in the late eighteenth century and maintained until the twentieth was a phase - a passing phase - remarkable and admirable in many respects, but oppressive and repugnant from the viewpoint of those over whom they exercised imperial authority. The ethnically unitary European nation-state never existed except as an ideal. Since the world wars of this century, it has plainly become obsolete in the place of its birth. It can scarcely be taken as a viable model any longer. Polyethnicity in some form or other is preferable, despite all its drawbacks and difficulties (84).

Robert D. Kaplan (1994) reviews the current interethnic conflicts around the world, points to the misleading nature of the political maps of the world which assign one nation-state to each single boundary and ends with predicting a coming general anarchy. James Mayall (1990: 52, 151-52) recognizes that a basic question connected with self-determination is the problem of minorities, but he also sees that the traditional way of solving the problem by territorial sovereignties is not completely workable any more. He addresses himself to the issue that the question of minorities has gone beyond the nation-state boundaries, yet draws our attention to the fact that the nation-state still remains the basic political unit.

To sum up, the concept of the nation-state, the actual process by which nation-states have been created and established and the structures that nation-states have become in the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries enwrapped in themselves latent interethnic conflict. The nation-state idea as representing one culture and one identity was propounded by dominant ethnicities and legitimized by intellectuals and scholars. Because it relegated the question of ethnic minorities to the problematic aspects of nation-statehood rather than allotting it a structural role, largely assuming that the problems would disappear with assimilation, nation-states, by and large, failed to develop institutionalized structures through which tensions deriving from diversity of
ethnic minorities could be adequately handled. History, however, showed that many minority ethnicities have either remained unassimilated, or did both, became assimilated in many respects, yet retained their identities in other respects. This has been buttressed by an explosion of migration around the world in the past fifty years, in the form of both, economic migrants and refugees. This also has created a need to develop new institutional structures that would integrate diverse ethnicities into existing social structures without repressing their identities. While theoretically this could take place outside of the nation-state structures, practically, at least in the foreseeable future, this has to take place within them.

**Persistence of Ethnicity: Post-Modernity vs. Modernity**

This raises further questions as to why ethnicities have persisted within modern societies such as the United States and Canada, and why do they show signs of increasing self-awareness and political pressure. To answer these questions I will again proceed by trying to look first for the phenomena that have been there all along but have been paid little attention because of intellectual paradigms which relegated them to intellectual margins and then proceed to look for new aspects of these phenomena, including new intellectual paradigms that will accord the phenomena new meaning.

The most influential and powerful conceptual paradigm of the 20th century had been the paradigm of "modernity". It defined the intellectual climate of the century from art and architecture to social science, philosophy and natural science. It owed a lot to the evolutionary paradigm of the previous century, except that instead of defining different societies and cultures as being in superior or inferior stage of evolution, it defined them as pre-modern and modern, modern referring to a technologically-based way of doing things and of thinking. An expression of this in social thought was the juxtaposition of the notions of "particularism" and "universalism". According to this framework, transition to modernity is a transition from particularism to universalism. Included in this is also a transition from quality to performance, i.e., from an emphasis on who one is to an emphasis on what one can do, from an emphasis on general, diffuse, "jack of all trades" social roles to specific or specialized, "expert" roles, from expression of feelings to control of feelings, and last but not least, from an emphasis on collectivity or community to an
emphasis on individuality and individual achievement. The greatest thinker to articulate this meaning of modernity was Talcott Parsons of Harvard University.

In this paradigm, ethnicity, ethnic groups, ethnic identity were all matters connected with particularism, with who one is, with diffuse responsibility, emotion, community or collectivity, in short with pre-modernity, not modernity. They were seen as being dysfunctional for modernity, as non-adaptive, as a drawback to social mobility and equality and to full participation in society. The term ethnic came to be identified with minorities only and it came to be assumed that as modernity progresses ethnic groups will change and eventually disappear (Bell, 1975; Porter, 1975). There are still many today who accept this paradigm, even though we have entered into the age of post-modernity.

I am proposing that this paradigm made understanding of ethnicity difficult. Somehow ethnicity was always outside society and society, often referred to as "society at large", came to be defined in non-ethnic terms. The mainstream social thought was one that articulated the paradigm of the "society at large", i.e., the modernity paradigm, and hence ethnic groups other than the mainstream groups themselves, were seen as social problems, as vestiges of the past. Only the mainstream community came to be seen as part of modern society.

