

## The World in Pieces: Culture and Politics at the End of the Century

To the memory of Edward Shils ... with whom I sometimes agreed

by Clifford Geertz

### The World in Pieces

Political theory, which presents itself as addressing universal and abiding matters concerning power, obligation, justice, and government in general and unconditioned terms, the truth about things as at bottom they always and everywhere necessarily are, is in fact, and inevitably, a specific response to immediate circumstances. However cosmopolitan it may be in intent, it is, like religion, literature, historiography, or law, driven and animated by the demands of the moment: a guide to perplexities particular, pressing, local, and at hand.

This is clear enough from its history, especially now that that history is at last coming to be written, by Quentin Skinner, John Pocock, and others, in realistic terms—as a story of the engagements of intellectuals with the political situations that lie round and about them, rather than as an immaculate procession of doctrines moved along by the logic of ideas. It is, by now, hardly unrecognized that Plato's political idealism or Aristotle's political moralism had something to do with their reactions to the vicissitudes of the Greek city states, Machiavelli's realism with his involvement in the maneuverings of the Renaissance principalities, and Hobbes's absolutism with his horror of the rages of popular disorder in early modern Europe. Similarly for Rousseau and the passions of the Enlightenment, for Burke and those of the reaction to it, for balance of power *realpolitikers* and nineteenth-century nationalism and imperialism, for John Rawls, Ronald Dworkin, and the liberal rights theorists and the post-45 welfare states of North America and Western Europe, for Charles Taylor, Michael Sandel, and the so-called communitarians and the failure of those states to produce the life envisaged. The motive to general reflection about politics in general is radically ungeneral. It proceeds from a desire, a desperation even, to make sense of the play of power and aspiration one finds swirling about in this disrupted place, at that disjointed time.

Today, a decade after the fall of the Berlin Wall, it is clear that we are once more in such a place, at such a time. The world we have been living in since Teheran and Potsdam, indeed since Sedan and Port Arthur—a world of compact powers and contending blocs, the arrangements and rearrangements of macro-alliances—is no more. What there is instead, and how we ought to go about thinking about it, is, however, distinctly less clear.

A much more pluralistic pattern of relationships among the world's peoples seems to be emerging, but its form remains vague and irregular, scrappy, ominously indeterminate. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the fumbings of the Russia which has succeeded it (not the same one, even spatially, that preceded it) have brought in their wake a stream of obscure divisions and strange instabilities. So have the rekindling of nationalist passions in Central and Eastern Europe, the crosshatched anxieties that the reunification of Germany has stimulated in Western Europe, and the so-called American Withdrawal: the declining ability (and the declining willingness) of the United States to engage its power in distant parts of the world—the Balkans or East Africa, the Maghreb or the South China Sea. The growing domestic tensions in many countries arising from large-scale, culturally ance of armed and impassioned religiopolitical movements in various parts of the world, and the emergence of new centers of wealth and power in the Middle East, in Latin America, and along the Asian edge of the Pacific Rim have but added to the general sense of motion and uncertainty. All of these developments, and others induced by them (ethnic civil wars, linguistic separatism, the “multiculturalization” of international capital), have not produced a sense of a new world order. They have produced a sense of dispersion, of particularity, of complexity, and of uncenteredness. The fearful symmetries of the postwar era have come unstuck, and we, it seems, are left with the pieces.

All large-scale, discontinuous changes of this sort, the sort that scholars and statesmen like to call “world historical,” to excuse the fact that they did not see them coming, produce both new possibilities and novel dangers, unexpected gains, surprising losses. The disappearance, at least for the moment, of the threat of massive nuclear exchange, the freeing of a wide range of people from great power domination, and the relaxation

of the ideological rigidities and forced choices of a bipolar world are positive developments from just about anybody's point of view. The recent advances toward peace and civility, fragile as they are, in South Africa, between the Israelis and the PLO, or, in a rather different way, in Northern Ireland, probably could not have occurred, and certainly not so quickly, if the distance between local dispute and global confrontation was still as short as it was before 1989. Nor, if it were, would Americans even be thinking of negotiating with Cubans, Russians with Japanese, Seoul with Pyongyang, Barak with Arafat.

On the other hand, the upheavals brought on by nationalist enmities previously held in check, if at enormous human cost, by powerful autocracies are hardly simply to be welcomed as the blessings of liberty. Neither are the falterings of European integration, now that the fear of Communism is relieved; the lessened ability of world powers to pressure client states to behave themselves, now that the rewards of clientship have lessened; nor the multiplication of candidates for regional domination, now that international politics have grown less constrained by global strategies. Superpower arms reduction and nuclear proliferation, political liberation and deepening parochialism, borderless capitalism and economic buccaneering: it is difficult to draw a definite balance.

But perhaps the most fateful change is, again, the pervasive raggedness of the world with which, so suddenly, we now are faced. The shattering of larger coherences, or seeming such, into smaller ones, uncertainly connected one with another, has made relating local realities with overarching ones, "the world around here" (to adapt Hillary Putnam's lambent phrase) with the world overall, extremely difficult. If the general is to be grasped at all, and new unities uncovered, it must, it seems, be grasped not directly, all at once, but via instances, differences, variations, particulars—piecemeal, case by case. In a splintered world, we must address the splinters.

And that is where theory, if there is to be any, comes in. In particular, where does this falling apart into parts—let us call it "disassembly"—leave the great, integrative, totalizing concepts we have so long been accustomed to using in organizing our ideas about world politics, and particularly about similarity and difference among peoples, societies, states, and cultures: concepts like "tradition," "identity," "religion," "ideology," "values," "nation," indeed even "culture," "society," "state," or "people" themselves? Surely, we are not reduced, now that the stark opposition of "East" and "West" has been exposed as the ethnocentric formula it always was (the East is Moscow, the West is Washington, and every place else—Havana, Tokyo, Belgrade, Paris, Cairo, Beijing, Johannesburg—is derivatively located) to talking only about idiosyncratic details and immediate concerns, to thought-bites and the wandering attentions of the evening news? Some general notions, new or reconditioned, must be constructed if we are to penetrate the dazzle of the new heterogeneity and say something useful about its forms and its future.

