Ethnic Groups in Conflict

Donald L. Horowitz
trine with nature worship, religion and ethnicity are coterminous.154 The same is true in neighboring Lebanon, where "sectarian affiliations are communal and sect affiliation has a corporate aspect."155

Alternatively, the sense of belonging to an ethnic group may transcend religious differences within it. In Africa, ethnic groups are frequently divided between adherents of Christianity and Islam, Protestantism and Catholicism, or one of these and an indigenous religion. The Muslim-Christian cleavage runs right through the Yoruba, as it does through the Melanau in Sarawak and the Batak in Sumatra. The Karens in Burma include both Christians and Buddhists. In such cases, the overarching identification is usually more closely linked with the presumed origins of the group and hence is felt to be more fundamental to group identity. Further, where competing confessions threaten to divide a group, there are frequently important reasons to define the group to encompass members of more than one religion, thereby avoiding schisms and a loss of group members that might weaken the group in a multiethnic setting. The response to religious change depends in part on what other groups are in the environment. Especially where religious differentiation is relatively recent, the common but not invariable pattern is for religion to form the basis for subgroups rather than for wholly separate groups.156

THE CONCEPT OF AN ETHNIC GROUP

In attempting to come to grips with the attributes that differentiate ethnic groups, I used some phrases that begin to define the concept of an ethnic group. I spoke of "genealogical doubts" when group members try to pass, of groups that see each other as "permanently distinctive," of a "sense of peoplehood," and of the "corporate aspect" of sectarian affiliations. I also noted that when a change of identity occurs, it is often because a person's origins have been conveniently forgotten.

If this usage makes any sense at all, it is because ethnicity is connected

to birth and blood, but not absolutely so. Individual origins count, but exceptions are made. Ethnic identity is relatively difficult for an individual to change, but change sometimes occurs. Group origins also are important, for the corporate aspect means that the group is intergenerational, ongoing, and independent of its present members. Hence, ethnic identity is established at birth for most group members, though the extent to which this is so varies. Ethnicity is based on a myth of collective ancestry, which usually carries with it traits believed to be innate. Some notion of ascription, however diluted, and affinity deriving from it are inseparable from the concept of ethnicity.157

Many of the innumerable definitions of ethnicity that have been proposed embody these same elements.158 The terms the groups themselves employ stress theascriptive element. Physical anthropologists can show that ethnic groups that are regarded as fundamentally different from or opposed to each other have, over time, drawn on the same gene pool, as inferred from cranial dimensions, nasal profiles, and stature measurements.159 In part, the disparity between this physical evidence and group conceptions reflects different time frames. Groups that were once may have split centuries before, with each of the resulting groups remaining largely endogamous, thus producing opposed but physically similar populations.160 In part, the disparity reflects recognition of individual group membership by other than birth criteria—conversion, internar-

157. Compare Abner Cohen, Custom and Politics in Urban Africa: A Study of Hausa Migrants in Yoruba Towns (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969), 4: "... an ethnic group is an informal interest group whose members are distinct from the members of other groups within the same society in that they share a measure of... 'compulsory institutions' like kinship and religion, and can communicate among themselves relatively easily." Note that this leaves out ascription, emphasizes cultural differences, and puts the basis of group cohesion on political interest.


160. This would certainly be consistent with early findings that the Javanese, the Minangkabau, the Perak Malay, several Filipino groups, and even the Southern Chinese show strong physical similarities. Cole, The Peoples of Malaysia, 329.
riage, passing, “forgetting” origins, and the like—as well as the merger of subgroups. In this way, genetically different but proximately located populations become physically less different over time. Taking account of the disparity between physical evidence and group conceptions requires a concept of ethnicity that is somewhat elastic. On this score, Enid Schildkrout’s does as well as any: “The minimal definition of an ethnic unit . . . is the idea of common provenance, recruitment primarily through kinship, and a notion of distinctiveness whether or not this consists of a unique inventory of cultural traits.” This is close to Max Weber’s conception of “a subjective belief” in “common descent . . . whether or not an objective blood relationship exists.” To this I would add a minimal scale requirement, so that ethnic membership transcends the range of face-to-face interactions, as recognized kinship need not. So conceived, ethnicity easily embraces groups differentiated by color, language, and religion; it covers “tribes,” “races,” “nationalities,” and castes.

This concept of ethnicity means that ethnic conflict is one phenomenon and not several. To be sure, that conflict takes different courses, depending on whether relationships between groups are ranked or unranked and on how groups are distributed in relation to territory and state institutions. But, as I shall explain in the next chapter, the putatively ascriptive character of ethnic identifications imparts to ethnic con-

161. Evidence of past intermixture of groups now deemed wholly separate is abundant. On Cyprus, there was much intermarriage and conversion between Greeks and Turks, and there are Turkish names among the Greeks. Pollis, “Intergroup Conflict and British Colonial Policy,” 583. In Sri Lanka, Sinhalese-Tamil contacts were many, as evidenced by Tamil loan-words in Sinhala, intermarriages at the Sinhalese royal court, and the incorporation of Tamil-speaking subgroups as new Sinhalese castes. S. Arasaratnam, Ceylon (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1964), 97, 103; Ryan, Caste in Modern Ceylon, 104.


164. Caste, however, will rarely figure in the analysis of this book. This is not because it fails to conform to a proper conception of ethnicity or because it fails to “pose the same kind of potential threat to the nation-state that tribes, religious communities, and linguistic groups do.” Rudolph and Rudolph, The Modernity of Tradition, 67. Rather, it is because castes are so commonly involved in ranked systems, which are beyond the scope of this work. As noted earlier, however, some castes have become essentially unranked groups, and some comprise subgroups of unranked groups. Where castes are not ranked, I shall refer to caste interaction.
flict its intense and pervasive qualities. It also accounts for some special difficulties ethnic conflict poses for democratic politics. And ascription is what makes interethnic compromise so difficult in divided societies, for those who practice compromise may be treated "with the bitter contempt reserved for brothers who betray a cause." 165

CHAPTER TWO

A Family Resemblance

Many of the puzzles presented by ethnicity become much less confusing once we abandon the attempt to discover the vital essence of ethnicity and instead regard ethnic affiliations as being located along a continuum of ways in which people organize and categorize themselves. At one end, there is voluntary membership; at the other, membership given at birth. We like to think of birth and choice as mutually exclusive principles of membership, but all institutions are infused with components of both. There are birth elements in associations purporting to be founded on choice. These emerge, for example, when a person's origins govern whether he will be accepted into a social club. There are also choice elements in birth associations. The family, the very fount of blood relationships, is perpetuated by the contract of marriage. Virtually everywhere provision is made for giving a person the status of child of another by adoption, and in many societies it is common for non-kin to become members of a kinship group through longstanding joint residence or close association.1 Both principles of membership—birth and choice—are capable of accommodating fictive elements. Language reflects the interweaving of the two principles in practice. The term affiliation, now widely used for membership by choice, originally signified acknowledgment of paternity.

Ethnic groups can be placed at various points along the birth-choice continuum. But there is always a significant element of descent. Most people are born into the ethnic group in which they will die, and ethnic groups consist mostly of those who have been born into them. We have

already established, of course, that individuals may alter their ethnic identity, and we shall soon see that groups sometimes do the same. Ethnic groups differ in the fluidity they are prepared to tolerate at the margin and in the alacrity with which they adapt their identity to changing conditions. The Karen along the Thai-Burmese frontier, for example, are willing to recognize as Karen men from outside the group who marry Karen women and conform to a few key Karen behavioral rules. Nevertheless, most Karen become group members by being born to Karen parents. In other cases, however, the choice element in membership looms so large as to make claims to ethnicity seem spurious. But this can change as a group closes its boundaries. Sikhism, as an offshoot of Hinduism, has traditionally relied on accessions from the Hindu community to augment its ranks, but the Sikhs in the Punjab have increasingly acted as if they were a separate descent group. Some decades ago, Sikh leaders attempted, with some success, to sever the traditional ties of Sikhs to Hindus. They apparently believed that by ending the long history of religious interchange, conversion, and intermarriage, they would put the Sikhs on a more solid—because more ascriptive—political foundation. Other groups that at first cohered on a wholly nonascriptive religious or linguistic basis, such as Ahmadis in Pakistan or Waswahili in Tanzania, have evolved into at least somewhat endogamous and self-conscious entities. These are borderline cases, no doubt, but it is a useful borderline that reminds us we are dealing with a continuum and not a dichotomy.

It is nonetheless true that ethnic membership is typically not chosen but given. The meaningfulness of ethnic identity derives from its birth


connection—it came first—or from acceptance by an ethnic group as if born into it. In this key respect (the primacy of birth), ethnicity and kinship are alike.6

THE KINSHIP WITH KINSHIP

To view ethnicity as a form of greatly extended kinship is to recognize, as ethnic groups do, the role of putative descent. There are fictive elements here, but the idea, if not always the fact, of common ancestry makes it possible for ethnic groups to think in terms of family resemblances—traits held in common, on a supposedly genetic basis, or cultural features acquired in early childhood—and to bring into play for a much wider circle those concepts of mutual obligation and antipathy to outsiders that are applicable to family relations.

