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”ETHNICITY AND NATIONHOOD”

A hundred years ago many liberals and socialists heard and expected that a liberal or socialist internationalism would put an end to the array of competitive nation-states. Very much contrary to these expectations, nation states have multiplied in the modern world. New nation-states have emerged through the break-up of empires and culture spheres predicated on other principles of organization. Contrary to expectations, too – and contrary especially to the predictions that modernization would put an end to ethnic exclusivity, groups and clusters of groups passionately dedicated to the politics of ethnicity have also proliferated. Everywhere, the expansion of citizenship has seemingly been accompanied by the emergence into the public sphere of social and cultural entities that define themselves through claims to differential ancestry and use these claims to mark out distinctive social trajectories. Since World War II, moreover, many previously quiescent ethnic groupings are waging armed struggle to win political autonomy or to set up sovereign states of their own. Indeed, some people have argued that World War III has already begun – of 120-some wars going on at present, 86 or 72 percent involve conflicts between states and ethnically marked populations within them. Wars between sovereign states account for less than 3 percent of such struggles and insurgencies 15 percent (Nietschmann, 1987).

Not only have both nation-states and ethnic groupings multiplied, but the odd and distinctive phenomenon that marks them both is that claims to autonomy or sovereignty are advanced and fought over in terms of kinship. To be precise, these terms are not based on the actual genealogical reckoning of demonstrated genealogical linkages, but on the basis of imputed, stipulated kinship. Such claims of stipulated kinship, in the service of establishing what Benedict Anderson (1983) called „imagined communities“, are based on an ideology of common substance supposedly connecting all the claimants to ethnic or national identity. That common substance is imagined to pass down the generations partly through biological transfers, „descent“, and partly through the handing down through the generations of a valued, culturally learned „tradition“. As different scholars have pointed out, this kind of ideology tends to fuse biology and socially acquired heritage, to establish each such social entity as a monad, separate and distinctive from all other such monads, each possessing an essence that

marks it off from others possessed of different essences. The ideology „naturalizes“ these distinctions, establishing them in the nature of things; and this common-sensical view of the nature of things is placed in the service of claims to exclusiveness and priority, monopoly and precedence.

These claims, often real enough to the participants, require analysis – and that analysis has been one of the major concerns of the anthropological sciences. We understand, as scientists, that such claims to the possession of eternal essences are based on fictions. We know, for one, that such groups claiming commonality through descent change over time. We also know that they become salient under certain determinate circumstances, or recede into oblivion at other times. We also know that such entities have always existed in the presence of other ethnicons, peoples, nations; that they mix and fuse with others, both biologically and culturally; and that – therefore – social and cultural entities and identities are not given, but constructed in the very maelstrom of change and upheaval. We are thus instructed to be attentive to the precise ways which construct and relinquish claims to identity under the pressure of complex forces, processes, that underwrite, maintain, exacerbate or cool ethnic assertion.

How nations are constructed – socially, economically, politically, and in communicative terms – is now much better understood than before – say – the 1930's and World War II. Social historians, studying history „from below“ as well as „from above“ have shown us how politics, the law, the army, the educational system were re-shaped to shape in turn new systems of hegemonic national cultures – to make Britons of Disraeli's two hostile nations; to turn peasants into frenchmen (Eugene Weber); to make Italians to inhabit a new unified Italy; to turn the 50 odd German principalities into a German Reich. (It should perhaps be remembered in this context that the entire problematic of Ferdinand Tönnies' *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft* which still haunts sociological inquiry is an extrapolation from the unwilling incorporation of Schleswig into the Bismarckian empire). We have also learned a lot from the models of social scientists who have shown how the successive formation of nations into nation-states took place in relation to each other. The advances of some core-states in the developing world system constrained the opportunities for their followers, and dictated the development of new national responses among the second and third cohort of new entrants. Thus the symbolic forms of nation-building have been remarkably similar, even as the various nations were consigned to quite different positions in the distribution of power and control over „the conditions of production“.

