ETHNICITY & DEMOCRACY IN AFRICA

Edited by Bruce Berman, Dickson Eyoh & Will Kymlicka

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Christina Murray . John Boye Ejobowah

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in Africa

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Preface

This book has grown out of a concern that ethnic politics was a primary factor shaping the success or failure of the renewed efforts at democratic development and political reform that emerged in Africa in the 1980s. The recognition of ethnic differences and the amelioration of ethnic conflicts through both institutional reform and policy initiatives appeared to be crucial to the reconstruction of African states and the establishment of stable and enduring democratic processes. At the same time, it was equally apparent that the ethnic communities of Africa were not atavistic survivals of a pre-modern world, but dynamic social creations of the colonial and post-colonial eras in which the state played an important and often determining role in the definition and development of ethnic communities and identities. The intimate embrace of ethnicity and the state raised a host of both empirical and normative questions regarding the effectiveness and legitimacy of varying institutional means for accommodating or overcoming ethnic diversity; the relationship between nation-building and assimilation or multi-cultural recognition; how to deal with ethno-regional differentiation due to uneven socio-economic development; and the proper relationship between individual and collective rights in liberal democratic theory and practice. There were no obvious answers to either the practical or the normative concerns about what both worked and should work in the diverse socio-cultural and political contexts of African states.

To address these concerns we decided to assemble a group of scholars who approached the issues from a diversity of disciplinary perspectives including history, law, sociology, anthropology and philosophy as well as political science. We were particularly interested in bringing political theorists focused on the normative issues of rights and democratic principles, and political scientists specializing in the comparative analysis of institutional systems like federalism, together with Africanists concerned with the empirical analysis of the African experience of ethnic politics and democratization. The result was three days of fruitful discussion that led, if not to definitive answers, then to new ways of addressing the questions and approaching the formulation of tentative answers in different contexts. One of the editors, Will Kymlicka, was unable to attend the conference due to scheduling conflicts, although his paper was presented at the conference and formed part of the discussions, as was the paper by Githu Muigai, who was prevented at the last minute from attending by the government of Kenya. Bogumil Jewsiewicki and Leonard Buleli, who were also unable to attend the conference, submitted their contribution to the project.

Events since the conference have reinforced our sense of the importance of the issues dealt with in this volume. Ethnic conflict continues to be the major source of violence ripping apart African states, and the peaceful accommodation of ethnic differences remains key to successful democratic development. The following chapters address two major issues. First, that the development of ethnic communities and identities and patterns of ethnic competition and conflict are the result of the contingent and often idiosyncratic interaction of indigenous cultures and institutions with the intrusive external political, economic and cultural forces of Western modernity. Second, that democratic development in multi-ethnic societies in Africa depends upon the contingent interactions and adapta-

tions of both indigenous and exogenous institutions and cultural elements. Successful democracies in Africa will probably neither look like, nor function as facsimiles of, familiar forms of Western liberal democracy, but rather produce distinctive African variants as the fundamental issues are argued out and negotiated in each state. Theory, both normative and empirical, must deal with understanding the bases of such complexity.

Acknowledgements

I

Ethnicity & Democracy in
Historical & Comparative Perspective

1

BRUCE BERMAN, DICKSON EYOH & WILL KYMLICKA
Introduction
Ethnicity & the Politics
of Democratic Nation-Building in Africa

T HE flow of commentary on political responses to the multifac-
eted crisis of development in which African countries have
been enveloped in the past three decades betrays the propen-
sity of Africanist social sciences to alternate, seemingly without much effort,
between moments of exaggerated optimism and despair about Africa's devel-
opment prospects.[1] Competing explanations of the causes of the crisis agreed
that the authoritarian post-colonial state was the primary culprit. The
groundswell of popular opposition to authoritarian rule in the late 1980s and
early 1990s was, for many, a welcome sign of the re-animation of the agency
of Africans to design for themselves more promising futures – futures that
would be based on liberal politics and market economies. This euphoria did
not last long as successive electoral cycles reaffirmed the resilience of clien-
telism and patronage as the dominant practice of African politics.[2] Civil
society, whose supposed resurgence was much vaunted, turned out to be riven
by communal divisions, particularly of ethnicity and religion. Civic associa-
tions reflecting such cleavages have had scant positive effect on party forma-
tion and electoral competition, and often demonstrate little interest in

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[1] Colin Leys, *The Rise and Fall of Development Theory*. Oxford: James Currey; Bloomington, IN:
Indiana University Press, 1996, pp. 107-8.
[2] We have tried to avoid using the term 'neo-patrimonial' in describing contemporary African polit-
ical systems, although it is widely used by political scientists. This seems to us a misuse of the orig-
inal Weberian concept, which referred to an explicit and formal, albeit highly personalized, system
of administration in what Weber classified as traditional 'oriental despotisms' (succinctly summa-
rized by Reinhard Bendix in *Max Weber: an Intellectual Portrait*, New York: Anchor Books, 1962, pp.
334-59). Although the behavior of African office holders is often very similar to that of officials in a
patrimonial system, the difference is that in contemporary Africa the formal institutions of state are
those of the legal-rational authority of the modern national state. A fundamental part of the politi-
cal crisis of Africa is the weakness of such institutions, as they are continually undermined by the
pervasive *informal* practices of clientelism and patronage.

promoting liberal democracy. Everywhere the politics of identity and ethnicity appears resurgent.[3]

Accounts of the travails of current experiments in multiparty politics turn on unavoidably normatively laden definitions of democracy and the criteria used to gauge its progress. To oversimplify, two, but by no means exclusive, perspectives are prevalent in the African literature.[4] There is the mainstream perspective which favors a minimalist (procedural) definition and sees periodic changes in governments through multiparty elections as the hallmark of democracy. For this perspective, unrelieved economic adversity, the paucity of middle and independent capitalist classes, cultural fragmentation, etc. jointly explain the resilience of 'neo-patrimonial' politics. Ranged against it are critics of liberal (minimalist) democracy, many of whom are advocates of 'popular democracy'. For them, the politics of clientelism endures because the main purpose of the elite-driven multiparty politics advocated chiefly by the United States is to widen the circulation and recruitment of elites and legitimate neo-liberal 'reforms', and not the transformation of existing inequalities in the distribution of economic and political power.[5]

We cannot in this context evaluate the important conceptual and normative differences that separate these and other perspectives in the worldwide and Africa-focused debates on current democratic experiments. We can suggest, however, that the two broad perspectives share a view that the social pluralism of African societies (a phenomenon for which ethnicity has come to serve as an all too convenient shorthand) is the taproot of clientelistic and patronage politics, and by extension, a leading, if not the primary, obstacle to democratic nation-building. They also incline toward an elite-centered perspective, based on the presumption that African politics is saturated with a mercenary ethos, that regards ethnic politics as 'the shadow theater of accumulation'.[6] The material preoccupations and personalistic nature of patronage networks that are the conduit of ethnic politics continue to eliminate the relevance of formal institutions, ideology and policy differences in the organization of the wider civic political arena.

