

## Ethnicity and Nation Building in Africa

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### **Abstract**

*In the scramble for Africa the colonial powers carved out areas of land for themselves with an absolute disregard for ethnic loyalties and compatibilities. The effects are being reaped across Africa to this day. This paper looked at the issues of ethnicity in sub-Saharan Africa by considering the interplay of the two nations, ethnicity and nation-states, considering some of the influences of economic situations to the issue of ethnicity, and then concluding with a consideration of the viability of federalism within the context of multi-ethnic societies. The paper posits and recommended Africa need not be synonymous with the import westernization or the attempt to erase ethnic consciousness. This had already been tried and has proved largely unintellectual, and sometimes tragic. The incorporation of ethnicity into political legislation seems to be crucial if the threat of ethnic warfare is going to be removed. The option of federalism seems to have been left relatively untouched, despite the fact that it has the mechanism and potential within it to incorporate ethnic diversities in such a way that does not threaten the nation's profile. With resources becoming scarcer every day and dwindling price of oil, the intensity of ethnic feeling is only going to increase, and ignoring ethnic profiles within African states could become increasingly dangerous.*

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### **INTRODUCTION:**

The body of research on the subject of ethnicity over the past years is relatively thin. There appears to be a prevalent self-consciousness about broaching the issue as nations of ethnicity have come to be more commonly associated with atrocities such as apartheid in South Africa, and ethnic cleansing in Eastern Europe and Rwanda. Ethnicity has been perceived to be a cause rather than a symptom for social disorder. Violent manifestations of ethnicity have defined it in negative terms which have consequently distorted the nature of a possible discourse. It follows on from the racist attitudes of colonial Africa, fed by nations of social Darwinism; which perceived Africa tribal systems to have been exclusively barbaric and savaged, although it is an area that is often avoided in the literature on Africa, the whole issue of ethnicity, however, does need to be considered and not merely dismissed as a form of irrational and false consciousness.

It can further be echoed in the dilemma of semantics when dealing with this subject. The word “tribal” has come to evoke such negative images of Africa’s dark and dangerous past that it has become awkward and emotionally loaded in its usage. We have therefore decided to use the word “ethnic” instead of a word which can cover both ideas of ethnicity as race, and ethnicity in terms of cultural or “primordial” identity, this does not solve the issue, but seeks to prevent offence. Neither be merely explained away or ignored: “It is with us in one form or another and we therefore have to attempt to understand its workings.”

There appears to be two main strands of thought on the issue of ethnicity: one that conceives of ethnicity in a situational, contextual and subjective sense, and the other that is typified by a tendency to conceptualize identity in primordial, static, or essentialist terms. It seems that the most likely solution on this that it is a combination of both: ethnic identity is not static, but it does generally have roots in an historically relevant culture. In connection with this issue, Lonsdale makes the distinction between

“political tribalism ‘and “moral ethnicity” warning that tribalism/ethnicity is not only about power, manipulation and boundary making but that it also has a moral content which guides people’s perceptions of their groups involvement in a wider arena of politics, economics and cultural identity. Thus, “ethnicity deserves to be treated as a phenomenon more complex than either primordial identity or the flamboyant garb of self-interest”.

In addition, ethnicity is something that is fluid rather than static, an issue which is sometimes used as a justification for negating its authenticity. Whether the histories of various ethnic groups are accurate or merely mythical is raise. Bringing into question the background or possible “invention” of ethnic identity is dangerous as it misses the point: ethnic feeling, whether newly created or extending through history, remains a valid means of identification and has to be dealt with in its contemporary sphere of implicit relevance.

### **ETHNICITY AND ITS RELATION TO NATION BUILDING.**

In the British Colonial Africa of 1940’s, tribal unions and tribal associations began to flourish, fitting in well with the colonial policy of “divide and rule”. Thus, strong ethnic identity was maintained at a great change and upheaval. Urban elites for a long time saw this as dangerous, having believed the colonial vocabulary that had reduced pre-colonial Africa to a seething mob of savings without a history. Therefore a rivalry developed between progress and “tradition”. As Africa began to move towards independence, the ability for states to “prove” their standing as nations began to be used as both the means by which anti-colonial struggles gained enough mass support to be effective, and the condition for independence that the retreating coronial powers put upon the state.