The language of ethnicity is the language of kinship. Group members often call each other brothers and call distantly related groups cousins. Harmonious relations among groups are referred to as brotherhood, a term with a figurative meaning: the word connotes the condition of being like brothers but not actually brothers. The behavior of ethnic groups is often justified on the basis of a family idiom. When the Fang of Gabon and Cameroon embarked on a movement to reunite their diverse clan and dialect clusters, they explained their former disunity in terms of family quarrels.7 The Nigerian Yoruba, searching for commonality against a background of intragroup strife, turned to the myth of a common ancestor for all the subgroups.8 One of the key indications of the conceptual underpinnings of a behavioral phenomenon is the language of justification, which, in the case of ethnicity, is heavily familistic.

The connections between ethnic relations and family relations are well illustrated by the importance placed on indigenousness or prior occupation of territory, wherever large-scale immigration of ethnic strangers occurs. Confronted with immigrants, a good many ethnic


groups have taken to referring to themselves as "sons of the soil," or some equivalent; they base claims to priority on that status. Prior occupation is also important in relations between families. Among certain fishing groups in the Southern Philippines, for example, some families are "recognized as the first, or leading, kin group. In most cases, this first group is the one that originally began mooring at the place. Others who began to moor there later recognized the priority of the first group. . . . Certain rights and prestige are enjoyed by these 'first families.' In the event of quarrels, others are often chastized as being outsiders, even though they may have moored there for many years."10 A comparable phenomenon is observable within families. The right of ownership based on having been there first, on being indigenous, is said to be derived from rivalry between older and younger siblings.11 Here, then, is an example of clearly parallel behavior at the intrafamily, interfamily, and interethnic levels. And, as Erik H. Erikson has pointed out, when prior ownership is contested by a claim to equality, the contradiction is "not easily reconciled either in systems of child training or in political systems."12

The mechanism by which connections are made among these various levels of relations probably entails the transference of conceptions and behavior developed at one level onto another. A category of person or a situation seems to resemble another, typically one in which some pattern of appropriate behavior has already been well learned. Something like this is implied by the admittedly too-simple statement that ethnic strangers can be perceived as "symbols of one's baby brother."13 The transference of habits of behavior is partly due to the difficulty of learning, compartmentalizing, and invoking at appropriate moments altogether different patterns for different relationships. Harry Eckstein has posited a tendency to reduce incongruity between the family and political spheres. Such incongruities, he argues, might produce strain by requiring that similar roles be performed in different ways at different levels.14

12. Ibid.
If transference does occur from one level to another, then it is reasonable to surmise that many of the conflictual and cooperative aspects of intrafamily and interfamily life will be reflected in ethnic relations. Freud's view of the family as the unconscious prototype of all human groups is especially appropriate for ethnic groups, with their birth element. Cultural variations in family patterns may be felt in the arena of ethnic conflict. Norms of equality in family life might, for instance, have a bearing on the emergence of a liberal pattern of ethnic relations. Cultural variables of this sort will not receive much attention here, for in a wide-ranging, cross-regional study of this kind, culture has to be held more or less constant. Nonetheless, there are interesting hints in the country-focused literature of the relevance of particular patterns of relations between parents and children and among siblings to relations between in-group members and members of other groups. The apparent spillover of one sphere into another is what Erikson refers to when he speaks of "those configurational analogies between family life and national mores which are hard to fit into a theoretical pattern but seem of utmost relevance."\(^{16}\)

The connections of kinship to ethnicity are not exhausted by the common ascriptive character of the two affiliations or by the merely analogical influence of family on ethnicity. There are more direct connections between the two. As an ascriptive affiliation, ethnicity is defined by congeries of family relationships, and ethnic ties are therefore pyramided on family ties, often with little consciousness of any distinction between the two. Some small ethnic groups are nothing more than agglomerations of kinship clusters, and many larger groups are aptly described as composites of subgroups—based on caste, region, or dialect, for example—which consist in turn of networks of extended families.\(^{17}\)

The whole matter has been put nicely by Joshua A. Fishman. Kinship, he says, "is the basis of one's felt bond to one's own kind. It is the basis of one's solidarity with them in times of stress. It is the basis of one's right to presume upon them in times of need. It is the basis of one's

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16. Childhood and Society, 316.

dependency, sociability and intimacy with them as a matter of course." And, concludes Fishman, "ethnicity may be the maximal case of societally organized intimacy and kinship experience." The ethnic tie is simultaneously suffused with overtones of familial duty and laden with depths of familial emotion.

There are no bright lines to be drawn between kinship and ethnicity, especially in societies where the range of recognized family relationships is wide and the importance of kinship ties is great. The wider the family network extends, the more likely does it seem that what appears to insiders as the fulfillment of a specific family obligation, say to a distant cousin, will appear to outsiders as a form of diffuse, ethnically based preference or discrimination. The common use of kinship networks to find jobs, for example, is sometimes interpreted by observers in ethnic terms instead. Which interpretation is put on the transaction matters, for the one is morally compelled as help to a kinsman in need, whereas the other is seen as an invidious instance of favoritism and even injury to those who lack recourse to such help. In the modern world, nepotism is generally regarded as more understandable and less reprehensible than ethnic discrimination is. The two shade into each other repeatedly. As David Parkin has noted, "one of the problems confronting many ethnic groups is how to promote or defend its interests in a manner which is discreet and hidden, so to speak, from wider disapproving authorities. A people's interests can be advanced through seemingly 'harmless' kinship relations."

Blurring the line further is the reported tendency for kinship obligations in urban areas to be "broadened to include fellow village dwellers and even persons from other villages and districts; and the language of relationships, such as the use of putative kin terms, is broadened to suggest this expansion," so that "a mythology of consanguinity" emerges. Such a conceptual extension is no sharp deviation. The range

of recognized kinship is variable over time to begin with, and, as already noted, in many parts of Asia and Africa it is customary to extend kinship terms and treatment to selected nonkinsmen. This extension of kinship is merely a wholesaling of what was previously done retail.

To put the point succinctly, in a society where fictive kinship is accepted and aid to extended kinsmen is commonplace, the supplicant who runs out of cousins to help him would seem likely to turn, as a matter of course, to persons of the same ethnic background. Ethnicity and kinship thus overlap in a quite direct, operational way: the former builds on the latter, the one is often confused with the other, and behavior in one sphere is extended into the other.

In politics, the line between ethnicity and kinship is repeatedly blurred, just as it is in other sectors. Time and again, regimes that are ethnically limited exhibit a reliance for their most crucial functions on family ties, as we shall see when we deal with narrowly based military regimes. Perhaps the apogee of this reliance was achieved in Kenya at the death of Jomo Kenyatta in 1978. Two factions vied for the succession. Both were dominated by Kikuyu, although other ethnic groups tended to cluster around one or the other faction. Beyond this, the factions were divided by Kikuyu subgroup, based on region of origin. One of the factions, in addition, was composed largely of close relatives of Kenyatta, including his son, nephew, brother-in-law, and son-in-law. This faction was popularly called "The Family." Here was a straight line from ethnic group to subethnic group to kinship group.

To emphasize the overlap with kinship is to make aspects of ethnicity clear that are not clear without the kinship connection. Three stand out: (1) the dependence of ethnicity on strong family ties; (2) because of this, the generally greater power and permeativeness of ethnic affiliations in Asia and Africa than in the West; and (3) the intensity of ethnic conflict when it occurs.

The ethnic group is dependent on the family. A strong sense of ethnic identity is difficult to maintain without strong family ties. These include, most prominently, marriage within the group, for completely free choice of marriage partners would undermine the birth basis of the ethnic group. It is not uncommon, as ethnic conflict accelerates, to observe a sharp decline in exogamy. As Kikuyu-Luo political relations grew more

22. For a clear statement of this connection, see Bryce Ryan, Caste in Modern Ceylon (New Brunswick: Rutgers Univ. Press, 1953), 25–32.
tense in Kenya, there was a virtual end to Kikuyu-Luo cohabitation and intermarriage. In all of Sri Lanka in 1949, there were only 167 marriages between Sinhalese and Ceylon Tamils. Rates of exogamy for severely divided societies typically run below 10 percent of all marriages, and probably lower if only unions between the most-conflicted groups are counted. In a Kampala, Uganda, survey, the rate of exogamy was 8.2 percent, and no marriage crossed the major fault lines of the society. In Singapore, the rate in the 1960s was 5.1 percent, but Malay-Chinese unions were much rarer. Exact figures are not available for Lebanon before the civil war of the mid-1970s, but there is enough evidence to show that exogamy ran much below 10 percent. Where ethnic loyalties are strong, marriage is even more urgently than usual a family matter.

Societies with more moderate levels of ethnic conflict generally have somewhat higher rates of exogamy. Ghana has overall exogamy rates in the 8 to 18 percent range, depending on how groups are counted. In Philippine cities, exogamy runs as high as 15 or 20 percent. Yet, in Morocco, with its mythology of relatively tolerant ethnic relations, by one count only 11.3 percent of all marriages crossed Arab-Berber lines. Virtually everywhere in Asia and Africa, endogamy is the norm.