The contributors to this collection are preoccupied by obvious questions which this commonsense about multiparty politics and ethnicity in Africa elicits. Why is ethnicity a political problem? How is the problem manifested? And which institutional models offer the best prospect of ameliorating the challenges that ethnicity poses to democratic nation-building? The interdisciplinary perspectives offered in the papers in this collection differ from the dominant perspectives in contemporary African political analysis in a number of key respects. First, they are all attentive to and built upon the growing body of more than two decades of research by historians and anthropologists that has demolished the view of African 'tribes' as atavistic survivals of primordial stages

[3] Patrick Chabal and Jean-Pascal Daloz, *Africa Works: Disorder as Political Instrument*. Oxford: James Currey; Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press for the International African Institute, 1999, pp. 17–30; Richard Sandbrook, *Closing the Circle: Democratization and Development in Africa*. Toronto: Between the Lines; London and New York: Zed Press, 2000, ch. 2; Robert Fatton, 'Africa in the age of democratization: The civic limitations of civil society,' *African Studies Review*, 38, 2, 1995; and Michael Bratton and Nicolas van de Walle, *Democratic Experiments in Africa: Regime Transition in Comparative Perspective*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.
[4] Sandbrook, *Closing the Circle*, pp. 4–6; Dickson Eyoh, 'African Perspectives on Democracy and the Dilemmas of Post-Colonial Intellectuals,' *Africa Today*, 45, 3–4, 1998, pp. 281–306.
[5] William I. Robinson, *Promoting Polyarchy: Globalization, U.S. Intervention and Hegemony*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.
[6] Jean-François Bayart, *The State in Africa: The Politics of the Belly*. London: Longmans, 1993.

of social development and of African ethnic politics as simply a cynical instrument of elite manipulation. Instead, African ethnicities are viewed here as complex and protean expressions of the often distinctive African experiences of modernity, grounded in the changing material realities of state and market, and the confrontations of class, gender and generation. From this perspective, the incorporation and reinterpretation of pre-colonial elements of culture and community and their instrumental invocation and manipulation are contextually located within the internal and external dimensions of communal politics. Thus, the essays which follow, especially those that analyze African country cases, are unambiguous about the key role played by elites in the politicization of ethnicity and the inherently authoritarian and exploitative character of clientelistic politics and patronage networks. However, as a needed corrective to the elite-centered thrust of much contemporary analysis, they suggest that fuller appreciation of the dynamics of ethnic politics and the challenges it poses to democratic nation-building must remain alert to two related pitfalls: (i) the inclination to treat both ethnic communities and elites as homogeneous and static; and (ii) the tendency to view the politicizations of ethnicity as phenomena manufactured by corrupt elites and consumed by more or less gullible masses.[7]

Instead, we attempt to build from the premise that ethnic pluralism is and will remain a fundamental characteristic of African modernity that must be recognized and incorporated within any project of democratic nation-building. For this reason, the historians and anthropologists who contributed to this volume have been joined in a dialogue with political theorists concerned with the development of democracy in multi-cultural societies and the institutional means for its realization. In the following sections of this chapter we shall briefly outline, first, the historical and cultural origins of modern African ethnic communities; second, the patterns of politicized ethnicity in contemporary politics, their relationship to existing states and market economies, and the challenge they pose to democratic development; and, finally, the concepts and institutional options available for creative adaptation in the development of multi-ethnic democratic nation-states in Africa.

The Construction of Ethnic Communities and Identities in Africa

As noted earlier, all of the contributions to this volume are based on the premise that African ethnicities are not atavistic, primordial survivals of archaic primitive cultures, but rather modern products of the African encounter with capitalism and the nation-state in the colonial and post-colonial eras. Contemporary ethnic communities and identities in Africa did not and will not fade away with the inevitable advance of global modernity, but rather represent critical aspects of the particular African experience of modernity itself. They are the outcomes of continuous and continuing processes of social construction emanating from the encounters of indigenous societies with the political economy and culture of the

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[7] Jan Pieterse, 'Varieties of Ethnic Politics and Ethnicity Discourse,' in Edmund Wilmsen and Patrick McAllister, eds, *The Politics of Difference: Ethnic Premises in a World of Power*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996; Dickson Eyoh, 'Conflicting Narratives of Anglophone Protest and the Politics of Identity in Cameroon,' *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, 16, 2, 1998, pp. 250–52.

West, as well as the deliberate manipulations of diverse political actors.[8] These processes are both historically specific and contingent on the outcome of internal and external struggles defining the membership and boundaries of ethnic communities, and their relations with the other communities with whom they share the same state. As several of the later chapters make clear, ethnicities have been constructed from diverse indigenous and foreign cultural materials and continue to be defined and redefined up to the present (see particularly the chapters by Diouf, Eyoh, Hendricks, Solway, and Falola). Any approach to democratic development in Africa that does not recognize the diversity and dynamism of ethnic communities in any foreseeable future cannot succeed.

The development of ethnicity in Africa for more than a century has been marked by a dialectic of expansion and differentiation.[9] Contemporary ethnicities are both much larger in social scale and population, and more sharply demarcated from other such groups, than the smaller and more fluid communities of the pre-colonial past.[10] At the same time, African ethnic groups are not univocal, and the content of culture and custom as well as the boundaries of communities remain matters of frequent conflict and negotiation. As the chapters by Falola and Mustapha illustrate, most large ethnic communities in Africa continue also to contain local sub-groups and identities whose relations are often problematic. The social forces shaping ethnic development and identity have been fundamentally material, and ethnic politics has focused on defining the terms of access both to traditional assets of land and labour and the material resources of modernity in both the state and the market.

It has become customary to distinguish the internal and the external aspects of this process. The internal dimension, concerned with relations inside the group, has been termed 'moral ethnicity', a contested process of defining cultural identity, communal membership and leadership. It is important to emphasize that the attachment many Africans have to their ethnic group and ethnic identity is not simply an atavistic or irrational attachment to kith and kin, or to blood and soil. It is rather tied up with a complex web of social obligations that define people's rights and responsibilities, and that protect people when they are most vulnerable and alone (for example when traveling, ill or dying). This indeed is the point of calling it 'moral ethnicity' – membership in an ethnic group entails subordinating one's behavior to certain moral imperatives when dealing with other group members.

It is equally important, however, not to romanticize moral ethnicity. Relations within the group are not egalitarian or harmonious. Indeed, as Lonsdale notes, moral ethnicity has primarily been a culture of personal accountability, with little concern for the poor and no articulation of a concept of universal, equal citizenship. He and other contributors note the tendency of African ethnic cultures to a conservative authoritarianism (see also the papers by Berman, Marks, and Falola). Competing elites and subgroups are continually contesting the

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[8] J.D.Y. Peel, 'The Cultural Work of Yoruba Ethnogenesis,' in Elizabeth Tonkin et al., eds, *History and Ethnicity*. London: Routledge, 1989; Thomas Hyland Eriksen, *Ethnicity and Nationalism: Anthropological Perspectives*. London: Pluto Press, 1993.

[9] Shaheen Mozaffar, 'The Institutional Logic of Ethnic Politics: a Prolegomenon,' in Harvey Glickman, ed., *Ethnic Conflict and Democratization in Africa*. Atlanta, GA: African Studies Association Press, 1995, pp. 60–61.

[10] The seminal statement is Aidan Southall, 'The Illusion of Tribe,' *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, v, 1, 1970. See also Leroy Vail, ed., *The Creation of Tribalism in Southern Africa*. London: James Currey, 1989; Carola Lenz, 'Tribalism and Ethnicity in Africa: a review of four decades of Anglophone research,' *Cahiers des sciences humaines*, 31, 2, 1995.

meanings of group membership, and seeking to renegotiate their assigned responsibilities. Nonetheless, within this conservative hierarchical system, there are relations of trust and solidarity: people can rely on others in the group to fulfil their responsibilities, minimal and inegalitarian as they often are.