Nationalism did exist tended to be fairly artificial, defined along the lines of being a common struggle against colonial rule. It therefore lacked an ideological basis and backing. As Davidson puts it: “As a mobilizing and emotively compelling slogan, nationalism had small meaning in the Africa of the 1950s. Its history was as little known as its credentials... nobody was thinking about the implications of nationhood. Frantz Fanon, writing at the time of the Algerian civil war, put this even more directly:

“National consciousness, instead of the all-embracing crystallization of

The innermost hopes of the whole being, instead of the immediate and

Most obvious result of the mobilization of the people, will be in any

Case only shell, a crude and fragile travest of what might have been”<sup>9</sup>

By contrast, nation-statism in Europe can be traced to the French Revolution and the nineteenth century in general, signified by increasing industrialisation and the rise of a growing middle class. The stated intention was to fit people who shared the same culture and language into a nation-state. By contrast, the fundamental yearning of African nationalism has been to weld peoples speaking different traditional cultures together. Richard Sklar voiced his worries about this in the sixties with pertinent foresight:

“Colonialism in Africa has been the medium for indiscriminate diffusion

of Western ideas and institutions. Dominant among these is the modern

State. Most current efforts to erect modern states in the heterogeneous

Cultural and racial milieu of African territories are producing situations

That either peaceful solution or invite authoritarianism.”

However, in post-colonial Africa ethnicity began to be a threat to nation-building. Modernisation had to mean the wholesale import of non-African scenarios. As Davidson comments, “Africa would prosper on condition of rejecting itself.” Maintaining an ethnic identity was considered antithetical to maintaining national cohesion, and the two forces were consequently set in opposition to each other. The threat of separatist divisions and the hazards to government of tribal preferment and nepotism scared government elites into retreating away from acknowledging the legitimacy of ethnicity. Thus ethnicity was reduced to a violent paradigm to nation-builders. Anya Peterson Royce questions the conflict that has been created between the two: “Political philosophers do not agree on the values to be placed on ethnic group loyalties and national affiliations, but there is at least one question that most would agree is legitimate: what are the qualities of the ties that bind individuals to an ethnic group and to a nation? Further, how are these ties different, and what ties mean in terms of relationship between the two groups?”

The antagonism is seen as conflict between primordial versus civil ties. Styles of government that had been forced on the newly independent status depend on established social classes. Africa did not have easily recognizable and operable social classes, and differing interests tended to operate along regional or territorial lines often under the name of ethnicity. Social scientists who see ethnic ties as non-adaptive in modernizing situations and as incompatible with the nation also feel that with time and industrialization ethnic ties will disappear. The belief is that class interests will take over from ethnic identity. However, it would seem that this is not a complete process, and certainly has not proved to be the case in Africa. Tanzania and Ghana are two examples of African states which tried to eradicate ethnic power at the time of independence.

The Tanzanian government at independence attempted to create a social unity that would overshadow ethnic identity. Tanzania, like most Africa states, has a diversity of ethnic groups within its borders.<sup>14</sup> The government maintained a tight control on civil society, both as part of its socialist ideology, but also in an attempt to create national identity. The grassroots nature of the single party, TANU, along with its widespread participation in the political life of the nation helped to establish Nyerere’s credibility. TANU, right from the beginning, stressed the need for mass political participation, and therefore fostered a fair degree of national integration. For example, all Christian denominations were grouped into two main bodies: the Christian Council of Tanzania (CCT) for all protestant denominations, and the Tanzanian Episcopal Conference (TEC) or Catholics. Any religious congregation claiming to be Christian had to affiliate with one or the other of the two bodies if it wanted both influence and peace with the government. Professional bodies have also sought to organize themselves nationally, and this is thought to be voluntary.