As ethnicity is an extension of family, however imperfect, some of the hostility manifested in interethnic relations can be an extension of hostility expressed in interfamilial relations. Ali A. Mazrui has contended that, in traditional African societies, one was either a kinsman or a potential

24. Ryan, Caste in Modern Ceylon, 139.
28. Where the level of conflict is much more moderate, intermarriage may be far more common. For European immigrant groups in the United States, exogamy rates ranged between 30 and 60 percent by the 1960s. Leonard Dinnerstein and David Reimers, Ethnic Americans: A History of Immigration and Assimilation (New York: Harper & Row, 1975), 147.
30. Rodolfo Bulatao, Ethnic Attitudes in Five Philippine Cities (Quezon City: Univ. of the Philippines Social Research Laboratory, 1973), 34.
enemy; there was no intermediate category, such as fellow citizen.\textsuperscript{32} From this Mazrui deduces that there are formidable barriers to building tolerant, multiethnic societies on such traditional foundations. One needs to be skeptical of such continent-wide cultural generalizations, but such sharp discontinuities between kin and non-kin are not uncommon.\textsuperscript{33} In the Philippines, where ethnic endogamy is strongly favored,\textsuperscript{34} the same term that is used for outsiders to the village is used for ethnic strangers, and “antipathy to the Chinese (or any other ethnic group) embodies elements of antipathy to the non-kin.”\textsuperscript{35}

The power and permeativeness of ethnicity in the developing world owe much to the considerable strength of kinship ties in Asia and Africa. In the West, most tasks outside the home are performed by organizations not based on kinship.\textsuperscript{36} The same is simply not true in Asia and Africa or is only accurate with a great deal of qualification, recognizing that formally impersonal institutions are actually infused with personal considerations of several kinds; and this is particularly the case with kinship. One reason for the difference is capacity: extended families are able to help their members in more transactions than nuclear families are. Reciprocally, the need and expectation of help strengthen the bonds of the extended family. They are ties it pays to keep in good repair. In the West, on the other hand, the expectation that impersonal criteria will generally (though not always) be applied to formally impersonal transactions weakens the ties of extended kinship. Conversely, the predominance of the nuclear family strengthens the role of impersonal criteria.

Where extended kinship is well established as an affiliation invoked across an array of social, political, and economic transactions, it is a small matter to take the next step and call upon ethnicity—kinship greatly extended—in those transactions. The use of ramified kin networks as underpinnings of ethnic group affiliation makes it easy to communicate “information about matters of common ethnic interest, thus


\textsuperscript{33} See, e.g., M. M. Green, Ibo Village Affairs (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1947), on the dangers of stepping outside one’s home village in Eastern Nigeria in the early part of the twentieth century.

\textsuperscript{34} Bulatao, Ethnic Attitudes in Five Philippine Cities, 39.


keeping people alert to the possibility of more mobilized, collective action." Kinship ties, in short, facilitate ethnic political organization. Where, on the other hand, extended kinship is not well established, the invocation of ethnicity is less in conformity with expectations and more apt to be viewed as a breach of the impersonal rules.

Because ethnic affiliations are putatively birth affiliations, their compelling power in conflict is also understandable. If group members are potential kinsmen, a threat to any member of the group may be seen in somewhat the same light as a threat to the family. To call ethnicity a kinlike affiliation is thus to call into play the panoply of rights and obligations, the unspoken understandings, and the mutual aspiration for well-being that are so characteristic of family life in most of Asia and Africa. And to take seriously the myth of ancestry and modal traits in common implies that, within group boundaries, there is something of ourselves in each other. In this light, identification with an ethnic group takes on a much more serious meaning, for it literally involves becoming one with the group.

GROUP BOUNDARIES AND THE NATURE OF ETHNIC AFFILIATIONS

The interplay of givens and chosens in ethnicity is nowhere better revealed than in changes that occur in the scope of group boundaries. As ethnic groups vary in the extent to which individual membership can be acquired solely by birth, so do they vary in the extent to which their boundaries change over time. Here, too, ethnicity parallels kinship. The range of kinship also varies from culture to culture, varies with context within a culture, and varies over time in the same culture. People who are recognized as relatives under some conditions would find their kinship unrecognized under other conditions, and the same is true for recognition of ethnic identity.

ETHNOGENESIS: ASSIMILATION AND DIFFERENTIATION

Ethnic groups can become more or less inclusive. Some small ethnic groups merge with or absorb others, or are absorbed by them, producing

38. I owe this formulation to Joshua Fishman, who presented this view at a conference on ethnicity in Eastern Europe, University of Washington, June 1976.
Table 1  Processes of Ethnic Fusion and Fissión

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<th>Assimilation</th>
<th>Differentiation</th>
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<td><strong>Amalgamation</strong></td>
<td><strong>Incorporation</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>$A + B \rightarrow C$</td>
<td>$A + B \rightarrow A$</td>
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<tr>
<td>Two or more groups unite to form a new, larger group</td>
<td>One group assumes the identity of another</td>
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larger, composite groups. Larger groups, on the other hand, may divide into their component parts, or a portion of such a group may leave it to form a new, smaller group. Group boundaries thus grow wider or narrower by processes of assimilation or differentiation. New groups are born, though old groups do not always die when this occurs. These changes are summarized in Table 1, and I shall provide examples in just a moment.

It will be noted from the table that amalgamation and division are opposite processes, just as incorporation and proliferation are. To say that these are opposites is also to imply that each is potentially reversible. In point of fact, ethnic identity typically embraces multiple levels or tiers, so that it is possible for an individual to claim more than one identity. In the case of amalgamation, for example, members of the new Group C need not renounce completely their membership in one of what are now the component subgroups, $A$ and $B$. At appropriate times, these lower levels of identity may be invoked again. From the family to the lineage or clan to the regional subgroup to the ethnic group—this is a common progression of increasingly inclusive group memberships.

I have analyzed patterns of ethnic fusion and fissión elsewhere,39 and there is no need to reiterate the details here. But the outlines of the processes of boundary change are important to a proper understanding of

ethnic conflict and of prospects for accommodation. Group boundaries are made of neither stone nor putty. They are malleable within limits. The mutability of boundaries does not mean that ethnic affiliations are merely "strategic," that they can be called forth whenever it is convenient to do so in the quest for competitive advantage or can be willed into being in the service of economic interest. On the other hand, boundaries do change, and it is possible to consider the design of measures to utilize shifts in group identity in the interest of conflict reduction. What is necessary, therefore, is a sense of the mutability of group boundaries and yet their dependence on antecedent affinities that are not easily manipulated. To overemphasize the one is to mistake the bases of conflict; to overemphasize the other is to miss important opportunities for policy innovation.

An appropriate starting point is the contextual character of ethnic identity. Group boundaries tend to shift with the political context. Among the most important features of that political context are the size and significance of territorial boundaries. Territorial boundaries help shape the level of group identity that emerges as most salient. The wider the effective territorial boundaries, the wider the ethnic boundaries are likely to be; the narrower the territorial boundaries, the narrower the ethnic boundaries, all else equal. Thus, in the former undivided state of Madras in India, with large Tamil and Telugu populations, cleavages within the Telugu group were not very important. As soon as a separate Telugu-speaking state was carved out of Madras, however, Telugu subgroups—caste, regional, and religious—quickly formed the bases of political action. When many other people in the territory were Tamils, it was vitally important whether one was a Tamil or a Telugu. But when virtually everyone is a Telugu, being Telugu is less important than being, say, Kamma or Reddi, Telangana or Coastal, Muslim or Hindu. The territorial boundary, in short, frames the context in which group interactions occur.

The colonial period in Asia and Africa was, overall, a time during which territorial horizons became larger and, concomitantly, an enormous amount of subgroup amalgamation took place. The colonialists often created territories out of clusters of loosely linked villages and regions. Out of this welding together of local environments a great many new groups appeared, among them the Malays in Malaysia, the Ibo in Nigeria, the Kikuyu in Kenya, the Bangala in Zaire, and the Moro in the Philippines. Some such groups were "artificial" creations of colonial authorities and missionaries, who catalyzed the slow merger of related
peoples into coherent ethnic entities. They did this by the way they categorized those they encountered and by the incentives they established to consummate the amalgamation, recruiting soldiers or clerks, for example, from among the newly forged group. Some amalgams emerged because older, lower-level identities were no longer apt, though many such groups also retained the older identities as alternatives, available for frequent invocation in appropriate circumstances. The Malays and Kikuyu, both very cohesive amalgams, can still divide up by ancestral place of origin. Everywhere, however, participants in the process of amalgamation had to adjust their identity upward to conform to the new and larger environment.

