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 (*Volk*) 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 Inguiomer—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.'[1] 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.'[2] 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 multilinguistic, and sometimes multiracial, 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.[3] 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.[4]

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 Ahmadiyas 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.]

Notes

Extract 1

RICHARD SCHERMERHORN: *Ethnicity and Minority Groups*

1. Robert Bierstedt, *The Social Order* (McGraw-Hill, 1963).
2. Talcott Parsons, *Societies, Evolutionary and Comparative Perspectives* (Prentice-Hall, 1966).
3. Modified from M. G. Smith, 'Social and cultural pluralism', *Annals of the New York Academy of Science*, 83, art. 5 (20 Jan. 1957) 763–77.

Extract 2

ELISABETH TONKIN, MARYON MCDONALD, and MALCOLM CHAPMAN: *History and Ethnicity*

1. R. Just, 'Some problems for Mediterranean anthropology', *Journal of the Anthropological Society of Oxford*, 6: 3 (1978).
2. Ibid. 73.
3. G. Autenrieth, *A Homeric Dictionary*, trans. R. Keep (rev. edn., University of Oklahoma Press, 1958); H. G. Liddell and R. Scott, *A Greek–English Lexicon* (rev. edn., Clarendon Press, 1958); R. Cunliffe, *A Lexicon of the Homeric Dialect* (Blackie and Sons, 1924); J. P. Balsdon, *Romans and Aliens* (Duckworth, 1979); H. D. Rankin, *Celts and the Classical World* (Croom Helm, 1987).
4. W. D. Elcock, *The Romance Languages* (Faber and Faber, 1960), 37.
5. Just, 'Some problems', 72.
6. Ibid. 83.
7. Ibid. 76.
8. Cf. S. Wallman, 'Ethnicity and the boundary process in context', in J. Rex and D. Mason (eds.), *Theories of Race and Ethnic Relations* (CUP 1986), 228–9.
9. Just, 'Some problems', 77.
10. N. Glazer and D. P. Moynihan, *Ethnicity—Theory and Experience* (Harvard UP, 1975), 1.
11. R. Schermerhorn, 'Ethnicity in the perspective of the sociology of knowledge', *Ethnicity* 1 (1974), 1, citing E. C. and H. M. Hughes, *Where Peoples Meet: Racial and Ethnic Frontiers* (Free Press, 1952).
12. Ibid., citing id, *Comparative Ethnic Relations—A Framework for Theory and Research* (Random House, 1970), 12.
13. Ibid. 2.
14. Just, 'Some problems', 76.
15. See e.g. E. Leach, *Political Systems of Highland Burma* (Athlone Press, 1954); F. Barth (ed.), *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference* (Allen and Unwin, 1969); A Southall, 'The illusion of tribe', in P. Gutkind (ed.), *The Passing of Tribal Man in Africa* (Brill, 1970) (reprint of *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, 5: 1–2, special issue); E. Ardener, 'Language, ethnicity and population', *Journal of the Anthropological Society of Oxford*, 3: 3 (1972), repr. in

Extract 4

THOMAS H. ERIKSEN: *Ethnicity, Race, Class and Nation*

1. N. Glazer and D. A. Moynihan (eds.), *Ethnicity: Theory and Experience* (Harvard UP, 1975), 1.
2. R. Williams, *Keywords* (Flamingo, 1976), 119.
3. R. Cohen, 'Ethnicity: problem and focus in anthropology', *Annual Review of Anthropology* 7 (1978), 379–404.
4. M. Chapman, Maryon McDonald, and Elisabeth Tonkin, 'Introduction—history and social anthropology', in id. (eds.), *History and Ethnicity* (Routledge, 1989), 17.
5. P. van den Berghe, 'Class, race, and ethnicity in Africa', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 6: 2 (1983), 221–36.
6. M. Banton, *Race Relations* (Tavistock, 1967).
7. Id., *Racial and Ethnic Competition* (CUP, 1983), 106; cf. R. Jenkins, 'Social anthropological models of inter-ethnic relations', in J. Rex and D. Mason (eds.), *Theories of Race and Race Relations* (CUP, 1986), 177.
8. T. H. Eriksen, *Us and Them in Modern Societies* (Scandinavian UP, 1992).
9. Williams, *Keywords*, 213–14.

Extract 6

CLIFFORD GEERTZ: *Primordial Ties*

1. I. Berlin, *Two Concepts of Liberty*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1958, p. 42.
2. E. Shils, 'Political Development in the New States,' *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 2: 265–292, 379–411, 1960.
3. E. Shils, 'Primordial, Personal, Sacred and Civil Ties,' *British Journal of Sociology*, June, 1957.
4. B. R. Ambedkar, *Thoughts on Linguistic States* (Delhi, 1955), 11. Noting that the modern bilingual states of Canada, Switzerland, and (white) South Africa might be quoted against him, Ambedkar adds: 'It must not be forgotten that the genius of India is quite different than the genius of Canada, Switzerland, and South Africa. The genius of India is to divide—the genius of Switzerland, South Africa and Canada to unite.'

Extract 7

JACK ELLER and REED COUGHLIN: *The Poverty of Primordialism*

1. A Hoben and R. Hefner, 'The integrative revolution revisited', *World Development*, 19: 1 (1990), 18.
2. M. C. Waters, *Ethnic Options* (University of California Press, 1990).
3. J. Nagel, 'Constructing ethnicity: creating and recreating ethnic identity and culture', in N. Yetman (ed.), *Majority and Minority: The Dynamics of Race and Ethnicity in American Life* (6th edn, Allyn and Bacon, 1993).

R. Moss and R. Rathbone (eds.), *The Population Factor in Tropical Africa* (University of London Press, 1975); id., 'Social anthropology and population', in H. Parry (ed.), *Population and its Problems* (Clarendon Press, 1974); C. Lévi-Strauss et al., *L'Identité* (Presses Universitaires de France, 1977); A. Epstein, *Ethos and Identity: Three Studies in Ethnicity* (Tavistock, 1978).