The problem with this kind of thinking is that those groups who have power, i.e., whose culture and identity determine the character of major social institution, tend to see themselves in universalistic, rather than particularistic, terms. They tend to perceive their own values, ideologies or policies as universal, i.e., as applicable to all people, or as being in the interest of all people, within their society and even those outside of their society. Those in the same society who are not in the "mainstream" may see the same ideologies and policies as fulfilling the needs of the dominant group rather than theirs. What is salient here is that to understand the nature of ethnicity and the ethnic processes one has to understand that those who constitute the mainstream in a society are also ethnic groups, albeit majority, or power holding groups, as against minority ethnic groups.
In this context, minority ethnic groups persist in society for many the same reasons that the majority ethnic groups do. Both types of groups have identity maintenance needs. The difference, of course, is that minority groups maintain their identity at a disadvantage, since their cultural-educational institutions are overwhelmed by the mainstream institutions and they are under social, and often political, pressure toward identity shift. In one respect the majority group feels a symbolic, not necessarily real, threat to their identity from the presence of different cultural identity symbols in society.

In culturally pluralistic contexts, particularly such as North America, pressures are generated and exerted on all aspects of ethnicity to become adaptable to each other. The mechanism through which this is achieved is the process of deconstruction and reconstruction. It is the process through which individuals in their everyday living come to modify the meaning of their own identity and to change or modify at least some of their ethnic behaviour patterns without necessarily divesting themselves of all of them. It should be emphasized that what is referred to here is not any change of ethnicity planned or accomplished by outside forces, as for example, governmental policies of assimilation. Rather it refers to the change brought about by individual members of ethnic groups themselves in their everyday interaction with outsiders and each other without external compulsion.

The deconstruction-reconstruction paradigm, itself part of the post-modernity paradigm, is a useful way of appreciating and articulating the new aspects of the ethnic phenomena, particularly as they derive from interaction of majorities and minorities. Deconstruction consists of some objective aspects of ethnic identity, as for example language, losing their meaning and use, while others lose their meaning without being completely dropped, as for example some ethnic dances or customs, or for still others, the meaning may become latent. Deconstruction may or may not be accompanied by negative attitudes toward one's ethnic group and by feelings of alienation. Although some objective patterns may be dropped and patterns acquired from different cultural sources may become more meaningful, other original patterns may continue to be meaningful and be retained. Similarly, at a certain point, one's ethnic background or group experience may acquire new meaning and be
objectified into new visible ethnic patterns. It is more likely that over the generations, some selected old patterns would be revived but given new meaning. New collective experiences, in particular, often work to create new meanings for community-type groups. This is the process through which ethnic identity is reconstructed. Different types or forms of ethnic identity emerge depending on different ethnicities, social status or social class groups, generational cohorts, and periods of time. It is important to note that this does not necessarily mean a process of gradual disappearance of ethnicity. Rather, it involves the emergence of a variety of new forms of ethnic identity which are more adaptable to the surrounding social and cultural structures or periods of time. These forms represent reconstructed ethnicity. This, however, is not any less "genuine" or "authentic". Indeed, it is part of development of all community identities and is not only a phenomenon typical to North American ethnic groups; it is an instance of a wider sociological process, one which has been occurring in many societies, even the highly traditional ones (Anderson, 1991). For various reasons, however, the process has been particularly distinct in North America.

The Politics of Recognition and Expansion of Democracy
In the 1980's and early 1990's the world has witnessed a rather large number of cases in which various parties to interethnic conflict have given recognition to those to whom they refused to accord it for decades before. Suffice it to mention only the following: Blacks in South Africa, Palestinians in Israel, countries of former Soviet Union, parts of former Yugoslavia, Slovakia in Czechoslovakia, Native Peoples in Canada, United States, Australia, Quebec in Canada in terms of constitutional arrangements, many immigrant ethnic groups in Canada in terms of recognition of multiculturalism and redress for historical injustices, Afro-Americans in the United States in terms of special anti-discriminatory policies, and others. These, of course, include different types of recognition, recognition of rights to self-determination, recognition of land claims, recognition of cultures, languages, recognition of worthy negotiation partnership, etc. Underlying all these is the claim for recognition of one's identity whatever way defined under the circumstances.

It is precisely these new reconstructed forms of ethnic identity, discussed above, that place claims for recognition. Recognition has become an essential
need of the new ethnic identities. To answer why so requires a more extensive treatise than is possible in this paper. Suffice it to say that one important factor is that reconstructed ethnicity is one that has a higher degree of self-awareness. Reconstructed ethnicity and self-awareness are also related to a higher level of education that has been an increasing trend among most ethnic groups, particularly in democratic societies (Gutmann, 1987).