They changed their identity by a process of shifting and sorting among the range of peoples they now confronted. The colonial territory contained ethnic strangers perceived as possessing varying degrees of likeness and difference. If a man from Owerri, in Eastern Nigeria, went to Lagos to seek a job, he had to decide whether his new neighbor, who hailed from Onitsha and spoke roughly the same language, was like himself or different. The question would not have arisen back home in Owerri. There an Onitsha man was clearly a stranger. But it was a serious question in Lagos, hundreds of miles from Owerri, for the new environment was heterogeneous. In the immediate vicinity, perhaps there lived members of groups as disparate as the Hausa, Kanuri, Tiv, Yoruba, and Efik. In this context, it became obvious that the Owerri man was related to the Onitsha man, whereas the Muslim Kanuri, who came from a distant region, spoke a quite different language, and behaved quite differently, surely was not. And the Onitsha-Owerri commonality would be even more obvious if those others in the environment made no distinctions between the two, which was likely the case. In such circumstances, a sense of “Ibo” identity was forged through the interplay of self-definition and definition by others.

The process of forging new identities was principally a perceptual one. The principles of social judgment theory help us to understand how it worked. In the experimental literature, the relevant phenomena are

called assimilation and contrast effects. In a heterogeneous environment, a series of stimuli, such as weights or heights or colors, will be sorted out perceptually so that those stimuli that are closely related to each other in value—say, two weights a few ounces apart, compared to others pounds apart—will be merged or assimilated, that is, will appear to the senses to be the same value. More distant stimuli will be contrasted; they will appear to be even more different in value than they actually are. So a complex environment is simplified by a process of judgment that declares relatively similar stimuli to be essentially the same and divergent stimuli to be quite different.

For this simplifying process to occur, there must be a range of difference represented in the environment. The colonial territory did indeed broaden the range of difference by bringing groups into contact that had not had contact, or at least simultaneous contact, before. Of course, the new identities did not necessarily hold for all seasons or all purposes. Just as Ibo subgroups seemed quite similar in the heterogeneous setting of Lagos, so might they again have seemed very different in an all-Ibo environment in Eastern Nigeria. Still, for political purposes, the colony-wide, heterogeneous environment came to be increasingly important. And, as it did, the broader identities it fostered among groups that started out with only limited affinities were solidified. The Malays, for instance, comprised varied groups from as far afield as Sumatra, the Celebes, Borneo, and Java, as well as Malaya, but they developed a highly cohesive, overarching identity vis-a-vis the substantial number of Chinese immigrants who appeared in their midst.42

If assimilation involves the simplification of identities in a more heterogeneous environment, differentiation entails drawing fine distinctions among people in a less heterogeneous environment. With changes in context, groups can adjust their identity downward as well as upward. This is especially possible if lower (subethnic) levels of identity provide a preexisting basis of cohesion to which a group can repair when the context seems to shrink. One instance of downward shifts in identity, already mentioned, was the heightened salience of divisions among the Telugus as soon as a Telugu-speaking state was carved out of Madras. An even more dramatic downward shift followed the partition of India and Pakistan along what were thought to be hard-and-fast Hindu-Mus-

lim lines. Barely had this been accomplished when ethnic divisions within Pakistan became prominent, culminating in the emergence of Bangladesh in 1971. Changing context can work for fission as easily as for fusion, and lower and higher levels of identity can coexist and be activated as territorial boundaries change. These are behavioral propensities quite relevant to the design of structures to reduce ethnic tensions.

To depict the process of boundary change in these terms is to understand why it makes no sense to ask abstractly whether groups based on language are more cohesive or more separatist or more prone to conflict than, say, groups based on religion. For, as I indicated in Chapter 1, it is not the particular differentiating characteristic that matters for such questions. That is largely an accident of context and contact. The differentiating characteristics that become prominent will be defined in terms of what traits an emerging group has in common as against other groups with whom it finds itself in a single environment. It is, in the end,ascriptive affinity and disparity, and not some particular inventory of cultural attributes, that found the group.

In fact, there may be quite a wide range of cultural difference represented even among the subgroups within an ethnic amalgam. Among the Malays, only the Minangkabau are matrilineal. Among the Nigerian Yoruba, there have been considerable differences of language from one traditional kingdom to another. In both cases, culture has tended to follow boundaries rather than defining them. So the Minangkabau tend to accommodate to general Malay cultural standards, and a standard dialect has been emerging among the Yoruba. As group cohesion grows, cultural deviations and rough edges get smoothed off. Culture is important in the making of ethnic groups, but it is more important for providing post facto content to group identity than it is for providing some ineluctable prerequisite for an identity to come into being.

There is no need to impute predetermation to this whole process. Although the perceptual side of boundary change bears emphasis, it is, of course, not entirely an unguided process of stimulus and response. Political choices are also made by group leaders as assimilation and differentiation proceed. Consider the Fang of Gabon, who developed a rivalry with the better-educated Mpongwe people during the colonial period. The Fang sensed that, in a political conflict, their clan and dialect divisions were a disadvantage, and they set about recreating their former unity. A prominent part in the Fang revival was played by a legend of
common origin and migration, which rested on genuine genealogies but also contained new elements, of dubious historical accuracy. Strategic judgments of this sort, about the shape and scope of group boundaries necessary for competition, are not incompatible with more spontaneous perceptual judgments. Rather, deliberative strategic judgments are made possible by prior perceptual judgments about other groups in the same environment. They presuppose, in other words, the sifting process by which group affinities and disparities are discerned.

In general, therefore, leaders cannot call into play an identity that is not founded on judgments of relative likeness and difference. If the perceptual context changes so as to reactivate some higher or lower level of group or subgroup identity formerly regarded as highly salient, such changes in identity may happen quickly. But, for the rest, the process of sifting and sorting takes time. Wholly new ethnic groups do not come into being overnight. There can be no “big bang” theory of ethnogenesis.

**Cultural Movements and Boundary Reinforcement**

Group boundaries must be underpinned by a suitable apparatus of myth and legend, which cannot be generated spontaneously. Cultural movements, ranging from mild literary, religious, and historical revivals to full-fledged crisis cults, gradually shape and reshape the contours of ethnic myth and legend. A common source of cultural movements is concern about potential shifts in group boundaries. The colonial period was filled with such movements. The form they took was largely a response to the direction of boundary change underway, to growing differentiation or assimilation. An ethnic group fragmented into subgroups that threatened to overtake the larger group identity might react by reinforcing elements of common culture and common ancestry, suppressing, for example, differences in dialect or stressing descent from a single ancestor. On the other hand, a group that found itself losing its distinctive identity by absorption in another ethnic group might respond by emphasizing its cultural uniqueness, selectively recalling ancient glories, resuscitating all that distinguishes group members from others, destroying all that links them to others. It is appropriate, then, to speak of movements of assimilation and movements of differentiation, depending on whether affinity or disparity is being emphasized. Either way, how-

43. Fernandez, "The Affirmation of Things Past."
ever, the progress of cultural movements to support boundary maintenance or reconstruction was measured in decades, for they entailed the reorientation of collective beliefs and practices, religious, linguistic, and historical.44

Movement of Assimilation

Groups such as the Fang of Gabon and Cameroon, the Yoruba of Nigeria, the Lozi of Zambia, and the Bakongo of Zaire, Angola, and Congo (Brazzaville) all experienced movements of assimilation. In each case, the movement was a reaction to internal differentiation. These were groups whose unity was precarious. Sometimes their subgroups had fought each other. Often their languages had drifted apart. During the colonial period, efforts were made by group leaders to unite them, efforts that stressed a glorious past and legends of common origin. They were often accompanied by measures to standardize language and in other ways to minimize cultural differences among the subgroups.

Typically, these efforts were spurred by the recognition that, as colonialism waned, the group would face ethnic competition in which its fragmentation would put it at a disadvantage. A group vulnerable to subgroup fission was liable to divide its support "uneconomically" among several political parties unless a foundation were laid for ethnic reunification. Movements that aimed to unify fragmented groups like the Fang and the Yoruba were generally utilized by party leaders to mobilize the groups for effective political action. The Yoruba movement, the Egbe Omo Oduduwa (Society of the Children of Oduduwa, the Yoruba mythical ancestor), was closely linked to the Yoruba party, the Action Group; there was much overlapping membership.

Attempts to reconstitute a group by amalgamating its subgroups met with a considerable measure of success. Still, the reconstitutive process left room for backsliding. The Yoruba, for example, managed to surmount internal differences and participate in politics on a broader group basis, but at various points Yoruba subgroups competed with the all-Yoruba identification. The persistence of subgroup identities was reflected in Yoruba party politics. Despite the quest for commonality, the Action Group was rent by subgroup factionalism.

44. For a fuller treatment than is possible here, see Donald L. Horowitz, "Cultural Movements and Ethnic Change," The Annals 433 (Sept. 1977): 6–18. The discussion in the remainder of this section is drawn from this article.
Movements of Differentiation

Whereas groups threatened with differentiation turn to the past to reduce their internal diversity, groups threatened with assimilation resort to their history to affirm their distinctiveness from those around them. Often begun by group members who are furthest along in the individual assimilation process, these movements commonly result in an explosive and violent assertion of group separateness.