By contrast, the external dimension, concerned with relations between an ethnic group and the state, or between two or more ethnic groups, is essentially amoral. This process, often called 'political tribalism', describes the competitive confrontation of 'ethnic contenders' for the material resources of modernity through control of the state apparatus (see the papers by Lonsdale and Kymlicka). Here success is defined as maximizing the power and resources available to one's own group, whatever the consequences for other groups or for the functioning of the state as a whole.

The interaction of moral ethnicity and political tribalism describes a complex process of ethnic definition and identity, of who belongs to what community and what access to material resources such membership makes possible. At the heart of ethnic politics is the use of historical and cultural resources of past and present in a struggle for control of the future and definition of the terms of social change (see the chapters by Diouf, Solway, Hendricks, Eyoh, and Marks).

Modern African ethnicities were shaped by a particular relationship with the institutions of the colonial state. Colonial bureaucracies played a key role in the construction of 'tribal' identities out of earlier kinship groups and political units, building upon indigenous power relations of clientage between big men and their supporters and dependants to forge terms of collaboration facilitating the typical pattern of indirect rule.[11] A subordinate apparatus of thousands of chiefs and village headmen, whether incorporated indigenous positions of authority or new colonial creations, exercised a 'decentralized despotism' of local control within ethnically defined administrative units.[12] These cadres provided the colonial state with its knowledge of the distinctly patriarchal and authoritarian versions of indigenous culture and custom it sought to sustain as the basis of law and order in the countryside.[13] The linkages of the chiefs and headmen and other local agents to the colonial state provided conduits of patronage resources of modernity as well as authoritative control over local land and labor, and made ethnic membership rather than any broader concept of citizenship the basis for rights and property. As Ekeh discusses in his chapter, for ordinary individuals contact with the colonial state always contained an element of danger and uncertainty, requiring powerful patrons for protection and intermediation, and making ethnicity the essential community of trust and security in opposition to the alien and amoral state and competing ethnic communities.

The cultural content of ethnic construction was powerfully promoted, if largely unintentionally, by Christian missions and mission education that created standardized print versions of 'tribal' languages from related vernacular dialects, created a literate intelligentsia, and, with translations of the bible, provided them with potent literary resources for the imagining of ethnic history and

[11] Bruce Berman, 'Ethnicity, Patronage and the African State: The Politics of Uncivil Nationalism,' *African Affairs*, 97, 388, 1998; Peter Ekeh, 'Social Anthropology and Two Contrasting Uses of Tribalism in Africa,' *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 32, 4, 1990; Catherine Boone, 'States and Ruling Classes in Post-Colonial Africa,' in Joel Migdal et al, eds, *State Power and Social Forces*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994. See also the chapter by Muigai in this volume.
[12] Mahmood Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press; London: James Currey, 1996.
[13] Sally Falk Moore, *Social Facts and Fabrications*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986; Martin Chanock, *Law, Custom and Social Order*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985.

culture. With these tools, ethnic intelligentsias, strikingly similar socially to the petty-bourgeois intelligentsias that created the ethnic nationalisms of Europe,[14] were able to combine and reinterpret indigenous and borrowed cultural elements into 'imagined communities' larger in scale and more culturally coherent than any that had previously existed.[15] On a more limited, but nonetheless politically significant scale, the development of Western anthropology based on first-hand fieldwork in Africa, created integrated, logically coherent and scientifically authoritative versions of the ostensibly homogeneous cultures and institutions of several important ethnic communities. Anthropology, too, provided compelling cultural resources for African intellectuals to create influential accounts of their peoples that were also resources of political mobilization.[16]

Ethnic development in colonial Africa had distinct, although linked, urban and rural contexts. The diverse, polyglot cities built on internal migration from various regions of a colony provided a cockpit for encountering the ethnic 'other' and conceptualizing the ethnic 'self' for both the educated and literate intelligentsia and the illiterate laborer. Through cultural and mutual aid societies and a developing vernacular press, the 'authentic' values, language and communal interests of the rural ethnic 'home' could be articulated and debated. At the same time, the urban encounter with other groups doing exactly the same thing crystallized the competition and confrontation of political tribalism.[17] In the rural homelands, ethnic development involved the collaborating chiefs and headmen, the local intelligentsia and petty bourgeoisie, Christian converts and traditionalists, women and youth in a politics of moral ethnicity focused on contested issues of custom, the moral claims of leadership, and the relations of genders and generations. Urban and rural contexts were linked by numerous personal journeys between them, including the final passage home for burial.[18]

The material substance of ethnic politics derived from the impact of colonial capitalism on indigenous processes of class formation and socio-regional differentiation. Conflicts over class formation were imbricated with ethnicity both within and between communities (see the chapters by Berman and Odhiambo). Changes in the social relations of production mattered, creating new disputes within kin groups and making ethnicity into an arena of conflict over the moral and material alienations of class formation that threatened established relations of indigenous moral economies. The differential access of men and women to the

[14] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*. London: Verso, rev. edn, 1991.
[15] John Lonsdale, 'The Moral Economy of Mau Mau,' in Bruce Berman and John Lonsdale, *Unhappy Valley: Conflict in Kenya and Africa*. London: James Currey, 1992; Terence Ranger, 'The Invention of Tradition in Colonial Africa,' in Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds, *The Invention of Tradition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983; Lenz, 'Tribalism and Ethnicity'; Peel, 'Cultural Work', and Falola's chapter in this volume.
[16] Jomo Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya*. London: Secker and Warburg, 1938; Bruce Berman, 'Ethnography as Politics; Politics as Ethnography: Kenyatta, Malinowski and the Making of *Facing Mount Kenya*,' *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, 30, 3, 1996; Kofi Busia, *The Position of the Chief in the Modern Political System of Ashanti*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1951.
[17] Berman, 'Ehnicity, Patronage and the African State,' pp. 323–9; Lenz, 'Tribalism and Ethnicity,' pp. 308–10; Eriksen, *Ethnicity and Nationalism*, pp. 10–69 *passim*.
[18] Crawford Young, 'Nationalism, Ethnicity and Class in Africa: a retrospective,' *Cahiers d'Etudes africaines*, 103, xxvi-3, 1986, pp. 445–6; Carola Lenz, 'Home, Death and Leadership: Discourses of an educated elite from north-western Ghana,' *Social Anthropology*, 2, 2, 1994; Leroy Vail, 'Ethnicity in Southern African History,' in Vail, ed., *The Creation of Tribalism*, pp. 7–11; Terence Ranger, 'The Invention of Tradition Revisited: the case of Colonial Africa,' in Terence Ranger and O. Vaughan, eds, *The Legitimacy of the State in Twentieth Century Africa*. London: Macmillan, 1993, pp. 20–7, 46–8; Sara Berry, *No Condition is Permanent*. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993, pp. 32–9.

proceeds of cash crop production and trade, and of youth to the wages of labor created, in particular, new axes of confrontation between genders and generations as male elders sought to sustain their power and control over women and young men (see chapters by Marks, Diouf, and Lonsdale). The constant debate over rights and obligations, relations of inequality and reciprocity shaped the character of political leadership and made moral ethnicity into a multi-layered dialogue between leaders and followers (see chapters by Lonsdale and Odhiambo). Within developing ethnic communities class conflict was thus expressed in confrontations over an implicit moral contract of leadership between the wealthy and powerful and their poorer clients and dependants; those who claimed leadership through their wealth and power and those who accepted such claims and expected to be protected and rewarded for doing so were bound in a community of trust and reciprocity. However, whose claims to leadership would be recognized was a matter of conflict between chiefs and headmen, educated teachers and clergymen, small businessmen and traders, and prospering cash-crop farmers. Similarly, whose claims to the patronage and support of leaders would be recognized and rewarded was a matter of conflict among the rest of the community, with contingent and revisable outcomes in particular groups.

