

Deconstructing/reconstructing ethnicity

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ABSTRACT. Ethnicity is here viewed as a continuum, varying widely in terms of salience, intensity and meaning, along which several types of ethnicity can be distinguished. *Domination ethnicity* is where a nation imposes monocultural control – it can be regarded as a form of ethnicity. *Enclosure ethnicity* has three variants – dormant ethnicity, cultural confinement, and inward-looking ethnicity. *Competition ethnicity* competes over resources of the state and development. Finally, *optional ethnicity* is of low intensity and is light, volitional and fluid, as in the case of ethnic entrepreneurs and symbolic ethnicity. What is considered as well are the *dynamics* of ethnicity, shifting from one mode to another. The politics of ethnicity is here taken up in terms of emancipation and domination. Perspectives on ethnicity are framed by the changing *meanings of ethnicity* over time. The final question concerns the *endgames of ethnicity*, or the paths of change of different types of ethnicity, and how each relates to ethnic conflict regulation.

The contemporary upsurge of ethnic militancy and its frequently ruthless character of ‘ethnic cleansing’ has given rise to pervasive pessimism. Perplexity as to its causes and intensity is combined with a sense of the irrelevance of beliefs in progress and universalism. Books such as Moinyhan’s *Pandemonium* (1992) and Kaplan’s article ‘The coming anarchy’ (1994) are expressions of this mood of pessimism. They show a tendency to relapse in primordialist explanations of ethnicity as archaic solidarities along with speculations on ‘primitive’ human nature. In the process ‘ethnicity’ functions as a new imagery and code of racism: civilised peoples have nationalism while ‘others’ indulge in ethnicity. Representations of ‘ethnicity’ – as of ‘fundamentalism’ in another context – are replete with references to irrational crowd behaviour and mass pathology. It is worth remembering that this kind of imagery has been projected on to collective action of virtually any sort whenever it threatened vested interests.

The pejorative associations of ethnicity go back a long time. In original Greek usage *ethnos* refers to nation or people, and *ethnikos* to heathen, or ‘others’. Taken in this sense the contemporary wave of ethnic politics is a politics of assertion on the part of ‘others’ protesting their subordination or exclusion by the nation. Many of the nationalisms that emerged out of

decolonisation have since turned into forms of domination of internal 'others'. It is meaningful that the contemporary wave of ethnic politics comes at a time when the epoch of the nation is past its peak. In a broad way we can interpret contemporary ethnic politics as a continuation of the dialectics of empire and emancipation in a finer print of history, moving on from the *national* to the *group* level, and as such part of an overall global dialectics of domination and emancipation.

Ethnicity can no longer be dismissed on the premises of modernisation theory or Marxism for these paradigms themselves are in question. Neither can ethnicity be taken at face value: because in itself it is but an empty container, because it is fluid, protean and hydraheaded, because to do so would yield an archipelago of particularisms, and because there may be 'life after ethnicity'. If ethnicity in one sense represents a repudiation of a false universalism which paraded as the universal subject but was in reality stratified and exclusionary, what then emerges on the horizon beyond ethnicity? What would be the points of reference for a new universalism that starts out from cultural pluralism?

'Ethnicity' can refer both to the cultural politics of dominant and of subaltern groups. Thus ethnicity can refer to emancipation as well as domination. This combination is not new. Nationalism has a similar double connotation, with the Janus faces of a liberatory meaning as in people's sovereignty and national liberation, and of domination, as in chauvinism, jingoism. One distinction runs between offensive or imperialist nationalism and defensive or anti-imperialist nationalism. These varieties of nationalism are part of common understanding – now we must come to turns with the varieties of ethnicity. This reflection is a deconstruction of ethnicity as a 'lumping' concept so as to recover the agency and subjectivity in ethnicity.

This article concentrates on several arguments which can be summed up as follows. Many discussions of ethnicity generalise as if there is only one type of ethnicity, but it is more realistic to think of ethnicity as a continuum, varying widely in terms of salience, intensity and meaning. Along this spectrum several types of ethnicity can be distinguished. *Domination ethnicity* – considering that the term 'ethnicity' itself is a discourse of domination and that the distinction between nation and ethnicity is questionable, if the nation takes the form of monocultural control it may be regarded as a form of ethnicity, or ethnocracy. *Enclosure ethnicity* – in varieties of dormant ethnicity, cultural confinement, and inward-looking ethnicity. *Competition ethnicity* – competing in relation to resources of the state and development. *Optional ethnicity* – or low-intensity ethnicity, light, volitional and fluid, as in the case of ethnic entrepreneurs and symbolic ethnicity. Ethnicity is not static; it is a matter of everchanging relational positioning, which refers us to the *dynamics* of ethnicity, shifting from one mode to another. A further dimension is the *politics of ethnicity*, which is here taken up in terms of emancipation and domination. The changing *meanings of ethnicity* over time are another, broader variable. The final

question concerns the *endgames of ethnicity*, or the paths of change of different types of ethnicity, and each relates to ethnic conflict regulation.

Ethnic identity formation

The extremes on the continuum of views in the debate on ethnicity are primordialism and instrumentalism. Primordialism is the essentialist view of ethnicity in which ethnic groups are taken as givens. In the familiar 'tribal model' 'tribes' are viewed as an archaic reality underlying modernity, resurfacing when modernisation fails or cracks (e.g. Isaacs 1975). This kind of static perspective has been popular in the media and for a long time also predominant in social science, as in the concept of plural society. It is the basis of a fundamentally pessimistic view of multiethnic societies. It ignores how 'tribes' themselves have usually been modern constructions through the intervention of colonialism which froze the play of identities (e.g. Vail 1989).

In recent years this view has made place for the notion of the constructed or invented nature of ethnicity, or ethnicity as an imagined community, as politics (e.g. Sollors 1989; Roosens 1989). The question that arises then is, what is the logic governing the process of construction and what are the political consequences of this view? One option is to take a social movement perspective and to treat ethnic politics as a form of resource mobilisation. Ethnic groups then are interest groups. An advantage of this view is that it takes distance from the essentialising claims of identity politics; but if it is interpreted in a rational choice framework (which resources best generate desired outcomes) the limitation is that the role of cultural meanings and symbolic resources is underrated or ignored, as if these could be flattened to straightforward economic or political choices.

Criticising the primordialist view of ethnicity is now commonplace, but the next step of theorising the process of subject formation is not as often taken. If it is, the most common position is to theorise ethnic identity formation in terms of elite competition. Thus Brass (1991) offers a theory of ethnic identity formation and mobilisation that hinges on elite competition. In a nutshell: 'The cultural forms, values, and practices of ethnic groups become political resources for elites in competition for political power and economic advantage' (1991: 15). And: 'Ethnic communities are created and transformed by particular elites in modernizing and in postindustrial societies undergoing dramatic social change' (1991: 25). The settings in which ethnic identity formation takes place range from modernising to postmodern societies. What they have in common is that the existing situation involves a hierarchy in the form of a 'cultural division of labour', featuring alignments between political elites and political forces such as mass parties and religious authorities. Next, social and economic changes 'may precipitate new center-locality conflicts in which issues of language

and religion come into play again and provide bases for ethnic and political mobilization' (1991: 275).

This elite model of ethnicisation implies a neglect of subaltern agency and a tendency to take elites as givens – rather than examining the process of in-group contestation through which elites emerge and come to the foreground. The implication is that subalterns are manipulated and duped by elites, which is a variation on the theme of 'false consciousness', presents a passive view of subalterns and simplifies the process of subject formation. This position should be questioned or qualified on several points. How to explain the interest of followers? An intervening factor that would make the ability of elites to influence followers intelligible is authoritarian political culture and institutions. Furthermore, viewing processes of identity formation and elite formation together in the context of mobilisation would produce a richer perspective. The role of elites cannot be generalised but varies according to the *type* of ethnicity.

Varieties of ethnic experience

How complex the role of elites may be emerges from an analysis of ethnic mobilisation in 'The development of political opposition in Taiwan, 1986–1989' by Wang (1992). Taking a social movement approach, Wang distinguishes two forms of ethnicity: ethnic competition and ethnic enclosure. The Taiwanese who are assimilated into Taiwan's mainstream political culture dominated by the mainland Chinese engage in ethnic competition and in the process experience discrimination on ethnic grounds. This makes ethnicity salient to them, so that in effect they experience a *double* process of assimilation and ethnic identity formation. According to Wang, this has been relevant for the start-up of ethnic mobilisation, the phase of grievance formation. Next, political opposition in ethnic terms spread to the Taiwanese *enclosed* within the ethnic experience – mostly rural, with less education and less mobility – to whom therefore ethnicity has not been salient ('the fish don't talk about the water'), but is *made* salient under the influence of the political protest actions initiated by the assimilating Taiwanese. This process has been relevant to the diffusion stage of ethnic mobilisation.¹

Hence there are *two* moments of ethnic identity formation: first in the context of ethnic competition during the process of assimilation and next in the course of ethnic mobilisation itself. The assimilated members, the initiators of the movement, according to Wang, would tend to be moderates because to them ethnicity remains an *optional* identity, while the non-assimilated members, once they have been recruited within the ethnic enclosure, tend to radicalise the movement. Accordingly, different elites tend to be involved in ethnic mobilisation: a bicultural elite and an ethnic enclosure leadership that emerges in the process of ethnic mobilisation.