The Bakonjo in Western Uganda, the Kurds in Iraq, Syria, Iran, and Turkey, the Basques in Spain, and the Sikhs in the Indian Punjab all went through such movements of differentiation. In each case, the boundary between them and a group in close proximity was porous. Acculturation to the norms of the neighboring group was common. This might include abandonment of one’s own language or religious practices. Changes in individual ethnic identity might follow. In this way, elites were lost to the group, and the language and culture of the group were frequently disparaged. Bakonjo borrowed Batoro rites and language, Kurds in Iraqi cities underwent Arabization, Basques became Castilianized, and the line between Sikhs and Hindus was uncertain.

The cultural revivals that emerged in response reflected an awareness of the danger of a fading group identity. They tended to emphasize the history of separateness and even hostility between the groups. Memories of insults were recalled. Languages were “purified” of words that derived from the language of the neighboring group. Religious practices were cleansed in the same way, in the name of returning to some former state of orthodoxy that may or may not have existed. Group identity was thus infused with a new or revived cultural content that served to demarcate the lines between groups more clearly, thereby reducing the ease with which individuals could cross group boundaries.

Concomitant with the sharpening of group differences was an increase in intergroup hostility. Movements that went furthest in asserting the distinctiveness of groups believed to be in danger of assimilation ultimately became strongly separatist. The Bakonjo and the Kurds both participated in secessionist insurrections. The Basque country of Spain has experienced separatist terrorism. The Sikhs have conducted separatist agitations on several occasions—most recently in the 1960s, before a Sikh-majority state was carved out of the Punjab, and in the 1980s in

behalf of an independent Sikh state, "Khalistan." As movements of assimilation are geared to transcend subgroup identities to facilitate effective group participation in the wider politics of the whole territory, so movements of differentiation lend themselves to separatist political claims. The violent character of these responses to the feared loss of group distinctiveness is a powerful point in the case against assimilationist policies of nation-building.

**Cultural Movements and Conflict**

A common result of cultural movements of assimilation and of differentiation, as well as of movements that began as anti-colonial cultural revivals, was the infusion of cultural demands into post-colonial politics. The ethnocentric cultural functionaries who rewrote the grammars, histories, and scriptures often emerged in a position to condition their political support on state recognition and patronage. In Burma, Buddhism was made the state religion. In Sri Lanka, Sinhala was made the official language. Where a language was recognized as official, language institutes were often created, and cultural functionaries were converted into state officials producing new lexical, literary, and instructional materials. Typically, there was heightened attention to language as a basis of group identity. At the same time, demands for state patronage and official adoption of ethnic symbols were seen as exclusivist by members of other ethnic groups. Concessions to such demands precipitated secessionist movements by non-Burmans in Burma and ethnic violence in Sri Lanka. Culture, revived to support group identity, became a public issue between groups.

**Culture, Boundaries, and Conflict**

Ethnic boundary change and cultural movements illustrate several general characteristics of ethnicity. Underlying all of them is the interactive quality of the variables related to group identity: culture, boundaries, conflict, and the policy outcomes of conflict.

Discourse about ethnic conflict is replete with assumptions about how wholly formed, unchanging cultural inventories give rise to the emergence of ethnic groups. Ethnic groups are said to be based on shared cultures, histories, traditions. In turn, it is assumed, groups with firmly fixed boundaries enter into conflict with each other. From this conflict, policy outcomes emerge. The common notion is that these are watertight, sequential, and unidirectional processes: each must precede the next.
No doubt it is often necessary to speak of things in flux as if they were static. In most of this book, I, too, shall speak as if ethnic conflict occurs between groups with fairly firm boundaries.

Yet, even as conceptual convenience often demands a static idiom, it needs to be remembered that the phenomena are reciprocal rather than unidirectional. First, the construction and reconstruction of group boundaries are not processes wholly prior to ethnic conflict; they take place partly in anticipation of conflict. Second, as ethnic conflict proceeds, it can influence the shape and firmness of the boundaries, by such means as heightened pressure for endogamy. Third, group boundaries are not simply the product of common culture. Emerging boundaries can alter cultural patterns by, for example, homogenizing them as amalgamation proceeds. Fourth, policy is not merely an end product of ethnic conflict, for it reacts in turn upon conflict and upon boundaries and culture. In all of this, there is ample evidence that phenomena which our mind’s eye tends to keep separate are parts of a system.

THE UTILITY OF ETHNIC AFFILIATIONS

From what has already been said, it is not difficult to infer that ethnic affiliations typically fulfill needs that might otherwise go unmet. What some such functions might be is hinted at in a general way by the conception of an ethnic group as a fictive, greatly extended family, a unit that provides blood solidarity and personalistic help in an increasingly impersonal environment—in short, ascription in an ostensibly nonascriptive world.

Previous writers have occasionally asked whether the recurrent importance of ethnic ties indicates that ethnic groups do somehow derive their strength from the functions they perform. Having approached the question, however, they generally draw back from it, for one of two reasons. Functional interpretations are in disfavor, because they are regarded as teleological and biased toward the status quo: something is—therefore, it must be. Alternatively, the question has sometimes been cast in an unfortunate way: are ethnic affiliations “natural”?46 To this, an answer has been given. Ethnicity, it is argued, entails a mistaken version of a natural process. The mistake is “pseudospeciation,” the treatment

of members of other groups as if they were members of different species, which manifestly they are not.\textsuperscript{47} Denial of common humanity has produced unspeakable brutality against members of other ethnic groups. And so the question of function has gone by default, because, on the one hand, it seems to conjure up functionalism and, on the other, it seems to lead directly to some of the great, potentially lethal, false cognitions of the human species.

The question, however, is deserving of more serious treatment. It is possible to identify some functions of ethnicity without succumbing to teleology and without getting derailed on the spurious survival value of "pseudospeciation" or the denial of a common humanity to members of other ethnic groups.

The ubiquity of ethnic loyalties suggests the existence of needs to which they respond. The sensitivity of group boundaries to changing territorial context in Asia and Africa provides help in identifying those needs in a concrete way. As I explained earlier, one of the most powerful influences on the scope and shape of "we" and "they" has been the scope and shape of political boundaries. For the most part, as I said, movement during the colonial period was upward—toward larger territories and more inclusive, frequently amalgamated, ethnic groups. It is worth looking a bit more closely at the impact of territory on ethnicity, for it is apparent that territorial unification, besides shaping perceptual judgments of ethnic affinity and disparity, created new conditions and opportunities that emerging ethnic groups were suited to meet.

There has been much misleading talk and writing about the artificiality of colonial territorial boundaries. The Europeans, it is said, drew arbitrary lines on maps to suit their own interests, heedless of their effect on ethnic groups. Some ethnic groups were thereby divided between territories, and some were included in the same territory along with others with whom they had little in common. These arguments are greatly exaggerated. The boundary-drawing process frequently took ethnic interests into account, and boundaries were often redrawn later by colonial powers in response to ethnic demands.\textsuperscript{48} Any boundaries of significant scale, no matter how they were drawn, would have been arbitrary, for most Asian and African groups of the time were clustered at


the village level or in somewhat larger kingdoms, generally not of a highly centralized sort. To draw any line to pull 200,000 or 300,000 square miles into a single territory was necessarily to throw together a great many stranger-groups and to divide other groups. What is remarkable is not that some former kingdoms, such as the Bakongo, were apportioned to several colonies, but that many others, including the Sinhalese and Baganda kingdoms and the Malay and Indonesian sultanates, were not divided.

What the colonialists did that was truly profound, and far more important for ethnicity, was to change the scale of the polity by several fold. The colonies were artificial, not because their borders were indifferent to their ethnic composition, but because they were, on the average, many times larger than the political systems they displaced or encapsulated.

Parallel to this political-territorial expansion were comparable economic developments, especially in the export sector. International commerce in minerals and cash crops required networks of labor recruitment, production, and transport that far transcended, in distance and complexity, established trading patterns. Of course, the long-distance trade antedated the European arrival; indeed, it attracted the Europeans. But the scale of trade made possible by an infrastructure of new roads and ports and markets, the new credit networks established for it, the number of people brought into the trading vortex, the new mobility it created as labor migrated in response to opportunity, the growth of urban centers—all were enormously expanded under colonial rule. As there was a new superstate imposed, so, too, was there a new supereconomy.49

In both, the network of transactions grew in scale out of all proportion to the reach of preexisting sentiments of community. With migration, trade, and a central bureaucratic structure, among other things, it became necessary to establish social relations far beyond the village or locality. Later, with national elections, the need became even more exigent. To respond to the new opportunity structure imposed by the Europeans required assurances of predictability, trust, reciprocity, fair deal-

ing, and help in the event of need in strange surroundings. From what source could appropriate social arrangements be fashioned?

One possibility was the evolution of an impersonal conception of citizenship that would transcend particularistic identifications, minimize uncertainty, and facilitate relations among strangers.\(^5^0\) In providing physical security and some measure of legal recourse, the colonial powers took the first steps along these lines, alleviating some inhibitions on taking up new opportunities. But a full-blown apparatus of citizenship was precluded by the obvious fact that colonials were not citizens but subjects. In Western Europe, by contrast, citizenship rights had developed along with conceptions of popular sovereignty. Even had that not been so, the European ideological developments that produced doctrines of equality and impersonal treatment had evolved over the course of centuries and were not susceptible to wholesale transplantation within the time frame required to respond to new colonial opportunities. In Asia and Africa, the transactional problem was measured in years and decades.

