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# Ethnicity

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John Hutchinson and Anthony D. Smith have also edited the Oxford Reader on *Nationalism* (1994).

**Advance praise for *Ethnicity*:** 'a most worthy companion to their well-received and broadly adopted reader of nationalism ... no major aspect of the subject has been overlooked.'

Walker Connor, author of *The National Question in Marxist-Leninist Theory and Strategy*.

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to describe phenomena that involve everybody, and that nevertheless has settled in the vocabulary as a marker of strangeness and unfamiliarity. No surprise, then, that the question 'What is ethnicity?' might often be asked, and that the answers should be less than lucid. Given this, it is easy to agree with Just's contention that it is 'a somewhat retrograde step that "ethnicity" should ever have entered into the *analytic* vocabulary of the social sciences'.<sup>14</sup>

Is the term 'identity' any better? It is certainly in common use, in senses that often overlap with those pertaining to ethnicity. It has been argued that difficulties arising from the term 'ethnicity' are not properly specific to the term, or to its etymology, but rather are the result of systematic features of human naming, and of attempts to delineate types of human group. If this is so, then no terminological innovation is going to solve these problems, which we might expect 'identity' to share.

We can, perhaps, contrast two notions of the term 'identity': one more-or-less essentialist notion, with identity as something (an attribute, entity, thing, whatever) which an individual or a group has in and of itself, an 'identity' that is subject to growth and decline, to health and sickness; and another much like that of ethnicity as already discussed—a notion only existing in a context of oppositions and relativities. This latter is no radically novel idea, but it is far from being well understood outside social anthropology, and it coexists uneasily with the discourse of identity as an essential and unitary entity. Social anthropologists have discussed in some detail what we might call, in this context, and in the search of neutral terminology, the 'classification of peoples', and some of this work is now quite old.<sup>15</sup> Within this discussion, a group or an individual has no *one* identity, but a variety (a potentially very large variety) of possibilities, that only incompletely or partially overlap in social time and social space.

[*History and Ethnicity* (London: Routledge, 1989), 11–17.]

MANNING NASH

### 3 The Core Elements of Ethnicity

Cultural categories with social and group referents are the focus of ethnic inquiry. Where there is a group, there is some sort of boundary, and where there are boundaries, there are mechanisms to maintain them. These boundary mechanisms are cultural markers of difference. The differences among groups are index features. The index features must be easily seen, grasped, understood, and reacted to in social situations. The index features implicate or summarize less visible, less socially apparent aspects of the group. These boundary-marking features say who is a member of what group and what

minimal cultural items are involved in membership. Like all things at boundaries, these index features must be visible to members of the group as well as to nonmembers. The meanings associated with the boundary differences among groups need not be, and most frequently are not, isomorphic. Valued insider aspects of culture may be comic or derided by outsiders, and caricature and exaggeration frequently mark outsiders' depiction of boundary mechanisms. Stereotyping is a form of caricature of cultural, index features of group differentiation; an emphasis and ranking of features that in itself helps mark the boundaries among different groups.

The most common ethnic boundary markers, in the ethnographic record, and the most pervasive, in any system of ethnic differentiation, are *kinship*, that is, the presumed biological and descent unity of the group implying a stuff or substance continuity each group member has and outsiders do not; *commensality*, the propriety of eating together indicating a kind of equality, peership, and the promise of further kinship links stemming from the intimate acts of dining together, only one step removed from the intimacy of bedding together; and a *common cult*, implicating a value system beyond time and empirical circumstance, sacred symbols and attachments coming from *illo tempore*.

These cultural markers of kinship, commensuality, and religious cult are, from the point of view of the analyst, a *single recursive metaphor*. This metaphor of blood, substance, and deity symbolize the existence of the group while at the same time they constitute the group. If these boundary mechanisms were breached with regularity, the group as a differentiated entity would also cease to exist. And, indeed, history is littered with group names for which there are no contemporary groups, or even claimants to affiliation to vanished entities. Both the durability and the ephemerality of ethnic groups are cultural and social enigmas of the first magnitude.