Hence the notion of elite *tout court* is too narrow and static, for what about subaltern social movement leadership?

The problem with the label 'ethnicity' is that it covers a wide and fluid variety of notions and experiences. The static nature of ethnicity discourse is generally disabling: 'ethnic identity' comprises many different modes along a wide spectrum ranging from objective markers to subjective identifications of varying salience and intensity. The conventional language in everyday as well as social science accounts is of the *persistence* and *resilience*, *survival* and *revival* of ethnicity. This is deceptive because of its essentialist logic, the assumption of continuity and sameness, suggesting dichotomies of tradition and modernity, old and new, in the process concealing the modernity and newness of ethnic responses. This discourse implies that ethnic sentiments and identifications are somehow primordial. It overlooks and underplays how ethnicity changes and that what is happening is not the reassertion of an old identity but the articulation of a new one.

For instance, Smith (1992) seeks to explain 'why ethnic groups survive'. He finds that 'myths of election' are most strategic in the reproduction of ethnicity: it is 'chosen peoples' that survive. This is a legitimate focus and characteristic of Smith's general interest in the nexus between ethnicity and nationalism. But there are problems with this outlook, in particular a tendency toward the reification of ethnicity. It is ethnicity that becomes the independent variable rather than the changing structure of political and social opportunities. The conditions under which 'myths of election' become salient are not specified. While highlighting the continuity of ethnicity this argument overlooks the varied and changing nature of ethnic identity. It may be more significant, then, to look at the *reconstruction* than the *reproduction* of ethnicity.

The notion of the ethnic origins of nations is erroneous not only because the meaning of ethnicity changes over time, but also because ethnic identification often follows state or nation-formation, rather than the other way round.

'Ethnicities' . . . are largely the product, rather than the foundation, of nation-states. . . . The ever more powerful structures of central state control – be they colonial or autochthonous, imperial or national – are what generate and motivate the new *need* for ethnic autonomy, and even, in many cases, the actual sense of ethnic identity on which the latter is predicated. (Guideri and Pellizi 1988: 7–8)

Instances where state formation preceded nation formation are numerous, particularly in the postcolonial world. Besides, many societies are multinational in composition. In such cases state-led efforts at national integration and development from above may provoke ethnic mobilisation. This encompasses ethnic politics in the West, such as emancipation movements of African Americans and native Americans, as well as regional autonomy movements in Europe.

Ethnicity is defined by a variety of markers. Brass distinguishes between

ethnic category or group – defined by objective cultural markers such as language, dialect, dress, custom, religion or somatic differences – and *ethnic community* or *ethnicity*, in which cultural markers consciously serve internal cohesion and differentiation from other groups. ‘Ethnicity is to ethnic category what class consciousness is to class’ (1991: 19). The third notion is *ethnonationalism* which is the politicisation of ethnic community.² The significant steps in the process of ethnicisation, then, are ethnic identity formation, or the step from cultural category to ethnic community, and ethnonationalism, or the politicisation of the ethnic community.

This taxonomy is useful but also problematic: if ethnicity only refers to subjective ethnic consciousness, is it appropriate to call groups that are merely differentiated by objective cultural markers *ethnic categories*? Should these not be simply termed *cultural categories* which can *become* ethnic following the process of ethnicisation? Furthermore, ‘ethnic community’ is a static concept – there are more experiences of ethnicity than through community. Indeed according to one argument (discussed below) ethnic identification may *increase* upon the decline of ethnic communities. Besides, community is a homogenising and contested concept generally (e.g. Young 1990).

Brass distinguishes three sites of conflict – *within* ethnic groups, *between* groups, and in relation to the *state*. He rightly points out that most treatments of ethnicity focus on the second form of conflict and neglect the others, particularly conflict within groups, as a consequence of their reified, objectified and homogenising view of ethnic groups. That which is to be demonstrated – ethnic identity formation or the degree of ‘ethnicisation’ – is taken as given. The negotiation of ethnicity in relation to other forms of difference – such as class, gender, age, place, ideology – is taken for granted. However, by equating ethnicity with ethnic community, Brass himself privileges a homogenising approach to ethnicity.

Ethnicity is an inherently unstable category – as a constructed community, like the nation, its logic is that of imagination and imagination is a social practice. Ethnicity is a plural and contested category, shifting in-between the narrow comforts of enclosure ethnicity and the contradictory pressures of competition ethnicity. The objective traits that can form the basis of ethnic identification range widely and vary according to circumstances. The circumstances under which objective cultural traits engender subjective cultural identification vary widely and are in part contradictory – the diminution of actual cultural differences can generate cultural identification (as in the case when groups begin to compete for the same resources) or, conversely, the heightened salience or hardening of cultural boundaries can foster cultural solidarity. These diverse dynamics may involve quite different experiences of ethnicity, although conventional wisdom groups them under the same umbrella. Or, it makes only a conventional classification such as regional autonomy movements, separatist movements, indigenous peoples movements, etc.³ It is necessary, then, to think of ethnicity

in terms of a *continuum* or spectrum, varying widely in intensity and salience. The spectrum of ethnic identification ranges from low-intensity ethnicity or opportunity ethnicity to ethnic fundamentalism, from ethnicity as an occasional, optional identity to ethnicity as a total identity. Individuals or groups do not occupy a stable, fixed place on this continuum for the degree of identification itself may vary according to the situation.

Ethnicities-in-relation

It is a sound principle of poststructuralist methodology that identities are constructed in relation to others rather than given. If we assume accordingly that ethnic identity is a relational concept, then how does ethnic identification come about? The theme of ethnicities-in-relation concerns an obvious point – that ethnicisation is part of a chain reaction; and a subtle point – that in many situations, new subjects are termed ‘ethnic’ whereas established subjects or the dominant group remain outside the field of vision. This refers again to the difference between *ethnos* and *ethnikos*.⁴ Inscribed then in the terminology of ethnicity is a coded relationship to power. Decoding this relationship must be the first step in the analysis.

With respect to the process of ethnogenesis an elementary starting point is that ethnicity is frequently imposed and that what often precedes it is a process of *othering* on the part of a dominant group. Accordingly, ethnic identity may derive not from ‘roots’ but from politics of subordination, imposed through labelling and legislation from above and subsequently internalised. Hence it makes sense to first consider cultural strategies of domination.

In the West, the ‘study of whiteness’ should *precede* an analysis of ethnic movements because these are reactions in a field already ethnically defined – although from the point of view of the dominant group this ethnic character is conventionally and conveniently perceived as national culture. Stuart Hall (quoted in Parry 1991) observes that ‘ethnicity in the form of a culturally constructed sense of Englishness and a particularly closed, exclusive and regressive form of English national identity, is one of the core characteristics of British racism today’. What is at issue is the ‘ethnic’ character of the centre, the dominant group and cultural alignment, the canon.

This relates to the question of ‘whiteness as an absent centre’ (Pajaczowska and Young 1992) – absent due to the denial of imperialism. A sizeable part of Western imperialism and colonialism can be interpreted in terms of ethnic or racial strategy – the White Man’s Burden. Besides, there are specific episodes of racial or ethnic mobilisation from above, such as political anti-Semitism and the ideology of Anglo-Saxonism.⁵ In colonial settler societies, in the Americas, Southern Africa, Australia, New Zealand, Israel or Taiwan, the relationship between *ethnos* and *ethnikos* is more obvious and prominent than elsewhere. Generally it is important to first

problematise the dominant cultural ethos: to examine whiteness as a constructed identity (Kovel 1970). In *The Wages of Whiteness* (1991) Roediger takes up the social construction of race and the 'struggle for whiteness' by the Irish and other immigrants in the United States.

What this means in general terms is that *ethnikos*, ethnicity, is first defined by *ethnos*, the nation. Thus, 'it was the European who created the Indian' (Knight 1990: 75). The category 'American Indian' and the politics of native American nationalism owe their existence to the expanding frontier and the policy of Indian Removal. Ethnicity then implies a relationship and this relationship, while usually asymmetric, is not one-sided. The construction of ethnicity takes place through a *mutual* labelling process: 'This labelling, the mutual process of identity construction, happens at ethnic boundaries, and both affects and is affected by the economic and political positions of groups' (di Leonardo 1984: 23).