Far more apt a response was the adaptation of preexisting social institutions, particularly informal ones that neither threatened the colonial regime with a new panoply of rights nor taxed its strictly limited administrative machinery. Most notable among these institutions were kinship and ethnicity. Some ethnic groups had earlier been active in controlling particular trade routes or occupations, and much economic activity had been organized along kinship lines. By itself, however, the reach of extended families or of existing ethnic groups was generally not great enough to cover the span of the new transactional networks. Yet it is not surprising that the familiar hand of kinship should reach out and expand into these new domains, through the medium of the extended family but more often through the medium of that greatly extended and expansible family, the ethnic group.\(^5^1\)

The point has been put in concrete form by Joseph M. Kaufert for urban Africa:

Among non-elites in African cities, kin groups may not possess sufficiently broad networks of influence or sufficient economic power to fulfill the same functions

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for the urban migrant that they did in the rural environment. A single family may have insufficient resources, for example, to pay the bribe, or contact the distant cousin in order to find employment for the migrant, or get a younger brother into a secondary school. Members of extended families having few elite linkages may not be very successful at resocializing their newly arrived relatives into the intricacies of the urban environment. In such cases more inclusive ethnic groups take on some of the functions of the extended family, thus diminishing the number of situations in which narrower kinship ties are important. 52

Kaufert notes that several students in his Ghanaian sample were called upon to play the role of “brother” or “uncle” for more and more distantly related people in the city and that kinship terms have tended generally to be transferred to members of the broader ethnic group.

Ethnicity, then, is functionally continuous with kinship. The process of shifting from one to the other has not been studied comprehensively, but there are interesting glimpses from which mechanisms of change can be discerned. Consider briefly two examples, one contemporary, urban, and African, the other historical, rural, and Asian. In both, ethnicity takes over a range of new interactions where kinship leaves off, and it does so using a kinship idiom.

The stretching of earlier kinship forms and obligations to meet the new transactional needs is exemplified by Mossi migrants from Upper Volta to Kumasi, Ghana. First-generation Mossi migrants have few kinsmen in Kumasi. Nevertheless, they quickly become part of the Mossi community and create fictive family relationships with other Mossi “which they can rely upon as they could rely upon kinship relationships ‘at home.’ They come to town with kinship concepts but without kin.” 53 Unrelated Mossi assume the specific roles and obligations of family members. The Mossi headman in Kumasi is treated by migrants just as a lineage head would be treated in Upper Volta. He is accorded authority to settle a wide range of what would otherwise be regarded as family disputes. The Mossi in Kumasi transfer, broaden, and apply their kinship concepts to the ethnic arena with alacrity, illustrating Meyer Fortes’ more general point (for the culturally similar Tallensi) that “all social


relations implying mutual or common interests tend to be assimilated to those of kinship."

Second-generation Mossi in Kumasi are in a different position. Unlike new migrants, they have real kin to assume kinship roles and obligations. For them, ethnicity is no longer a substitute for kinship. Overlaying kinship relations is a network of explicitly ethnic associations devoted to advancing Mossi political interests in the competitive environment of Kumasi.

The interplay of kinship and ethnicity thus changes as the generationally defined situation of the Mossi in Kumasi changes. In the first instance, kinship provides the bridge to ethnic membership. This is achieved by ignoring actual consanguinity in establishing relationships. Then kinship recedes to its previous dimensions, based on consanguinity. Ethnic membership, inclusively defined and broader in Kumasi than in Upper Volta, where Mossi society is subdivided, becomes important in coping with the problems of collective existence in a multiethnic city far from the Mossi homeland. The initial stretching of kinship so as to disregard actual consanguinity facilitates the later representation of the Mossi as a single, undifferentiated community by their political associations. From adaptations of this sort, it becomes possible to see how the scale of group interactions could expand with the effective size of the territory, permitting people to go further afield and redressing what would otherwise have been an imbalance between the scope of transactions and the scope of social relations required to consummate the new transactions.

The Asian example, drawn from Malaysia, involves an analogous extension of kinship to the wider ethnic community, but it entails a different sequence of changes. In the nineteenth century, Malay rural life in the Sik district of Kedah state was centered on padi-growing villages, virtually all of whose inhabitants were kindred. Kinship was the source of aid in the event of destitution, of easy and trusting personal relations, of certainty in dealings, and of popular support for aspiring

leaders. As rice cultivation is a labor-intensive and cooperative enterprise, the extended family was also an economic unit in subsistence production. With the advent of rubber tapping and a vastly improved system of roads in the early twentieth century, however, there was a great influx of strangers, most of them also Malays, into Sik. The developing cash economy also put Malays into contact with Chinese shopkeepers. The need to earn money, rather than merely grow rice, reduced the general ability to help distant kin. Rubber tapping required less social cooperation than rice farming. The net result of these developments was to dilute somewhat the kinship basis of village organization, to foster a wider sense of being Malay, and to heighten the importance of the nuclear family at the expense of the extended family.\textsuperscript{57}

As the twentieth century wore on, the population in Sik had grown so rapidly that land shortage became prevalent. Many Malays inherited no land and were forced to leave their home villages for rubber tapping jobs far away. With this development, the “importance of filial ties declined in the lives of many,”\textsuperscript{58} so that the nuclear family became more distant as out-migrants were thrown upon their own resources for sustenance. The former village antinomy between “familiars” and “strangers” was broken by the whole sequence of in-migration and out-migration, and there emerged “a wider community of concern with other peoples possessing different accents who are all now simply Malays and opposed to Chinese and other groups . . . .”\textsuperscript{59} Kinship defined by strict consanguinity had not been supplanted but supplemented by kinship defined in inclusive ethnic terms. The case of Sik “shows a dispersion of kinship outside of the immediate nucleus of parental-filial and sibling relations to include various kinds of bonds, with friendship, contractual, and blood components. People must look for kinship everywhere now”—that is, everywhere in the Malay community. As the range of intrafamilial interactions contracted, the range of intraethnic interactions widened, and the targets of family-like claims for emotional and material help were broadened accordingly.

In both Kumasi and Sik, modern transport, colonial administration, and a cash economy created opportunities to which people responded. An effective response was not possible within the literal confines of the

\textsuperscript{57} For parallel developments in an urban Malay community, see Djamour, \textit{Malay Kinship and Marriage in Singapore}.

\textsuperscript{58} Banks, “Changing Kinship in North Malaya,” 1268.

\textsuperscript{59} Ibid., 1271.

\textsuperscript{60} Ibid.
prevailing genealogical kinship system, for an effective response entailed migration far from identifiable relatives. Such a response was possible, however, by substituting fictive kinship for genuine kinship, conferring kin or kin-like relationships on members of the same ethnic groups, and recognizing a broader role for the ethnic group in the lives of individuals. The route to this outcome was not the same in Kumasi and in Sik, but in both cases there was a disposition to see ethnicity and kinship as functionally related structures. The balance between them could be altered and obligations from one transferred to the other. The willingness to mold elements of the two structures to meet the exigencies posed by a broader transactional network suggests that the functions of ethnicity and kinship in the new setting may not be so different from those of kinship alone in the old.

Among the most important needs met by ethnicity is the need for familiarity and community, for family-like ties, for emotional support and reciprocal help, and for mediation and dispute resolution—for all the needs served by kinship, but now on a larger canvas. And, because the scale is changed, some new functions also have to be performed. Transactions with people not previously encountered become more frequent. Common ethnicity enhances the predictability of their behavior and imposes a set of normative obligations on transactions. Encounters with the state and its ostensibly impersonal apparatus are also necessary. Common ethnicity can create bonds between bureaucrats and citizens. If impersonal criteria of fair treatment and impartiality are novel, suspect, or imperfectly understood, then protection deriving from the very partiality of ethnicity can provide a cushion against arbitrariness. Ethnicity, moreover, provides a convenient handle for political organization to press claims on government and to interpret government to group members. Knowledge that a group's leaders are guarding group interests can impart a sense of security to group members. In short, members of an ethnic group need not face a new environment, an untested system of relations, or a situation requiring help all alone.

No doubt the degree to which ethnicity performs these functions, or does so to the exclusion of other affiliations, is highly variable. For example, in interactions with strangers, common ethnic membership calls

61. Ethnicity counters "the structured and artificial isolation of persons who must act and interact with one another within legitimated boundaries restricted to the differentiation of roles in complex societies. If alienation is a malfunction of modern society, ethnicity is an antidote." Ronald Cohen, "Ethnicity: Problem and Focus in Anthropology," Annual Review of Anthropology 7 (1978): 379–403, at 401.
up abstract qualities that transcend the individual qualities of individual members and cue the behavior of others on the basis of social placement and supposedly innate characteristics. But the degree to which ethnicity entails such abstraction varies with, among other things, the cultural disposition to think about others in categorical rather than personal terms. In Bali, to take one instance, that disposition is strong, and so ascriptive identity is paramount.\textsuperscript{62} In Morocco, categories are less important than are the attributes of individual personality. Consequently, ethnic identity is used in personal relations only to establish probable traits, which, combined with individually established traits, provide the basis for interpersonal judgments.\textsuperscript{63} Cultural variations of this sort, which I shall generally suppress, do not detract from the broader point that ethnicity provides a convenient way to simplify reality in unfamiliar circumstances by avoiding the necessity to make wholly individual judgments with every new encounter.

