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Revisiting Nationalism and Ethnicity in Africa

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# **REVISITING NATIONALISM AND ETHNICITY IN AFRICA**

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**M. Crawford Young**

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## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

M. Crawford Young is the H. Edwin Professor of Political Sciences at the University of Wisconsin, Madison and a specialist in African politics, cultural pluralism, comparative politics, and the State. Young received his BA from the University of Michigan and his Ph.D. from Harvard University. He was visiting scholar at the Institute of Historical Research at the University of London as well as at the Institut d'Etudes Politiques, University of Paris. He joined University of Wisconsin - Madison Political Science Department in 1963 and in those years has been visiting professor at Makerere University in Kampala Uganda and at the Universite Cheikh Anta Diop de Dakar in Senegal and Dean of the Faculty of Social Science at the Universite Naitonale du Zaire, Lubumbasha. Among his many books and articles are The politics of Cultural Pluralism, Ideology and Development in Africa and The African Colonial State in Comparative Perspective. In addition to his leadership in the study of political dimensions of cultural pluralism, Young is considered the preeminent scholar of politics in what is present-day democratic Republic Congo. His co-authored book *The Rise and Decline of the Zairian State* remains the definitive treatment of Mobutu's Zaire. Young is the recipient of numerous awards and honors among which are African Studies Association's Distinguished Africanist Award, Hilldale Award for distinguished research, teaching and service as well as being elected to the American Academy of Arts and Science.

## FORWARD

I am extremely pleased to welcome everyone to the Eighth Biennial James S. Coleman Memorial Lecture. I am particularly pleased that Mrs. Ursula Coleman is able to join us. I understand that she has known our speaker, Crawford Young, for quite some time, having met him during the time he was involved in higher education institution building in Central Africa.

As I am sure you all know, this lecture is dedicated to the life, memory, and contribution to the field of African development made by James S. Coleman, the founding director of UCLA's African Studies Center. The Center was founded just over forty years ago, and from the very beginning, it assumed the position of one of the leading Africa focused university research centers in the world. In large measure, this was due to the vision and tireless efforts of Coleman to make a large contribution to institution and capacity building in the new states of Africa.

Coleman was a pioneer in the field of the development of African higher education, and the idea behind this biennial memorial lecture in his name is to feature a speaker who exemplifies what Coleman stood for. I am sure you will all agree that Professor Crawford Young is just such a person. He worked closely with James Coleman in Central and East Africa helping to establish and strengthen the universities of Lubumbashi (Zaire) and Mekerere (Uganda) respectively.

In a commemorative booklet, issued following the memorial service for Jim after his death in 1985, the forward describe him in terms of, "...his genius, warmth, energy, integrity, vision, and dedication." These same words could be used to describe Crawford Young. In many ways his career has been a mirror image of Coleman's, particularly in terms of his contribution to African development.

I first came to know Professor Young when I joined the Ph.D. program in African and Comparative Politics at the University of Wisconsin in 1969. He was at the height of his scholarly career at that time, having just published a seminal book on the politics of the former Belgian Congo, and was in the process of writing an even more path-breaking study, The Politics of Cultural Pluralism. At the same time, he was involved in fieldwork in Uganda, and in the early 1970s, he served as Dean of the Faculty of Social Science at the National University of Lubumbashi in Zaire. Professor Young has engaged in field research in a number of African countries, most notably the present-day Democratic Republic of Congo, Senegal, and Uganda.

In his research fieldwork and in his administrative roles in Africa, Young has always been not only a teacher, but also a talent scout. He has been responsible for identifying and training a large number of African intellectuals to fill the ranks of scholars and administrators, dedicated to the development of their respective countries. Therefore, you can see why I think it is fair to say that Crawford Young is the ideal person to deliver the Coleman lecture for this year.

Presently Professor Young is the H. Edwin Young Professor of Political Science at the University of Wisconsin, Madison. He joined the faculty there some 37 years ago, after having received his BA from the University of Michigan and his Ph.D. from Harvard University. One of my colleagues here at UCLA always describes Harvard Ph.D.'s as people who have thought deeply about something. In traditional Harvard fashion, Young has thought deeply about a great deal and he has shared with all of us the products of these profound ruminations. He is the author of several highly influential books including, Ideology and Development in Africa, and The African Colonial State in Comparative Perspective, the latter the winner of the American Political Science Association's prestigious prize for the best book in Comparative Politics. In addition to the books I have mentioned, he is the author of numerous journal articles and book chapters.

Young has been the President of the African Studies Association and the recipient of numerous awards and honors including, the Distinguished Africanist Award of the African Studies Association. Further evidence of Crawford Young's standing as a political scientist who specializes in African matters could be seen in his election to the prestigious American Academy of Arts and Science.

We are indeed fortunate to have Professor Young as the presenter of this year's Coleman Memorial Lecture. His presentation is entitled: *Revisiting Nationalism and Ethnicity in Africa*.

By Edmond J. Keller

Professor of Political Science, UCLA

Director of the James S. Coleman African Studies Center

## REVISITING NATIONALISM AND ETHNICITY IN AFRICA

The closely bound yet distinctive discourses of identity represented by nationalism and ethnicity play intriguing roles in contemporary African politics. Both are global idioms of solidarity, whose African expressions are in important ways distinctive. The idea of nationalism, whose African form is often regarded by European interpreters as lacking the deep ancestral and primordial rooting of its Eurasian versions, I will argue, has been underestimated. Ethnicity, in contrast, often seen in the external gaze as the defining feature of African society, proves a less potent competitor to nation-state nationalism than is the case in Europe and Asia.