The next step in the analysis is to problematise the concept of ethnicity itself and the implicit distinction between nation and ethnicity. In French the term *ethnie* appeared in 1787 and by mid nineteenth century it carried a definite meaning: that of 'heathens' or non-Christian peoples, a notion that gradually encompassed all 'savages', considering that Judeo-Christianity was the only civilisation worthy of the name. Around 1880 at the time of the new imperialism, the term was incorporated in 'ethnography' and 'ethnology' and popularised through German social science (Coquery-Vidrovitch 1994). Thus, etymologically, ethnography refers not to *ethnos* or people but to *ethnikos* or savage people. Hence the colonial and postcolonial assumption that ethnicity (previously 'tribalism') is a peculiar habit of the lesser breeds in the South, whereas nations (nationhood and nationalism) are reserved to the civilised peoples in the North.

This is crosscut by another terminology, that of *race*. There is no clear dividing line between race and ethnicity. The common distinction is that 'race' primarily refers to somatic differences while ethnicity refers to a combination of cultural (language, religion), place (region), descent (claim to common descent) differences, often along with some degree of somatic difference. But since 'race' discourse also spills over into culture, the difference is a matter of degree rather than principle: the *degree* to which differences in somatic attributes play a part in the social construction of difference.⁶

For a long time most Western countries have been 'stable' in terms of ethnic relations. Ethnicity occupied a marginal, often decorative status on the periphery of a stable institutional and cultural mainstream. In the United States, according to bell hooks (1992: 21), 'The commodification of Otherness has been so successful because it is offered as a new delight, more intense, more satisfying than normal ways of doing and feeling. Within commodity culture, ethnicity becomes spice, seasoning that can liven up the dull dish that is mainstream white culture.' This is the familiar situation of a stable core of WASP hegemony with a sprinkling of 'ethnic neighbourhoods' available for 'slumming' for spicy variety. Thus, 'Little Italy' can be

consumed as a tourist commodity, complete with local colour and ethnic atmosphere (di Leonardo 1984: 18). For some time, also in the United States, this core-periphery relationship has been no longer stable due to a host of factors including demographic, economic and cultural changes. That WASP hegemony is on the wane and can no longer be taken for granted (Brookhiser 1991) accounts for the ferocity of the battles over 'political correctness' and the multicultural curriculum. Here ethnicisation refers to the renegotiation of hegemony.

In recent years the distinction between nation and ethnicity has been gradually fading: ethnicity tends to be viewed more and more as a form of 'peoplehood' and the distinction between *ethnikos* and *ethnos* is being forgotten. Thus, media now refer to Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland as 'ethnic minorities' (until fairly recently 'sectarianism' was the common terminology), a shift that reflects secularisation and depoliticisation. The concept 'ethnonationalism' merges both notions and denotes a kind of second-order nationalism. The distinction between nation and ethnicity is fading also due to criticisms on the part of bicultural migrants who resist being classified in pejorative terms, as 'minorities' or 'ethnics', and see no grounds why the dominant centre should not also be understood as another ethnicity. This sensibility we might term the decolonisation of ethnicity. What is taking place in the multicultural societies of the West is a shift of hegemony which affects the very terms of analysis and changes their meaning. Eliminating the status difference between nation and ethnicity creates a level cultural playing field. Probably this reflects the diminishing status of nations in the context of regionalisation and globalisation.

Domination ethnicity: ethnocracy

One of the consequences of eliminating the distinction between nation and ethnicity is that we can speak of phenomena such as ethnocracy. In many societies the state is an instrument of domination by privileged ethnic groups who engage in a form of 'cultural despotism'. The modern state, according to Hechter (1975), upholds a cultural division of labour that distributes values jobs and economic development unevenly. Ethnocracy or 'monocultural control of the state apparatus' (Mayall and Simpson 1992: 15) comes in many varieties.⁷ The ethnicisation of the state is a familiar process in many countries North and South. Nationality itself is often defined in terms of the majority ethnicity. The 1972 Bangladesh constitution decreed that the citizens of Bangladesh shall be known as Bangalees, to the dismay of the peoples of the Chittagong Hill Tracts. Language policies are another indicator of ethnocracy. In Sri Lanka the 1956 Sinhala Only Act was one in a series of ethnocratic measures marginalising the Tamils. Government hiring and contracting and the composition of the armed forces are other obvious indicators of ethnic bias.

We can differentiate ethnocracies by majority or minority, stable or unstable ethnocracies, democratic ethnocracies such as 'Herrenvolk democracy' and even 'ethnic democracy'. The United States has been analysed as a Herrenvolk democracy (Van den Berghe 1978). This momentum is apparent in the difference between the American Declaration of Independence which is universalist and inclusive within a patriarchal framework ('All men'), and the Constitution which is particularist and exclusive ('We the people') (Ringer 1983). South African apartheid and its construction of racial and ethnic identities from occupational and political niches to Homelands was a Herrenvolk democracy by a minority. Israel has been described as an 'ethnic democracy', combining ethnic dominance of Ashkenazi Jews with political and civil rights for Sephardim and Israeli Arabs (Smooha and Hanf 1992).⁸

Several states practise some form of ethnic coalition government, either by ethnic juggling or more institutionalised arrangements (Kenya, Zambia, Nigeria, Ghana). One type of institutionalised arrangement is consociationalism or government by a cartel of elites. The Netherlands during the era of pillarisation (1917–60s), Belgium (federalised in 1993) and Austria used to be classic instances of consociationalism, but presently the main remaining instance is Lebanon (1943–75 and 1989–) (Smooha and Hanf 1992) and arguably Canada since 1974 (Kellas 1991).

That ethnocratic minorities tend to be insecure goes without saying, but a different problem is that of the *insecure majority*. When in Sri Lanka from independence in 1948 Sinhalese hegemony was established politically (ruling party in parliament) and symbolically (the lion on the flag), it was a reaction to the lead Tamils had gained under British colonialism through education and in the bureaucracy. Indian support in Tamil Nadu for the Tamils played a part in making the Sinhalese feel insecure. What ensued was the gradual ethnicisation of the state – in the recruitment to the bureaucracy and armed forces, the victory of the SLFP, the Sinhala Only Act, ethnic riots instigated from above and the role of ethno-merchants. Prior to independence the Tamil cultural identity movement, like the Sinhala cultural revival, was primarily anti-imperialist, but under the circumstances it gradually evolved into an ethnonationalist and ultimately separatist movement (Jeganathan and Ismail 1995).

In India, militancy in Punjab and ethnonationalism in Kashmir have been fuelled by a process of communalisation of Indian politics. Leading parties including Congress I played the communal card and mobilised majority Hindu identity as a prop for electoral support in unstable constituencies in North India (Rupesinghe and Kothari 1989). In India ethnicity is conventionally termed *communalism* because the lines of cultural difference tend to be drawn in terms of religion rather than ethnic descent. On the other hand, religion is often a stand-in for language and place of origin, and thus for the same markers that underpin ethnicity. Oommen (1990) distinguishes five types of communalism in India: assimilationist –

when a community tries to assimilate other communities into their fold, as in the case of Hindutva; welfarist – when a community takes advantage of state provisions, as with Christians and Muslims; retreatist – when a community stays aloof from political involvement, as with Bahais and Christians; separatist – when a community seeks autonomy, as with the Sikh claim to Khalistan; and secessionist – when a community wants to secede, as with Muslims in Kashmir.

In Yugoslavia, what happened since the demise of Tito and with the erosion of communism as the hegemonic ideology, has been the gradual regionalisation and ethnicisation of politics and the ethnicisation of the federal state by Serbian interests. The uncertainties of economic transition and ideological erosion made playing the nationalist card politically attractive. Serbs, although a majority, could be made to feel insecure. The second Yugoslav state like the first was based on Serbian hegemony, but allegations of the subjugation of Serbs in Kosovo were politically useful (Feffer 1992).

Enclosure ethnicity

In class analysis the classic distinction runs between class position and class consciousness, class as condition and as mentality, objective and subjective, *an sich* and *für sich*. Brass, as discussed above, draws a parallel distinction between ethnic category and community, and in his view only ethnic community is really ‘ethnicity’. Similar distinctions run between dormant and salient ethnicity, generic and emergent ethnicity.