This trinity of boundary markers and mechanisms is the deep or basic structure of ethnic group differentiation. It is the presence of cultural markers of blood, substance, and cult that separates ethnic groupings from other kinds of social aggregates, groups, and entities. But sometimes the members' basic symbols of ethnicity are not visible, graspable, or available in social interaction, and hence other surface features stand for the index features. These are, more or less, secondary to the basic recursive metaphor of ethnicity, and hence more mutable over time and less psychologically central to group identity.

These surface pointers make recognition at a distance, or in a fleeting instance, possible, and as such are in themselves often barriers to more intimate contact in much the same way as the core trinity of ethnicity.

The frequent surface pointers include dress, language, and (culturally denoted) physical features. To this secondary trinity a host of subsidiary indices of separateness can be layered on: house architecture and interior

arrangements, ritual calendars, specific taboos in joint social participation, special medical practices, special economic practices, and a host of other secondary and tertiary markers of differentiation. All of them take their force of separating groups and persons only if they are linked to the core features of differences. Differences in dress, from whole costumes to single items of apparel, serve as surface markers of group differences. These items of apparel best serve when visible and public, but items of dress may reinforce group boundaries even if not visible, like the underwear of Sikhs, or the undergarment of pious Jews. The meaning of dress codes in ethnic boundary identification is a branch of semiotics until it is tied to the core elements of social differentiation.

Language is a marker akin to dress. A different language, or a series of public utterances far from the norms of communication, may mark off an ethnic group as does dress. And some language usage is akin to Sikh or Jewish hidden apparel; it serves an internal reminder of difference. Language as group marker has more social and psychological weight than dress does. Successful mastery of language implies learning it from birth, in the context of the kinship or primary group. Learning a language as an adult or as a later-in-life accomplishment is not the same as being a 'native' speaker of the language. I leave the problem of 'true' bilingualism to the linguists and the psychologists, while noting that culturally such a speaker is an ethnic anomaly.

Physical features are also secondary cultural markers, because what is relevant for social differentiation is not given in the body form of persons but in the cultural attention and stipulation of aspects of that body form. Again, body form has the Möbius band dimensions of inside and outside which form a continuous surface. Physical elements may include skin color, hair form, height, density, eye shape, or whatever superficial things the culture stipulates as making for essential difference. But it must also include the less visible physical features, some of which are internal to the group, like body mutilation (circumcision, scarification, or tattooing).

All of the secondary surface and tertiary indices of group differences must be related in determinate ways to the basic or core elements of ethnic group formation. Physical features, language, dress, and the others must stand for and imply differences in blood, substance, and cult and hence to the building blocks of ethnicity. If the social markers do not relate to the structure of the building blocks, they are forms of social differentiation of the sort that mark off lodges like the Elks from Masons, boy scouts from sea scouts, or other superficial and transient social identities. These transient social identities are often voluntary, in that they can be volitionally assumed or cast off. Some aspects of ethnicity are also voluntary in that sense, and the balance between voluntary social groups and involuntary elements in social groups is of foremost interest in the study of ethnic groups in modern societies. The

ideas of assimilation, integration, fusion, and pluralism have in large measure to do with the mix of voluntary-involuntary aspects of ethnicity as that is defined by the social system and internally in the groups constituting that social and cultural system. The choice of 'cauldron' in the title of this work indicates my conviction that assimilation or total erasure of ethnic groups and differences is less likely than a pluralism resembling a sometimes calm, sometimes boiling pot more than it does either a melting pot or a pressure cooker, to borrow common images.

While ethnic differences and group identities have a history and a historical dimension, as noted in restricting the use of ethnicity *sensu stricto* to the historical time of the rise and spread of nation-states and to kinds of social and cultural orders called modern, there is a kind of time, or most exactly temporality, that is a cultural construct rather than a chronological record of time and events as they actually passed—if that sequence could be recovered and its facticity agreed upon. This temporal aspect of culture is grasped in the concept of 'tradition.'