There are, in fact, a fair number of proposals now being advanced as to the direction that thinking about the emerging situation ought to take: proposals about how to understand it, about how to live with it, about how to correct it, or, for there are always those (especially in Europe, where historical pessimism is so often taken for a mark of breeding and cultivation) who stoutly insist that nothing ever really changes in human affairs, because nothing ever changes in the human heart, about how to deny that it is actually emerging.

The most prominent of these proposals, or anyway the most celebrated, is, in at least one meaning of that manufactured and protean term, "postmodernism." In this view, the search for comprehensive patterns must simply be abandoned as a relic of the antiquated quest for the eternal, the real, the essential, and the absolute. There are, so it is said, no master narratives, about "identity," about "tradition," about "culture," or about anything else. There are just events, persons, and passing formulas, and those inconsonant. We must content ourselves with diverging tales in irreconcilable idioms, and not attempt to enfold them into synoptic visions. Such visions (this vision has it) are not to be had. Trying to achieve them leads only to illusion—to stereotype, prejudice, resentment, and conflict.

In full opposition to this neurasthenical skepticism about efforts to pull things together into encompassing accounts, *grands recits* with a plot and a moral, there are attempts not to discard largescale, integrative, and totalizing concepts as vacuous and misleading, but rather to replace them by even more large-scale, integrative, and totalizing ones—"civilizations," or whatever. Attempts to tell stories even grander and more dramatic are beginning to appear, now that the older ones are wearing out, stories of the clash of uncommunicating societies, contradictory moralities, and incommensurable world views. "The great divisions among human kind and the dominating source of conflict [in the years immediately ahead]," the American political scientist Samuel Huntington has recently proclaimed, "will be cultural," not "primarily ideological or primarily economic."<sup>1</sup> "The clash of civilizations," he says, "will dominate global politics. The fault lines between civilizations [Christian and Islamic,

Confucian and Hindu, American and Japanese, European and African] will be the battle lines of the future.” “The next world war, if there is one,” as he apparently thinks altogether likely, given these massive aggregations of religion, race, locality, and language, “will be a war between civilizations.”

Faced with this choice between disabused skepticism that leaves us with little to say, save that difference is difference and there is no getting around it, and operatic word-painting that conjures up even more spectacular, war-of-the-worlds collisions than those we seem, just now, to have so narrowly avoided (as well as with various other implausible suggestions—that history has ended, that knowledge claims are but bids for power thinly disguised, that it all comes down to the fortunes of genes), those of us who are committed to sorting through concrete matters so as to develop circumstantial comparisons—specific inquiries into specific differences—may seem naive, quixotical, dissimulating, or behind the times. But if guidelines for navigating in a splintered, disassembled world are to be found, they will have to come from such patient, modest, close-in work. Neither cool scenes nor hot scenarios will really do. We need to find out how, rather exactly, the land lies.

But that, too, is much more difficult now that the way in which we have become accustomed to dividing up the cultural world— into small blocks (Indonesia, say, in my own case, or Morocco), grouped into larger ones (Southeast Asia or North Africa) and those into yet larger ones (Asia, the Middle East, the Third World, or whatever)—no longer works very well on any of its levels. Intensely focused studies (of Javanese music or Moroccan poetry, African kinship or Chinese bureaucracy, German law or English class structure) are no longer adequate, or even intelligible, as enclosed, free-standing inquiries unrelated to one another, to their setting and surroundings, or to the general developments of which they are a part. But at the same time, the lines along which such relationships might be traced, such settings described, and such developments defined are tangled, circuitous, and difficult to make out. The same dissolution of settled groupings and familiar divisions that has rendered the political world so angular and hard to fathom has made the analysis of culture, of how it is people see things, respond to them, imagine them, judge them, deal with them, a far more awkward enterprise than it was when we knew, or rather thought that we knew, what went with what and what did not.

In cultural terms, as in political, “Europe,” say or “Russia,” or “Vienna” must be understood not as a unity of spirit and value, set off against other such supposed unities—the Middle East, Africa, Asia, Latin America, the United States, or London—but as a conglomerate of differences, deep, radical, and resistant to summary. And the same is true of the various subparts we in one way or another mark off within these conglomerates—Protestant and Catholic, Islamic and Orthodox; Scandinavian, Latin, Germanic, Slavic; urban and rural, continental and insular, native and migrant. The disassembly of the political world has of course not caused this heterogeneity. It is history, careening and wayward, and riven with violence, that has done that. Disassembly has only made the heterogeneity patent: plain, impossible to cover over with enormous ideas, impossible any longer not to see.

What we need, it seems, are not enormous ideas, nor the abandonment of synthesizing notions altogether. What we need are ways of thinking that are responsive to particularities, to individualities, oddities, discontinuities, contrasts, and singularities, responsive to what Charles Taylor has called “deep diversity,” a plurality of ways of belonging and being, and that yet can draw from them—from it—a sense of connectedness, a connectedness that is neither comprehensive nor uniform, primal nor changeless, but nonetheless real. <sup>2</sup> Taylor’s concern, facing ideologized separatism, the threatened departure of Quebec from Canada, is with political disassembly, with the belonging, citizenship side of identity in a splintered world: What is a country if it is not a nation? But the matter is the same on the being, selfhood side that is its mirrored and obverse face: What is a culture if it is not a consensus?

A good deal of philosophical and social scientific thinking in Europe and the United States is currently absorbed, not very effectively, with both of these questions, often, indeed, in ways which confuse them with one another, and with the far from identical and, to my mind, rather more awkward, flaccid, and overgeneralized, certainly overused, notion of “nationalism.” The coexistence, in most parts of the world, indeed in virtually all, of great cultural traditions, rich, distinctive, and historically deep (civilizations in the proper, not the polemical, sense of the term), with an endless progression of differences within differences, divisions within divisions, jumbles within jumbles, raises a question that cannot any longer be passed off as idle or inconsequential: how is it, in so multifold a world, that political, social, or cultural selfhood comes to be? If identity without unison is in fact the rule—in India or the United States, in Brazil or Nigeria, in Belgium or Guyana, or even in Japan, that supposed model of immanent like-mindedness and essentialized uniqueness— on what does it rest?