Wang (1992), from whom I borrow the concept, refers to enclosure ethnicity with respect to the rural Taiwanese. He does not further differentiate the concept, but it would seem that enclosure ethnicity can have several meanings. Firstly, it can refer to a self-enclosed community – as in anthropology’s ‘primitive isolates’ – and their sense of peoplehood, their basic, unreflected identity. Because ethnicity makes sense only in a relational context their identity would be ‘ethnic’ in the eyes of outside beholders and not necessarily in their own. This could be termed *dormant ethnicity*. Second, it can refer to a community whose enclosure is enforced and a function of domination by another group – as in the case of Indians in the Andean countries who in the wake of Spanish colonisation and latifundio agriculture were gradually driven from the valleys higher into the mountains. Here is a sense of ethnicity, held both by the dominant (who speak of *indigenes*) and the dominated (*Indios*), that is profoundly shaped by the relation to the dominant group. Here *enclosure itself is relational*. The classic instance is the original ghetto. Third, it can refer to an *inward-looking* strategy of collective self-definition, as in some forms of radical Afrocentrism. This kind of enclosure ethnicity is in effect a mode of competition ethnicity – by looking inward, marrying inward, buying black,

voting black, celebrating blackness, people seek to build their collective resources so as to better compete.

Upon closer reflection then enclosure ethnicity is a mixed category. Generally it tends to correlate with economic deprivation and low class status. Enclosure ethnicity means low mobility, while competition ethnicity is associated with class mobility. As a discourse it involves less cultural capital than the bicultural discourse of competition ethnicity. It is a discourse much less attractive to middle-class sensibilities than the outward looking discourse of competition ethnicity. Once mobilised it tends to approximate competition ethnicity over time: ethnic mobilisation by definition means engaging in ethnic competition and thus looking outward – even if in a posture of adversity. Politically, enclosure ethnicity, fuelled by class grievances, tends to be more radical than competition ethnicity. Thus, in Fiji in the wake of the 1987 military coup, the lower strata Fijians radicalised the intervention in the name of ‘Fiji for the Fijians’, which had been initiated by the moderate bicultural customary elite of principal chiefs (Norton 1993).

A further argument that might follow is to differentiate between successful and unsuccessful assimilation and argue that unsuccessful assimilation fosters ethnic identification, and hence can lead to ethnic mobilisation in an attempt to renegotiate access to resources on a collective basis. Ethnic identification and mobilisation, then, are strategies to achieve collectively what one could not achieve individually. In that respect they parallel class solidarities.

Enclosure ethnicity may tend towards ethnonationalism and possibly separatism. In general, ethnic mobilisation in postcolonial societies can turn into secessionism under the following conditions: if the ethnic groups have been treated differently within the same territory under colonial rule; if the postcolonial government imposes monocultural rule; and if there is support within the regional environment for the secessionists (Mayall and Simpson 1992: 9).

An inward looking disposition may involve striving for ‘ethnic cleansing’ or the homogenisation of space and community, and for delinking. This replicates the logic of ethnos but seeks to reproduce it on one’s own terms. It follows a binary logic of opposition in which dominant ethnocentrism (nationalism) is both confronted by and mirrored in opposition ethnocentrism (ethnicity or micronationalism). What these perspectives share is that nation and ethnicity are taken as destiny. One of the paradoxes of contemporary ethnonationalism is that it is usually being fed transnationally by overseas diasporas and support networks of various kinds (Goonatilake 1995). Ethnonationalism then may be a strategic posture, while implicitly ethnonationalists may have given up on nationalism and have a postnationalist mentality at heart.

Over time enclosure ethnicity is likely to transform into competition ethnicity: due to modernisation and globalisation many ‘enclosures’ are

generally shrinking. Cultural enclosures are transformed into sites of cultural competition. The contemporary upsurge of ethnic movements is the manifestation of this momentum of uneven incorporation and represents an attempt to renegotiate the terms of incorporation.

Modernisation: competition ethnicity

Arguably, the theory of ethnicisation in terms of elite competition is more concerned with the how than the why of ethnic politics: elites mobilise cultural identity as a resource in political competition, but *why* are certain cultural differences singled out? Hechter's model of internal colonialism starts out from the fact that 'The spatially uneven wave of modernisation over state territory creates relatively advanced and less advanced groups' (1975: 9). The superordinate group seeks to stabilise its advantages by institutionalising the existing stratification system, in the form of a cultural division of labour which consolidates cultural solidarities. In this argument, modernisation (in the sense of economic development) and its uneven spread are woven *into* cultural differentiation.

This alone puts the modernisation discussion on a different footing. The next question is, what is the effect of ongoing modernisation? Whereas the post-war modernisation literature posited a zero-sum relationship between 'tradition' and 'modernity', it is now increasingly recognised that 'modernisation intensifies communal conflict':

The expansion of markets and improved communications increases contact and generates competition among communal groups. As people aspire to the same social and economic rewards, competition intensifies and communal solidarities become an important – often the most important – vehicle for mutual support and promotion, especially in urban areas. The expanding role of the state invites and even requires groups to mobilize for collective action to struggle for their share of the benefits available from government and for political access, cultural rights, and economic opportunities. . . . The competition generated by economic development thus politicizes ethnic pluralism and makes it even more salient than in earlier periods. According to this perspective, modernization does not erode communal solidarities, it modernizes them and converts them into more-effective instruments of group defense, promotion, and combat. (Esman and Rabinovich 1988: 15)

This assessment has been borne out in different ways in many areas, such as Indonesia (Wertheim 1978), India (Kothari 1989) and Québec (Esman 1994). Accordingly, ethnicisation and ethnic conflict are *part* of the process of modernisation. This means a drastic departure from the conventional modernisation/assimilation point of view. Economic development and modernisation may evoke ethnicisation. Modernity and ethnicity coexist very well. Development does not eliminate ethnicity but makes for its refiguration. Modernisation and ethnicisation interconnect around the state and development. In relation to the state, ethnic competition may be evoked

by state formation, the centralisation of state control, nation-building and cultural homogenisation, and electoral politics. In relation to development, ethnic competition may be unleashed by regional uneven development, cultural bias in capital accumulation, and the effects of migration flows.

Nation-building often involves ethnonational elements such as the state-sponsored exclusion of minorities and foreigners (like Armenians and Jews in Atatürk's Turkey) or the privileging of an ethnic category. The government policy favouring the Bumiputra in Malaysia is a case in point. Preferential treatment of Bumiputra or 'sons of the soil' as against the Chinese minority has been part of a state-led accumulation strategy of building an ethnonational bourgeoisie (Lee 1990; Ibrahim 1989), which is now gradually being phased out. In Fiji a similar policy under the slogan 'Fiji for the Fijians' has been adopted since the 1987 military coup (Premdas 1993). Kothari (1988: 214) related ethnicity in India to the 'dialectic of development': 'ethnicity becomes a ground for reassessing the cultural, economic and political impacts of developmentalism'. 'Instead of disappearing, ethnic identities harden as a combination/convergence of three trends': viz. developmentalism as culture, as economics, and 'in the role of electoral politics in dividing up the development cake' (1988: 214, 217).⁹

Some view ethnic competition for state power and state resources as the key to ethnic group formation: 'The state is itself the greatest prize and resource, over which groups engage in a continuing struggle in societies that have not developed stable relationships among the main institutions and centrally organised social forces' (Brass 1991: 275). But equally important is competition in relation to uneven development.

The relationship between uneven development and ethnicisation is not a matter of simple deprivation. The economic argument frequently cuts the other way: often the economically advanced and prosperous areas seek secession or autonomy, as in the case of the Punjab (wheat bowl of India), Kashmir (tourism), Biafra (oil), south Sudan (oil), Shaba (mining), Eritrea (infrastructure), Basque country and Catalonia (industry). What may be most significant is relative deprivation in terms of political control: 'it is being shut out from political power which is decisive, rather than the presence, or absence, of economic resources in and of themselves' (Mayall and Simpson 1992: 19).¹⁰ It is the interplay of state and development, power and profit that matters.

In relation to postcolonial sub-Saharan Africa, Shaw distinguishes different forms of ethnicity. In Africa ethnicity has changed form 'from ethnic aggrandisement in the 1960s to ethnic fragmentation in the 1980s' (Shaw 1986: 590).¹¹ Focusing on the political economy of ethnicity Shaw compares two situations: sustained growth, as in Nigeria in the 1970s, and economic contraction, as in Most Seriously Affected countries such as Ghana or Uganda. Sustained growth produces a mixed-sum situation in which patron-client relations work and ethnic identity is accordingly reinforced: 'Factional ethnic politics are seen to work', there is a "trickle

down” of ethnic association’ (598–9). Negative growth produces a zero-sum situation in which patron-client networks break down and therefore one would expect class consciousness to develop. The contracting economies, however, tend to experience ruralisation: ‘a retreat from urban decline to rural survival in ethnic homelands’ (591). Accordingly Shaw (602) distinguishes between an ‘old’ and a ‘new’ ethnicity: ‘In only the few expanding economies will the “old” ethnicity of patronage remain a dominant factor, whereas in the many contracting countries, the “new” ethnicity of survival may become prevalent.’