As analytical fields, both nationalism and ethnicity in Africa trace back to a single towering mind, that of James S. Coleman to whose memory this lecture series is dedicated. Coleman was among a tiny handful of scholars who, in the 1950s, sought to understand anti-colonial protest as nationalism.<sup>1</sup> His classic 1954 article firmly situated African demands for self-rule in the larger context of the idea of nationalism, translated to African circumstances.<sup>2</sup> Alone of the initial cluster of students of African nationalism, he also confronted the ethnic phenomenon, and its symbiosis with anti-colonial nationalism. His magnum opus, *Nigeria: Background to Nationalism*, begins to chart a pathway to conceptual grasp of both nationalism and ethnicity.<sup>3</sup>

In revisiting the themes of nationalism and ethnicity in Africa, the Coleman oeuvre remains a point of departure. At the time of composition of his most influential works, over four decades ago, the hiding hand of the future still veiled the prospective nature of post-colonial politics, and the part that discourses of identity might play. Although anti-colonial nationalism as mobilizing doctrine was clearly visible, much less evident was its possible naturalization as state ideology of territorial solidarity. Ethnicity, at once codified and constructed yet covered and concealed by colonial autocracy, offered an even more inscrutable itinerary. The goal of this paper is to examine the evolving forms and uses of nationalism and ethnicity in Africa in the latter half of the twentieth century.

Two major puzzles inform this inquest. The first baffling phenomenon has been the tenacity of territorial national attachments even when the state, which bears this nationhood, has fallen into discredited decrepitude, or all but vanished as an institutional reality. Many of the leading students of nationalism, such as Anthony Smith or Walker Connor, dismissed territorial nationalism in Africa as inauthentic, lacking the ultimate ethnic origin around which the constitutive myths of shared history and ancestry took form.<sup>4</sup> In taking stock of the idea of nationalism in Africa fifteen years ago, I found that the discursive energies mobilized by the struggle for independence had dissipated, and that nationalist thought appeared moribund.

The tongue of discourse is – perhaps momentarily – silent. Conjuncture doubtless plays its part; so dispiriting are the economic circumstances confronting most African States that the self-confidence exuded by an earlier discourse has vanished. As nationalist thought was assimilated into State ideology, it suffered the

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<sup>1</sup> The most influential, aside from Coleman, was doubtless Thomas Hodgkin, *Nationalism in Colonial Africa* (London: F. Muller, 1956).

<sup>2</sup> James S. Coleman, "Nationalism in Tropical Africa," *American Political Science Review* 48, 2 (1954), 404-426.

<sup>3</sup> James S. Coleman, *Nigeria: Background to Nationalism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1958).

<sup>4</sup> See Anthony D. Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), and *State and Nation in the Third World: The Western State and African Nationalism* (Brighton: Wheatsheaf Books, 1983); Walker Connor, *Ethnonationalism: The Quest for Understanding* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).

delegitimation of the State itself, and the silent processes of civil society disengagement from the public realm.<sup>5</sup>

Paradoxically, however, the presumption that state delegitimation erased national attachment proves erroneous. Consider such cases as Congo-Kinshasa, Sierra Leone, or Sudan. In Congo-Kinshasa, the discredit of the state as a venal predator was well nigh total by the end of the Mobutu era, and little has changed since; the country is split into four fragments, occupied by six foreign armies. Yet no voice is raised in support of secession; the sole point upon which all parties seem agreed is the urgency of preserving the unity of the country. Sierra Leone in the 1990s has been racked by warlordism, overrun by sanguinary rebel militia culpable of mind-numbing atrocities; its diamond wealth a blood currency trafficked by all hands. Yet all Sierra Leonians desperately cling to the dream of a restored state able to assure basic security; Sierra Leone remains an undisputed national attachment. In Sudan, the south has known peace only for a decade since independence in 1956. Much of the time, Khartoum regimes have insisted upon an Arab and Islamic content to a Sudanese national personality, identities not only alien to the south but deeply threatening. Despite more than a million casualties, savage civil war, and recently ruthless ethnic cleansing of southern populations from oil-producing zones, the leading insurgent movement, the Sudan Peoples Liberation Movement (SPLA) still officially espouses the goal of a secular and inclusive Sudan.<sup>6</sup> Thus, even though the African state system in its historical origins was more arbitrary and externally determined than any other, some sense of territorial attachment to the colonial partition administrative entities as “nation” has taken root in the social imaginary.

The second confounding pattern lies in the forms taken by political ethnicity. Commonly known as “tribalism”, when political ethnicity first became visible in the 1950s, it was negatively viewed in two ways: firstly, as antithesis to progress, an artifact of traditionality in the African countryside which modernizers wanted to contain at the social margins, and secondly as a divisive and fissiparous force which posed great danger to the consolidation of new states. The more optimistic of the African nationalist leaders dreamed of a swift victory over the demons of division. “In three or four years,” declared radical nationalist Sekou Toure at the time of independence, “no one will remember the tribal, ethnic, or religious rivalries which, in the recent past, caused so much damage to our country and its population.”<sup>7</sup> Some analysts perceived in the novel forms of ethnicity visible in urban centers an evolutionary step in the shedding of customary “tribalism”; these syncretized, constructed versions of ethnic attachment, ran the argument, lacked the stubborn customary rooting of rural “tribe”, and thus could be more readily overwritten by the nationalism message.<sup>8</sup> The common faith was the devout wish for the erasure of political ethnicity.

Ethnicity, however, in the wry observation of Leroy Vail, “failed to cooperate with its many would-be pall-bearers.”<sup>9</sup> The equation of “tribe” and tradition proved false. The rise in ethnic expression was intimately bound with what was commonly perceived as “modernity”: urbanization, increasing literacy, ramifying patterns of communication. The crucial query was whether ethnic diversity would make new states ungovernable. The first response was to contain and repress ethnicity through the imposition of single party systems. The first

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<sup>5</sup> Crawford Young, “Nationalism, Ethnicity, and Class in Africa: A Retrospective,” *Cahiers d’Etudes Africaines* 26, 2 (1986), 436.

<sup>6</sup> All its followers and fighters, many of whom are convinced that the north will never accept a secular and inclusive Sudan, by no means share the SPLA official position and thus that separation is the only possible path.

<sup>7</sup> Sekou Toure, *Towards Full Reafricanisation* (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1959), 28.

<sup>8</sup> See for an influential example of this reasoning Immanuel Wallerstein, “Ethnicity and National Integration in West Africa,” *Cahiers d’Etudes Africaines* 3 (1960), 129-139.