Ojiambo and Schluter highlight the danger of the Tanzanian approach as ‘indoctrination’ is likely to take place “where the state can seek to persuade its citizens of ideas which serve to justify its own authority and actions. However, the multi-party election in 1992 led to a more relaxed attitude to this, and it is hoped that greater freedom of expression will be maintained.

Kwame Nkrumah, the first president of Ghana passed a law that prevented the formation of ethnic, religious and regional political parties. The 1969 and 1979 constitutions contained provisions aimed at curbing ethnic politics and the national Redemption Council (NRC) banned the use of the word ‘tribe’ from all documents “as a step to eliminate divisive and tribal forces which militate against national unity. “ The NRC also advocated the elimination of tribal surnames such as Asante and the discontinuance of the inscription on people of ethnically distinctive facial marks. In addition, the Nkrumah government tried to establish national political linkages between the Ghanaian people and his regime, believing this would foster a degree of national commitment. However, his strategy failed and popular confidence in his government was eroded, partly as a result of the miserable performance of the administrative institution, and partly due to the fact that the perception of the government for the majority of Ghanaians was not of a national stature.

Girdler sites two major reasons for the failure. His mistake was the politicization of local District officers whose professional competence was often questionable. This limited and reduced the opportunity for the local level administrative structure to generate the people's respect and commitment for national institutions and identities, and therefore, national integration. The other mistake was that personnel within the government structures could not override their attachments to ethnic groups. Thus, as she concludes, "...the national bureaucracy became extensions of narrow local interests; civil servants and their officers were viewed as part of local conflicts and parochial obligations. "

Therefore, despite attempts by the government to eradicate ethnic identity and affiliation, the opposite effect tended to occur. Every regime in Ghana has been accused practicing ethnicity of verifying intensities at different times of their tenure of office. It has also created such a high degree of self-consciousness around the issue that Ghanaians have become allusive or evasive when talking about ethnicity and are therefore reluctant to ask crucial questions for fear of being accused of being ethnocentric. The issue has recently been debated in parliament, instigated by Dr. Obed Asamoah, showing that the measures taken to try to eradicate or diffuse ethnicity at independence have been unsuccessful. It is hoped that it will now be dealt with in such a way that does not affect national stability.

Having dealt in some depth with the relationship between ethnicity and nation-building, a closer look will now be taken at the interplay between the economic life of countries and the issues of ethnicity.

### **ECONOMIC INFLUENCES ON ETHNICITY**

Much of the body of literature dealing with the issue of why there is still such a strong sense of ethnic in Africa points to the area of economics. This produces a very straightforward correlation between economic dissatisfaction and the strengthening of the ethnic roots. As Lewis puts it 'as long as the overall security and well-being of the individual are not provided for by the state, independently of his tribal affiliation, he will be encouraged to rely upon traditional tribal principles of co-operation.

This is not a complete explanation, but it projects the phenomenon that the more incompetent the state, the wider has grown the gap between the state and society. This includes a substantial urban and rural divide, and the wider this gap has become, the more frantic and unbridled the subversions of tribalism have become as people look for self-defence in kinship ties or their equivalents.

In the introduction to a series of papers from an international conference, Ethnicity, Identity and Nationalism in Southern Africa at Rhodes University in April 1993, one of the conclusions reached was that "ethnicity appears to come into being most frequently when individuals are persuaded of a need to confirm a collective sense of identity in face of threatening economic, political, or other social forces. This implies that a poor standard of living alongside inadequate political freedom provide an incentive for the rekindling of ethnic identity. Much of Africa fits uncomfortably well into this category as it struggles with lack of land, desertification, poor water resources and despotic governments instead of the economic disparities being merely expressed and articulated in the form of class consciousness, "it is the economic opportunities. This can be illustrated by the example of agriculture, something which came out strongly from another conference which was titled, Indigenous peoples in Africa held in Denmark in 1993.