Tradition is the past of a culture, as that past is thought to have continuity, a presence, and a future. These features of tradition bestow upon the past a weight of authority; the very fact of survival, pastness, and continuity give an aura of authority, legitimacy, and rightness to cultural beliefs and practices. The phrases common to most cultures—such as 'time honored,' 'the way of the elders,' 'in the eyes of the ancestors,' 'as our fathers before us,' and 'the way it was always done'—indicate the reverence and authority for the pastness of things. That things and practices have traditional warrant makes for a linkage over generations, thus bestowing upon even the most humble member of the group a pedigree, allowing him to identify with heroic times, great deeds, and a genealogy to the beginning of things human, cultural, and spiritual. Max Weber has written extensively on some of these aspects of tradition as has E. A. Shils, but since they were chiefly concerned with tradition as a form of authority neither did much to tie tradition to the pedigree of the dispossessed, the formerly 'historyless' and the newly arrived on the world scene.

Tradition, while chiefly concerned with the past and hence backward looking, has a forward, future dimension. The preservation and the continuity of tradition is enjoined on its carriers. The social-psychological meaning of this forward orientation binds the individual fate of group members to the fate of the future of the group. This set of attitudes tries to merge the life trajectory of persons with the trajectory of the group, positing the two as indissoluble. The group has strengths from the evident fact of its survival, and that strength is augmented if individual survival is but a link in group survival. In the forward motion of tradition the elements of blood, commensality, and cult are those most emphasized through their symbolic markers. In brief, an identity is fashioned by name and symbol. A recursive metaphor of

social differentiation is constituted, and tradition is enshrined. Group and individual survival meld into a personal identity. These are the basic features when the differences between groups are of the sort called 'ethnic' and when this ethnicity takes place in a system of such differences in the political organization of a nation-state.

[*The Cauldron of Ethnicity in the Modern World* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 10–15.]

THOMAS H. ERIKSEN

#### 4 Ethnicity, Race, Class and Nation

##### *The term itself*

'Ethnicity seems to be a new term', state Nathan Glazer and Daniel Moynihan,<sup>1</sup> who point to the fact that the word's earliest dictionary appearance is in the *Oxford English Dictionary* in 1972. Its first usage is attributed to the American sociologist David Reisman in 1953. The word 'ethnic', however, is much older. It is derived from the Greek *ethnos* (which in turn derived from the word *ethnikos*), which originally meant heathen or pagan.<sup>2</sup> It was used in this sense in English from the mid-fourteenth century until the mid-nineteenth century, when it gradually began to refer to 'racial' characteristics. In the United States, 'ethnics' came to be used around the Second World War as a polite term referring to Jews, Italians, Irish and other people considered inferior to the dominant group of largely British descent. None of the founding fathers of sociology and social anthropology—with the partial exception of Max Weber—granted ethnicity much attention.

Since the 1960s, ethnic groups and ethnicity have become household words in Anglophone social anthropology, although, as Ronald Cohen has remarked,<sup>3</sup> few of those who use the terms bother to define them. In the course of this book, I shall examine a number of approaches to ethnicity. Most of them are closely related, although they may serve different analytical purposes. All of the approaches agree that ethnicity has something to do with the *classification of people and group relationships*.

In everyday language the word ethnicity still has a ring of 'minority issues' and 'race relations', but in social anthropology it refers to aspects of relationships between groups which consider themselves, and are regarded by others, as being culturally distinctive. Although it is true that 'the discourse concerning ethnicity tends to concern itself with subnational units, or minorities of some kind or another,'<sup>4</sup> majorities and dominant peoples are no less 'ethnic' than minorities. This will be particularly evident

in chapters 6 and 7, which discuss nationalism and minority–majority relationships.

##### *Ethnicity, race and nation*

A few words must be said initially about the relationship between ethnicity and 'race'. The term race has deliberately been placed within inverted commas in order to stress that it has dubious descriptive value. Whereas it was for some time common to divide humanity into four main races, modern genetics tends not to speak of races. There are two principal reasons for this. First, there has always been so much interbreeding between human populations that it would be meaningless to talk of fixed boundaries between races. Second, the distribution of hereditary physical traits does not follow clear boundaries. In other words, there is often greater variation within a 'racial' group than there is systematic variation between two groups.