The symbolic forms of national-formation have been quite similar (flags, emblems, holidays, monuments, songs, theatre; the construction of a national aesthetics; resurrection and reformulation of literature, oral and written; exaltation of a standard language – see e. g. Mosse, 1975). Yet these forms have been introduced under different conditions, involving – as Antonio Gramsci understood so well – historically strategic alliances of classes and segments of classes that wield hegemony both over internal and external relations of the state.

When we look at ethnic phenomena (in the sense of efforts to underwrite the solidarity of groups through appeals to commonalities of descent and tradition), we are faced with a much wider range of circumstances that generate what seem to be similar effects. Ethnic phenomena arise under the impact widely different promptings.

A first step towards understanding them, therefore, is to look at them in different situations, to portray them in their very different scenarios.

A first scenario is that of groupings ordered by kinship among other groupings ordered by kinship, characterized not only by descent and affinity, but – in the absence of an overarching state – by autonomous processes of fission and fusion. An example of this is furnished by Maurice Godelier (1982) in his study of the Baruva of the Eastern New Guinea Highlands. Forming once part of a cluster called Yoyue, they broke with them in hostile action and fissioned off, invading territory occupied by other people, incorporating some of them while driving out others. The resultant federation of clans, held together by the initiation cult brought by the invading newcomers, constitutes the people now known as the Baruya.

A second scenario for the formation of ethnically defined groupings is furnished by situations along the expanding frontiers of European expansion, under the aegis of mercantile „capitalism“. Thus in North America local clusters of people formed ethnically defined alliances, such as the Iroquois, the Ottawa, the Chippewa, to take advantage of opportunities in the trade for furs and hides. In the ensuing military competition among European powers for control of the new continent, such macrobands were also able for a time to exploit their positions in the local balance of power. Similar situations obtained on the edges of the Dutch, French and Portuguese advance in Brazil; on the ever widening frontier of the slave trade in Africa; and on the Siberian frontiers of the Russian fur trade. Temporarily, but only temporarily, ethnogenesis here took place under conditions of relative autonomy, as yet unhampered by the political, legal, and military constraints of colonialism. It was accompanied, indeed underwritten, by lively exchanges of goods and information among the participants, giving rise to notable examples of cultural creativity as the result of interchange.

This kind of scenario comes to an end with the establishment of state dominance and control over territories, with defined territorial limits. From this perspective, one of the functions of the hegemonic state is to inhibit the processes of fusion and fission, as much as the securing of control over rival internal and external sovereignties. States, of course, stake out claims to a monopoly of power that can be realized only partially, thus causing the effective exercise of sovereignty to be distributed quite unevenly in both space and time. Yet, because one of the important functions of states is to secure „the conditions of production“ (Borochoy, 1937) (to construct the social, economic, political, legal and ideological infrastructure that renders expanding production possible), states also penetrate into localities and regions, curtailing local autonomies and subjugating their upholders, but also offering new opportunities and opening new lines for social mobility. In either case, the formation of ethnic clusters – either constrained in their functioning or privileged under changed circumstances – must now go forward in an active interchange with the state. Thus in Spain political centralization favored Castile and dampened the development of the Basque country and Catalonia. In France, Paris subjugated the many other „Francs“ (Braudel, 1984) and curtailed the autonomy of the maritime towns. But integration can be quite uneven: in Britain, the conquest of Ireland subjugated the Gaelic-speakers to a class of Anglo-Irish landlords, while in Scotland warfare broke the back of the Scottish landed class, but opened up the road to an alliance of Scottish merchants with the City of London.

What spells subjugation for some, opens up opportunities for others. Some opportunities are economic, most notably in trade. A type example is furnished by Abner Cohen's study of the emergence of Hausa cattle traders in Nigeria who secure their control over trade routes and transactions through the development of an especially pious, ethnically-based, Islam (1969). Similar commercial diasporas, giving rise to ethnically defined networks, occur elsewhere (Curtin, 1984). Other opportunities are political/bureaucratic, offering points of entry to ethnic groups that master the appropriate skills of literacy and professionalism, e. g. „Nyasalanders“ (Malawians) in Central Africa (Epstein, 1958), Creols in Sierra Leone (Cohen, 1981), Garifuna in Belize (Wright, 1986). Still other ethnically defined networks may straddle several domains, as did the Scots who moved into Asian commerce, railroad construction, missionary activities and into the cadres of empire in the 19th century. (In that context it is worth remembering that a whole cult of Scottish nostalgia and ethnic identity as noble savages was invented in the late 18th and 19th centuries – see Trevor-Roper, 1983).