The uneven spread of colonial economic and infrastructure development between cash-crop and labor reserve regions, mining zones and centers of urban commerce and industry introduced significant regional differentiation in access to cash-crop production, trade, education, wage labor and state employment amongst different ethnic communities to produce sharper edges in the confrontation and competition of political tribalism. The significant economic growth and rapid amplification of the 'development' programs of the state in the late colonial period after World War Two greatly increased the resources available in both state and market, and the stakes of ethnic competition for them. Sustaining positions of leadership in ethnic communities increasingly rested on effectively claiming a share of the 'national cake' providing resources for both collective projects of 'development' in the community and individual benefits of patronage. At the same time, the growing conflicts of political tribalism allowed leaders to manipulate appeals to ethnic solidarity that could override the internal conflicts of moral ethnicity and obscure the development of class cleavages and confrontations (see chapters by Marks, Lonsdale, and Odhiambo).

Understanding the complex interactions between indigenous societies and the intrusive forces of Western modernity in the colonial state and capitalism that have produced the internal and external contests of ethnic formation in Africa leads to another important point: the plurality of trajectories of change and the varying experiences of modernity that have resulted. Against the pervasive teleological assumptions of Western development theories, whether in modernization theory, neo-Marxism or neo-liberalism, of a unilinear path to a singular modernity, we are called to remember Malinowski's warning in the 1930s that the encounter of European and African cultures would produce something strikingly different from either, rather than a replication of European modernity or a preservation of African 'tradition'.[19] The continued production of ethnic difference suggests the need to explain complexity and singularity in the African experience of change and the plurality of potential outcomes of economic and political development.

The connection of ethnic development with the growth of the institutions of

[19] Bronislaw Malinowski, 'Preface,' in *Methods of Study of Culture Contact in Africa*. London: International African Institute, Memorandum XV, 1938.

the modern state under colonialism, in which individuals were linked to the pre-
dominantly bureaucratic institutions of the state through pervasive patron-client
networks, meant that in Africa people related as subjects and clients, rather than
citizens, to an authoritarian and paternalistic state. It was a state, moreover, that,
as Peter Ekeh notes in his chapter, was typically subject to the pressure of foreign
interests to exploit the indigenous population and provided little in the way of
protection or security. At the same time, throughout the colonial and most of
the post-colonial eras the state also was the greatest source of wealth and power,
and became the central focus of attempts to accumulate both. Ordinary people
sought patrons for access to resources of the state as well as protection from its
abuses; and such patrons were primarily available within ethnic communities in
which they could claim membership. The critical consequence of this pattern of
state-society linkage was the generation of a politics of opportunistic material-
ism, the 'politics of the belly', that made the maintenance of patron-client net-
works and the conditions of successful leadership increasingly dependent on the
distribution of material benefits.[20] Moreover, the growing materialization of
patron-client relations sharpened the internal conflicts of moral ethnicity over
the obligations and reciprocities of leadership, and reduced the external con-
frontations of political tribalism to an amoral free-for-all for control of state
resources.

Finally, the contradictions between the processes of ethnic construction and
patronage politics and the anti-colonial nationalist movements of the late colo-
nial period and post-colonial projects of nation-building are becoming increas-
ingly clear. Nationalist thought, with visions of a united post-colonial nation,
stumbled on the question of ethnic diversity. The most typical position was a
vigorous rejection of a supposedly archaic and atavistic tribalism, as in Samora
Machel's often quoted dictum that 'for the nation to live, the tribe must die.'[21]
At the same time, nationalist movements were frequently identified as under the
domination of particular ethnic communities which sought ascendancy in the
new state (see chapters by Falola, Mustapha, Lonsdale, and Odhiambo), and
this could provoke the competitive political mobilization of other ethnic com-
munities that feared marginalization. Even before independence, nationalist
movements were frequently rent by internal confrontations of political tribalism
and held together by tenuous coalitions of ethnic leaders based on promised
divisions of the resources of the state. Regardless of their visions of the nation,
in the rough-and-tumble competition of political tribalism within nationalist
movements, leaders relied on an ethnic base of support and their links with its
patronage networks. Such contradictions were rarely resolved. As Githu Muigai
notes in his chapter, Jomo Kenyatta remained torn between being the President
of the Republic of Kenya and paramount chief of the Kikuyu. Post-colonial
attempts at nation-building were overlaid on top of ethnically defined patronage
politics, which rapidly reproduced itself within national institutions of states and
parties. Given this capture of national institutions by ethnically defined groups
and parties, it is perhaps surprising that nation-building efforts have had any
success at all. Yet many Africans do have at least an incipient sense of attach-
ment to national institutions, and a desire to see them work for the benefit of all

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[20] Bayart, *The State in Africa;* René Lemarchand, 'The state, the parallel economy, and the chang-
ing structure of patronage systems,' in Donald Rothchild and Naomi Chazan, eds, *The Precarious
Balance: State and Society in Africa.* Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1988.
[21] Samora Machel quoted in Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject,* p. 135.

citizens, so long as this does not threaten the basic survival, cultural identity or economic well-being of their own group. Since the process of ethnic construction continues into the present, the issue of how sub-national ethnic communities and identities can co-exist with the development of universal citizenship, national identity and strong national democratic institutions remains the enduring dilemma of African politics.

'Democratization' and Ethnic Conflict in Contemporary Africa

There is little doubt that the wave of 'democratization' in Africa since the 1990s has seen an increase rather than decrease in the visibility of ethnic politics and conflict. The country case studies presented here concur with the widespread opinion that the return to multiparty electoral competition has led to an intensification of the 'politics of primary patriotism'.[22] Multiparty politics reshapes the contexts of struggle among elites seeking to defend or challenge the distribution of state power and resources. It obligates both incumbent elites, long accustomed to rule without popular mandate, and opposition elites, to compete openly for the support of ordinary citizens. In effect, by prompting rearrangements of power relations at all societal levels, multiparty politics opens spaces for the 'venting' of long-entrenched elite and communal cleavages. The fragmentation of broad, urban-based opposition movements into parties with core ethnic constituencies and the consequent regionalization of political competition are the most obvious expressions of this trend. It is a trend that is strikingly reminiscent of politics at the terminal phase of colonialism when elite attention shifted from the defeat of colonialism to struggle for control of the resources of successor states.

While the form, intensity, and ramifications vary in accordance with the ethno-regional make-up of societies, the fount of ethnic competition remains the weaving of communal cleavages into the fabric of state power and uneven regional processes of economic transformation from which these cleavages derive their material content. The informal clientelistic networks that dominate politics have involved hierarchical patterns of incorporation and exclusion of ethno-regional elites and communities within the state system of power. This has ensured that both *elite* and *popular* evaluations of the relationship between the distribution of state power and material opportunities is framed in terms of class *and* communal advantage or disadvantage.