<sup>9</sup> Leroy Vail, “Introduction: Ethnicity in Southern African History,” in Vail, ed., *The Creation of Tribalism in Southern Africa* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 2.

three independence decades of single-party authoritarianism drove ethnicity into the shadows, but entirely failed to eradicate its mobilizing potential. The widespread though uneven democratization surge of the 1990s revealed that ethnicity was alive and well, often shaping political alignments and finding public expression. The genocidal tragedies of Rwanda and Burundi demonstrated the lethal potential of ethnic polarization in extreme cases. However, most cases were not extreme, and for the most part open political competition did not produce escalating ethnic antagonisms. More striking yet, the unmistakable vitality of ethnic consciousness did not, with rare exceptions, lead to demands for separation and self-determination, as was so frequently the case in Europe and Asia. Ethnic politics pivoted about relative shares, not secession. Ethnicity thus proved neither an expression of backwardness easily swept aside, nor a mortal threat to the political order.

In unraveling this pair of puzzles, I begin by defining nationalism and ethnicity, and the relationship between them. The African expressions of each of these phenomena then require situation in a global comparative context, to illuminate both their commonalities and distinctive features. With this comparative grounding, possible explanations are proposed for the surprising tenacity of territorial nationalism, and the failure of ethnicity to evolve into an ethnonational challenge to the state system.

Nationalism and ethnicity are intertwined concepts, which overlap but are not identical. Nationalism I would define as an ideology claiming that a given human population has a natural solidarity based on shared history and a common destiny. This collective identity as a historically constituted “people” crucially entails the right to constitute an independent or autonomous political community. The idea of nationalism takes form historically in tandem with the doctrine of popular sovereignty: that the ultimate source of authority lies in the people, not the ruler or government.

The foregoing definition of nationalism will be found in any classic text with minor variations. Definitions of ethnicity are more diverse; distilling from the menu of meanings in the literature, I would suggest that ethnicity might be conceptualized in terms of three defining elements. Firstly, ethnicity rests upon a variable list of shared cultural attributes. Language is primarily, although not invariably present as a marker; one may recollect that Hutu and Tutsi share the same speech code in Rwanda and Burundi, as do Serbs and Croats in former Yugoslavia. Other frequent defining common properties include ancestry and kinship ideologies, cultural practices, symbolic repertoires, or modes of religious observation. Secondly, ethnicity is defined by an active consciousness of collective selfhood. The group is invariably named, and its members hold a self-awareness of their collective affiliation; absent consciousness, shared attributes cannot constitute groupness. Thirdly, ethnicity is defined by boundaries. “They” constitute the “us”; whom one is depends upon whom one is not.

There is a large zone of overlap between nationalism and ethnicity; however, not all nationalism is ethnic, nor does all ethnicity lay claim to nationalism. In its first stages, nationalism was usually ethnic in content, when it took form around historic European states whose name bore the imprint of a dominant group (France, Spain, England, Sweden, and Russia). Subsequently, as a doctrine for national unification movements (Germany, Italy), or as an ideology for self-determination movements amongst subject ethnonationalities of the Hapsburg, Ottoman or Russian empires, the fusion of ethnicity and nationalism was complete. However, in the Western hemisphere settler-led independence movements of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, a territorial version of the idea of nationalism appeared. Subsequently, the notion emerged that the shared attachment to a common set of political ideals – civic nationalism – could be constitutive of nationhood.<sup>10</sup> The

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<sup>10</sup> The idea of nationalism has attracted a vast array of students. For a recent survey of nationalism, including the debate about purely civic forms of the phenomenon, see Ronald Beiner, ed., *Theorizing Nationalism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999).



rise of self-assertion of colonized populations in Africa, Asia, and the Caribbean after World War I produced yet another form of nationalism. A “people” was constituted by the shared subjugation to an alien colonial power. The nation thus formed had a right to throw off imperial rule and enjoy sovereign independence. In this form, nationalism explicitly repudiated ethnicity as a legitimate basis for nationhood. The diverse cultural communities subjugated by a given colonial power formed the “people”; nationhood belonged to the collectivity, and not to individual ethnic communities. Thus although in many versions nationalism is ethnic, in a number of other settings it is not.

Conversely, ethnicity frequently gives rise to ethnonationalism, but does not necessarily involve the claim that the ethnic group represents itself as a “nation” with a legitimate claim to a right of sovereignty. In Europe and large parts of Asia, ethnic groups commonly appropriate the language of nationalism in their political status claims. In the modal Eurasian country, which bears the name of its ascendant ethnonational group (“titular nationality”, in Soviet lexicon), other ethnic communities are commonly regarded as “national minorities”, a classification upon which they insist. However, ethnicity does not always insist on nationhood. In the Western hemisphere, immigrant communities and racial minorities normally do not invoke the discourse of nationalism, which is limited to Quebec and indigenous peoples. In most of Africa and large parts of South and Southeast Asia, communal identity is not politically expressed as nationalism.

A further exploration of the variety of forms of nationalism and its historic diffusion will help illuminate the special features of its African version. Although scholars of nationalism debate its birth date, most agree that the idea first takes form around the leading historical states in early modern Europe. Two critical developments opened the way for the doctrine of nationalism to emerge. Firstly, beginning in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, states evolved into their modern form, built upon a permanent administrative and military apparatus distinct from the household and court of the sovereign. Once sovereignty became the “high, perpetual, and absolute” property of state institutions rather than the crown, in the ringing phrase of Jean Bodin, the stage was set for the emergence of claims beginning in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries that sovereignty ultimately belonged to the people. The American and French Revolutions enacted the doctrine of popular sovereignty, and opened the door for its marriage to the idea of nationalism.

Once established in the global constellation of political ideologies, the idea of nationalism became available for a variety of causes. It became a potent basis of challenge to the legitimacy of the great polyglot land empires of interior Europe, Austria-Hungary, the Ottoman state, and Russia. Germans, South Slavs, Italians, and Arabs invoked the doctrine as foundation for unification projects. Old states threatened by European imperial expansion found in the idea of nationalism an invaluable basis for self-strengthening and engaging the subject population in fending off Western intrusion; the survival of Japan, China, Iran, Thailand and Ethiopia as independent states owes much to the timely assimilation of nationalist ideology into state doctrine. In all these instances, the appropriation of nationalism included an ethnic content.