The favouring of settled agriculture over hunting, gathering and nomadic cattle herding has been instrumental in both marginalizing and stigmatizing some peoples and inspiring them to identify themselves as indigenous groups.

An example can be seen in some of the land-disputes in Kenya. The economist (February 1995) reported that 10,000 kikuyu had been driven off their land near Naivasha by armed Maasai in early 1994. The report goes on to say that promises to resettle them have so far come to nothing, and instead the

policy rounded up many of the people who were then living in makeshift camps and dumped' them in what they termed their ancestral lands. Kenya's Central Province and the area around Nairobi. This is one of many such attempts to sweep the Kikuyu from the Rift valley area.

However, in the conference on Indigenous Peoples in Africa, MK Klinken presented a paper on precisely the people who had removed the Kikuyu from their land. He talked about how the pressured of change on the Massai people brought about by education and integration in the national economy have polarized the pastoral communities. The availability of land is perceived to be perhaps the greatest factor in this, and defence of scarce resources has been manifested in the aggressive behaviour illustrated in the report above. This therefore shows the complexity that is involved in such issues, and illustrates the degree to which ethnicity plays an important role.

From the same conference, there were examples of some steps that are currently being taken to alleviate this problem. Statements by CT Ntwaagae (Ministry of Local Government, Lands and Housing in Botswana) and Mrs. Ulitala Hiveluah (Permanent Secretary, Ministry of lands, Resettlement and Rehabilitation, Namibia) both show the need and desire to protect the Baswara (Bushman) and have set up projects for rehabilitation and gradual integration. This shows an awareness of the existence of ethnicity and a concurrent desire to accommodate ethnic differences in terms of economic equality.

Thus the physical well-being of individuals and communities has a direct effect upon the intensity of ethnic identity. But it is important to hold on to the fact that ethnic processes involve much more than resource competition; they are not merely operating opportunistically. Unfortunately, however, the power that ethnicity has to create violent confrontation has often been heavily fuelled by the competition for scarce resources. Governments, aware of this danger, have often grasped onto despotic power as a precaution against competition from other ethnic groups. This has often manifested itself in the way in which resources are distributed. The interplay of ethnicity and economic growth therefore becomes vital to the growth of a state as the two notions feed off each other. As Schuler and Ashcroft put it.

Ethnicity can be an important factor in undermining the economic growth of countries. Ethnic conflict contributes to the political instability and deterioration in law and order which in turn leads to the destruction of infrastructures, lower levels of investment and loss of skilled people.

Thus it is detrimental to the state to ignore ethnicity and its consequent economic implications.

### **A CASE FOR FEDERALISM**

The main political options operating in Africa during the 70s and 80s seem to have oscillated between the extremes of despotic totalitarianism and a grafted form of Western-style democracy. The former is undesirable for obvious reasons pertaining to the abuse of basic human rights, and the latter, in the form in which it has been implanted, does not have a high rate of success.

One of the main reasons for this is the fact that multi-party politics have almost invariably operated, sooner or later, along ethnic lines. This is something that is hard to avoid because, economic class divisions and ideological or sectional interests have not become entrenched; the chief source of social differentiation remains region or ethnicity. This reveals a fundamental flaw in the exact replication of western Europe's system of democracy which has been attempted (and strongly encouraged by western donors) in Africa. The grafting on to African states of this style of government has largely failed as multi-partism has become multi-tribalism. Central Government are often seen as a threat to those who are unlikely to benefit from a power centre in which they are inadequately represented. This often leads to conflict with devastating results as people who feel that they have been excluded from power-base for themselves. This then leads into a power struggle manifested in the form of a cycle of ethnic violence.

Thus Africa is beginning to be considered other than leadership that would take into account the specific context including, significantly, the issues of ethnicity. In response to this, the paper will consider the possibility of a federal form of government by looking specifically at the countries of Nigeria, Ethiopia and South Africa.