Here, too, however, the question is *mal posée* if it is interpreted as a general one looking for an invariant

answer—the problem, again, in at least much of the writing on “nationalism” (or, for that matter, on “ethnicity” as well) that has become so popular in the last few years. For there are nearly as many ways in which such identities, fleeting or enduring, sweeping or intimate, cosmopolitan or closed-in, amiable or bloody-minded, are put together as there are materials with which to put them together and reasons for doing so. American Indian, Israeli, Bolivian, Muslim, Basque, Tamil, European, Black, Australian, Gypsy, Ulsterman, Arab, Maroon, Maronite, Hispanic, Flamand, Zulu, Jordanian, Cypriot, Bavarian, and Taiwanese—answers people sometimes give to the question, whether self-asked or asked by others, as to who (or, perhaps, more exactly, what) they are—simply do not form an orderly structure.

Nor a stable one. As the world becomes more thoroughly interconnected, economically and politically, as people move about in unforeseen, only partially controllable, and increasingly massive, ways, and as new lines are drawn and old ones erased, the catalogue of available identifications expands, contracts, changes shape, ramifies, involutes, and develops. A half century ago there were no Beurs or Bangladeshis, but there were Peranakans and Yugoslavians; Italy did not have a “Moroccan problem,” Hong Kong did not have a Vietnamese one. (Nor Vancouver a Hong Kong one.) Even those identities that persist, as both Austrians and Americans have cause to know, as do Poles, Shi'is, Malays, and Ethiopians, alter in their bonds, their content, and their inner meaning.

Political theorists tend to operate at levels well above this thicket of characterizations, distinctions, particularities, and labelings that makes up the who-is-what world of collective identities, to float musefully over it as though in a Montgolfier balloon—perhaps for fear that descending into it will expose them to the sort of endless, conflicting detail that so often overwhelms anthropologists; perhaps because the thicket as such seems somehow repellent: emotional, creaturely, irrational, dangerous; perhaps because it seems unreal or incidental, mere gloss, decor, and mystification. But if what we are in fact faced with is a world of pressed-together dissimilarities variously arranged, rather than all-of-a-piece nation-states grouped into blocs and superblocs (the sort of thing that is visible from a balloon), there is nothing for it but to get down to cases, whatever the cost to generality, certainty, or intellectual equilibrium.

But, in fact, the costs may not be so great as feared, and the benefits underestimated: abstraction from specifics is not the only form that theory takes. In the years immediately ahead, as China lumbers awkwardly and unevenly into the international economy, as Germany seeks to mend a half century of political division, as Russia tries to find some workable form in which to exist, as African societies try to contain multiple hatreds and intricate distinctions, as Japan, discovering or rediscovering its own variousness, seeks to define a place for itself in a region moving a half dozen directions at once, and as the United States, France, Mexico, or Algeria find themselves to rest on a good deal less commonality of mind than their public creeds proclaim them to have, approaches to political analysis that engage such matters in the fullness of their particularity are likely to be more helpful to understanding than those that attempt to develop some overall, panoptical view.

It would seem, in short, that a number of serious adjustments in thought must occur if we, philosophers, anthropologists, historians, or whoever, are going to have something useful to say about the disassembled, or anyway disassembling, world of restless identities and uncertain connections. First, difference must be recognized, explicitly and candidly, not obscured with offhand talk about the Confucian Ethic or the Western Tradition, the Latin Sensibility of the Muslim Mind Set, nor with wispy moralizings about universal values or dim banalities about underlying oneness: Rosie O'Grady and the Colonel's Lady. Second, and more important, difference must be seen *not* as the negation of similarity, its opposite, its contrary, and its contradiction. It must be seen as comprising it: locating it, concretizing it, giving it form. The blocs being gone, and their hegemonies with them, we are facing an era of dispersed entanglements, each distinctive. What unity there is, and what identity, is going to have to be negotiated, produced out of difference.

Whatever originality and distinctiveness Malaysian and Chinese forms of life in Southeast Asia may have, for example, or English, Scottish, Welsh, or Irish in Britain, Indio and Latino in Nicaragua or Guatemala, Muslim and Christian in Nigeria, Muslim and Hindu in India, Sinhalese and Tamil in Sri Lanka, or Black and White in South Africa—and they clearly have a very great deal—it arises out of the ways in which the variety of the practices which make them up are positioned and composed. It is not, to adapt Wittgenstein's famous image of a rope, a single thread which runs all the way through them that defines them and makes them into some kind of a whole. It is the overlappings of differing threads, intersecting, entwined, one taking up where another breaks off, all of them posed in effective tensions with one another to form a composite body, a body locally disparate, globally integral. Teasing out those threads, locating those intersections, entwinements, connectings, and tensions, probing the

very compositeness of the composite body, its deep diversity, is what the analysis of these sorts of countries and societies demands. There is no opposition between fine grained work, uncovering variousness, and general characterization, defining affinities. The trick is to get them to illuminate one another, and reveal thereby what identity is. And what it is not.

To do this—to connect local landscapes, full of detail and incident, to the intricate topographies within which they are set—demands an alteration not only in the way in which we conceive of identity but of the way we write about it, the vocabulary we use to render it visible and measure its force. Political theory, so often in our times either synoptic musings about essentialized principles locked in a Manichaeian death struggle—collectivism and individualism, objectivism and relativism, right and obligation, freedom and constraint—or ideological commitments dressed up to look like ineluctable deductions from inescapable premises, needs to get a firmer grip on the hard particularities of the present moment. But the language within which it is cast, a language of summings up rather than of sortings out, seriously inhibits most of it from doing so. The available genres of description and assessment are ill-fitted to a multiplex world, mixed, irregular, shifting, and discontinuous.

It would seem that something between, or perhaps combining in some fashion or other, philosophical reflections on the self, agency, will, and authenticity (or the questioning of these as ideological constructions or metaphysical illusions), historical tracings of the emergence of ethnicities, nations, states, and solidarities (or the imagining of these in the political rituals and cultural technologies of modern life), and ethnographical representations of mythologies, moralities, traditions, and world views (or, the excoriation of these as exoticizing, hegemonizing, neocolonialist reductions of a radically otherwise, put-upon other) would seem to be needed. But it is not very clear what that would be. Someone attempting, as I am here, to confront the confused and conflicted picture presented by a world no longer satisfactorily describable as either a distribution of peoples or a system of states, a catalogue of cultures or a typology of regimes, finds little to fall back upon in the received conceivings of the human sciences.