The military-managed centralization of political and economic power after the civil war (1970) in Nigeria, for example, that was made possible by the emergence of petroleum as the pre-eminent source of public income, resulted in the central (federal) state eclipsing regional governments as the main theater of accumulation and class formation. The continually reconstituted alliances amongst the three dominant ethno-regional elite blocs (North, East and West) and elites of minority communities for control of the central state has been regulated by the determination of the 'northern' elites (civilian and military) not to relinquish control of the central state (see chapters by Mustapha and Falola). The undiminished salience of this fundamental future of Nigerian state organization and politics since independence is evident in the pattern of electoral competition for national office between and within regions in the most recent

democratic experiment. It also incubates the post-electoral sectarian violence especially in the northern states, where elites who have come to view the current regime as inimical to 'northern interests' have been threatening the imposition of *Sharia* as the juridical foundation of public authority (Mustapha).

In Kenya, the consolidation of the Moi regime called for a remake of the Kenyatta regime's multi-ethnic elite alliance in a way that seriously diminished the economic and political power of the Kikuyu faction. The regime has responded to the challenges of multiparty politics by a combination of state-orchestrated violence and an alliance between elites from Luo, Kalenjin and other minority ethnic communities who find common purpose in precluding the political resurgence of the Kikuyu elite (see chapters by Odhiambo and Muigiai). The inner sanctum of Biya's regime in Cameroon has been composed of elites from his Beti and co-ethnic groups. Here, too, the regime has succeeded in deflating mass-based opposition to its incumbency by a mixture of state violence, manipulation of administrative rules and pressures on elites who are wedded to state patronage to become political leaders of their communities (Eyoh).

South Africa is held, with some justification, as an exception in the modern African political trajectory. Its present constitutional arrangements seem designed, and have been lauded, for succeeding in dissuading ethnic political mobilization (Simeon and Marks). Yet the post-apartheid state is not without traces of the above characteristics of African post-colonial states. The apartheid state was built on a tripartite race-based hierarchy of citizenship. Despite its impeccable commitment to an equal and universal citizenship, the ruling African National Congress (ANC) is overwhelmingly supported by the African (black) majority, while the major opposition parties are backed mainly by non-black (White, Indian and Colored) minority ethnicities (Hendricks, Simeon and Murray).

Another powerful propellant of 'politics of primary patriotism' is competition for power between competing elites from the same ethnic communities. This is hardly surprising as elites of ethnic communities are never homogeneous; the symbols, grievances, and expectations that are marshaled by elites to foster ethnic political consciousness are typically contested by other elites from the same community (see chapters by Lonsdale, Mustapha, Falola, Hendricks, Marks, and Odhiambo). Multiparty political competition accentuates the in-group competition for leadership characteristic of the process of moral ethnicity by making control over local and regional populations all the more imperative for political success. Although instigated by urban-based social groups, current processes of political liberalization have lent a new or renewed significance to rural society, which, with the exception of heavily urbanized South Africa amongst the cases, is demographically predominant in African states. Across African societies, then, the vast number of political constituencies outside the 'cosmopolitan' cities and towns continue to be differentiated by markers of cultural difference, ethnic and/or religious. This reality, understandably, encourages and rewards elite manipulation of kinship ideologies and communal identities in the quest for local and regional leadership.

Two recent and increasingly common forms of such manipulation contribute significantly to inter- and intra-communal political competition and conflict. First, there is the invocation of distinctions between the 'natives/indigenous' and 'stranger/migrant' groups to assert the rights of communities to be represented by elite 'sons of the soil'. Second, there is the resort to ever narrower definitions

of kinship boundaries to found claims for leadership within culturally-related groups. The varied uses of autochthony, as opposed to residence, as the core principle for determining local/regional leadership buttress conceptions of politics as primarily a struggle for supremacy between ethnic communities or kinship groups. The political efficacy of the manipulation of localized kinship ideologies rests on the ability of elites to repress internal dissent over their conceptions of ethnic and kinship boundaries. It feeds the increasingly violent politically motivated confrontations in local society that often pit one ethnic minority or segments of the same ethnic group against another (Mustapha, Falola, Marks, and Eyoh).

The internal as well as external dynamics of political ethnicity challenge the often implicit assumption of elite-centered perspectives that ordinary citizens are unwitting victims of a form of political competition organized by and for the benefit of corrupt elites. The prevailing social, cultural, economic and political factors outlined earlier that have led to the historical development of African ethnic communities and their particular relationships to the state continue to predispose ordinary citizens to privilege kinship and communal affinities as a premise for political participation. On the one hand, electoral competition has accentuated conflict within ethnic communities over elite claims to leadership and class-based confrontations over the moral obligations and reciprocities of rich and poor. The example of Kenya stands out strongly (Lonsdale, Muigai, Odhaimbo). On the other, political liberalization also has opened up space for the articulation of inter-ethnic regional grievances that were often repressed by authoritarian regimes. These grievances stem from the hierarchical incorporation of ethno-regional communities within the state system of power and the attendant inter-communal inequalities of access to resources in modernity. The moral validity and proposed redresses of regional grievances are matters for debate. The examples of Nigeria (Mustapha, Falola, Ejobowah,) Cameroon (Eyoh) and Senegal (Diouf) suggest, however, that the 'feelings' of collective disadvantage that impel regionalist movements are shared by cross-sections of elites and commoners of concerned communities. Neo-liberal programs of reform that sanctify free-market principles of efficiency in the allocation of public investments promise to exacerbate regional economic, social and political disparities.

However constructed, transformed and instrumentalized politically, ethnicity is always or nearly always metaphoric kinship[23]. For the vast majority of contemporary Africans, the metaphorical kinship of ethnicity remains crucial to securing basic security, and similar to the 'horizontal kinship' of nationalism of peoples all over the world,[24] to their conceptions of selfhood and social belonging. It is, thus, the durability of kinship as the most fundamental unit of social trust (Ekeh and Berman) that ultimately grounds the vitality of ethnicity as the idiom of political identity and competition in post-colonial Africa. The historical experiences and repertoires of cultural practices that structure and differentiate kin-based ethnic communities embed normative references for judging claims to communal belonging and the exercise of political authority within. To recall Lonsdale's persuasive argument, moral ethnicity gets perverted into political tribalism when ethnic groups collide in competition for resources in state-ordered arenas, and the measure of effectiveness of political representation is the

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[23] Thomas Hyland Eriksen, 'A Non-Ethnic State in Africa? A Live World Approach to the Imaging of Communities,' in Paris Yeros, ed., *Ethnicity and Nationalism in Africa: Constructivist Reflections and Contemporary Politics.* Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999.
[24] Anderson, *Imagined Communities.*

ability of elites to promote the interests of their primary community through state institutions dominated by ethnic patrons and their clienteles[25] (Berman and Ekeh). Subordinate groups, even if they are ultimately the losers in the flow of the resources of modernity through patronage networks, are equally adept at the deployment of kinship and ethnic ties for political purposes for a simple reason: it enables evaluation of the legitimacy of elite political leadership through a shared, if constantly contested, moral vocabulary. And few modern elites can escape without personal conflict the moral obligations of their primary group membership, which is also central to their individual and social identities (Ekeh, Odhiambo, Lonsdale).