However, in a crucial innovation, settler communities in the Americas in revolt against Britain or Spain needed the doctrine of self-determination embedded in nationalism, but also claimed a distinctiveness based not on ethnicity but on their American residence. Legitimation of the new states necessitated activation of a common sentiment: “we the people” of the American constitutional preamble as living reality rather than mere rhetorical flourish. Both shared political values – republicanism, democracy – and a territorial self-designation – America preempted by the United States, administrative subdivisions of the former Spanish empire in Latin America – replaced ethnicity as defining content of a nascent nationalism. One should also note a clearly exclusionary dimension to the first forms of Western hemisphere nationalisms; African slaves (or freedmen) and indigenous peoples were not for a long time a part of the “nation”.

Yet another use for the idea of nationalism appeared in the twentieth century, with the Afro-Asian revolt against colonial subjugation. By this time, the nationalist doctrine of self-determination began to win recognition in the law of nations in the World War I settlement; in different ways, Woodrow Wilson and Vladimir Lenin elevated the idea of nationalism to a new level of world recognition. The bounded subjugation formed by the territorial container of a given unit of colonial rule was asserted as formative of a “people,” entitled to enjoy the right of self-determination. This reformulation of the idea of nationalism provided the ideological weapon for the eventual liberation of the vast African, Asian and Caribbean domains of Western overseas empires.<sup>11</sup>

As the idea of nationalism reverberates around the world, its content in particular settings may evolve. Germany, whose virulent prewar nationalism mingled race and ethnicity in a lethal elixir, sought a reformulation of the national idea after its catastrophic defeats in the two world wars. What some have termed “constitutional patriotism” comes to the fore, with a conscious effort to foreground the federal democracy of the postwar republic as defining German identity, rather than the blood ties of language and ethnicity. In France, republicanism, laicity, and the mythology of the French Revolution mingle with language and culture in defining the nation. Some students of nationalism, such as Ernest Gellner and Liah Greenfeld, perceive a geographical gradient in its nature in Europe, predominately civic in the west, becoming increasingly ethnic to the east.<sup>12</sup>

In sum, the idea of nationalism is an ideology with variable content and different pathways, but a core claim of the right of a “people”, however defined, to sovereignty. In its diverse versions, nationalism supplies very potent discursive resources. In its ethnic, territorial, anti-imperial, civic, or irredentist forms, nationalism readily weaves the pristine simplicity of its basic message into the historic narrative and symbolic repertoires of a given context.

We may now turn to the particular itinerary of nationalism in Africa. The colonial partition of Africa created the preconditions and framework for its emergence. Once established, mostly in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the colonial state constituted its subject in three ways, which in turn provided the identity vessels through which collective self-assertion occurred. First, the African was a racialized subject, a “black”.<sup>13</sup> European conquest of Africa occurred simultaneous with the apogee of ideologies of racism, given new virulence with the assimilation of social darwinism into creeds of European superiority. The racialization of the subject gave rise to comprehensive patterns of segregation, and the suffocating paternalism linked to the premise that the African subject was a mere savage child.

Secondly, the African was classified as the native subject of a given territorial division of the colonial partition. In the lived experience of the colonial subject, the territorial compartment defined the terms of subjugation. The taxation, law enforcement, labor requisitions, and other distasteful impositions of the colonial

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<sup>11</sup> The classic study of the rise of Afro-Asian nationalism remains Rupert Emerson, *From Empire to Nation: The Rise to Self-Assertion of Asian and African Peoples* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960). See as well the splendid new study by one of his former students, David Abernethy, *The Dynamics of Global Dominance: European Empires 1415-1980* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000).

<sup>12</sup> Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983); Liah Greenfeld, *Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992).

<sup>13</sup> Racialization in the Arab tier of states in northern Africa was somewhat different, since Arabs were not phenotypically “black” in the way required by the racial stereotypes common in Europe. They were, however, indubitably a racial (and religious) other, towards whom were directed attitudes of scorn and policies of differentiation and segregation derived from the sentiments of racism embedded in European colonial rule.

regime operated at the territorial level, through which the institutional reality of a state apparatus functioned.

Thirdly, the African was constituted as an ethnic subject. The organization of European administration in Africa rested upon a “tribal” metaphor. African society was presumed to be divided into discrete, bounded social entities, or “tribes”. The challenge to the colonial state-builder was to discover and codify these divisions. Once mapped, “native administration” was erected upon this external reading of ethnicity. The significance of this classification project is well captured by Mahmood Mamdani:

*...more than any other colonial subject, the African was containerized, not as a native, but as a tribesperson. Every colony had two legal systems: one modern, the other customary. Customary law was defined in the plural, as the law of the tribe, and not in the singular, as a law for all natives ....roughly as many sets of customary laws as there were said to be tribes.<sup>14</sup>*

Each of these constituted categories of identity gave rise to a different discourse of solidarity, and served as a vehicle for the collective agency of the subject. The first two forms in time became joined to the global ideology of nationalism; “African” as racialized subject created the doctrine of pan-Africanism, while “native” as a territorial subject appropriated the idea of nationalism for use as anti-colonial challenge around the units of colonial partition. The third identity category, as “tribal” subject, gave birth to political ethnicity, whose constructivist dynamic exhibited remarkable creative energies. However, for the most part, the social construction of ethnicity did not draw upon the idea of nationalism.

The first evocation of the idea of nationalism appeared in the form of pan-Africanism. At first, the architects of the ideal of continental liberation and a vocation of unity came from Africans of the diaspora. Since their social experience in the Americas was defined by slavery and racial oppression, and the great majority had lost any knowledge of their territorial or ethnic antecedents, the language of protest and solidarity necessarily followed the racial axis, inverting European racism into an assertion of African dignity and worth. The series of pan-African congresses, beginning in 1900, provided a venue for the framing of demands for African rights. Another important diasporic impact on the pan-African idea was the Garveyite movement of the 1920s, with its theme of a return to Africa to create a new kingdom of racial solidarity.