Thus in both situations, of growth and contraction, ethnicity is reinforced, ethnicisation takes place, but they are different kinds of ethnicity: varying from patronage politics to rural retreat. Accordingly the relationship between development and ethnicity is highly complex. Ethnicity is not a stable category but contingent, while development and modernisation are contingent and contested concepts as well. We can differentiate between economic growth and contraction, successful and failed, balanced and uneven development, centre and local dynamics. Uneven modernisation can be both a cause and effect of ethnicisation. A cause because it generates group stratification; an effect because privileged groups seek to institutionalise their advantage and discriminate against ‘others’, thus deepening cultural cleavages. Shifting centre-local relations destabilise the cultural division of labour and in the process may both reinforce and refigure ethnic associations. Ethnicity itself, in terms of content and meaning, changes character across this range of situations.

In Yugoslavia, uneven modernisation (more advanced in Croatia and Slovenia) and the lack of modernisation are held responsible for setting the stage for ethnic conflicts through the process of ‘scapegoating’ (Flere 1992: 263), as well as the authoritarian style of modernisation during the Tito years (cf. Nederveen Pieterse 1997).

The discourses of competition or bicultural ethnicity are complex and varied. A radical position is to reject the terminology of ethnicity altogether as a pejorative terminology. Or, to turn the tables and declare *ethnos* a form of *ethnikos* – for from the point of view of bicultural ‘others’ the nation itself is just another form of ethnicity which happens to be dominant. When nation and ethnicity are equated, then, as a consequence *both* are bracketed, relativised. This is a matter of awareness of the way ethnicities-in-relation function, of the effects of the cultural division of labour, and of the dynamics of ethnicisation in the stream of political and socio-economic change, without essentialising and freezing ethnicities.

Thus, Hall (1992) speaks of decolonising ethnicity and in the process recognising difference, engaging in a new politics of representation premised on the end of the essential black subject. In the United States, African American intellectuals can take a position of double engagement and accept, in the words of West (1992: 704), the importance of ‘positive identity, self-affirmation, and holding at bay self-doubt and self-contempt

and self-hatred' as 'an indispensable element for people of African descent' – as in the lineage of black nationalism that runs from Marcus Garvey to contemporary Afrocentrism; but, on the other hand, reject the 'black nationalist rhetoric that is still operating in a binary oppositional discourse', as in the black/white discourse of Louis Farrakhan. The contrast between the positions of West and Farrakhan illustrates the difference and tension between competition ethnicity and enclosure ethnicity. A broadly parallel difference in South Africa runs between Pan African Congress (PAC) and the ANC.

Optional ethnicity

When shooting Westerns, use real Indians if possible; but if Indians are not available, use Hungarians.

Old Hollywood manual on lighting (Weinberger 1992: 31)

Episodes of ethnocracy and challenges of competition ethnicity provide ethnicity with a certain reality and concreteness, a kind of practical objectivity. Thomas' theorem applies: if situations are believed to be real, they are real in their consequences. If this position informs analysis, the result is a kind of ethnic *Realpolitik*: ethnicity may have been constructed but now it is real. At this point constructivism becomes academic; in the end there is no noteworthy difference between a constructivist and a primordialist interpretation because the net social and political outcome is the same. In other words, we are back to square one. The point of this section is to refute this tendency. The point of constructivist analysis is to unpack ethnicity, to render visible its contingencies, and this applies *through* the social realities of everyday ethnic politics.

Ethnicity – like class, gender, occupation, religion – is a form of cultural capital which, to a degree, one can choose to foreground or keep in the background. This notion of ethnicity as a *resource* is what the instrumentalist thesis proposes. As a general position this is too shallow. Identity is more than a resource, is not simply optional or volitional, but yet a degree of choice also plays a part. This refers not only to the *use* made of ethnic identity (which in itself is not a given or a constant factor) but to ethnic identification itself. Identifying ethnic can be a way to connect – social capital, social glue, a way to obtain state provisions, a political manoeuvre, an economic gambit.

The fluidity and contingency of ethnic identification finds expression in several ways – in the selection of markers of identity, the salience, meaning and application of markers, the definition of boundaries, the meaning of identity itself, in multiple identity and ambivalence. This fluidity functions on two levels: as an attribute of *all* forms of ethnic identity and as constituting a form of ethnicity in itself, optional ethnicity. Hence, to a

certain extent, *all ethnic identity is optional* and second, where optionality is the most prominent feature, it constitutes itself a type of ethnicity.

There may be considerable variation over time and situation to the objective markers of cultural difference which form the potential basis of ethnic identification. Which features of cultural difference are highlighted can vary greatly. Subjective ethnic identity likewise involves considerable variation and flux in terms of which elements are foregrounded, their meaning and relevance. While ethnicity is often associated with place or origin and claims to common descent, the actual variety of cultural markers is much wider and besides the salience of cultural markers changes over time. In terms of Brass's (1991: 30) elite model: 'the choice of the leading symbol of differentiation depends upon the interests of the elite group that takes up the ethnic cause'. If it concerns a religious elite, religion will be the first and language the second symbol of differentiation. Next, an elite will try to promote multisymbol congruence through education and publishing religious pamphlets in the vernacular.

While on the surface the label remains the same, the actual nature of identity may shift. Thus, in Sri Lanka, Sinhalese identity used to be a matter of language first, religion second; but after independence and in the wake of agitation by the Buddhist sangha, a new identity developed in which religion became central and language secondary: 'Where previously to be Sinhalese implied being Buddhist, now to be Buddhist implies being Sinhalese' (Brass 1991: 31). The new inflection changes the way group boundaries are drawn. As Eriksen (1993: 30) notes:

the compass of the 'We' category may expand and contract according to the situation. At general elections in Mauritius an individual may identify him or herself with the Hindu community at large; when looking for a job the extended kin group may be the relevant category, and when abroad he or she may actually take on an identity as simply Mauritian, even to the extent of feeling closer to Christian and Muslim Mauritians than to Hindus from India.

The opportunistic character of the markers of ethnicity has also been apparent in former Yugoslavia:

each side will alternately emphasize their common roots when it indeed suits its purposes. Before the war, for example, when the Serbs still hoped to keep Bosnia in Yugoslavia, the media frequently highlighted similarities with the Muslims, while Croats often stressed that Bosnia had been part of historical Croatia and that most Bosnian Muslims were originally of Croatian descent. (Bell-Fialkoff 1993: 121)

Some forms of ethnic identity in fact represent, not the hardening but a *weakening* of ethnic boundaries. In a study of ethnic identity in the United States, Alba finds that among white Americans objective ethnic markers and differences – of education, residence, occupation, marriage – have been steadily and irreversibly eroding, while there has been a simultaneous increase in ethnic phenomena such as media broadcasts in ethnic mother tongues and ethnic studies courses at colleges and universities, and a

growing societal sensitivity to matters of ethnicity (1990: 16). But it is not the same 'old' ethnicity. Ethnicity has become increasingly voluntary. It is no longer a working and lower-class style. On the contrary, among third-generation immigrants, the more highly educated 'may be more likely to identify ethnically than those with less education' (1990: 29). This has also been referred to as *symbolic ethnicity* (Gans 1979). 'Symbolic ethnicity is concerned with the symbols of ethnic cultures rather than with the cultures themselves' (Alba 1990: 306). Also termed 'twilight ethnicity', it may find expression in ethnic activities of an occasional character and of a kind that is acceptable in a multiethnic setting.

This points to 'the underlying transformation of ethnicity in the lives of white Americans' (Alba 1990: 292). First, what has remained or returned is ethnic identity, or the subjective importance of ethnic origins and affiliation. Second, for most white Americans ethnic identification has become volitional, situationally specific and shallow. Ethnic identification is most salient among Italians, Jews and Poles, and least among those originating from northern and western Europe. Third, is the privatisation of ethnic identity – 'a reduction of its expression to largely personal and family terms' (1990: 300). Fourth, among third-generation immigrants ethnicity has become a form of cultural capital so that ethnic identity rises along with educational level. Hence the multiethnic chic. Fifth, this points to the formation of a new ethnic category of 'European Americans'. In the process the very content of 'ethnic culture' changes. Thus, 'the ancestors of people who wear the "Kiss me, I'm Italian" tee-shirt never thought of themselves as such – but as Sicilian, or Calabrian or Neapolitan – and would be mystified by their "Italian-American" children' (Delbanco 1992: 84). Likewise the Italian food served to visitors at home may be fashionable North Italian cuisine quite unfamiliar to their ancestors.

Part of ethnic opportunism is the fluidity of labels. Thus, whether movements identify themselves as ethnonationalist or as indigenous peoples is a matter of political strategy. In Indonesia, for instance, for some years movements in West Irian and the Moluccas have tended to identify themselves as indigenous peoples rather than national liberation movements, whereas Fretilin in East Timor continues to identify as a national liberation movement. Both types of movements strive for autonomy but with different emphases.