A quite different scenario born of constraint and opportunity marks the emergence of ethnic markers in the labor markets of the capitalist world. The advances and retreats of industries with different requirements for the elements of production, including labor, and the segmentation of work processes into distinctive operations create very different circumstances for populations of workers. The type case that would show the rest of the world what to expect in the future was early industrial Britain, where proletarianization of the English working class went hand in hand with the large-scale immigration of Irish workers, much resented and allocated at lower pay to the more menial occupations. The burgeoning demand for labor on plantations around the world led, first, to the wholesale export of African slaves, later to „the second slavery“ of Indian and Chinese contract laborers, and still later to the contracting of multiple „available“ ethnic groups (for a recent Central American example, see Burgois, 1988). Expanding industry in North America was heavily fed by the city-ward movement of Afro-American ex-slaves after the Civil War. Since the end of World War II, Europe-previously a major exporter of people – has become a region of immigration. Göran Therborn summarizes the effects of this as „the Old World turned New“, but „getting the worst of both worlds, the underclass ghettos of the New while keeping the traditional cultural closure of the Old“ (1987, p. 1187). Lest we fall into a misplaced methodological individualism – looking at the migrant as an individual agent, and forgetting the folks he or she left behind, the remittances sent home, the active connections woven across oceans between sending and receiving areas – we must come to see the new ethnic economics and politics as connecting regions of the so-called core with regions of the periphery as quite new, and often emergent, cultural phenomena.

Finally, there is the scenario of ethnic assertion in secessionist rebellions against dominant states. I have already mentioned that two thirds of the wars going on in the world at the present time are between Third World states, most of them created in the 20th century, and so-called minorities, ethnic cluster both new and old fighting to gain autonomy or set up independent states, or to defend their resources against invasion by their putative co-citizens. The Niskito in Nicaragua, the Xawthoolei in Burma, the Tamil in Sri Lanka, the Palestinians in Israel, the Maya in Guatemala are only a few of these. One might hazard the guess that war is one of the most effective ways of

intensifying ethnicity. For obvious reasons this is a process not easily studied, but worth the anthropologist's attention. I will mention here only the outstanding study (1985) by David Lanof how the Shona rebels, during the conflict that created an independent Zimbabwe, constructed for themselves an identity as quasi-reincarnations of royal warriors of the past, by developing links of communication, through the agency of spirit mediums, with the *mhondoro*, the spirits of the dead Shona kings and chiefs. Not every example is as dramatic as this; but the re-formulation and innovation of tradition under the aegis of ethnic ideologies is an on-going process in the modern world.

In conclusion, let me state my conviction that, if we are to understand the range of phenomena just touched on in this presentation, we shall also have to revise our time-honored conceptions of the concept „culture“. Perhaps that concept, too, is a legacy of a time when we thought in essentialist terms, of each Volk, each people, with a distinctive culture, a characteristic mode of integration, its own world view. This manner of apprehending culture very much beget the question of just how unity and integration was achieved, under what circumstances, and with what degree of uniformity or differentiation. We need to substitute for this all too easy view of cultural homogeneity a much more organizational perspective. It will mean looking at culture-making and re-making in terms of particular, specifiable processes of organization and communication, always deployed in contexts „of different interests, oppositions, and contradictions“ (Fox, 1985, p. 197). (Recently Fredrik Barth /1983, 1987/ has taken up Robert Redfield's notion of a „social organization of tradition“ /1956/, while Hobsbawm and Ranger have pointed out how often traditions are invented as „responses to novel situations which take the form of reference to old situations, or which establish their own past by quasi-obligatory repetition“ /1983, p. 2/). We are challenged to comprehend culture always „in the making“ (Fox, 1985), to learn to comprehend just how in the midst of on-going action the protagonists combine old and new practices into ever renewed and ever new figurations.

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