After World War II, leadership of the pan-African movement was assumed by a new generation of African intellectuals from the continent. Colonial boundaries were excoriated as fundamentally illegitimate; the 1945 Manchester Pan-African Congress denounced “the artificial divisions and territorial boundaries created by the Imperialist Powers.” The theme of rejection of colonial partition boundaries continued until the virtual eve of independence; the 1958 Accra All-African Peoples’ Congress denounced “artificial frontiers drawn by the imperialist Powers to divide the peoples of Africa,” insisting on “the abolition or adjustment of such frontiers at an early date.”<sup>15</sup>

The dream of unity expressed by the pan-African conferences found expression on another track, with emergence in the postwar years of sophisticated philosophic narratives enriching the pan-African idea. A Belgian missionary, Placide Tempels, extracted from his reading of Luba-Shaba culture an eschatology of evangelical intent, representing his hermeneutics as the revelation of a generic “Bantu philosophy” common to

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<sup>14</sup> Mahmood Madani, *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 22.

<sup>15</sup> Quoted in Saadia Touval, *The Boundary Politics of Independent Africa* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972), 22-23.

this vast linguistic zone.<sup>16</sup> *Présence Africaine*, in reprinting translated versions of this work, enlarged its scope to a pan-African level by urging that “every African” should read this text. Senegalese intellectual Cheikh Anta Diop developed the thesis, based on controversial linguistic evidence, of a black civilization as precursor and source of Egyptian and Ethiopian high cultures.<sup>17</sup> Leopold Senghor elaborated a philosophy of *négritude*, attributing a unique array of naturalist, non-materialist values to African cultures. Other influential intellectuals contributed to this venture, among them V.Y. Mudimbe, D.A. Masolo, Paulin Houtondji, and Kwame Gyekye.<sup>18</sup> Intriguingly, the articulation of an African philosophy often involves the silent projection upon a continental canvass of a moral aesthetic derived from a given ethnic community. In addition to Tempels, the thoughtful Gyekye version of an African philosophy is an exegesis of Akan culture, as was the earlier work of W.E. Abraham.<sup>19</sup> The implicit theme is that the metaphysics which can be extracted from a particular setting are a faithful replica of the philosophic precepts of a far vaster universe, that there is a natural commonality to African culture. One may note in passing that this postulated shared worldview does not readily encompass the Arab cultural zone.

Though the actual achievement of independence occurred through the territorial frame of the colonial partition, the resiliency of the pan-African vision stands out. African leaders first endeavored to give content to the dream with the creation of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in 1963. Although the institutional reality of the OAU, constrained by its meager resources, limited mandate, and divergent interests of its member states, fell far short of its vision, the pan-African version of nationalism still resonates. The replacement of the OAU in 2001 by a revamped African Union, whose structural ambitions go far beyond the OAU, illustrates this point. Although the authorship of this project by the mercurial Libyan autocrat Muammar Qaddafi might have given rise to suspicions of his personal ambitions, the project, adopted and ratified with remarkable speed, a process doubtless lubricated to some extent by Libyan subsidies to some of the smaller and impoverished states. However, “Africa” clearly exists at the level of a continental social imagination, and the pan-African vehicle of nationalism in Africa holds significant meaning.

The territorial form of nationalism was slower to develop, but became the inescapable frame for effective confrontation and challenge to the colonial order. Political organization at the pan-African level was limited to the episodic conference. Continuous agitation and effective popular mobilization could only occur at the institutional level where the nationalist organizer encountered a specific state structure. Once this struggle was effectively joined, an ideology of mobilization inevitably had to privilege the territorial referent.

A degree of territorial consciousness was already in place, shaped by the classifications of the colonial state. In a number of instances, immigrant communities played an important part in asserting a territorial consciousness, particularly where settlers were numerous and imagined that they could assume control of the colonial state. In Gabon, for example, Roland Poutier traces the earliest manifestations of territorial consciousness to the small European community resentful of restrictions imposed from the distant center of the French Equatorial African administrative federation in Brazzaville. These territorial discontents were swiftly assimilated by an emergent generation of African clerks, teachers, and forest workers, and reframed in African

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<sup>16</sup> Placide Tempels, *La philosophie bantoue* (Elisabethville: L’Olivier, 1945).

<sup>17</sup> Cheikh Anta Diop, *Nations nègres et culture*, 2d ed., (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1965).

<sup>18</sup> V.Y. Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988); D.A. Masolo, *African Philosophy in Search of Identity* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994); Paulin Houtondji, *African Philosophy: Myth and Reality* (London: Hutchinson, 1983); Kwame Gyekye, *Tradition and Modernity: Philosophical Reflections on the African Experience* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

<sup>19</sup> W.E. Abraham, *The Mind of Africa* (London: Wiedenfeld & Nicolson, 1962).

terms.<sup>20</sup> Although the colonial state invested little moral energy in promoting territorial consciousness, by the time that independence struggle began in earnest such awareness was well implanted, reflected in the use of the territorial name in an array of social and political organizations that sprang up in the postwar years.

Once independence was won, new leaders faced an urgent task of legitimizing the states, which they ruled. “Nation-building” was everywhere perceived as an imperative vocation. States had substantial resources for this task. The educational system was a critical instrument. Africanization of the curriculum was promoted across the continent; in practice, this was above all a territorialization of content. The pedagogical “nation-building” coincided with a very rapid expansion of the educational system in most states, multiplying its impact. One may recollect in this regard the enormous importance of mass education in turning “peasants into Frenchmen”,<sup>21</sup> or assimilating waves of European immigrants in the United States. State controlled media were conscious instruments for inculcation of the national idea. Innumerable rituals of state drummed the national idea into the public consciousness: national holidays, national anthems, daily flag-raising ceremonies at all administrative headquarters. In a dozen banal ways, the nation was subliminally communicated through its ubiquitous flag, its currency, its postage stamps, its identity cards. The national football team was a powerful rallying point for country solidarity. The international system provided daily validation through its classification of the populace as nationals of a given territory, authorized to travel by bearing its passport. Political action and participation could legitimately occur only within the territorial domain of one’s citizen status.