My tack here, improvisatory, opportunistic, and casually redirected as I go along, will be to focus in turn on the two questions I mentioned earlier as leading into the central interpretative issues raised up by the fractionation, the instability, and the uncenteredness of the post-Wall world: What is a Country if it is not a Nation? What is a Culture if it is not a Consensus? A few short years ago, when the chart of the world looked reasonably consolidated and its outlines more or less distinct, both of these questions would have seemed confused or senseless, because there was little, if anything seen to be separating the contrasted terms. Countries *were* nations—Hungary, France, Egypt, Brazil. Cultures *were* shared ways of life—Hungarian, French, Egyptian, Brazilian. To drive a wedge between the terms, and thus between the questions themselves, to disentangle them from one another and pursue them separately, would seem at best a pointless undertaking, and at worst a mischievous one.

It may be mischievous, or at least disequilibrating; but it is not pointless. There are very few countries any more, and perhaps there never were, that even approximately coincide with culturally solidary entities; Japan, Norway, possibly Uruguay, if you forget the Italians, maybe New Zealand, if you forget the Maoris. State forms—Mexican and German, Nigerian and Indian, Singaporean and Saudi Arabian—are so enormously various as hardly to be collected under a single term. The foundations of legitimacy of even immediate neighbors, the sorts of stories they tell themselves to account for their existence and justify its continuance—Israel and Jordan, Cambodia and Vietnam, Greece and Turkey, Sudan and Ethiopia—are contrastively phrased, scarcely translatable, in no way homologous. The illusion of a world paved from end to end with repeating units that is produced by the pictorial conventions of our political atlases, polygon cutouts in a fitted jigsaw, is just that—an illusion.

To take apart the political and the cultural aspects of the disassembled world, prior to relating them again to one another, at least permits us to uncover something of the maneuverings and crossactions involved in the formation and interaction of collective personae, and some of the conundrums such maneuverings and crossactions pose for the social orderings, the economies, the polities, and the day-to-day lives, in which they take place. We know at least something—not anywhere enough, but something—about how differences in power, wealth, status, luck, and ability are, for better or worse, composed in society, about how material interests are adjusted, reconciled, contained, or suppressed, and about how ideological conflicts are resolved or exacerbated, balanced or fought out, how they are managed. But in the face of social struggles phrased in terms of selfhood, of inbred feeling and primordial loyalty, of natural contrasts and immanent quiddities, we remain pretty much at sea. They seem to come like storms and evaporate with mere exhaustion or an unaccountable change in the weather, or else, and

more often, persist like chronic irritants, smoldering, halfhidden, and merely lived (or died) with, not really understood, not really resolved.

An improvement upon this situation of mere witnessing, and mere deploring, is not easily come by. But surely the first move toward improving it is to look more carefully at just what, on the ground and in place, countries come to (or don't), as collective actors. And the second, surely, is to look at what it is (to the degree that it does) that makes them such.

Since 1945, we have gone from a situation in which there were perhaps fifty or so generally recognized countries, the rest of the world being distributed into colonies, protectorates, dependencies, and the like, to one in which there are nearly two hundred, and almost certainly more to come. The difference, of course, is the decolonization revolution that took place in Asia and Africa, and to some extent in the Pacific and the Caribbean, in the fifties and sixties, now reinforced by the breakup of the last of the transcultural empires (unless one considers China as such), the Soviet Union. This revolution has been generally understood, both by its leaders and its theorists, and by those against whom they were rebelling, as a liberation from foreign domination, and it was, consequently, rather quickly and easily assimilated to the nationalist movements in Europe and Latin America in the nineteenth century—as the last wave of a global thrust toward self-determination, the rule of like over like, the modernization of governance, the unification of state and culture, or whatever. But it was, as has become increasingly clear as time has passed and the more purely ideological ardors have cooled, something rather more profound than that. It was an alteration, a transformation even, of our whole sense of the relationships between history, place, and political belonging.

The realization that the appearance of a host of new countries, large, small, and medium sized, in Asia and Africa was something more than an imitative catching up on the part of the “undeveloped,” or “backward,” or “third” world to the so-called nation state pattern constructed in Europe from the seventeenth through the nineteenth centuries, that it was in many ways more of a challenge to that pattern than it was a reinforcement or a reincarnation of it, has been rather slow in coming. The diffusionist notion that the modern world was made in northern and western Europe and then seeped out like an oil slick to cover the rest of the world has obscured the fact (which should already have been apparent from developments in the United States and Latin America, leave aside Liberia, or Haiti, or Thailand, or Japan) that rather than converging toward a single pattern those entities called countries were ordering themselves in novel ways, ways that put European conceptions, not all that secure in any case, of what a country is, and what its basis is, under increasing pressure. The genuinely radical implications of the decolonization process are only just now coming to be recognized. For better or for worse, the dynamics of Western nation building are not being replicated. Something else is going on.

To find out what that might be involves, on the one side, an understanding of terms like “nation,” “state,” “people,” and “society,” the worn coinage of political analysis, that does not reduce them all to a common pattern, continuously reproduced, and, on the other, an understanding of terms like “identity,” “tradition,” “affiliation,” and “coherence,” the hardly less battered vocabulary of cultural description, that does not reduce them all to uniformity and like-mindedness, to a categorical mold. It is this enterprise I will take up, in a preliminary and exploratory manner, in the next two sections in the hope of illuminating the challenges and the imperilments, the terrors and the possibilities, of the world in pieces.

## **What Is a Country if It Is Not a Nation?**

The words we use, these days, to refer to what we take to be the elementary building blocks of global political order—“nation,” “state,” “country,” “society,” “people”—have a disturbing ambiguity built into their range, intent, and definition. On the one hand, we use them interchangeably, as though they were synonyms. “France” or “Hungary,” “China” or “Cambodia,” “Mexico” or “Ethiopia,” “Iran” or “Portugal” are all of these at once—nations, states, countries, societies, and peoples. On the other, we perceive them as leading us off, in their nuances and connotations, their resonances and their inward meanings, in rather different directions: toward blood, race, descent, and the mysteries and mystifications of biological likeness; toward political and civic loyalty and the indivisibilities of law, obedience, force, and government; toward geographical aggregation, territorial demarcation, and the sense of origin, home, and habitat; toward interaction, companionship, and practical association, the encounter of persons and the play of interests; toward cultural, historical, linguistic, religious, or psychological affinity—a quiddity of spirit.