The view I have advanced here of the utility of ethnic affiliations in the wider transactional networks of the colonial and post-colonial state contrasts with the commonly held notion in the early years after independence that there was a need for a massive shift of loyalties from the ethnic group to the state in the interest of "nation-building."\textsuperscript{64} The assumption was that ethnic loyalties subsisted at a lower level and lagged behind the development of the modern state. What we have seen shows this assumption to be unfounded. More often than not, ethnic groups are the product of altered levels of loyalty and are already keyed to the state level. That they are not inclusive of everyone within the state is not due to any lag in development but to the powerful role of contrast in the growth of group identity. In view of the functions ethnicity performs, supplanting ethnic loyalties is at once less realistic and less attractive a goal than is the more modest object of reducing ethnic conflict.

There is another issue raised by identification of the functions of eth-


nicity, and it is best clarified sooner rather than later: the relationship between the needs met by ethnic ties and the emergence of ethnic conflict. That relationship is not straightforward. To understand the functions of ethnicity is not necessarily to know anything much about ethnic conflict. To be sure, in a great many countries the functions I have identified have not only been performed but overperformed. Some groups have been given so much security as to make others uneasy and suspicious. Organization has generated counterorganization, familiarity a sense of exclusion in others, ethnic allocations a feeling of discrimination and grievance. Yet it remains true that many of the needs I have identified are met by private activity that does not impinge on intergroup relations or by action that culminates in a tacit apportionment of ethnic spheres of influence, as we shall see in the case of job competition. The quest for community, which leads to clustering by ethnic groups, can actually retard the growth of intergroup conflict. The utility of ethnic affiliations cannot be gainsaid, but it need not and should not give rise to a wholly utilitarian or instrumental theory of ethnic conflict.

ETHNIC AFFILIATIONS AND THE INSTITUTIONS OF THE MODERN STATE

I have insisted on describing ethnic affiliations as involving descent. The principle of ethnic membership is typically the birth principle, however much it may be diluted in practice by fictive extensions. What I have not done is to say what difference ascription makes in ethnic politics. The difference can be shown dramatically with a single, revealing example of the interaction of ascriptive affiliations with the formal institutions of the modern state.

Suppose the population of a country is divided into two ethnic groups, A and B. Group A comprises 60 percent; Group B, 40 percent. The two groups have equal rates of natural increase and similar age structures. Political parties form along ethnic lines, as they tend to do in ethnically divided societies. Members of Group A uniformly support Party A. Members of Group B support Party B. Both groups are cohesive, so that no third party emerges in this bipolar society. In parliamentary elections, the parties bring to the polls the vast majority of their respective supporters. The country is divided into single-member territorial constituencies of equal population. The two ethnic groups are spread through the country in such a way that Group A forms a majority
in 60 percent of the constituencies and Group B a majority in 40 percent. (Note that if the two groups were distributed evenly through the territory, Group A would form a majority in all of the constituencies.)

Under these conditions, Party A will always form the government. As a matter of fact, Party A will form the government under a number of variations on these conditions as well. Whether the rule of decision is majority vote or first-past-the-post, Party A will secure 60 percent of the seats. Likewise, if the election were conducted on the basis of proportional representation, with the whole country as a single constituency, Party A would also win 60 percent of the seats. It is possible to introduce uncertainty into the result, but to do so would require rather drastic and elaborate electoral engineering. The contrivances needed to make the result uncertain would quickly begin to undermine the legitimacy of the electoral process, because they would inevitably mean that a party with a nationwide voting majority might nevertheless be deprived of office. In short, the predictable and "reasonable" result of party preferences distributed as I have specified is the victory of Party A and Group A.

The implications for Group B are ominous. It has not lost just one election. Absent some dramatic change in group demography or in the cohesion of Group A, the result of this election is likely to hold for the next election and for every election thereafter. Group B will forever be excluded from power and its rewards and even from the ability to influence the exercise of power. In such a predictable system, what electoral incentives do Group A and Party A have to be moderate toward Group B? Perhaps the only reason to be moderate is to discourage members of Group B from being driven to extreme strategies of opposition.

It will come as no surprise that where the interaction of ethnic demography, party alignments, and electoral systems produces results of this sort, Group B often resorts to violence. In the example given, the two groups are spread through the country, so secessionist violence is highly unlikely; but where the groups are territorially concentrated, that possibility is not to be excluded. Two other forms of violence are possible. Members of Group B may vent their sense of permanent exclusion through rioting against members of Group A that is more or less spontaneous or more or less directed by the leaders of Party B. Alternatively, members of Group B in the armed forces may decide that something is fundamentally wrong with the electoral process and that a fairer way of allocating power is to seize it.

It will at once be objected that the specifications given in the problem
are unrealistic. There are never only two ethnic groups in a single society. Each group rarely throws its support to only one party. If it does, the groups will nonetheless vary in their electoral participation rates. Rates of natural increase are ethnically variable. Ethnic groups are not so distributed through a territory as to permit the drawing of constituencies to produce a parliamentary majority mirroring the ethnic composition of the whole population. The fixity of the result in the example is an artifact of rigidly specified demographic, party-political, and electoral conditions.

It is certainly true that the politics of every country is more complex than the politics I have conjured. But the example, albeit an ideal type, remains far more realistic than might be supposed. The variations that have been adduced do not assure a more satisfying or tranquil outcome.

This is the business of later chapters, and I can only indicate enough here to show that the example is merely a pristine case of a much larger category of cases. Generally, there are more than two groups, but sometimes they nonetheless choose up sides in what becomes a bipolar confrontation. Where bipolarity does not take over, the presence of third groups opens the possibility that the largest group, though able to muster a plurality of the vote for its party, will be excluded from power by the configuration of votes and seats obtained in toto by the other groups. If the excluded group is the largest, the degree of dissatisfaction may be greater than in the simple 60–40 situation. An even more extreme result can be produced by party fragmentation. If Group A, with 60 percent of the population, divides its support between two parties, it is open to Group B or to B and C, with 40 percent but only one party, to form a government that excludes the majority group. This it can do by winning a majority of seats by repeated pluralities in three-way contests. Likewise, rates of natural increase often do vary, but the variation, while making the group with the lower rate more anxious about the future, does nothing to change ascriptive party politics. In polarized polities, ethnic variations in rates of voting participation are rarely great, because parties mobilize their supporters. Variations in the territorial distribution of population or in the apportionment of constituencies, though common, have as their principal effect the widening of the gap between votes cast by an ethnic group and seats won by that group. If Group A, with 60 percent of the total vote, wins 80 percent of the seats, the outlook for Group B is even gloomier. If, however, Group B, with 40 percent of the vote, gains 51 percent of the seats, then Group A, a nominal
majority, is reduced to minority status. None of the variations does much to soften the rigidity of ascriptive party politics. There are, however, some deliberate policies, dealt with in Chapter 15, that may have some impact.

If we ask what went wrong with this election, there are at first plausible grounds for saying nothing went wrong. The election was democratically conducted. The results are in conformity with the principle of majority rule. But that is the sticking point. Majority rule in perpetuity is not what we mean by "majority rule."65 We assume the possibility of shifting majorities, of oppositions becoming governments, of an alterable public opinion. All this is foreclosed by the ascriptive character of the majority that voted for Party A. The election, intended to be a vehicle of choice, was no such thing and will be no such thing in the future; it registered, not choice, but birth affiliation.66 This was no election—it was a census.

I shall show later that elections of this general type are a major—though not the only—reason for the decline of democracy in Africa, Asia, and the Caribbean. Such elections have much to do with the outlawing of opposition, the rigging of future elections, and the incidence of military coups. But that is not the drum I wish to beat here. Here I want to argue that the source of the unsatisfying outcome of the election resides in the antinomy between two principles of human organization. At the outset of this chapter, I called attention to the continuum of ways in which people organize and categorize themselves, with voluntary membership at one end and birth membership at the other. Actually, birth membership is an anchor on more than one such continuum: territorial proximity, for example, is another competing way in which people organize themselves. These principles of organization—birth and choice, birth and territory, birth and function—are not merely alternatives. Occasionally, they collide, and some of the mysteries of ethnic politics are explicable in terms of the collision. In this election, there was a collision of birth and choice.

65. For example, one of Dahl's rules promulgated to keep conflict low enough for "polyarchy" is that no group should indefinitely be denied the opportunity to participate in government. Robert A. Dahl, Polyarchy (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1971), 114–21.