The failure of post-colonial states to service competently and without bias the most elementary material and security needs of their citizens has compounded reliance on kinship and ethnic networks by individuals and groups seeking ways to cope with unrelenting economic hardship and for sanctuary from elite-orchestrated political violence (Ekeh, Berman). This has prompted calls not only for decentralization of state administrations, but also for new approaches to nation-making that recognize and allow for the political expression of the social pluralism of African societies. The arguments behind such advocacy are fashioned differently; their common premise is that citizenship in ethno-cultural communities retains its far greater relevance to the political behavior of the majority of Africans than the abstractions of (universal) national citizenship. What are needed to enhance the accountability of political systems are institutions that validate indigenous precepts of political community and authority and permit representation of both individual and communal interests.[26]

Several of the essays in this volume review the normative premises and problems of institutional models of how best to reconcile the competing demands for individual and communal representation in democratic nation-building processes (Berman, Kymlicka, Ejobowah, and Simeon). We discuss these models in the next section. However, it is worth noting that some African countries have already experimented with new approaches to nation-building that give greater space to indigenous identities and greater representation of traditional authorities. Some countries, for example, have attempted to decentralize power to sub-national political units that are defined along ethnic or cultural lines. By itself, however, this has not resolved problems of political ethnicity or political accountability. Reorganization of states in this fashion risks encouraging solidification of ethnic boundaries and cementing competition between ethno-regional oligarchies as the basis of national politics (see Eyoh).

Historical and contemporary migrations have ensured that localities and regions in African nation-states that are ethnically homogenous are increasingly rare. As Mamdani has forcefully argued, colonial use of cultural groups' membership, rather than residence, as the exclusive criterion of citizenship in rural society imposed as one of the most compelling tasks of post-colonial nation-building resolution of the question 'when does the stranger become a citizen?'[27].

[25] John Lonsdale, 'Moral Ethnicity and Political Tribalism,' in Preben Kaarsholm and Jan Hultin, eds, *Inventions and Boundaries: Historical and anthropological approaches to the study of ethnicity and nationalism*. Roskilde, Denmark: Institute for Development Studies, University of Roskilde, 1994.
[26] Patrick Chabal, *Power in Africa*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992.
[27] Mahmood Mamdani, *When does a Settler become a Native?: Reflections on the Colonial Roots of Citizenship in Equatorial Africa and South Africa*. Inaugural Lecture as A. C. Jordan Chair of African Studies, Cape Town: University of Cape Town, 1998.

Unless this question is answered in a fair and democratic way, the use of cultural criteria, in effect the principle of autochthony, to delineate citizenship rights within sub-national units risks further encouragement, if not the formal institutionalization, of differential and unequal local citizenship.

Other countries have experimented with the use of traditional political institutions as the basis of local democracy. Whatever the merits (and they are considerable) of such proposals, it remains the case that these institutions are almost by definition hierarchical and authoritarian. Shaped by and addressed to the needs of primary local groups, they tend to exclude minorities and migrant groups from political participation (Solway on Botswana). They are also inherently patriarchal and deny women the right to equal participation in local politics. Not surprisingly, the interests of so-called traditional African women were least well served by attempts to constitutionalize chiefly authority in post-apartheid South Africa that conflict with the gender equality enshrined in the constitution (Marks).

These examples show that greater formal accommodation of social pluralism (through such things as ethnic federalism or traditional chiefly authority) is not necessarily or inherently beneficial to democracy. If we are to find a way of reconciling ethnicity and democracy, we need to find ways of encouraging pluralism without compromising norms of freedom and equality. That is the challenge we discuss in the next section.

Strategies of Reconciliation and Democratization

Despite the media stereotype that Africa is uniquely afflicted by ethnic and tribal conflicts, the fact is that many other countries around the world have faced comparable problems. Very few countries are united by common descent, language, religion and culture. Perhaps only Iceland, Portugal and the Koreas could plausibly be described in this way. In every other country, the sense that there is one united people inhabiting one connected country has had to be constructed.

Developing a sense of common citizenship, and of loyalty to a common state, amongst people who differ in their identities, cultures and religions is a difficult task, but by no means an impossible one. Many multi-ethnic states have proved to be remarkably successful in it, and there is no basis for the pessimistic assumption that multi-ethnic states are inherently unviable or unstable, or incapable of democratization.

It is often said that states in Africa are 'artificial', and that state borders were drawn without much attention to the historic identities and cultures of the people who live within them. But that was also originally true of many borders in Europe, Asia or the Americas, which were the result of conquest, imperial treaties, or dynastic marriages. Very few arose from the democratic will of the people themselves. If these borders now seem natural or reasonable, it is because states have succeeded in giving citizens a reason to identify with the state, and to see it as 'their own'. Indeed, a survey of the countries of the world should teach us, not that multi-ethnic states are unviable, but that states have many tools for constructing common loyalties amongst a diverse population.

In this section, we discuss five (potentially overlapping) approaches that have been adopted by democratic states to reconcile ethnic diversity and common citizenship, and that have been adopted or recommended in the African context:

- a 'neutral' or 'difference-blind' state
- Jacobin republicanism (nation-building from above)
- civil society (nation-building from below)
- federalism/decentralization
- consociationalism

All of these are intended to create freedom and equality for the members of all ethnic groups within a democratic regime. There are, of course, other alternatives which are premised on ethnic hegemony rather than equality. These typically take the form of what Ian Lustick calls the 'control' model of regulating diversity: one ethnic group not only controls the state and its major institutions (including the bureaucracy, police and army), but also dominates the other groups, containing them within a position of political marginalization and socio-economic disadvantage.[28] This has perhaps been the dominant model in most of the world historically. In most cases, such 'control' regimes are undemocratic. But forms of ethnic hegemony can exist even within nominally democratic regimes: they then take the form of what Sammy Smooha calls 'ethnic democracy'.[29] In such systems, there is universal franchise, but the state is nonetheless defined as the property of the dominant group, and a variety of techniques are used to ensure that all the important decision-making positions in the state are reserved for members of that group. Oft-cited examples include Israel, Latvia and Estonia, Northern Ireland (under Home Rule), and Malaysia.

Regimes of control and ethnic democracy can be quite stable, and vary in their level of oppression. A stable and minimally oppressive ethnic democracy may be the best that can reasonably be expected in some circumstances. But these regimes are obviously flawed from the point of view of justice and democracy. So our focus in this section is on proposals – such as the five listed earlier – which at least aspire to a more inclusive democratic regime, in which the state would be seen as equally belonging to, and serving the needs of, all its citizens.

In thinking about the relevance of these five models in Africa, we must not lose sight of the distinctive conditions and challenges facing African countries today. While ethnic diversity and 'artificial' borders are not, by themselves, unique to Africa, there are other ways in which the African context is distinctive. To oversimplify, we can say that, in the West, the process of accommodating ethnic diversity has taken place within states that have reasonably well-functioning market economies and democratic political systems. The challenge, in short, was to pluralize already existing and functioning liberal-democratic economic and political systems. Elsewhere in the world, however, the challenge of ethnic conflict is magnified by the fact that it is occurring simultaneously with other radical transformations of the state and the economy.