This ambiguity, persistent, stubborn, perhaps irremovable, has troubled the history of Europe and the Americas from at least the seventeenth century, and it now troubles, at least as relentlessly, Asia and Africa as well. The conception of the biological, the governmental, the territorial, the interactional, and the cultural as equivalent and substitutable expressions of the same reality, as folding into one another and converging toward some overall sum, and the sense that they so fold and converge only partially and incompletely, that they refer back to different realities, represent different sorts of solidarities and affiliations, grow out of different imaginings, different aspirations, and different fears, renders uncertain just what it is that is mapped on the political map of the world. What do we say when we say Mauritania? Slovakia? Bolivia? Australia?

If one browses through the relevant entries of the *The Oxford English Dictionary*, one sees this perplexity and its history, at least for Europe and for English (though I daresay about the same result would be obtained by wandering similarly through the *Grand Robert* or the *Deutsches Wörterbuch*), laid out before one. For each of the terms there is a sort of penumbral, ground bass meaning specific to it, surrounding it with a certain air and tonality, and what looks like a deliberate attempt, indeed a desperate one, to suppress this and force the word in toward a semantic coincidence with the others, to produce, whether as country, people, society, state, or nation, a generic unit of collective agency—bounded, nameable, single, and consistently defined; a historical self.

“Country,” for example, said to come from the late Latin root from which we also get “contra” and “counter,” moves from a so-called literal meaning, “that which lies opposite or fronting the view, the landscape spread out before one,” through a series of definitions from the generalized “a tract or expanse of land of undefined extent; a region, a district,” through the rather more specific “tract or district having more or less definite limits in relation to human occupation, e.g. owned by the same lord or proprietor, or inhabited by people of the same race, dialect, occupation, etc.” and the “land of a person’s birth, citizenship, residence etc.,” to the wholly comprehensive “the territory or land of a nation; usually an independent state or a region once independent [this to deal with Scotland and Ireland] and still distinct in race, language, institutions, or historical memories” and, in culmination, the flat and simple “the people of a district or a state, the nation”—as in Macaulay’s *History of England*, “The people had no love for their country or their king,” which does not mean, I take it, that they disliked the landscape.<sup>3</sup>

“People,” itself, follows a similar trajectory from a generalized and indistinct “populace,” “multitude,” or “commonality,” through the rather more specific “persons in relation to a superior or someone to whom they belong” and “the whole body of ... qualified citizens as a source of power,” to, again, the unitary collective, “a body of persons composing a community, tribe, race, [folk], or nation”<sup>4</sup>. So does “state,” which comes of course, from roots for rank and standing, as in “estate” and “status,” and moves semantically through “realm” and “commonwealth” to the more focused “the body of people occupying a defined territory and organized under a sovereign government ... the territory occupied by such a body” and thence to the fully integral “the supreme civil power and government vested in a country or a nation.” “The state is properly,” Matthew Arnold wrote in *Democracy*, “... the nation in its collective and corporate capacity.”<sup>5</sup>

The pattern repeats with “society” (“association with one’s fellow men”; “intercourse with persons”; “the aggregate of persons living together in [an] orderly community”; “the system or mode of life adopted by a body of individuals for the purpose of harmonious coexistence”; “connexion ... union ... affinity”).<sup>6</sup> But it is with the most radically consolidative term in this series, and the most elusive, “nation,” that it comes to fullest expression, drawing all the others toward it like some semiotic strange attractor.

“Nation,” which comes ultimately from Latin *nation-em*, “breed,” “stock,” “race,” in turn derived from *nasci*, “to be born,” has, or has had in the course of its evolution, a number of highly particular applications, such as “a family, a kindred,” “an Irish clan,” “the native population of a town or city,” “a ... class, kind, or race of persons,” “a country, a kingdom,” or “the whole people of a country ... as opposed to some smaller or narrower body within it,” the majority of which it has by now escaped into the magisterial capaciousness of what has become its central meaning: “An extensive aggregate of persons, so closely associated with each other by common descent, language, or history, as to form a distinct race or people, usually organized as a separate political state and occupying a definite territory.” (“In early examples,” the *Oxford English Dictionary* remarks, perhaps uneasy itself with the enormous reach and *pot-aufeu* quality the conception had by 1928 taken on, “the racial idea is usually stronger than the political; in recent use the notion of political unity ... is more prominent,” and gives two quotations, rather opposed in just this tendency, to compound the difficulty: Bright’s pub-and-plough populist “the nation in every country dwells in the cottage,” and Tennyson’s sword-and-scepter hieratic “Let us bury the Great

Duke [that is, Wellington] To the noise of the mourning of a mighty nation.”<sup>7</sup>

I bring all this up, not because I think words in themselves make the world go round (though, in fact, they have a lot to do with its works and workings), or because I think you can read political history off from the definitions in dictionaries (though, in fact, they are among the more sensitive, and underused, detectors we have for registering its subsurface tremors). I bring all this up because I think the tension between a convergent and a dispersive conception of collective agency, between the attempt to make the terms for such agency identic and interchangeable and the attempt to maintain their differences and separations, reflects, and indeed drives, a good deal of what is going on in the world these days as well as what philosophers, anthropologists, journalists, and ideologues have to say about what is going on.

Indeed, in the Europe between Napoleon and Hitler (to have a tendentious name for a tendentious period), the move toward the subordination of the various ways of thinking about the “what am I (or you, or we, or they)?” question to that of a comprehensive likeness of kind, difficult to specify, easy to feel, and impossible to eradicate, has been a central dynamic of political history; so much so that it has frequently been identified with the very process of modernization itself.<sup>8</sup> A relatively brief, as these things go, geographically highly localized, and in any case quite incomplete process has been taken as a general paradigm for political development overall and everywhere. It is this, as I would call it prejudice, that, first, the anticolonial revolutions, from India's in the late forties to Angola's in the early seventies, and now the disassembly of the bipolar world (aspects, as a matter of fact, of a single upheaval) have thrown into question.