'Ethnic conflict' itself easily becomes a heading of convenience under which very different sentiments find shelter. Thus, 'In Sarajevo and some other cities, the Muslims were an elite more sophisticated and more affluent than their rural Serbian neighbors. The class antagonism of the Serbian peasants in Bosnia was easily converted into ethnic hostility by anti-Muslim propaganda from Belgrade' (Laber 1993: 6). This element comes across in Muslim women's testimonies of their rape by Serbs: 'They kept pigs, they came down from the mountains, they stank . . . and now they are treating us this way!' (Laber 1993: 3). Considering that the majority of Muslims live in towns, the war in Bosnia has been interpreted as *urbicide*, a campaign of

rural peasants laying siege to, bringing destruction and taking revenge on cities and their inhabitants (Humphrey 1994).

To the medley of motives that underlie the politics of cultural difference we can add the political economy of ethnicity. Ethnic enterprise is as old as the world's trading minorities and mercantile diasporas. In its two main forms, trading minorities and entrepreneurs who serve ethnic enclaves, ethnic enterprise has become an accumulation strategy in 'global cities' and globalising environments (Waldinger *et al.* 1990; Light and Bonacich 1988). Ethnic association sustains mutual aid, savings clubs, forms of community self-help, market niches. In the case of trading minorities, ethnic association provides transnational networks that serve as information channels and supply lines, while cultural cohesion sustains trust and cooperation. The Jews in Europe, Chinese in Asia, Arabs, Armenians, Lebanese and Indians in various parts of the world are familiar examples. Kotkin (1992) makes a bold case on the economic capabilities of 'global tribes' as strategic assets in the post cold war world economy.

Moreover, in the era of multiethnic chic, ethnicity *itself* can be commodified or identity turned into a mercantile ploy. Thus, a trader of mixed Native American descent active in the 'Indian business' in the United States, muses that 'It would be real interesting if it turned out that all Indians are "fake"', and observes: 'The media began looking at the Indian fad about seven years ago. Dealers and collectors in New York went directly from the African fad to the Indian fad. And the funny thing is that African "trade beads" are now passed off as Indian "trade beads"' (Steiner 1976: 209). From an entrepreneurial point view, ethnicity can be a chameleon strategy: 'The minds of the Indians operate so that they can be Indian when they want to, or white when it's profitable, or Chicano when it's necessary. They can do whatever does them the most good' (1976: 211).

Hybrids of various stripes – half-castes, métis, mestizos, mulattos, ladinos, cholos, etc. – can choose to identify with domination ethnicity ('passing'), subaltern ethnicity ('roots'), with their in-betweenness, using it as a bridging, bicultural capital (a rainbow identity), or with all these identities serially. Multiple identity is another expression of optional ethnicity.

Another feature of optional ethnicity is ambivalence. In Asian American discussions of ethnicity, Lowe (1991: 27) observes, on the one hand, 'the desire for an identity represented by a fixed profile of ethnic traits, and at another, challenges to the very notions of identity and singularity which celebrate ethnicity as a fluctuating composition of differences, intersections, and incommensurabilities'.

At the other extreme on the spectrum of ethnic identification are the claims made in the language of the politics of blood – updated in a language of DNA. In the words of the American Indian poet John Trudell: 'genetic light, from the other side'. Ethnic identification may be taken to the point of ethnic fundamentalism. Class and national mobilisation refer to universalist ethics of egalitarianism and democracy as part of their horizon, but ethnic

Table 1. Types of ethnicity

Types	Variants	Keywords	Dynamics
Domination	Nationalism	Ethnocracy Monocultural regime	Engenders enclosure and tends towards competition.
Enclosure	Dormant. Confinement – ghetto. Inward-looking – self-chosen.	Low mobility Monocultural	Towards competition
Competition	Patronage Survival	Bicultural. Mobile. Niche competition. Resources of state and development.	Towards optional ethnicity
Optional	Symbolic ethnicity Low-intensity ethnicity Hybrids	Bicultural, multicultural Agency, ambivalence, opportunism Multiple identity	Beyond or after ethnicity

mobilisation *per se* has a particularist agenda only. It may take the form of cultural polarisation, stressing the unbridgeable gap of cultural habitus, as in the discourses of *négritude* and Afrocentrism (e.g. Asante 1988). That there may be a fundamental affinity between racism and racism-in-reverse is familiar enough. As long as anti-racism follows the logic of binary opposition, the current is the same, only the polarity changes. For instance, there is a definite family relationship between Nazi racism and *négritude*, as Léopold Senghor conceded: 'Unconsciously, by osmosis and reaction at the same time, we spoke like Hitler and the Colonialists, we advocated the virtues of the blood' (cited in Hymans 1971: 71).

At this point three questions remain: the politics of ethnicity, the changing meanings of ethnicity over time and the endgames of ethnicity. They are all interrelated – to assess the politics of ethnicity is to address their meaning, and vice versa, and one's view on either is affected by what one holds to be the endgames of ethnicity.

Politics of ethnicity: emancipation and domination

Ethnicity then is protean. Ethnicities are clusters or crystallisations of cultural difference and there are as many 'ethnicities' as there are boundaries that social formations generate and positions to take along them. How then, if ethnicity often serves as a common currency of power, do we arrive at the standard representation of ethnicity as a social or political problem

associated with 'irrationality', bloodshed, riots, terror? According to Shaw (1986: 597), 'Ethnicity is only unacceptable when it is used for reasons unacceptable to dominant social interests.'¹² But this is too simple. Ethnicity may also be unacceptable as a form of domination – of different groups and internally; and on account of its exclusivist particularism.

To return to a point made at the beginning: ethnicity is a continuation of the dialectics of domination and emancipation in a finer print of history, finer that is, by comparison to the conflict among nations.¹³ In the grand sweep of history, in the absence of a last word, nationalism is often attributed a progressive place. By and large it is deemed to have an emancipatory momentum, even though the manner in which it has found expression has rarely been edifying. The past 150 years or so have witnessed countless battles fought in the name of nations – wars of great power rivalry, empires expanding and contracting, battles of colonisation and decolonisation. The upside of the age of nationalism is the fall of empires, the demise of absolutism and the entrée of people's sovereignty, constitutionalism, self-determination, decolonisation, civil rights – in fact, much of the lexicon of contemporary notions of civility.

The present period, if it could be characterised as an 'age of ethnicity', seems to subvert these accomplishments but also appears to be a continuation of the same kind of battles for hegemony and power which once prevailed among nations, now unfolding as civil wars *within* nations, or among groups straddling nations. Often these tensions and conflicts existed all along but were masked and papered over by the overriding drama of interstate war, colonisation and decolonisation. For instance, there have been frictions all along between the Kabyles and majority Algerians, but as long as the headlines focused on the Algerian war of independence with France, they seemed a background issue. Only in the wake of independence did they spring to the foreground, and now they are being eclipsed again by the conflict between Islamists and secularists. In a sense, then, the shift from the age of nationalism to the age of ethnicity is the background becoming foreground and the foreground fading into the background – a shift in the scenery of history, a shift in collective optics. From a local point of view this shift may often be much less significant than when viewed at a distant remove (except that macro dynamics have also significantly altered local relations).

If, by analogy to the epoch of nationalism, we contemplate the emancipatory dimension of ethnic conflict and set aside the blind ferocity of enmity and contestation, because these were equally characteristic of the wars among nations and of class struggles, what are the emancipatory features of ethnic conflict? It is not that ethnicity discourses can be regarded as liberatory or progressive for the most conspicuous feature of enclosure ethnicity is its unrelenting particularism while its social practice is that of domination within. Yet, the discourse and practices of nationalism were also steeped in particularist pathos. Much of our vocabulary of political vice

is the lexicon of nationalism – chauvinism, jingoism, as the obverse of patriotism, national pride, rule of law. Yet our vocabulary of political wisdom and accomplishment is beholden to the same epoch of massacre and war which raged on a far more devastating scale than the contemporary ethnic conflicts.

And what would be the prognosis? Is a hundred years of nationalism, at its peak from 1840 to 1960 (Harris 1990), to be followed by a hundred years of ethnicity? If interstate wars have given rise to some form of international hegemony and settlement, intrinsically precarious but less so than before, will the ‘age of ethnicity’ over time likewise result in forms of interethnic settlement? The outcomes of ethnic conflict vary from secession or the formation of new nations, long periods of societal disintegration and warlordism, as in Somalia and Liberia, to cantonisation or federalism, or power-sharing arrangements and forms of intercultural cohabitation.

The competing particularisms of *ethnos* and *ethnikos* or nation and others may not be an edifying spectacle from any point of view. But it should not be overlooked that these particularisms are not symmetrical, for one is dominant and the other subaltern. Even so, subaltern identity may operate as a form of domination in its own social space, in relation to the differences that crosscut ethnicity. Rather than adopting a wholesale position, what would be necessary is to distinguish the moments of emancipation and domination in relation to each form of ethnicity. Schematically these could be charted as follows.