This sort of antinomy arises because the institutions of the modern liberal state—institutions such as democratic elections—tend to be biased against birth. These institutions have their roots in the ideological heritage of the post-Enlightenment West, and that heritage is heavily individualistic in its assumptions. We like to think that states are composed of conglomeries of free-floating individuals, each of whom is endowed with a kit of basic rights and immunities and each of whom is available for those tasks and associations that fit his talents and preferences. The rules of equality in treatment by government officials, merit in employment, the Utilitarian standard of the greatest good for the greatest number (of individuals), and even the vote itself all presume that the effective unit of action is the individual person. Ascription, on the other hand, connotes fixed social placement, based on abstract categories transcending the personal qualities of individuals. Ascriptive membership was distrusted by Enlightenment political theorists. For them, the birth principle signified the chains of the feudal estates; their individualism was an alternative both to feudal immobility and to the centralized autocracy of the monarchical state. Now, as then, the birth principle of membership introduces a qualification on the free-floating availability of individuals for tasks and associations according to individual talent and preference. It is for very good historical reasons that Western individualism is hostile to birth affiliations.67

Liberalism, however, is at its weakest when it comes to constructing bonds of community.68 Community, which is based on diffuse affinities among people, is difficult to rest on the multiple networks of functionally specific, compartmentalized ties that the liberal state fosters. Of the three pillars of the French Revolution, liberty-equality-fraternity, fraternity has fared least well in the West.69 It is here that ethnicity comes in, for, even in the West, ethnicity continues to be an organizing principle of community, supplementing the weak bonds of egalitarian individualism. The individualistic assumptions of Western thought are modified in


69. See McWilliams, The Idea of Fraternity in America.
practice by the collective instincts of everyday behavior and by what is at root the need for family and family-like ties. Outside the West, as I have argued, this is all the more true.

The individualistic assumptions of Western thought have, however, had a powerful influence on formal political institutions, an influence that extends far beyond the West. The election, based on individual choice, is one such institution. The rise of the modern territorial state, with its principle of membership by proximity, is also part of this heritage. The modern state, which in the short span of a few centuries has come to cover the globe, is founded on territorial inclusiveness: it necessarily encompasses everyone within its boundaries. There was a time when it was thought, with Sir Henry Sumner Maine, that in primitive societies "kinship in blood is the sole possible ground of community in political functions." Maine argued that the territorial basis of political community was a revolutionary innovation, a conception entirely alien to primitive antiquity. It now seems clear that even the simplest peoples can possess territorially based political systems. The perfect dichotomy of kinship and territory has been pierced.

Yet the dialectical relationship between consanguinity and contiguity as organizing principles of community persists. Often the two coexist uneasily, neither displacing the other. Even the political systems of preliterate peoples commonly embrace groups of unrelated strangers. Various arrangements are worked out to manage relations among the component groups. The organization of heterogeneous descent groups in a territorially based political system is, in short, always a complicated matter. Rarely, if ever, is territory alone sufficient to give rise to uniform treatment of all who reside within it.

This analysis has a number of implications for our understanding of ethnic conflict. For one thing, it helps explain our reluctance to acknowledge the importance of ethnicity in politics. To the considerable extent that ethnic ties reflect the birth principle, they fall within the curtilage of


71. Schapera, Government and Politics in Tribal Societies.

72. Ibid., 19, 198–200.
those disagreeable phenomena disfavored by our ideals and therefore capable of securing only the reluctant attention reserved for distasteful subjects.

Then, too, to understand that consanguinity and contiguity are competing principles of organization is to appreciate that ethnic groups can appeal now to one, now to the other of these principles. Whereas territorial proximity is an inclusive principle—all within the territory are to be treated equally—ascription can be an exclusive principle. Politics in severely divided societies needs to be understood as reflecting this competition of principles. If kinship is not the sole basis of political community, neither has it been wholly displaced by territory. There is no clear path from the principle of blood to the principle of proximity, any more than there was from status to contract.

To suggest that formal institutions are predicated largely on choice and territory, whereas the realm of informal behavior is suffused with birth allegiances, is not at all to concede that formal institutions are unimportant. Many states make special, discriminatory provision for one group or another in the polity. It is testimony to the worldwide power of Enlightenment ideals that such provision is usually justified as an exception, a temporary expedient, often with a specified time limit. Because the acknowledged norm remains equal treatment of all individuals in the territory, such measures carry a heavy presumption of illegitimacy. In short, the gap between the theory of formal institutions and the practice of ethnicity is not evidence of the insignificance of the theory. The world of ethnic relations would be quite different—and, I believe, less civil than it already is—were it not for the pervasive importance of individualist thought. The equal treatment of individuals is the touchstone by which deviations from it are measured.

ETHNIC AFFILIATIONS
AND CLASS AFFILIATIONS

In Chapter 1, I pointed out that ethnicity is not just a mask for social class conflict; in Chapter 3, I shall argue that ethnic affiliations are not just a convenient vehicle by which elites satisfy their own class aspirations. Here I intend to show why ethnicity is so often a more compelling and preemptive affiliation than social class is. That conclusion has often
been reached," but remains in need of explanation. Although a full-scale comparison of ethnicity with social class is beyond the scope of this book, it is possible to understand the generally greater conflict potential of ethnic affiliations than of class affiliations in Asia and Africa by considering a few central features of each.

A good way to do this is to utilize Marxist assumptions against Marxist conclusions. Ralf Dahrendorf has aptly summarized the conflict-producing attributes of class identity as conceived by Marx. The key is Marx's belief that class identity is ascriptive, that a person's class position is his "inherited and inescapable fate." One's position in society is determined by his parents' position. For Marx, social classes are closed conflict groups, permanently composed, and that, above all, makes class the affiliation that supersedes all others.

Had Marx been right about the closed character of class affiliations, he would surely have been describing an explosive conflict situation. The lines between contestants would be hard and fast, the stakes high. Mediating attachments between classes would be few. Conflict groups would be solidary and polarized, their memberships fixed, clear-cut, exclusive, and relevant in a wide range of contexts.

The Marxian prophecy of class conflict in Western industrial society was, however, undermined by the inaccuracy of this characterization of class affiliations. First of all, class membership is not wholly inherited and inescapable. Social mobility, both within single lifetimes and across generations, mitigates the ascriptive character of class affiliations, and in the West the degree of social mobility has been considerable. As Dahrendorf suggests, "the weight and intensity of manifest group interests within the individual personality decrease as social mobility and the openness of conflict groups increase. The easier it is for the individual to leave his conflict group, the less likely is he to engage his whole personality in group conflict . . . ." Dahrendorf goes so far as to postulate "an

76. Dahrendorf, Class and Class Conflict in Industrial Society, 191.
inverse relation between the degree of openness of classes and the intensity of class conflict." 77 Second, class position is not utterly determinative in arenas of life removed from the workplace. Contrary to the Marxian conception of class as the central social affiliation, class position is "merely one of a plurality of social roles." 78 Indeed, concludes Dahrendorf, "occupation has been confined to a set place in the life of the worker, just as industry has been confined to a set place in the structure of society." 79 And so the fluidity of class membership and the plurality of social roles both act to reduce the prevalence of class conflict.

Data on social class are less reliable for Asia and Africa than they are for the West. What is available, however, suggests that social mobility is likely to mitigate the emotive component of class affiliations. Summarizing a variety of studies of social mobility in developing countries, Joan M. Nelson finds that a significant fraction of the urban poor manages to improve its material condition substantially. 80 Intergenerationally, a majority of people whose fathers were unskilled manual workers become skilled manual workers, nonmanual workers, and in some cases administrators, businessmen, or professionals. Even within generations, she concludes, "there is widespread though modest upward mobility across the span of individual working lives," and in addition many "who fail to climb the occupational ladder may nonetheless manage to increase their incomes." 81 Where overall rates of occupational mobility are modest, the composition of modern-sector elites tends to be quite open to persons of various social backgrounds. This is largely due to the powerful influence of schooling in regulating access to elite positions and the tendency of secondary schools to draw students from a broad spectrum of the population, including the peasantry. 82 Given such patterns, it comes as no surprise that interclass hostility is far more rarely expressed in surveys than is the desire for emulation of those of higher status. 83 Moreover, social class affiliations, though sometimes important, appear to be as

77. Ibid., 222.
78. Ibid., 60.
79. Ibid., 269.
81. Ibid., 46.
readily compartmentalized in developing countries as in industrialized countries. The Marxian concept of class as an inherited and determinant affiliation finds no support in these data.

Marx's conception applies with far less distortion to ethnic groups. Ethnic membership is generally given at birth. The ethnic group has a certain "position" in society. As Marx postulated that class affiliations penetrate every pore of social life, ethnic group membership has ramifying effects; its significance is not confined to a single narrow realm. If class and family are disconnected in a way Marx did not envision, ethnicity and family are indeed connected. For this "Marxian" reason, ethnic affiliations have considerable power to generate conflict. They are not exact replicas of the class affiliations Marx had in mind, but their properties bear resemblance in ways central to Marx's argument. In much of Asia and Africa, it is only modest hyperbole to assert that the Marxian prophecy has had an ethnic fulfillment.