So far as the anticolonial revolution (which in forty years has quadrupled the number of entities called countries, nations, states, or peoples—distinct societies with names and addresses) is concerned, it has been, as I remarked previously, simply assimilated, whole and entire, to the European development, or what is thought to have been the European development. Especially in its opening, declamatory phases, the Bandung days of the Nkrumahs, Nehrus, Hos, and Sukarnos (and the Maos and the Titos), it was seen as “the last wave” of a worldwide movement toward, to quote Benedict Anderson, the master-narrative theorist of all this, “nationness [as] virtually inseparable from political consciousness.”<sup>9</sup> More recently, both the developments within those entities—Nigerian, Sri Lankan, and Algerian decomposition, Cambodian terror, Sudanese genocide, Yemeni civil war—and in their relationships with one another, have complicated the picture more than a bit. And so far as the disassembly of the bipolar world is concerned, the loss of a sense of analogous elements packed into a well-defined structure of power and importance, has rendered the notion that the world is composed of atomic nationalities, mighty and unmighty, sovereign and subaltern, hard to articulate and harder to defend. Resisting the coalescence of the dimensions of political community, keeping the various lines of affinity that turn abstract populations into public actors separate and visible, seems suddenly, once again, conceptually useful, morally imperative, politically realistic.

In pursuit of this aim, one could of course simply run serially and routinely through the various pairs, people and society, society and state, state and nation, and so on, and lay out some of the mischief and misconceptions that result when they are kept insufficiently distinct. To an extent this has already been done, now and again and rather unsystematically, most especially for nation and state as the hyphen in the nation-state formula has begun at long last to be looked upon with a more critical eye and as the principle of national self-determination (any group should have a state that really wants one; any group that has a state is per se a nation) has come to be seen for the wisp or ideality, Tamilnad and Kurdistan, Surinam and Zaire, that it is. But I want to concentrate here on just one of these pairs, country and nation, and especially on freeing the first from the tentacles of the latter. Their fusion, or confusion, which amounts to the submergence of the idea of country almost altogether, not only obscures what is happening in this place or that. It prevents us from seeing very clearly how in fact our world nowadays is put together.

The easiest way to do this is, of course, simply to oppose them to one another. You can damn the one as “nationalism,” something (to quote from the last American ambassador to integral Yugoslavia in an otherwise perceptive account of what happened there) “by nature uncivil, antidemocratic, and separatist, because it empowers one ethnic group over others,” and praise the other as “patriotism,” the decent and warming love of country—green valleys, sidewalk cafes, the call of the muezzin, Fuji in the mists, campos and piazzas, the scent of cloves. Or you can objectify them as classing expressions, irreconcilable sorts, the one bad, the other okay, of “nationalism” as such: “ethnic” vs. “civic,” “official” vs. “popular,” “divisive” vs. “unificatory,” “Habsburg” (or “Eastern”) vs. “Liberal” (or “Western”) or whatever.<sup>10</sup> In either case, you get a manichaeian picture which sets

jealous provincialism and sanguineous xenophobia on the one side against honest pride and relaxed self-confidence on the other.

At some very general level, that view from the hovering balloon, this is plausible enough: the sort of nationalism associated with Hitler or Karadzic does seem in thoroughgoing contrast to the sort associated with Gandhi or Lincoln. But again, when we descend to cases, to the ethnicism (if that's what it is) of Israel or Bangladesh, Hungary or Singapore, or the patriotism (if that's what it is) of Castro or Solzhenitsyn, Enoch Powell or Jean-Marie Le Pen, things begin to grow rather less obvious. If one takes, for example, three countries beset right now, in ascending degrees of severity and danger, by nation-phrased collective identities resistant to their embrace, Canada, Sri Lanka, and (ex-) Yugoslavia, it is clear that the relationships between "country" and "nation" are so different from one to the next as to be as impossible to fold into a dichotomous opposition as they are into a promiscuous fusion. And if one moves on then, to Burundi or Nigeria, Afghanistan or Indonesia, Belgium or the United States (I leave aside Switzerland and Lebanon as almost too amenable cases), matters get more various yet. There is, again, nothing for it but a sort of political, or politico-economic, ethnography which can trace out the relationships between particular countries and the affinities and dissonances they are almost everywhere—no, not almost everywhere ... everywhere—engaged with.

For, insofar as there is a distinction to be made between "country" and "nation," it lies not in the civility and unassertiveness of the one and the passion and clamorousness of the other, which is anyway (China, France, Morocco, Argentina) not always the case. It lies in the one as a political arena and the other as a political force: between a bordered, to some degree arbitrary, space within which the more immediate sorts of public struggle, the sort we unreflectively call domestic (the ordering of social encounters, the distribution of life chances, the utilization of productive resources) are supposed to be contained and regulated, brought into line, as against one of the central energies driving those struggles, the sense of whom one descends from, who one thinks, looks, talks, eats, prays, or moves like, and feels, in result, empathically bound to come what may.

If we take, briefly and with no serious attempt to unpack their histories, assess their prospects, or judge the rights and wrongs of things—a task I am, quite frankly, unprepared for—the three countries I just mentioned as undergoing varying degrees of nationphrased tension, Canada, Sri Lanka, and the lingering shadow, not gone, not present, that is Yugoslavia, this interplay between the terrain of politics and their complexion is quite apparent. The arrangement and disarrangement of the rifts and solidarities that language, descent, race, religion, and so on generate and the spaces and edges within which those rifts and solidarities are so arranged and disarranged not only differ widely from one case to the next, the particularities of such difference deeply affect what, as we say, with perhaps more reason than we realize, takes place on the ground. A very large country, very unevenly occupied, a small, impacted island country, offshore from a continent, and an irregular cutout of mountain valleys, closed plains, incised rivers, and narrowed coasts, crowded round with jealous neighbors, provide ideational frames, specific and distinctive, for the clash of identities—historicized places that shape with some force the structure of the clash.

Canada, which has been described by the sardonic Toronto press lord, Conrad Black, as "historically ( ... ) a collection of people who were not Americans: French-Canadians abandoned by France in 1763 after the British military victory; British Empire Loyalists who fled the American Revolution; immigrants and fugitives from Europe and recently other places, including the United States; Newfoundlanders who narrowly elected to become a Canadian province in 1949 after going bankrupt as an autonomous dominion," plus, though he, perhaps characteristically, forgets to mention them, a significant number of significantly different Amerindian groups, is surely one country in which the difference between the ideational space within which politics is framed and across which it ranges—ten million square kilometers between Detroit and the Artic Circle—and the collective identities that color those politics is impossible to miss. <sup>11</sup> The struggle there, so often seen (at least by outsiders) as a straightforward matter of French *fierté* and English bloody-mindedness, is in fact a multisided, "deep diversity" encounter played out over an immense, imperfectly known, uncertainly conceived, unevenly occupied, and unequally endowed territory. When perhaps 90 percent of the population is concentrated within three hundred kilometers of the U.S. border; when half the population lives in the Toronto to Montreal corridor alone and a quarter of it lives in Quebec, which is more than 80 percent French speaking; and when the other nine-tenths of the country, the more or less frozen north where the greater proportion of the natural resources of the country are located, is so thinly populated as to have an Amerindian majority in most places—merely to scratch the surface of the complexity here (a different sort of French minority in New Brunswick; Inuit Eskimos in the Northwest Territories; Ukrainians, Asians—a rapidly expanding group—and yet more Indians in the west; Métis, French and

Indian mixed-bloods speaking a French and Indian Creole, in the forested center; wall-to-wall English in Newfoundland)—you obviously have a situation in which there is a good deal of room for maneuver between parts and wholes, however defined.