Concepts of race can nevertheless be important to the extent that they inform people's actions; at this level, race exists as a cultural construct, whether it has a 'biological' reality or not. Racism, obviously, builds on the assumption that personality is somehow linked with hereditary characteristics which differ systematically between 'races', and in this way race may assume sociological importance even if it has no 'objective' existence. Social scientists who study race relations in Great Britain and the United States need not themselves believe in the existence of race, since their object of study is the social and cultural relevance of the *notion* that race exists. If influential people in a society had developed a similar theory about the hereditary personality traits of red-haired people, and if that theory gained social and cultural significance, 'redhead studies' would for similar reasons have become a field of academic research, even if the researchers themselves did not agree that redheads were different from others in a relevant way. In societies where ideas of race are important, they may therefore be studied as part of local discourses on ethnicity.

Should the study of race relations, in this meaning of the word, be distinguished from the study of ethnicity or ethnic relations? Pierre van den Berghe does not think so,<sup>5</sup> but would rather regard 'race' relations as a special case of ethnicity. Others, among them Michael Banton,<sup>6</sup> have argued the need to distinguish between race and ethnicity. In Banton's view, race refers to the categorisation of people, while ethnicity has to do with group identification. He argues that ethnicity is generally more concerned with the identification of 'us', while racism is more oriented to the categorisation of 'them'.<sup>7</sup> However, ethnicity can assume many forms, and since ethnic ideologies tend to stress common descent among their members, the distinction between race and ethnicity is a problematic one, even if Banton's distinction between

potentialities inherent in the rather ambiguous notions of tribe and people. Such intermittent political action may easily develop into the moral duty of all members of tribe or people (*Volks*) to support one another in case of a military attack, even if there is no corresponding political association; violators of this solidarity may suffer the fate of the [Germanic, pro-Roman] sibs of Segestes and Inguomer—expulsion from the tribal territory—, even if the tribe has no organized government. If the tribe has reached this stage, it has indeed become a continuous political community, no matter how inactive in peacetime, and hence unstable, it may be. However, even under favorable conditions the transition from the habitual to the customary and therefore obligatory is very fluid. All in all, the notion of 'ethnically' determined social action subsumes phenomena that a rigorous sociological analysis—as we do not attempt it here—would have to distinguish carefully: the actual subjective effect of those customs conditioned by heredity and those determined by tradition; the differential impact of the varying content of custom; the influence of common language, religion and political action, past and present, upon the formation of customs; the extent to which such factors create attraction and repulsion, and especially the belief in affinity or disaffinity of blood; the consequences of this belief for social action in general, and specifically for action on the basis of shared custom or blood relationship, for diverse sexual relations, etc.—all of this would have to be studied in detail. It is certain that in this process the collective term 'ethnic' would be abandoned, for it is unsuitable for a really rigorous analysis. However, we do not pursue sociology for its own sake and therefore limit ourselves to showing briefly the diverse factors that are hidden behind this seemingly uniform phenomenon.

The concept of the 'ethnic' group, which dissolves if we define our terms exactly, corresponds in this regard to one of the most vexing, since emotionally charged concepts: the *nation*, as soon as we attempt a sociological definition.

['Ethnic groups', in G. Roth and C. Wittich (eds.), *Economy and Society*, Vol. 1 (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1978), 389–95.]

CLIFFORD GEERTZ

## 6 Primordial Ties

Some of this conceptual haze is burned away, however, if it is realized that the peoples of the new states are simultaneously animated by two powerful, thoroughly interdependent, yet distinct and often actually opposed motives—the desire to be recognized as responsible agents whose wishes, acts, hopes, and opinions 'matter,' and the desire to build an efficient, dynamic modern