In various ways, a territorial national consciousness filtered into popular culture. Distinctive national genres in music and art emerged. In popular song and urban folk art, the particular social experience of given countries found expression. A hidden process of naturalization of the territorial nation took place, creating an everyday, unreflected notion of national attachment well captured by Michael Billig as “banal nationalism”:

*In so many little ways, the citizenry are daily reminded of their national place in a world of nations. However, this reminding is so familiar, so continual that it is not consciously registered as reminding. The metonymic image of banal nationalism is not a flag being consciously waved with fervent passion; it is the flag hanging unnoticed on a public building.*<sup>22</sup>

In this form, territorial nationalism could persist even in the face of state decay and crisis. Indeed, the Congo-Kinshasa case suggests that crisis may lead to the crystallization of new bases for such nationalism. The thesis gained force in the 1990s that a Congolese nation rested not just on colonial partition and anti-colonial mobilization, but was a natural emanation of an underlying cultural and linguistic unity, based upon “Bantu” identity. This theory, redolent of the Tempels discovery of “Bantu philosophy” five decades earlier, was endowed with a master narrative by the massive 900-page history of the Congo published by a distinguished Congolese historian, Isidore Ndaywel è Ntiem, in 1998.<sup>23</sup> Most Congolese languages fell within the Bantu linguistic family. Those, especially along the northern tier of the country, which did not could be conceptualized as in process of acquiring a deepening affinity to the Bantu zone. An older and now disputed linguistic theory explained the diffusion of Bantu languages as the product of a mass migration by a

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<sup>20</sup> Roland Pourtier, *Le Gabon*, 2 vols. (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1989).

<sup>21</sup> See the classic study by Eugen Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France, 1870-1914* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1979).

<sup>22</sup> Michael Billig, *Banal Nationalism* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1995), 8.

<sup>23</sup> Isidore Ndaywel è Ntiem, *Histoire générale du Congo: De l’héritage ancien à la République Démocratique* (Paris: Duculot, 1998).

technologically superior people, who achieved linguistic and social ascendancy and assimilated older population strata, a premise which serves as subtext to the Ndaywel theory. The thesis of a Congo nation incarnating a common Bantu culture drew energy from the immediate political context. The role of Rwandans as an occupying force in wake of the overthrow of the Mobutu regime in 1997, then in the new insurgent invasion of 1998 sparked a wave of anti-Rwandan (more specifically, anti-Tutsi) popular sentiments; the intruders were variously seen as “Nilotics” or “Hamitics”, outsiders whose invasions of the Great Lakes region centuries earlier had wreaked great havoc. Thus, even at a juncture when the state was fragmented and barely operating, the text of territorial nationalism acquired important new cultural content.<sup>24</sup>

Territorial nationalism co-existed easily with its possible pan-African competitor. The denial of the legitimacy of the colonial partition heard early in the development of African nationalism, and accompanying calls for erasure of the imperial boundaries, vanished well before independence. Pan-Africanism was, on the contrary, entirely territorialized. Projects of a larger African unity were firmly grounded by the OAU in the existing state system, whose boundaries were declared sacrosanct by the founding congress in 1963. This territorial basis for pan-African constructs was entirely preserved in the newly launched African Union.

The relationship of territorial nationalism with ethnicity was far more uneasy. With a handful of exceptions, African polities are multi-ethnic. Territorial nationalism thus must explicitly deny any ethnic content, and represent itself as a higher order of solidarity, which has superior claims to the loyalty of the citizen. With independence, most states sought to abandon the ethnic containerization of the colonial state, through dropping ethnic categories in the national census, redrawing internal administrative lines, and often banning ethnic organizations. “Tribalism” was regularly denounced, a sin invariably committed by one’s adversaries. Ethnicity was by no means ignored in political practice; even authoritarian rulers normally included political figures from most major groups in their cabinets. Nevertheless, the territorial nation was portrayed as a solidarity standing above the cultural composition of its populace, not simply a sum of its ethnic parts.

However, the citizen invariably had an ethnic as well as a territorial self. The nation-building project has not erased ethnicity, nor confined it merely to the private realm. However, the very nature of the territorial nation meant that there was no possibility of imposing the kind of homogenizing project, which, in a number of Eurasian cases, has provoked strong cultural resistance and even separatist movements. Sudan is the major exception; Arabization and Islamization produced the same results as did Russification in the Baltics or Sinhalization in Sri Lanka.

The itinerary of ethnicity in Africa reflects a distinctive pattern of encounter between cultural identity and state practice. A dynamic evolution of identity stands out, beginning with the colonial partition and the accompanying third constitution of the African subject as an ethnic person. The pre-colonial identity map in Africa was very different from the ethnic cartography of today. Most large states in pre-colonial Africa were neither ethnic in self-definition nor homogeneous in population. In the many regions of the continent where small-scale political organization prevailed, a given linguistic zone had multiple polities. Most identities were localized, even if there might be some awareness of sharing a widely diffused linguistic consciousness, as with Arabic.

The colonial partition set in motion far-reaching changes. The architects of the colonial state undertook the organization of their new domains informed by the premise of a “tribal” Africa. An ethnic template was

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<sup>24</sup> Jan Vansina provides a compelling critique of the “Bantu” theory of a Congolese nation, “Bantu: A Racist Ideology in Contemporary Congo,” typescript, 2001.

placed upon the territory; the first task of administrators was to interrogate their new subjects to discover the tribal map. The information they gathered was naturally complex and contradictory, and required simplification and codification. The early years of colonial administration were marked by constant tinkering with the boundaries of the units of “native administration,” in tireless pursuit of a correct alignment of identity and jurisdiction. The subjects could not easily escape the classificatory containers into which they found themselves placed.