And the recent (though not only the recent) political history of the country has consisted of a whole series of such maneuverings, the majority of them abortive, or, to date, incomplete, indefinite, and of uncertain future. There have been attempts to revise constitutional arrangements, already among the most devolved in the world (only hollowed-out Belgium or burnt-out Lebanon seem further advanced), to devise new subunits of various sorts (the Yukon Council, Nunavut, the Métis Association), to adjust internal borders, to redistribute resources among regions and subgroups, and most especially to forestall, or, if that too fails, to prepare for the almost continuously threatened secession of Quebec. And all this while trying, in a country essentially defined by a single border, to maintain its integrity and self-direction vis-à-vis what its leaders usually carefully refer to as “our great neighbor to the south.”

The result is at once fluid and oddly persistent—a chronic “Whither Canada?” debate in which language, religion, ethnicity, and regionalism seem continuously on the verge of altering the very shape of the country, redrawing its outlines and transforming the topography of the political landscape whole and entire, while not, so far anyway, managing actually to do so. How it will all play out of course remains to be seen. Will Quebec finally leave, half-leave (“a sovereign state within a sovereign state”), or merely go on endlessly threatening to leave? Whatever it does, what will its relations with the rest of Canada be, including, not unimportantly, with Indian tribes within its borders (Algonkians and Inuits, they comprise the majority in about half the territory claimed by it), with whom it is already embroiled concerning control over natural resources on Indian lands? (“The meek may inherit the earth,” as J. Paul Getty is supposed to have said, “but they can forget about the mineral rights.”) Will the resentments of the western provinces toward Ontario, which by now provides half the GDP (and in a Quebec-less Canada would provide an overwhelming proportion), or those of the English-speaking remnant in Montreal toward the French majority there, escalate into new fissures? How will the great, open north finally be organized, especially as European Canadians begin to move there? And so on, and on.

And so too with its relationship to its discomfiting neighbor. Black, himself a Quebec-born Anglophone who, like so many of his fellows (a hundred thousand since separatism got underway in 1976) has moved toward more congenious surroundings, even projects a scenario (called, I trust ironically, “A More Perfect Union”) in which, if the bicultural state dissolves, English Canada would form a federation with the United States, stabilizing the latter’s “complicated demography” (“Geopolitically, America would be almost born again”)—though it is unclear that even he is able to believe such a story.<sup>12</sup> What is clear is that Canada as a country is more a field of (culturally supposed) “breeds,’ ‘kinds’ or ‘stocks’ of persons” than it is one in itself—something, of course, if anything even more true of the United States, “*voll*,” as Herder said some time ago, “*von so viel kleinen Nationen*.”

Sri Lanka, née Ceylon, is, just to look at it, hardly reminiscent of Canada. A tight little island, not a sprawling continental expanse, it is about a hundred-fiftieth its size. It is a hundred times more densely populated, with its inhabitants reasonably evenly distributed over the whole rather than packed in distinct concentrations set off from great emptinesses. It is a precipitate of a hundred and fifty years of direct colonial rule and more than a millennium of history, not a collection of peoples rather accidentally and rather recently thrown together. And it is tropical, Asian, and but weakly industrialized. That the internal tensions threatening to dismantle it, though, so far at least, much more severe, much more hate-filled, and much more marked with violence, are, nonetheless, in some ways, curiously resemblant of those threatening to dismantle Canada, gives some cause for reflection.<sup>13</sup> Here, too, the country is less itself a purported “stock” or a “kind” than an historicized terrain—a milieu and a place within which such stocks or kinds jostle and maneuver, mutually constructing themselves, their character, and their collective interests.

What seems, to an outsider in any case, most striking about Sri Lanka in terms of the identity-group tensions that have wracked it for the last four decades or so is not the fact that they are more starkly bipolar than is the rule in such cases these days (only Rwanda and Burundi, or perhaps Northern Ireland, seem to approach it in this regard; Nigeria, Yugoslavia, India, Canada, and the United States, multisided, wheels within wheels, are rather more the norm), or even that they are so severe, so chronic, and so resistant to difference splitting. What is most striking is that they involve a clash between two groups, both of which feel themselves to be in some way minorities, that they have arisen so recently as an almost direct result of the puzzlements of the “self” in “self-rule,” and that they have taken place in a country that has been, in other respects, rather stable, progressive, and at

least moderately successful—slowed population growth, contained inflation, improved education, a decent growth rate, and an infant mortality rate approaching Chile's or South Korea's, a life expectancy matching Hungary's or Argentina's.<sup>14</sup>

The two minorities situation is a result of the fact that the twelve million or so Sinhalese, most of whom are Buddhists and who speak an Indo-European language, are all of them there in the world, while the three million or so Tamils, most of whom are Hindu and who speak a Dravidian language, are matched by thirty or forty million (the number is, characteristically, disputed) more of them just across the Palk Strait in southern India. Both, thus, can easily see themselves as being swallowed up by the other: the Sinhalese by Tamil expansionism, which has flared up periodically under the banner of a free and unified Tamilnad; the Tamils by Sinhala-only domination of Sri Lanka as such, a central theme in the political uproar that independence, itself a sedate and undramatic, almost *huis clos*, affair—no war, no revolution, not even all that much agitation—brought on.