Nigeria, which is a clear example of a plural society being composed of disparate groups located in different areas of the same country, each with its own ethnicity, language, religion and economics, has adopted a federal form of government. There are thought to be about 300 different linguistic and cultural groups living in Nigeria, of which the Hausa/Fulani, Yoruba and Igbo are major ones with a population of over 3 million each.

The main threat to national unit is therefore the fear of domination by one group over the others. Nwabueze sees the possibility for alleviating this situation through both the federal government and through the practice of a tribal leadership. This was the thinking behind the leadership of Chief Obafemi Awolowo, who governed Nigeria after independence. He argued that Nigeria's ultimate goal be an arrangement whereby "each ethnic group, however small, is entitled to the same treatment as any other group, however large. He was unusual in the way in which he acknowledged and attempted to deal with the issue of ethnic identity. Sklar sites him as only one of two first generation leaders to take ethnicity into account in this (the other; leader being Joseph Kasavubu of what was then the Congo). This formed the basis for a federal form of government.

Initial imbalances in the structure of government have since been partially by the creation of additional states within the system in 1967, 1976 and 1987, which increased the number from 4 to 21. Nwabueze sees this as a crucial basis for government as the concept of ethnic identity is such a prevalent force within the borders of a highly pluralistic state. He recognizes the potential that these differences have for causing conflict as feelings of resentment, bitterness and hate can so easily be nurtured into conflict:

"the tragedy of tribal religious difference, unlike ideological ones, is that the feelings which they generate are not amenable to rational argument and persuasion."

However, he maintains that the federal system has not led to equality. He sees Nigeria as a country riddled with injustice, for instance the fact that, at an ethnic level, 60-70% of the country's industries are located in two or three states. There are also significant imbalances in federal government investment. In this, the main problem seems to be an imbalance of ethnic and national levels of consciousness operating, with too strong an emphasis on the former. Successive military regimes have created more and more states culminating in the present day 30-state structure with 580 local governments at the micro level.

But despite these apparent failings, the question has to be asked, what state would Nigeria be in if had not had a federal form of government? The importance of equality for all people is among the fundamental principles of the Nigerian polity. The constitution (1976) states that the senate shall consist of five senators from each state regardless of differences in the population of the states, and that each state shall be divided into five senatorial districts for purposes of election to the senate. Thus, despite many failings Nwabueze still holds great hope for Nigeria's future political stability.

A more recent newcomer to federalism is Ethiopia. Large scale conflict has dominated the whole region of the Horn of Africa and commentators have traced the various struggles to the twin roots of intense and escalating competition for resources, and the control of allocation of these resources by a state apparatus dominated by one ethnic group. The Marxist Mengistu regime was brought down in 1991 and, in response to a previous high degree of centralization and averted Amhara domination of state structures

over the past century, the new constitution ratified in December 1994 divided the country into 9 federated states “delimited on the basis of settlement patterns, identity, language, and consent of the people concerned. “Thus a system of federalism has been created defined specifically and overtly along ethnic lines – what could be called politicized ethnicity. This policy of ethnic federalism has elicited a broad spectrum of suspicion and hostility internationally as the danger of such clearly defined ethnicity is recognized. It is also surprising that Ethiopia, which has a far stronger history of integrated nationalism, has opted for this option, but it does have to be considered within the context of the secession of Eritrea. Vaughn suggests that, despite the apparent fragmentation in the form of ethnic federalism, the Ethiopian state is, if anything, stronger than it was during the mengistu regime.