Missionary action introduced a parallel dynamic. The evangelical endeavor required a more systematic linguistic access to the subject than was needed for the administration. The holy book had to be translated; catechism needed the local idiom. Cost-effective conversion called for identification of speech codes with a potentially wide diffusion, then creation of a standard written version. Once equipped with grammar and dictionary, a language had new identity-building capacities. Mission rivalries might result in multiple standard forms in given linguistic zones; for example, in the Kongo area Swedish and English Protestants and Walloon and Flemish Catholic mission orders created competing standard forms based on regional dialects in the zones of their mission stations. Overall, the mission-based language codification project provided a crucial basis for the emergence of larger categories of ethnic consciousness.

Colonial anthropology also played a role. Initially often carried out as an amateur pursuit by administrators or missionaries, the classic medium of the early generation of anthropological research was the ethnic monograph. Many of the early studies projected data gathered in a small area upon a much larger geographic canvass, often including expansive maps portraying the group as occupying a vast area. The ethnic monograph, bearing the high authority of scientific scripture, fed back into the ethnic templates of the administration. Their findings also found their ways into school curricula, and to the body of formal cultural knowledge communicated to the subject.

Agency in this active process of social construction of ethnicity was not limited to the alien labors of European administrators, missionaries, or anthropologists. Africans were active participants as well. The colonial chiefs soon acquired a vested interest in the containers created by “native administration”, and the identity labels attached to them. In the emergent urban centers, migrants of common cultural affinity formed organizations for mutual support in overcoming the multiple challenges of town life: jobs, housing, coping with misfortune. These ethnic and hometown associations became as well sites for performance of cultural identity, and articulation of collective consciousness. With the introduction of electoral competition in the terminal colonial period, ethnic associations became building blocks for political parties; in the process, ethnicity acquired new political meanings.

Pioneer African intellectuals played a crucial role as cultural entrepreneurs for some major groups. Sir Apolo Kagwa, the outstanding Protestant Katikiro (Prime Minister) of Buganda in the early colonial years, synthesized the oral history of Buganda into several written volumes, and was the primary informant for the first anthropological chronicler of the kingdom, Sir John Roscoe. Decades later, Christopher Wrigley reported that copies of the Kagwa history are found today in most villages.<sup>25</sup> Samuel Johnson and Samuel Crowther, Yoruba intellectuals of the late nineteenth century, were prime agents in the construction of Yorubahood, a collective consciousness that does not predate the colonial encounter. Johnson produced a *History of the Yoruba* in 1897, and Crowther led the way to a standard version of Yoruba, based on the Oyo dialect. Catholic clergyman Alexis Kagame codified a court version of Tutsi oral tradition in Rwanda, which became a basic source for identity construction.

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<sup>25</sup> Christopher Wrigley, *Kingship and State: The Buganda Dynasty* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 8.

If we examine the ethnic phenomenon in Africa in comparative perspective, some distinctive features stand out. The dynamic of flux and change is particularly consequential; probably more than in any other major region, ethnicity in Africa must be grasped through the analytical lens of constructivism.<sup>26</sup> The scope of identity reformulation over the last century affects the landscape in several ways. One consequence is the significance of multiple levels of identity, often a product of an overlay of newer, broader definitions of ethnic community upon older, more localized versions. Another is the fluidity and ambiguity of ethnic boundaries in many instances, as a social construction process has proceeded unevenly in different zones. The placement of territorial boundaries also affects cultural categories; to cite but one example, populations known as Kiga in southwestern Uganda are historically indistinguishable from counterparts in northern Rwanda incorporated into a Hutu category.

The flux and change is particularly visible in the urban sector. In much of Africa before 1940, most towns were small, with few cities exceeding a population of 20,000. Through the 1980s, urbanization increased at a formidable rhythm, dotting the landscape with a number of mega cities. As crucibles of identity, the sprawling, mammoth city is a social universe radically different from the rural village.

One may observe a process of congealing cultural ideologies surrounding major ethnic categories. The instrumental uses of ethnicity as a competitive resource in the political realm – struggles over distribution and domination – have reinforced its place in the social repertoire of the individual citizen. In those instances of high ethnic polarization – the Nigerian civil war, genocidal episodes in Rwanda and Burundi – the deep anxieties and mutual fears produced by communal violence conveys a special intensity to identity. Agonizing security dilemmas also emerge when ethnic militia appear, as in the Great Lakes area, Congo-Brazzaville, southern Sudan or Nigeria. Slowly and unevenly, a tendency towards deeper primordialization of ethnicity seems in progress.

Ethnicity and pan-African discourse operate on entirely different identity tracks. The idea of a single Africa, that “we are all Africans” arises from the racialization of the African by Europe; appropriation of a stigma of scorn as a badge of pride inverted a doctrine of conquest into a theory of liberation. In so doing, it accepted the bond of color as supreme basis for unification its philosophers spun elaborate theories of a deep commonality of the moral universe. In such a vision, ethnicity fades into insignificance before these more profound underlying unities.

Pan-Africanism does not perceive ethnicity as a competitor, save only for the rival claims of pan-Arabism, geographically orthogonal to African unity. Movements for Arab unity and solidarity rely upon very different identity narratives, both in contemporary issues and historical referents. Colonial racialization, as noted earlier, was differently experienced by the Arab tier of states in northern Africa. Like pan-Africanism, pan-Arabism has been thoroughly territorialized; the Arab League, like the OAU, has been a cartel of states. This permits the Arab states of Africa to participate in both directions, avoiding the necessity of a choice. However, pan-Africanism as an ideology of identity doubtless resonates more strongly below the Sahara; the major texts asserting a generic African cultural domain all derive from this zone.