Table 2. Politics of ethnicity

Type of ethnicity	Emancipation	Domination
Domination (nationalism)	Self-determination. Anti-imperialism, anti-regional hegemonism, anti-racism	Monocultural control, internal colonialism, oppression of minorities, xenophobia. Regional hegemonism
Enclosure	Self-determination, autonomy, dignity	Cultural exclusivism. Suppression of internal differences (gender, class)
Competition	Collective struggle	Seeking advantage over other ethnic groups. Suppression of internal differences
Optional	Individual or collective improvement, agency, flexibility, multiple identity, play	Alienation, inauthenticity, posturing

Meanings of ethnicity

Ethnic identities are affected by many variables – historical mortgages, socio-economic change, political transformation, changing centre-local relations – which make them deeply local. At the same time local conditions are also affected by global circumstances and macro dynamics – such as the end of the cold war, the wave of democratisation, the restructuring of states – which play into the politics of cultural difference and in relation to which ethnic politics is but one in a range of responses.

End of the cold war. The waning of the great political ideologies has resulted in global and local political and discursive realignments. Thus in Angola, Unita no longer follows the cold war schema of anti-communism but has been organising in the name of ‘authenticity’ and along cultural, regional, rural–urban lines (Birmingham 1993). In South Africa, Inkatha underwent a similar career shift. If in social science there is a cultural turn, social solidarity and conflict have also taken a cultural turn. Ethnic association may also be viewed in terms of the absence or weakness of other bases of solidarity, in particular along lines of class and ideology.

Democratisation. Ethnic politics may represent a deepening of democracy if it concerns the mobilisation of hitherto passive, alienated constituencies in reaction to regional uneven development or internal colonialism. For instance, when indigenous peoples who had been excluded in earlier rounds of nation-building assert their rights. Ethnicisation may also be a consequence of a shift to multiparty democracy; conversely it may be used and manipulated to sabotage multiparty democracy, as in Zaire and Kenya in recent years.

Postnationalism. The era of the nation is past its peak and questions of power and hegemony are now being played out at multiple levels. Postnationalism refers to the tendency to shift allegiance from the nation to units or networks smaller or larger than the nation, generally on account of diminishing returns from nationalism. If ethnic mobilisation takes the form of micro-nationalism or ethnonationalism, then the appropriate terminology would not be postnationalism but post statenationalism.

Changing functions of the state. The trend of informalization is frequently interpreted as a retreat of the state due to globalisation under the sign of neoliberalism and a general crisis of development. It is viewed as a de-centring of the state, or the centre cannot hold. In most instances, however, it may be more appropriate to analyse these changes in terms of the changing role and functions of the state in the changing world economy. (Cerny 1990)

Melucci (1989: 90) finds that ethnic nationalism contains

a plurality of meanings that cannot be reduced to a single core. It contains ethnic identity, which is a weapon of revenge against centuries of discrimination and new forms of exploitation; it serves as an instrument for applying pressure in the political market; and it is a response to needs for personal and collective identity in highly complex societies.

This medley of meanings would be unimaginable until fairly recently. Not only, then, is ethnicity unstable in itself, metamorphosing along a broad continuum, also its meaning is unstable. Depending on context it is given

quite different meanings. The question is whether patterns or trends in the changing meanings of ethnicity can be detected.

Originally *ethnikos* stood to *ethnos* as ethnicity came to stand to nation – as the lesser, minor, other. As such the nation and ethnicity have been interdependent, nations create and sustain ‘ethnicity’ as long as they need low wage labour reserves on their fringe. This may be what Miller (1990: 31) refers to: ‘To think anthropologically is to validate *ethnicity* as a category, and this has become a problematic idea.’ Ethnicity has become problematic also because the distinction between nation and ethnicity is gradually losing its self-evident character. Since the status of the nation is no longer as sacrosanct and dominant, and many small nations have emerged, ethnicity can be easily recognised as micro-nationalism, would-be nationalism, nationalism-in-the-making. The solidarities which we term ethnic derive their meaning from their status in relation to the nation. In addition, the architecture of the state shapes their status – which tends to be high in federal structures, such as the German Federal Republic, and low in unitary, centrist structures such as the French *état*. When national and state change status, overshadowed and refigured by globalisation, so does ethnicity.

Another change concerns the politics of cultural difference – the politics of belonging, identity politics. This elicits profound ambivalence – on the one hand, a politics of recognition, which is liberalism’s cultural turn and adaptation to the realities of multiculturalism; but if the liberal framework is transgressed, the principle of intolerance for the intolerant sets in. Thus, if cultural difference is valorised, by the same token cultural extremism is repudiated. Thus, the changing meanings of ethnicity are also a kaleidoscope for viewing collective itineraries, in which we see reflected the changing status of the nation, the changing architecture of states and economies, processes of social composition and recomposition, international realignments, and the traces of globalisation.

Ethnicity endgames

Since ethnicity is a construction, is it amendable to deconstruction?

If ethnicity is constructed and reconstructed by articulations arising from contemporary conditions and power relations among social groups and the interpretative meanings people give to them, rather than out of some timeless or primordial dimension of human existence, then creative leadership by political and cultural elites and public intellectuals, as well as the everyday interventions of ordinary people into the flow of racial and ethnic discourse, do matter, perhaps more than we are now prepared to imagine. (M. P. Smith 1992: 526)

This hope is contested by Ake:

Part of the appeal of this view may well be the fear and contempt of some of us for ethnic consciousness and the desire to wish it away . . . For those who are threatened

by ethnicity, the belief that it is constructed is more than wishful thinking. It is an important practical matter. For one thing, they use this belief to legitimize a concerted assault on political ethnicity for as they reason, if ethnicity is constructed, it is amendable to deconstruction and it is entirely legitimate to deconstruct it. Many of them have done just that often with crude measures of social engineering and outrageous brutality. (Ake 1994: 53)

This polemic makes sense but is also inspired by a misreading of constructivism – that ethnicities, like nations, are constructed is not to say that therefore they are not real;¹⁴ rather it is to make a statement about the character of their reality, acknowledging that their reality is contingent and open-ended.

Does distinguishing types of ethnicity add to our understanding of ethnic conflict regulation? Macro-political forms of ethnic conflict regulation range from methods for managing differences (hegemonic control, third party arbitration, cantonisation or federalisation, and consociationalism or power-sharing) to methods for eliminating differences (genocide, forced mass-population transfer, partition or secession, integration or assimilation) (McGarry and O'Leary 1993: 4). Are different forms of ethnicity amenable to different modes of conflict regulation? The varieties of ethnicity do not neatly translate into distinct scenarios. The discursive and political strategies that are deployed refer more to changing opportunity structures and niches than to compelling dispositions that would be intrinsic to each type of ethnicity. With this proviso, endgames of different forms of ethnicity run as follows.

Enclosure ethnicity. It is the exclusivism of enclosure ethnicity that leads to ethnic cleansing and that elicits the standard condemnation of ethnicity. But this also needs unpacking. Enclosure ethnicity is a consequence of or reaction to ethnocracy; the dynamic of enclosure ethnicity is towards competition ethnicity and enclosure itself can be a competitive strategy – or delinking for the sake of relinking. Thus the line between enclosure and competition is thin, and cooperation between enclosure ethnics and competition ethnics is frequent. An example is West's participation in Louis Farrakhan's Million Man March in Washington. West joined the march in the name of 'black operational unity' and followed the example of Martin Luther King: 'Dr King, the integrationist, had no fear of a black united front and no hatred of black nationalists' (West 1996: 98). This echoes the earlier episodes of cooperation between M. L. King and Malcolm X. Similarly in South Africa operational cooperation between PAC and ANC is on the cards.

Is the world of ethnic politics merely an archipelago of particularisms? 'The progressive character of a struggle does not depend on its place of origin but rather on its link with other struggles' (Chantal Mouffe quoted in Mercer 1992: 429). Competition ethnicity is in a better position to forge such links and engage in roundtable 'rainbow politics' of multicultural, multi-issue coalitions than enclosure ethnicity, but enclosure ethnicity is open to coalition politics as well.

Competition ethnicity. The dynamic of competition ethnicity is toward

separatism or secession – in which case it may reproduce ethnocracy on a smaller scale; towards ethnocracy – if it succeeds (as in the 1987 coup in Fiji); or toward power-sharing – in which case over time ethnicity is likely to become increasingly optional. Present times show examples of both worst case and best case scenarios. Ethnic cleansing in Bosnia, Rwanda and Burundi are worst case scenarios, Sri Lanka is in a stalemate, while South Africa is a shining example of power-sharing.