Recognition of identities of others implies that one can conduct a discourse with them on equal footing. It implies respect for them not on account of any of their acquired attributes, such as wealth, position, expertise, but simply on account of them being human. It assumes the idea that two human beings can settle any of their problems through a human discourse. The idea of according recognition to other identities is the contrary of any racist-type ideology that holds that some people are superior, others inferior. It is also at the basis of the democratic ideology. The only problem here is that whereas in the past the idea of giving recognition to individuals has been more easily acceptable in democratic societies, the according of equal recognition to groups of people, particularly ethnic groups, has not been so widespread. In the West, human rights have tended to be defined as individual rather than group rights and, as I have pointed out before, the social thought of modernity has tended to see ethnicity as pre-modern. Yet, today, it is becoming clear that refusal to accord recognition can have damaging effects on all concerned. As Charles Taylor (1992) put it:

Equal recognition is not just the appropriate mode for a healthy democratic society. Its refusal can inflict damage on those who are denied it. . . . The projection of an inferior or demeaning image on another can actually distort and oppress, to the extent that the image is internalized. Not only contemporary feminism but also race relations and discussions of multiculturalism are undergirded by the premise that withholding of recognition can be a form of oppression (p.36).

Indeed, to be a good citizen in a democratic society one must have a confidence in one's own identity and to have that confidence, recognition of one's identity by others is necessary. Individual identities, however, derive from group identities. To have a strong individual identity one must feel that the group of which one de facto is a member enjoys acceptance and is not seen as inferior by others, especially by the societal mainstream.
Recognition of identities, both, of individuals and groups has been related to democratic politics probably from their very beginnings (Taylor, 1992: 44-50). Perhaps the most prevalent form that this has taken is that of the question of human rights, including again both, the individual rights commonly spelled out in various bills and charters, and the less commonly spelled out group rights, such as minority cultural rights and the right to self-determination. The problem, however, has been the question as to whether human rights should be exclusively a matter of internal affairs of nation-states or a matter going beyond the nation-state boundaries. Since World War II, however, there has been a sort of consensus among democratic states that the question of human rights cannot be left exclusively to the states, since these may have tendencies to disregard the question for various sectors of their populations (Gotlieb, 1970: 147-210). Yet, interethnic conflict in the 1990's has raised a very serious question as to whether the international bodies, be they political or economic, really have the ability to guarantee recognition of human rights.

Some commentators today insist that the nation-state is a thing of the past and as the economic market becomes more dominant in international relations (Bauman, 1988), the role hitherto performed by the state will be taken over by the international community. The European Community is given as an example, as are also the various common market arrangements, NAFTA, Pacific Rim, etc. The United Nations is pointed to as being more and more involved in matters that used to be the exclusive domains of specific nation-states.

While all this may be true, the facts do show that in recent interethnic conflicts in Bosnia-Herzegovina, in Rwanda, in Somalia international intervention proved to be completely ineffective. It has achieved some humanitarian aims, but it has shown a complete inability to prevent ethnic genocides and to negotiate any peaceful solutions. The international bodies, i.e., the European Community and the United Nations, have continuously used negotiation in their attempts to bring peace, yet to no avail. In fact, they have demonstrated the opposite, that peace, i.e., all the so-called cease-fires, can be effectively used as an instrument of war. The problem is that the international community was psychologically, or morally, unable to use force in support of
its negotiations and interestingly enough the few times that it did use it, the negotiated agreement held.

The point here is, that the international community was unable to act as states normally do. The main function of the state is to protect its people and in this the international community failed, perhaps because it did not consider the people in question to be "their" people. The opposite is also true, that is, that if a government of a state is unable or unwilling to protect those who are supposed to be its people, and especially if it itself engages in either discriminatory practices or in genocide of other ethnic groups within its political domain, then obviously these groups would not see the state as being their own. This precisely has been the long-standing problem in many African countries, particularly Rwanda. But Uganda, Angola, Nigeria, Kenya should not be forgotten. This is also one important factor why the Soviet Union collapsed so easily: because of many historical repressive experiences, most ethnicities subsumed under it, did not see it as their state.

Yet, on the state level, recently, in South Africa, Canada and, to an extent, Israel there has been an effective use of recognition in moving toward a solution of interethnic conflicts and claims. The change achieved in Africa in such a short period of time by use of this technique is astounding. In Canada, once the recognition was given to the Native Peoples as worthy negotiation partners, the results achieved was something that some of the Native People have worked hard to achieve for close to a century, but whose demands were never taken seriously (Berger, 1981). Similarly in Israel the first steps in negotiations when the government took the Arab demands seriously produced a change and a real promise of a solution that was unthinkable before. In each of these three cases the determining factor was action by strong governments, but governments acting within the context of democratic principles and human rights considerations and by according recognition to the ethnic minorities.

What I think is slowly emerging is a structure of democracy in which powerful governments accord public recognition to their minorities, engage in negotiations with them, as if both were on equal footing, and develop policies or structures that positively address the ethnic minority claims. These
three elements - recognition, negotiation and multicultural type of policies and structures - make up democracy expanded to reduce interethnic conflicts or incorporate diverse ethnic identities into existing nation-states. The concrete examples suggested before, particularly South Africa and Canada, involve all the three elements. Elaboration of these however, goes beyond the scope of this paper.

REFERENCES