Thus Ethiopia is attempting to address the issues of democracy and nationalism/ethnicity simultaneously. As Vaughn goes on to say, “now (Ethiopia) is back to a non-Lockean form of democracy, based not on multi-party competition, but on the Rousseauist idea of the general will – the united will of the nation. The key to achieving that unity is the recognition of diverse nationalities, and operation at this highest level where unity is possible. “Whether this will prove to be divisive, as many are predicating, remains to be seen. But if ethnic federalism can provide a framework in which development is seen to be relatively even, it may help to alleviated the stresses mentioned above in terms of resource competition : as Gerard mare put it, “to separate the factors that make a population available for ethnic identity formation from the sparks that politicize and give a conflictual edge to ethnicity.”<sup>46</sup>

In South Africa, ethnicity has been used as a tool of colonization and oppression and, as a result, talk of ethnic factors has only recently become less emotively loaded. Apartheid served reinforces an individual’s ethnic identity far more than their national identity. “In consequence, in south Africa at present, there is a number of distinct groups who would define themselves – and each other – as separate groups or ‘peoples’. Merely sweeping away the apartheid legislation and practices will not automatically change those perceptions.” Groups such as the South African Conservative Party (CP) or the Afrikaner right-wing group AWB under Eugene Terreblanche are extreme examples that illustrate the strength of ethnicity in a powerful blend of politics, ideology, religion and ethnicity, fuelled by economic viability. As Andries Treurnicht, ex leader of the CP was reported to have said: “I am not a racist... There is a difference between racism and sound nationalism. I consider a poor, uneducated white farmer to be one of my own. I prefer him to an educated black man, who isn’t one of mine. I think that’s the most natural thing in the world.”<sup>48</sup> This shows ethnicity at its worst, as a tool for justifiable exploitation.

In contrast to this, anti-apartheid struggles up until the 1990s tended to operate far more along the lines of a tented ‘black’ struggle. It overlooked the differences between ethnic groups to a large extent. However, with the release of political prisoners such as Nelson Mandela along with the unbanning of the ANC and other political organizations, struggles for power began to take on a far more ethnically definable profile. Thus within townships, African National Congress (ANC) and Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) conflicts often turned into Zulu versus Xhosa battles. Although the antagonism was operating along dual lines simultaneously (acting as both a political and ethnic struggle), it shows that ethnicity had not been buried during the apartheid years.

Chief Minister Buthelezi of the IFP mobilized a notion of Zulu identity in order to legitimize a call for the secession of KwaZulu. This issue nearly de-railed the 1994 electors, and is again looking increasingly ominous as the regional elections draw near and the call for autonomy is once more being articulated. This therefore presents the greatest threat to nation-building in South Africa at this time. It mobilize ethnicity on a political terrain and presents it as fixed and unquestioning. This therefore sets into opposition the notions of politicized ethnicity and ethnicity as a social identity and, unless the Government of National Unity is prepared to take this into account, ethnic polarization is likely to occur further. Mare, in connection with this issue of Zulu/IFP identity writes, “the approach to nation-building that stands most chance of success is one that gives coherence to multi-culturalism through democratic

structures. The IFP threatens, as it did in the run-up to the elections, first, the democratic process; second, and notion of common allegiance; and, third, the political territory of the Republic of South Africa. “But the ANC has not had a particularly credible or consistent response to any of the elements in Inkatha’s mobilization or political strategies, whether it be its use of ‘traditional’ authority, of provincial powers, or of ethnic mobilization.

Saul Dubow in his paper, *Ethnic Euphemisms and Racial Echæs*, sees the question of whether or not it is now possible to exercise claims to ethnic identity without tending to chauvinism or exclusivity as still a very open question. It is obviously a sticky issue for the ANC to deal with. But the political recognition of cultural identity and diversity seems to be crucial if South Africa wants to retain a nation on which to build. Pluralism is essential in order to diffuse dangerous opposition. Renata Salecl wrote in connection with the collapse of Yugoslavia that “past ideology had never used the concept of pluralism of opinions, ideas or interests; rather, it had clung to the notion of unity at any price.” This is a clear warning to South Africa of the dangers of highly centralized government and clearly points to the option of federalism.

Thus the examples of Nigeria, Ethiopia and South Africa seem to show an alternative option to either totalitarianism or centralized government. It is too early to judge the success of Ethiopia, and the final constitution for South Africa is going to take a long time to finalize, but they are small indications that suggest recognition of a federal option and call for deeper exploration into the possibilities that would encompass ethnic and national identities simultaneously.