Ethnicity, in turn, is not challenged by pan-Africanism. Were the African Union to realize some of its

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<sup>26</sup> On the three major analytical streams in the interpretation of ethnicity, constructivism, instrumentalism, and primordialism, see Crawford Young, ed., *The Rising Tide of Cultural Pluralism: The Nation-State at Bay?* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993), and Stephen Cornell and Douglas Hartmann, *Ethnicity and Race: Making Identities in a Changing World* (Thousand Oaks: Pine Forge Press, 1998).



ambitions for supra-national construction, only the states would surrender some political space. The foil for ethnic solidarity is the territorial state; there are “national cakes” to divide and share, but no continental ones. In its interaction with state nationalism, ethnicity no longer faces the muscular effort to contain and marginalize it, which characterized the early post-colonial years. The era of denial of ethnicity as an embarrassing relic of the past is long over. In many states, one may observe a kind of truce between ethnicity and territorial nationalism, a pact of mutual forbearance. State leaders accept that ethnicity is a part of the social landscape, and begin to acknowledge its positive role as expression of a cultural heritage and basis for social cohesion. Ethnic leaders, with the exception of Ethiopia and to some extent Nigeria, shy away from ethnonationalism.

By way of conclusion, returning to our two puzzles, I would suggest that the persistence of a kind of territorial attachment, even in the face of state decline or collapse, demonstrates that state nationalism is more deeply implanted than many had believed. To my mind, this is best characterized as “banal nationalism,” naturalized at a sub-conscious level. My own and other earlier skepticism about territorial nationalism relied too much on measuring the phenomenon in terms of great texts or epic figures, such as Kwame Nkrumah or Patrice Lumumba. The major statements of African nationalism generated by the independence struggle were for the most part political tracts, which in context were compelling summations of grievance, but lacked the intellectual scope of an opus such as *The Discovery of India* of Jawaharlal Nehru.<sup>27</sup> Probably the most influential testaments were the writings of Amilcar Cabral and Frantz Fanon. However, these were long ago, and the context of state crisis by the 1980s bore little resemblance to the exuberant hopes of the independence struggle.

However, the real sites of a construction of territorial identity were elsewhere: in the schoolhouse, where a pedagogy of nation was recited, in the bars where a national popular culture of song and painting was performed, in the stadiums where the national football team played. In these everyday locations, territorial attachment became an unreflected assumption. The entry of Rwandan and Ugandan armies into Congo-Kinshasa in 1998 brought a visceral indignation to most Congolese; these soldiers were foreigners who did not belong. A similar reflex of popular anger occurred in Guinea-Bissau in 1998, when Senegalese troops occupied the capital in support of an embattled premier; Senegalese were interlopers in Bissau to nearly all, whatever their views on the internal power struggle. Everyone knew that a Ugandan was not a Kenyan, and vice versa. This form of banal nationalism should not be confused with forms of nationalism which are erected upon elaborated historical mythologies and richly embroidered ideologies: the nationalism of Japan, France, Armenia, for example. There are no tombs of unknown soldiers, whose inextinguishable flame bears witness to an ethos of willing supreme sacrifice for the nation. Thus, one should not expect that these territorial attachments would resist every challenge and overcome any obstacle. If, in Congo-Kinshasa, the de facto fragmentation of the country were to persist over extended time, to the extent that a long-term reconfiguration of social and economic space took place, then a permanent fracturing of the country and related territorial identity patterns might occur. If, in Sudan, no negotiated end to the unbearable violence and insecurity in the south can be achieved by a redefinition of the Sudanese nation, then the weakening threads tying the SPLA leadership to the goal of a single Sudan will snap.

Nevertheless, in most countries territorial nationalism faces no such challenge. Banal perhaps but sturdier than suspected, the territorial attachments are a key aspect of contemporary reality. The African state system persists not simply, as some argue,<sup>28</sup> because weak states are artificially sustained by the international system, but because their citizenries have come to regard them as an accepted part of the natural order.

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<sup>27</sup> Jawaharlal Nehru, *The Discovery of India* (New York: Meridian Books, 1946).

<sup>28</sup> Robert H. Jackson, *Quasi-States: Sovereignty, International Relations, and the Third World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

The answer to the second puzzle – the reticence of ethnicity before the temptations of nationalism – is partly found in the basic nature of cultural consciousness in Africa. The fluidity and complexity of ethnicity inhibit any tendency to assert maximal rights. In comparison with ethnic forms elsewhere, which have traveled the ethnonational route, ethnicity in Africa tends to have less highly elaborated cultural ideologies; its primordial dimensions are more weakly affirmed. As well, the African state system has not forced an ethnonational response to identifying the national personality with particular ethnic communities. The de-ethnicized territorial nationalism can co-exist with political ethnicity, if there is mutual restraint and agreement upon the rules of the game. Here one can detect a clear pattern of political learning, of the sort, which Ted Gurr credits for the surprising decrease in ethnic conflict in the world at large in recent years.<sup>29</sup> In coming to terms with their multi-cultural reality, states have become more sophisticated in accommodating their diversity.

However, contrary trends are observable. Some major ethnic groups may well become ethnonational. Such groups as the Zulu in South Africa, the Ganda in Uganda, the Yoruba and Igbo in Nigeria, the Oromo in Ethiopia have well-developed cultural ideologies, and come close in their recent political claims to embracing an ethnonational agenda. In Ethiopia, the 1991 Constitution was drawn upon an ethnonational principle, reconfiguring the major provincial subdivisions on an ethnic basis, and inscribing a right to national self-determination, including separation. The incumbent rulers have carefully structured politics to preclude effective use of this clause, but their ascendancy may not endure.

Yet it remains striking that demands for ethnic secession are rarely heard in Africa. Separatist movements almost invariably base their claims upon an existing administrative subdivision: the former Eastern Region for Biafra, Casamance in Senegal, and the three southern provinces for separatists in Sudan, Katanga, and the anglophone region of Cameroon. Even though the real energy for the Biafran secession was Igbo, and Diola in the case of Casamance, the discourse of secession is framed in territorial terms.

The dimensions of the challenges facing contemporary Africa in pursuing democratic consolidation and a return to economic health are forbidding enough. Were the zones of disorder in the continent to bring about a far-reaching dissolution of the state system, prospects for recovery would be dim indeed. However, the surprising persistence of territorial attachments, and the self-denial of ethnicity faced with the option of nationalism, gives reason to hope that the existing state system may remain viable.

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<sup>29</sup> Ted Robert Gurr, "Ethnic Warfare on the Wane," *Foreign Affairs* 79, 3 (May/June 2000), 72-84.