state. The one aim is to be noticed: it is a search for an identity, and a demand that that identity be publicly acknowledged as having import, a social assertion of the self as 'being somebody in the world.'<sup>1</sup> The other aim is practical: it is a demand for progress, for a rising standard of living, more effective political order, greater social justice and beyond that of 'playing a part in the larger arena of world politics,' of 'exercising influence among the nations.'<sup>2</sup> The two motives are, again, most intimately related, because citizenship in a truly modern state has more and more become the most broadly negotiable claim to personal significance, and because what Mazzini called the demand to exist and have a name is to such a great extent fired by a humiliating sense of exclusion from the important centers of power in world society. But they are not the same thing. They stem from different sources and respond to different pressures. It is, in fact, the tension between them that is one of the central driving forces in the national evolution of the new states; as it is, at the same time, one of the greatest obstacles to such evolution.

This tension takes a peculiarly severe and chronic form in the new states, both because of the great extent to which their peoples' sense of self remains bound up in the gross actualities of blood, race, language, locality, religion, or tradition, and because of the steadily accelerating importance in this century of the sovereign state as a positive instrument for the realization of collective aims. Multiethnic, usually multilingual, and sometimes multi-racial, the populations of the new states tend to regard the immediate, concrete, and to them inherently meaningful sorting implicit in such 'natural' diversity as the substantial content of their individuality. To subordinate these specific and familiar identifications in favor of a generalized commitment to an overarching and somewhat alien civil order is to risk a loss of definition as an autonomous person, either through absorption into a culturally undifferentiated mass or, what is even worse, through domination by some other rival ethnic, racial, or linguistic community that is able to imbue that order with the temper of its own personality. But at the same time, all but the most unenlightened members of such societies are at least dimly aware—and their leaders are acutely aware—that the possibilities for social reform and material progress they so intensely desire and are so determined to achieve rest with increasing weight on their being enclosed in a reasonably large, independent, powerful, well-ordered polity. The insistence on recognition as someone who is visible and matters and the will to be modern and dynamic thus tend to diverge, and much of the political process in the new states pivots around an heroic effort to keep them aligned.

A more exact phrasing of the nature of the problem involved here is that, considered as societies, the new states are abnormally susceptible to serious disaffection based on primordial attachments.<sup>3</sup> By a primordial attachment is meant one that stems from the 'givens'—or, more precisely, as culture is inevitably involved in such matters, the assumed 'givens'—of social existence:

immediate contiguity and kin connection mainly, but beyond them the givenness that stems from being born into a particular religious community, speaking a particular language, or even a dialect of a language, and following particular social practices. These congruities of blood, speech, custom, and so on, are seen to have an ineffable, and at times overpowering, coerciveness in and of themselves. One is bound to one's kinsman, one's neighbor, one's fellow believer, *ipso facto*; as the result not merely of personal affection, practical necessity, common interest, or incurred obligation, but at least in great part by virtue of some unaccountable absolute import attributed to the very tie itself. The general strength of such primordial bonds, and the types of them that are important, differ from person to person, from society to society, and from time to time. But for virtually every person, in every society, at almost all times, some attachments seem to flow more from a sense of natural—some would say spiritual—affinity than from social interaction.

In modern societies the lifting of such ties to the level of political supremacy—though it has, of course, occurred and may again occur—has more and more come to be deplored as pathological. To an increasing degree national unity is maintained not by calls to blood and land but by a vague, intermittent, and routine allegiance to a civil state, supplemented to a greater or lesser extent by governmental use of police powers and ideological exhortation. The havoc wreaked, both upon themselves and others, by those modern (or semimodern) states that did passionately seek to become primordial rather than civil political communities, as well as a growing realization of the practical advantages of a wider-ranging pattern of social integration than primordial ties can usually produce or even permit, have only strengthened the reluctance publicly to advance race, language, religion, and the like as bases for the definition of a terminal community. But in modernizing societies, where the tradition of civil politics is weak and where the technical requirements for an effective welfare government are poorly understood, primordial attachments tend, as Nehru discovered, to be repeatedly, in some cases almost continually, proposed and widely acclaimed as preferred bases for the demarcation of autonomous political units. And the thesis that truly legitimate authority flows only from the inherent coerciveness such attachments are conceived somehow to possess is frankly, energetically, and artlessly defended:

The reasons why a unilingual state is stable and a multilingual state unstable are quite obvious. A state is built on fellow feeling. What is this fellow feeling? To state briefly it is a feeling of a corporate sentiment of oneness which makes those who are charged with it feel that they are kith and kin. This feeling is a double-edged feeling. It is at once a feeling of 'consciousness of kind' which, on the one hand, binds together those who have it so strongly that it overrides all differences arising out of economic conflicts or social gradations and, on the other, severs them from those who are not of their kind. It is a longing not to belong to any other group. The existence of this fellow feeling is the foundation of a stable and democratic state.<sup>4</sup>

It is this crystallization of a direct conflict between primordial and civil sentiments—this 'longing not to belong to any other group'—that gives to the problem variously called tribalism, parochialism, communalism, and so on, a more ominous and deeply threatening quality than most of the other, also very serious and intractable problems the new states face. Here we have not just competing loyalties, but competing loyalties of the same general order, on the same level of integration. There are many other competing loyalties in the new states, as in any state—ties to class, party, business, union, profession, or whatever. But groups formed of such ties are virtually never considered as possible self-standing, maximal social units, as candidates for nationhood. Conflicts among them occur only within a more or less fully accepted terminal community whose political integrity they do not, as a rule, put into question. No matter how severe they become they do not threaten, at least not intentionally, its existence as such. They threaten governments, or even forms of government, but they rarely at best—and then usually when they have become infused with primordial sentiments—threaten to undermine the nation itself, because they do not involve alternative definitions of what the nation is, of what its scope of reference is. Economic or class or intellectual disaffection threatens revolution, but disaffection based on race, language, or culture threatens partition, irredentism, or merger, a redrawing of the very limits of the state, a new definition of its domain. Civil discontent finds its natural outlet in the seizing, legally or illegally, of the state apparatus. Primordial discontent strives more deeply and is satisfied less easily. If severe enough, it wants not just Sukarno's or Nehru's or Moulay Hasan's head it wants Indonesia's or India's or Morocco's.

The actual foci around which such discontent tends to crystallize are various, and in any given case several are usually involved concurrently, sometimes at cross-purposes with one another. On a merely descriptive level they are, nevertheless, fairly readily enumerable:

1. *Assumed Blood Ties.* Here the defining element in quasi-kinship. 'Quasi' because kin units formed around known biological relationship (extended families, lineages, and so on) are too small for even the most tradition-bound to regard them as having more than limited significance, and the referent is, consequently, to a notion of untraceable but yet sociologically real kinship, as in a tribe. Nigeria, the Congo, and the greater part of sub-Saharan Africa are characterized by a prominence of this sort of primordialism. But so also are the nomads or seminomads of the Middle East—the Kurds, Baluchis, Pathans, and so on; the Nagas, Mundas, Santals, and so on, of India; and most of the so-called 'hill tribes' of Southeast Asia.

2. *Race.* Clearly, race is similar to assumed kinship, in that it involves an ethnobiological theory. But it is not quite the same thing. Here, the reference is to phenotypical physical features—especially, of course, skin color, but also facial form, stature, hair type, and so on—rather than any very definite sense

of common descent as such. The communal problems of Malaya in large part focus around these sorts of differences, between, in fact, two phenotypically very similar Mongoloid peoples. 'Negritude' clearly draws much, though perhaps not all, of its force from the notion of race as a significant primordial property, and the pariah commercial minorities—like the Chinese in Southeast Asia or the Indians and Lebanese in Africa—are similarly demarcated.

3. *Language.* Linguism—for some yet to be adequately explained reasons—is particularly intense in the Indian subcontinent, has been something of an issue in Malaya, and has appeared sporadically elsewhere. But as language has sometimes been held to be the altogether essential axis of nationality conflicts, it is worth stressing that linguism is not an inevitable outcome of linguistic diversity. As indeed kinship, race, and the other factors to be listed below, language differences need not in themselves be particularly divisive: they have not been so for the most part in Tanganyika, Iran (not a new state in the strict sense, perhaps), the Philippines, or even in Indonesia, where despite a great confusion of tongues linguistic conflict seems to be the one social problem the country has somehow omitted to demonstrate in extreme form. Furthermore, primordial conflicts can occur where no marked linguistic differences are involved as in Lebanon, among the various sorts of Batak-speakers in Indonesia, and to a lesser extent perhaps between the Fulani and Hausa in northern Nigeria.