#### **Conclusion:**

Ali Mazrui promotes the view that Africa needs a process of ‘social engineering’ to instigate nation-building, with the four imperatives. “*emphasizing* what is African, *nationalism* what is tribal, *idealizing* what is indigenous, and *indigenizing* what is foreign. “ In other words, he is calling for an approach that allows room for being specifically African and not merely dependent on western models. It illustrates the danger of ideological and political imitation that has no roots in African soil and is therefore too alien to achieve authenticity.

Modernization in Africa need not be synonymous with the import westernization or the attempt to erase ethnic consciousness. This had already been tried and has proved largely intellectual, and sometimes tragic. The incorporation of ethnicity into political legislation seems to be crucial if the threat of ethnic warfare, as has been recently witnessed in Rwanda, is going to be removed. The option of federalism seems to have been left relatively untouched, despite the fact that it has the mechanism and potential within it to incorporate ethnic diversities in such a way that does not threaten the nation profile. With resources becoming scarcer every day, the intensity of ethnic feeling is only going to increase, and ignoring ethnic profiles within African states could become increasingly dangerous.

Robert Kaplan in his article, the Coming Anarchy, sounds a warning about what he perceives to be the immanent disintegration of the nation-state. He writes in connection with the situation of near anarchy that has been developing in Sierra Leone:

“Sierra Leone is a microcosm of what is occurring, albeit in a more tempered and gradual manner, throughout West Africa and much of the underdeveloped world: the rise of tribal and regional domains, the unchecked spread of disease, and the growing pervasiveness of was.”

This is echoed in Samuel P Huntingdons article in the 1993 issue of *Foreign Affairs* in which he published an article entitled, *The Clash of Civilizations?* He argues that the world has been moving during this century from nation-state conflict to ideological conflict to, finally, cultural conflict. Kaplan



adds to this another level of antagonism which is comprised of group who are refugees and migrating populations and comments, “in the eyes of these uneducated but newly empowered millions, the real borders are the most tangible and intractable ones: those of culture and tribal.” He concludes, “...it is apparent how surging populations, environmental degradation, and ethnic conflict are deeply related. “

His apocalyptic article finishes with the assertion that the political and cartographic implications of postmodernism are “an epoch of themselves juxtapositions, in which the classification grid of nation-states is going to be replaced by a jagged-glass pattern of city-states, shanty-states, nebulous and anarchic regionalism. ”Alongside this, war will (and is) no longer large-scale ‘conventional’ war, but has more in common with the struggles of different tribal/ethnic groups. His extreme pessimism may appear to be destructive and distressing, but it is salutary to realize that this article was published two months before the explosion of ethnic genocide in Rwanda.

As globalization increases, so does ethnicity. Just as the IMF and the World Bank undermined the state during the 1980s, the end of the Cold War appears to have had the effect of weakening it further in both its status and ability to mobilize national identity: African states are less capable of preventing ethnicity being mobilized politically and manifesting itself in genocide now that the ‘ideological’ competition over Africa, symptomatic of the Cold War, is over. The state is further undermined by NGOs, (Non-Government Organizations) operating at a local level more than at a state level. Meanwhile, ethnicity and conflict have become synonymous in the media. Ethnic identity may have lost its innocence in the eyes of the world, but to dismiss the notion of ‘difference’ as being intrinsically benevolent is extremely dangerous. It was the mishandling and exploitation of ethnicity which caused the genocide in Rwanda, not ethnicity itself. It has to be seen as a symptom rather than a cause of conflict. Ethnicity is not going to merely disappear by being ignored. In increasing numbers, groups of people are revitalizing their ethnic identity in a bid for the world’s decreasing resources. This is particularly true of Africa. The drive for secession is being accentuated, fuelling a myriad of struggles that need to be addressed at a grass-roots level. Whether authentically cultural or merely politically and economically motivated, a strong sense of ethnic allegiance exists. This has often led to war suggesting that the problem is far from being solved.

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