Latin American states, for example, are undergoing a double transformation: they have to deal with problems of ethnic conflict (particularly relating to indigenous peoples) at the same time as they are moving away from systems of military dictatorship. Eastern European states are also facing a triple transformation: they are having to deal with ethnic conflict (particularly from linguistic and national minorities) at the same time as they are both moving away from a system of one-party Communist dictatorships, and shifting from a centrally

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[28] Ian Lustick, 'Stability in Deeply Divided Societies: Consociationalism versus Control', *World Politics*, 31, 1979.
[29] Sammy Smooha and Theodore Hanf, 'The Diverse Modes of Conflict-Regulation in Deeply Divided Societies', *International Journal of Comparative Sociology*, 33, 1, 1992, pp. 26–47.

planned economy to a market economy. It is not surprising, therefore, that issues of ethnic conflict have proved more dangerous and destabilizing in Eastern Europe than in either Western Europe or Latin America. Fears about ethnic conflict are exacerbated when people are already suffering from broader forms of economic, political and social insecurity. But even in Latin America and Eastern Europe, functioning states and national economies existed to be democratized and liberalized. In many African countries, by contrast, state construction is still incipient and incomplete. There is an urgent need to build state capacity, so that states can effectively secure public order, uphold the rule of law, and meet the basic needs of citizens.[30] We could say, then, that African states face a quadruple transformation: they must negotiate ethnic diversity at the same time as they are building state capacity, democratizing political systems and liberalizing economic institutions.

Given these factors, Western models of democratic pluralism cannot simply be exported into the very different circumstances of Africa today. Some pessimists argue that these difficult circumstances make the very idea of liberal-democratic pluralism impossible in Africa. The best we can expect, they argue, is a less oppressive form of authoritarian control. And indeed, as we shall see, the track record when these proposals have been implemented in Africa is not good. Yet this sort of pessimism is premature, and potentially misdirected. After all, the track record for regimes of authoritarian control in Africa is also not good. If some of these proposals seem idealistic, one could respond that it is even more naive to suppose that current systems of hegemonic control will work in the long term. All around the world today people demand a voice in the way their lives are governed, and demand a level of security and respect from the state. Older models of authoritarian control can sometimes gain the passive acquiescence of their subjects, but successful states today require the active allegiance and participation of citizens.

Moreover, it is important not to hold African states to standards that Western countries themselves do not meet. It may be difficult to imagine eliminating ethnic bloc-voting, or ethnic favoritism in patronage, in many parts of Africa. But these phenomena exist in the West as well. Political life in many Western democracies remains divided along ethnic or linguistic lines. The goal should not be to somehow purify politics of all forms of partiality or favoritism, which is impossible, but rather to establish political institutions and conventions which make all citizens feel secure and respected by the state, whatever their ethnicity, language or religion. The goal, in short, is not utopian harmony or altruism amongst all ethno-cultural groups, but simply learning to manage ethno-cultural diversity and ethno-cultural conflict in a constructive rather than destructive way.

Given the quadruple challenge facing many African countries, there can be no magic formulas or simple solutions. No matter what approach African countries adopt, they will face difficulties not faced in other parts of the world, and will have to come up with their own variations, adapted to local conditions and customs. With these provisos in mind, let us now turn to the five models:

(i) *The Difference-Blind State*: When asked how states should respond to ethno-cultural diversity, many people, particularly those trained in the liberal tradition, will want to say that the state should simply ignore these differences. The state

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[30] On the inability (and/or unwillingness) of African states to meet the basic security needs of their citizens, see the provocative chapter by Peter Ekeh in this volume.

should allow people to develop and express their cultural practices and identities in private – in the home, church or private associations – so long as they respect the rights of others to do the same. But the state should neither promote nor discourage cultural affiliations and practices. Ethno-cultural diversity should simply be privatized, and the state should be blind to the private cultural choices of individuals.

This is a popular model amongst many liberals because it extends to the case of ethno-cultural differences a model which has proved very successful in the case of religious differences. During the Wars of Religion in Western Europe, Catholics and Protestants fought over a century of civil wars to decide which religion should be the official state-sponsored religion. Both sides agreed that there must be an official religion, and that believers in any other religion should be subject to discrimination and persecution. They simply disagreed about which religion it should be. However, when it became clear that neither side had the military capacity to defeat the other, a compromise slowly emerged, which involved the separation of church and state. People would be free to attend whatever church they wanted in private, but the state itself would have no official religion, and would be indifferent to the religious beliefs of its citizens. This model of a separation of church and state has proved to be surprisingly successful in the West. The division between Catholics and Protestants, which produced untold and seemingly unending violence, has now become almost entirely pacified and depoliticized in most Western countries. The state has become more stable by privatizing religion, and the religious groups themselves have thrived and prospered without state support or sanction.

Given this apparent historic success with religion, many people naturally want to apply the same model to ethno-cultural differences. However, there are two obvious limitations to this model. The first is that it requires considerable self-restraint on the part of dominant groups who control the state, and hence who have the power to adopt state policies supporting their culture. This self-restraint was only acquired by Catholics and Protestants in the West after over a century of bloodshed. It would be naive to suppose that dominant groups will not always be tempted to use their control over state resources to promote their identities and practices.

More importantly, this difference-blind strategy is in fact impossible. The fact is that the state cannot avoid implicitly or explicitly supporting some cultures over others. Most obviously, the state must make decisions about the language of public administration, public health care, schools, public media, road signs and so on. Any group which manages to get its language adopted as a state language in this way can gain enormous benefits, while other groups will face pressure to assimilate to this state-sponsored language group.

Many African countries have tried to avoid the danger of linguistic favoritism by simply adopting the colonial language as the state language. But this does not solve the problem of language policy at the more local level. As most of their populations are illiterate in official languages, public institutions at more local levels tend to operate in the local vernacular(s). Moreover, there are many other areas where states cannot avoid giving public recognition and support to some ethno-cultural groups. For example, the state makes decisions about which holidays to recognize, which authors to teach in schools, and which heroes or events to celebrate when naming streets, towns and topographic features. These decisions almost invariably involve giving public recognition and support to certain ethno-cultural groups over others (usually the majority or dominant group, of

course). For these reasons, talk about 'difference-blindness' often simply obscures the fact that states are inevitably involved in making decisions which recognize and benefit some ethno-cultural groups while ignoring or disadvantaging others.

(ii) *Jacobin republicanism*: A second strategy accepts the premise that the state is unavoidably involved in promoting a particular language, culture and identity, but tries to turn this into a virtue rather than a vice. The goal, on this view, is for the state to deliberately support and diffuse a common language and culture which will be defined as the 'national' language and culture, to which all citizens should assimilate. While this language and culture may historically have originated in a particular ethnic group, the state should redefine it as a 'universal' language and culture, belonging equally to all citizens. The goal, in other words, is not to privatize culture, but rather to de-ethnicize it, so that a particular language and culture becomes the official and public language and culture, and is redefined as the joint possession of all citizens, not of any particular ethnic group.

This is, of course, the French model of citizenship, in which all citizens are expected to assimilate to a particular national language, republican political heritage, and secular culture. It has had considerable success in producing a unified and cohesive political community within France, into which many groups have assimilated. The sharing of a common language and national culture has helped strengthen democratic trust and solidarity across ethnic, religious and regional lines within France. And yet this strategy also has serious limitations. In fact, it probably only succeeded in France because massive coercion (for example, forbidding people to speak or publish in a minority language) was used in the nineteenth century to assimilate groups like the Basques and the Bretons. The same was true about the coercion needed to suppress minority groups in other Western states that now take for granted a common national language and culture.