4. *Region.* Although a factor nearly everywhere, regionalism naturally tends to be especially troublesome in geographically heterogeneous areas. Tonkin, Annam, and Cochin in prepartitioned Vietnam, the two baskets on the long pole, were opposed almost purely in regional terms, sharing language, culture, race, etc. The tension between East and West Pakistan involves differences in language and culture too, but the geographic element is of great prominence owing to the territorial discontinuity of the country. Java versus the Outer Islands in archipelagic Indonesia; the Northeast versus the West Coast in mountain-bisected Malaya, are perhaps other examples in which regionalism has been an important primordial factor in national politics.

5. *Religion.* Indian partition is the outstanding case of the operation of this type of attachment. But Lebanon, the Karens and the Moslem Arakenese in Burma, the Toba Bataks, Ambonese, and Minahassans in Indonesia, the Moros in the Philippines, the Sikhs in Indian Punjab and the Ahmadiyahs in Pakistani, and the Hausa in Nigeria are other well-known examples of its force in undermining or inhibiting a comprehensive civil sense.

6. *Custom.* Again, differences in custom form a basis for a certain amount of national disunity almost everywhere, and are of especial prominence in those cases in which an intellectually and/or artistically rather sophisticated group sees itself as the bearer of a 'civilization' amid a largely barbarian population that would be well advised to model itself upon it: the Bengalis in

India, the Javanese in Indonesia, the Arabs (as against the Berbers) in Morocco, the Amhara in—another 'old' new state—Ethiopia, etc. But it is important also to point out that even vitally opposed groups may differ rather little in their general style of life: Hindu Gujeratis and Maharashtrians in India; Baganda and Bunyoro in Uganda; Javanese and Sundanese in Indonesia. And the reverse holds also: the Balinese have far and away the most divergent pattern of customs in Indonesia, but they have been, so far, notable for the absence of any sense of primordial discontent at all.

[ 'The integrative revolution', in C. Geertz (ed.), *Old Societies and New States* (New York: Free Press, 1963), 108–13.]

JACK ELLER AND REED COUGHLAN

## 7 The Poverty of Primordialism

The concept of primordialism, as used by Geertz and most of those who followed him, thus seems to contain three distinct ideas:

(1) Primordial identities or attachments are 'given', *a priori*, underived, prior to all experience or interaction—in fact, all interaction is carried out *within* the primordial realities. Primordial attachments are 'natural', even 'spiritual', rather than sociological. Primordial attachments are *ab origine* and *causa sui*: they have no social source. Accordingly, those things called primordial presumably have long histories. This is the aspect of primordialism which we call *apriority*.

(2) Primordial sentiments are 'ineffable', overpowering, and coercive. They cannot be analysed in relation to social interaction. If an individual is a member of a group, he or she *necessarily* feels certain attachments to that group and its practices (especially language and culture). The primordial realities are binding 'in and of themselves . . . by virtue of some unaccountable absolute import attributed to the very tie itself'. Geertz allows that the strength and type of bond may vary but offers no notion of how such a natural and underived phenomenon *could* vary nor any language to describe such variation. This aspect of primordialism is its *ineffability*.

(3) Primordialism is essentially a question of emotion or affect. Geertz speaks of primordial 'attachments', 'sentiments', and 'bonds'. Although some expositors of the concept have used it otherwise (say, as primordial identities or groups), the concept has most often to do with feelings. These feelings make primordialism more than a mere interest theory, and primordial identities are qualitatively different from other kinds of identities (e.g., class identities). This third aspect of primordialism we shall call its *affectivity*.

Thus, primordialism presents us with a picture of underived and socially-unconstructed emotions that are unanalysable and overpowering and