The worst case scenario of ethnic politics is an unending chaingang of particularisms, a vendetta logic in which the sins of the fathers are endlessly revisited upon the sons. The only way to break the vicious cycle of ethnic exclusivisms is power-sharing. Since the state and development are the key bones of contention these are the sites where sharing has to take place. State power needs to be shared in terms of government positions, contracts, citizenship rights, decentralisation or devolution, language, education, the armed forces and symbolism, and development needs to be shared across regions and sectors and in terms of civic representation and cultural accommodation.

The endgames of ethnicity are not determined by ethnic politics *per se* because there is no ethnic politics *per se*. Ethnic politics does not stand alone but is mixed in with other politics and shaped by political conjunctures. This is the elusiveness of ethnicity as well as a source of hope. I do not share the pessimism of many observers of ethnicity. The key problem is not ethnicity but nationalism; more precisely, the key problem is domination ethnicity. Do those who so readily condemn ethnicity also condemn nationalism? The single factor common to virtually all varieties of ethnicity is that they protest some form of monocultural regime and very often the outcome of protest is to establish monocultural control in as large a domain as they themselves can control.

The emancipatory moment of ethnic mobilisation lies in the fact that ultimately ethnic conflict is an affirmation of difference in the name of sameness – sharing the same aims, claiming the same rights as dominant or rival ethnic groups. The same aims – self-determination, economic prosperity – which now manifest as conflict may, when the balance of interethnic power has crystallised at a point where mutual recognition becomes possible and the benefits of settlement outweigh those of continued conflict, translate into recognition of the same rights and a settlement on that basis. If this affirmation is implicit in enclosure ethnicity discourse it is often explicit in competition ethnicity discourse.

This is not intended as an 'optimistic' assessment or prognosis. It is rather an acknowledgement of struggle as the furnace of history. Neither is it pessimistic. The pessimism which contemporary ethnic politics evokes may be as misguided and stereotypical as the stereotyped representations of ethnicity themselves. If it has been possible to acknowledge the dialectics of conflict in relation to nation and to class, would it not be possible and indeed plausible to extend this to ethnicity?

No single narrative exhausts the variety of ethnicity or defines the course of ethnic politics. The fluidity of cultural identifications is an intrinsic part of our times. Living with shifting boundaries means living with ethnicity. Meanwhile ethnicity itself is a term loaded with past prejudices. It would be analytically more productive to discard the term and replace ethnicity with *cultural difference* and ethnic politics with culturally articulated interest politics. On the other side of ethnicity is hybridity, heterogeneity, difference. But life after ethnicity comes available only by living with ethnicity. For one cannot want the outcome without wanting the process.

Notes

1 This argument concerns relations between recent and earlier arrivals from mainland China and leaves the native Taiwanese out of the picture (see Yen Liang 1989).

2 Brass defines *ethnic category* as 'any group of people dissimilar from other peoples in terms of objective cultural criteria and containing within its membership, either in principle or in practice, the elements for a complete division of labor and for reproduction' (1991: 19). An *ethnic community* is an ethnic category that 'has adopted one or more of its marks of cultural distinctness and used them as symbols both to create internal cohesion and to differentiate itself from other ethnic groups' (1991: 19, 263). In this context a *nation* is a particular type of ethnic community: 'an ethnic community politicized, with recognized group rights within the political system' (1991: 20). 'Insofar as an ethnic group succeeds by its own efforts in achieving and maintaining group rights through political action and mobilisation, it has gone beyond ethnicity to establish itself as a nationality' (1991: 23).

3 A brief inventory would run as follows. *Regional autonomy movements/ethnic conflicts*: Africa: Angola, Chad, Cameroon, Ethiopia (Oromos, Tigray), Nigeria, Rwanda, Burundi, Senegal (Casamance), Zaire (Katanga/Shaba), Kenya, Uganda. Asia: India (Punjab, Assam). Philippines (Moros). Indonesia (Aceh, Moluccas). Europe: UK (Scotland, Wales), Spain (Basques, Catalonia, Andalusia), France (Corsica, Bretagne), Netherlands (Frisians). CIS and regions of the former Soviet Union. Dynamics: monocultural state control, rural/urban disparities and regional uneven development; differential treatment of regions under colonialism; post-cold war realignments; weakened state due to economic crisis and deregulation. Modes: territorial, economic, political, cultural interests. *Ethnonationalism*: Asia: India (Kashmir). Sri Lanka (Tamil Eelam). Indonesia (East Timor, West Irian). China (Tibet). Africa: Sudan (South). Dynamics: monocultural state control, differential treatment under colonialism, support for secession in the regional environment. Modes: regional micronationalism. Territorial, economic, political, cultural interests. *Indigenous peoples' movements*: Asia: India (Adivasi). Sri Lanka (Veddas). Malaysia (Orang Asli in East and West Malaysia). Bangladesh, Burma, Laos, Thailand (hill tribes). Japan (Ainu, Okinawa). Americas: Native Americans, Indios. Africa: South Africa, Botswana (San). Central Africa (Twa). Maghreb (Berbers). Australia (Aborigines). New Zealand (Maoris). Dynamics: penetration by multinational capitalism; ecological concerns over land, water, timber, mining; monocultural state control, exploitation and exclusion. The dynamics of ethnic politics in these clusters are diverse but the modalities are similar in that they are all concerned with territorial, political, economic and cultural interests. *White ethnic identity in the USA*: Dynamics: demographic and cultural change and ongoing immigration of Hispanics, Asians. modes: symbolic ethnicity, cultural interests.

4 Ella Shohat (1991: 215) makes a point in relation to American cinema that is of wider relevance:

The . . . assumption that some films are ethnic whereas others are not is ultimately based on the

view that certain groups are ethnic whereas others are not. The marginalisation of ethnicity reflects the imaginary of the dominant group which envisions itself as the universal or the essential American nation, and thus somehow 'beyond' or 'above' ethnicity. The very word *ethnic*, then, reflects a peripheralizing strategy premised on an implicit contrast between 'norm' and 'other', much as the term *minority* often carries with it an implication of minor, lesser, or subaltern.

5 In the late-nineteenth century Anglo-Saxonism served as one of the ideologies of English hegemony in Britain and on the world stage. As an ideology it served to link the political projects of leading strata in Britain and the United States, and in this context played a strategic part in the process of 'imperial succession' from the British Empire to the United States in the period between the 1890s and the early-twentieth century (Nederveen Pieterse 1990: ch. 12).

6 'Race' is discussed at length in Nederveen Pieterse (1990 ch. 11; 1992).

7 The term *ethnocracy* was first coined by (Veiter 1977), and is quoted in Stavenhagen (1986: 83).

8 A brief, incomplete panorama is as follows. Minority ethnocracies in the Middle East include Syria (Alevites), Jordan (Hashemite monarchy supported by Bedouins) and Bahrain (Sunni rulers, Shiite majority), while Turkey (Summi Muslims over Alevites and Kurds) and Etypt (Muslims over Copts) are stable majority ethnocracies. Iraq (Sunni Arabs over Shiites and Kurds) is an unstable quasi-majority ethnocracy. Stable majority ethnocracies in Asia include Indonesia (Javanese Muslims), Malaysia (Malays), Singapore (Chinese), Bangladesh (Muslims), while unstable majority ethnocracies include Sri Lanka (Sinhalese), the Philippines and Burma. Taiwan is an unstable minority ethnocracy of mainland Chinese and Fiji of Melanesians who are a quasi-majority in Fiji. Unstable ethnocracies in Africa include Burundi (Tutsi domination), Rwanda, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Sudan, Chad, Uganda, Cameroon, Senegal, Mauritania.

9 According to Kothari (1988: 214):

Developmentalism, as culture, creates a universal spread of commercial values and conspicuous consumption based on western life styles and in particular on the hegemony of the 'Market'. . . . unlike other models of universality in past civilizations, this particular model is so arrogant and ethnocentric that it has no in-built mechanism of self-correction in it. Ethnicity and recovery of ethnic spaces become the only correctives.

10 Humphrey (1994) makes an interesting analysis of ethnic conflict as conflict over the control of state power on the model of civil war. Ake (1994) introduces the notion of political ethnicity. As a conceptual point this does not seem to be very persuasive because the point of ethnicity generally is that it is always 'political'.

11 Shaw tends to take an instrumentalist point of view: most of the literature 'on African ethnicity still treats it as an orthodox political concept rather than as a contemporary economic response' (1986: 591).

12 Cf. 'Ethnicity is only characterised as a "problem" by the bougeoisie when it ceases to be functional . . . In short, ethnicity only becomes a problem when (i) ethnic groups turn the tables on each other in terms of access to the state; or (ii) ethnic politics degenerates from a form of political support into a basis for political secession' (Shaw 1986: 597).

13 Dialectics of empire and emancipation are discussed in Nederveen Pieterse (1990, ch. 15).

14 Instead, Ake argues, ethnicity is 'perhaps better conceived as a dialectic between imagination and reality' (1994: 52), but that is just what constructivism is about.

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