It is not clear that this strategy can work today, or that the international community would tolerate the level of coercion needed to make it work. David Laitin provides a nice example of how our views regarding state coercion have changed over the centuries:

> It is said that in Spain during the Inquisition gypsies who were found guilty of speaking their own language had their tongues cut out. With policies of this sort, it is not difficult to understand why it was possible, a few centuries later, to legislate Castilian as the sole official language. But when Emperor Haile Selassie of Ethiopia pressed for policies promoting Amharic, infinitely more benign than those of the Inquisition, speakers of Tigray, Oromo, and Somali claimed that their groups were being oppressed, and the international community was outraged. Nation-building policies available to monarchs in the early modern period are not available to leaders of new states today.[31]

To be sure, many African countries have tried to pursue this sort of top-down Jacobin nation-building strategy, particularly in Francophone Africa. But as the papers by Diouf (on Senegal) and Eyoh (on Cameroon) show, this model is bitterly resisted by some minority groups.[32] What is presented by the state as an

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[31] David Laitin, *Language Repertoires and State Construction in Africa*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992, p. xi.

[32] See also the chapters by Falola (on Nigeria), Hendricks (on South Africa), Muigai (on Kenya) and Solway (on Botswana) for other examples of how minorities have felt excluded from the 'unified national culture' promoted by their respective states.

effort to promote a 'national' or 'universal' language and culture is perceived by minorities as an effort by the dominant group to privilege its particular language and culture. Where minorities cannot see themselves properly represented and respected in this 'national' culture, or have not played an active role in defining it, they typically respond by challenging these nation-building strategies, and in the extreme case may even challenge the very legitimacy of the state's authority over them. Moreover, African nations are composed for the most part of collections of ethnic minorities. Most lack ethnic majorities who may be tempted by their numerical preponderance to try to impose their language and culture as the 'national' language and culture.

The limitations of this centralized, top-down nation-building strategy are a common theme in virtually every academic analysis of the post-colonial African experience.[33] As Jibrin Ibrahim notes, 'For a very long period, African institutions – the schools, the media, state organs and sometimes even religious institutions – have been propagating the virtues of national unity and the necessity of developing the national state.'[34] Yet the level of identification with the state remains very low, the strategy has simply not worked, and in many cases has backfired, by fuelling fear and resentment amongst groups who feel excluded. Indeed, most analysts would agree with John Markakis that this approach has been a 'disastrous failure'.[35]

(iii) *Civil society*: A third strategy seeks to avoid the flaws of 'top-down nation-building' by arguing instead for 'nation-building from below'. The idea here is that a common national language, culture and identity will emerge, not as a result of imposition from a centralized and authoritarian state, but rather as a result of the mixing of peoples in the institutions of civil society, such as churches, trade unions, newspapers, environmental groups, women's groups, and so on. Out of these everyday and non-threatening interactions in civil society, inter-ethnic trust will develop, as will a new pan-ethnic vernacular and identity. In this way, nation-building will occur as a result of gradual evolution and consensus-building in civil society, not state imposition.

This is obviously an attractive model, and Thomas Eriksen argues that it is in fact occurring in some African countries. He claims that Mauritius, for example, is in the process of developing a common set of supra-ethnic national myths and symbols which is invested with meaning and relevance by the bulk of the population, and has a 'high level of cultural integration, which makes a national public sphere possible', based on a Creole version of the colonial French language.[36] This, he argues, is the result of compromise and consensus from below, rather than (or in addition to) nation-building from above.[37] But, as Eriksen notes, Mauritius is unique in its island isolation, high education levels, and comparative lack of a gap between elites and masses. In most countries, the reality is that the associations of civil society are themselves already

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[33] 'At the core of the problem is the nation-building strategy adopted in post-colonial Africa. So far, most African countries have pursued the strategy of imposing the nation and the polity rather than trying to generate a democratic consensus' (Lidija Basta and Jibrin Ibrahim, *Federalism and Decentralisation in Africa: The Multicultural Challenge*. Fribourg, Switzerland: Institute of Federalism, 1999, p. 4.

[34] *Ibid*, p. 25.

[35] John Markakis, 'Nationalism and Ethnicity in the Horn of Africa' in Yeros, *Ethnicity and Nationalism in Africa*, p. 70.

[36] Thomas Hylland Eriksen, 'A Non-ethnic State for Africa?', in *ibid.*, pp. 52–3.

[37] The model of inclusive nation-building adopted by the ANC in South Africa, discussed in the chapter by Hendricks, has some affinities with this approach.

defined and divided on ethnic lines. Proponents of this civil society strategy tend to describe the state as the home of vice and civil society as the home of virtue. But as Berman notes in his chapter, 'hopes that the development of civil society would be a force for democratization are particularly unrealistic, since with distressing frequency, the rhizomes of ethnic factionalism and patron-client politics reproduce themselves within these parties and associations, rendering them, like so much of the apparatus of state, into ideological and institutional facades covering the reality of business as usual'. Insofar as this is true, focusing on civil society simply relocates the problem, rather than providing a means of resolving it.

(iv) *Multination federalism*: Given the limitations of both top-down and bottom-up nation-building in deeply divided societies, one obvious response is to give up the goal of forming a unified nation-state. If there is no feasible route to developing a cohesive sense of national identity, or a common sense of loyalty to the nation-state, why not abandon the very idea of a nation-state, and accept that the state is 'multinational'? Such a multination state can be seen as a federation or partnership of various groups, each of which will retain its distinctiveness and its right to autonomy or self-government.

This multination state can take two forms. Where groups are more or less territorially concentrated, it is likely to take the form of federalism. In a multination federal system, the country is divided into several sub-units whose borders are drawn in such a way that each of the various groups will form a local majority in one or more of the sub-units. By *de facto* controlling a sub-unit, even if they are a minority in the country as a whole, each group is able to feel a sense of security, and can use the levers of sub-state power to protect and promote its identity and culture. Such a model of multination federalism has been successfully adopted in several Western democracies, including Canada, Switzerland, Belgium and Spain. Quasi-federal regimes have also been adopted in the United Kingdom, Italy and Finland to create autonomous sub-units in which national minorities form a local majority. And we see similar developments in India, Russia and Malaysia. There is a long history of promoting similar forms of federalism in Africa. To date, however, it has been relatively unsuccessful. Many African federations have failed (the Mali Federation); others exist primarily on paper (Ethiopia). Some critics have concluded that federalism is an 'abject failure' in Africa. But as Ladipo Adamolekun notes, unitary states in Africa do not have a superior record in terms of democracy, human rights, peace or economic development, and so 'the failures of federalism in Africa are not peculiar to federalism; they are part of the general failure of democratic governance on the continent'.[38]

The merits of federalism are discussed in several of our chapters, and elicited a great variety of views. Some authors were sceptical. Berman, for example, says that federalism often simply devolves power to levels where problems of patronage and political tribalism are even greater. Eyoh notes that federalism might exacerbate the problem of the exclusion of internal migrants. If a sub-unit is seen as 'belonging' to a particular group, then 'sons of the soil' preference will be given or will agitate for preference over mere 'citizens' from elsewhere in the state. In effect, the problem of ethnic hegemony is solved at the central level by creating a series of ethnic hegemonies at the sub-state level. Mustapha goes so

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[38] Ladipo Adamolekun and John Kincaid, 'The Federal Solution: Assessment and Prognosis for Nigeria and Africa', *Publius: The Journal of Federalism*, 21, 1991, p. 174.