The creation of a country, or more accurately, I suppose, the officialization of one where a colony had been before, is what set Sri Lanka's ethnical troubles in motion—not ancient grievances or long-nurtured fears. Before 1948, and for a few years after, a bicultural Anglicized elite, entrenched in Colombo, kept matters proceeding in a more or less orderly way; what group tensions existed were diffuse and local, kept in check by multiple differentiations, established accommodations, cross-cutting loyalties, and the practical intricacies of everyday life. But from the mid-fifties this delicate and somewhat artificial comity collapsed, replaced by a radical division of the population into “Sinhala” and “Tamil” (or “Buddhist” and “Hindu,” or “Aryan” and “Dravidian”) supercategories and an ascending curve of suspicion, jealousy, hatred, and violence that has not ended yet, despite a series of Canada-like constitutional proposals, a continuing shuffle of governments, and the reluctantly invited assistance, now terminated, of the Indian army.

What, in the space of a few short years, brought all this on—the coming to power of Sinhalese demagogues and the rejection of the English-speaking elite by the Sinhalese- and Tamil-speaking masses alike; the impassioned language battle, still unresolved, that followed from that; the transformation of Buddhism from a quietist religion into a militant creed under the leadership of revivalist monks and ayurvedic doctors; the growth of Tamil separatism, attraction toward south India, and movement back and forth across the Strait; the upsurge of internal migration, religious segregation, ethnic ingathering, and reciprocal terrorism; the recrudescence of a classical mythology of religious, racial, and communal warfare, Tamil conquests and Sinhalese expulsions—can be here left aside. The details are obscure, in any case, and their weight more so. What is important is that, once again, the bounds of a country, celebrated and questioned, historically put together and historically takeable-apart, provide the frame within which identity conflicts crystallize: the stage—here, compact and congestive—on which, perforce, they work themselves out, or, of course, do not. It makes a difference where things happen.

It certainly does in the Balkans. In turning very briefly to Yugoslavia (or as we now must say, with a dying fall, “the former Yugoslavia”), it is not with the intention of sorting out what just about everyone else who has tried, even the skilled and desperate Messrs. Vance and Owen with their ten-ply restructuring of Bosnia-Herzegovina, has largely failed to sort out. Nor can I address the terrible issues of the morality and policy it has thrown up for a world unprepared to deal with them. I want only to conclude my short, illustrative, and quite arbitrary series (I could as well have taken Belgium, Nigeria, and Afghanistan; Brazil, Rwanda, and Czechoslovakia) of instructing cases: cases in which the discrimination of a country as a historicized place—a location, a name, and a rememberable past—from the affirmative, “who are we?” solidarities that support or trouble it is more helpful to reflection about a splintered world than is the fusion of the two into a one-size-fits-all, demonized “nationalism.” Yugoslavia (I suppress “the former” henceforth, for the sake of style: it is to be taken as read, in its fullest irony) provides a case in which the sorts of tensions so far contained in Canada and at least, though the word doesn't seem quite right given the levels of violence involved, so far lived with in Sri Lanka, have, in a half-dozen years, overwhelmed the country: literally disassembled it; left it in pieces.<sup>15</sup>

The “virtue” (the word, of course, in the heaviest of shudder quotes) of the Yugoslav case is that the country came apart—that is, was taken apart—if not precisely in slow motion at least with a certain relentless, he who says “A” must say “B,” deliberation in which the stages of disintegration are distinct, sharp, dramatic, and visible. There was Milosevic's speech in the capital of Kosovo on the six-hundredth anniversary of the famous lost battle against the Turks, finally demonstrating to even the most Yugoslavian of Yugoslavs (there were many still left then, and far from powerless) that the Serbian Question was back to stay. There was the almost furtive departure, via the confused and hesitant ten-day war, of Slovenia from the Federation in June of 1991, the coincident declaration of

independence by Croatia, the recognition of both these events by a reuniting Germany, getting back into European politics as an unfettered actor, and the outbreak of war in Croatia as Belgrade moved to support its Serbian enclaves that immediately followed. There was the movement of the war to Bosnia-Herzegovina after its declaration of independence in mid-1992; the ill-fated Vance-Owen cantonization plan in 1993—dismembering Bosnia in order to save it; the fragile and porous Sarajevo cease-fire, yet another cantonization plan; the fearful prospect of murder without end in 1994; and the trembling peace of the Dayton Accords. Each of these events, as well as a host of others—the shelling of Dubrovnik, the leveling of Vukovar, the siege of Sarajevo, the reduction of Mostar—are phases of a single process: the erasure of a country and the attempt to redelineate what then is left. (The more recent events in Kosovo are but another chapter in an unfinished—what is to become of Montenegro?—perhaps unfinishable, story.)

The country was, of course, never that firmly rooted; its history was short, vertiginous, interrupted, and violent. Assembled by the Great Powers after the Great War from some of the linguistic, religious, and tribal enclaves, that had been excited by the Balkan Wars and then left behind by the Austrian Empire, it was plagued from its birth by challenges to its integrity from both within and without—Croatian and Macedonian separatism, Hungarian and Bulgarian irredentisms—and passed from monarchy, to parliamentarianism, to Nazi occupation, to Communist dictatorship, and back to parliamentarianism in the space of some eighty years.

It seems rather a wonder that it took hold at all. But, at least in retrospect, it seems to have done so with considerable force, especially in the cities and towns, and it is not clear that its mental pull, the idea it projected, a North Balkan country with a multicultural population, has altogether dissipated yet, whatever the practical finality of its disappearance. The war that destroyed it went from being a Yugoslavian one, to being a Serbo-Croatian one, to being a Bosnian one—a succession of attempts, of ascending brutality and madness, to replace what had, almost accidentally, been lost: neither a state nor a people, a society nor a nation, none of which it had ever more than inchoatively been, but a country. Yugoslavia, or, one last time, “the former Yugoslavia,” seems to be an almost pure case of the noncoincidence, in meaning and in fact, of these so often identified and interfused realities, and, in a negative way, the weight, the power, and the importance of the last.

“Zdravko Grebo [Misha Glenny writes of a friend of his, a law professor at Sarajevo University and a former politician] is a Bosnian who oozes humour and culture. His parents were Moslems from Mostar but he had been brought up in Belgrade and he continued to call himself a Yugoslav, even after he openly admitted that Yugoslavia no longer existed. ‘What else can I call myself?’ he mused, ‘I can hardly start calling myself a Moslem or a Serb after all these years.’ Bosnia (and Sarejevo especially) had the highest percentage of people who designated themselves Yugoslavs in the national census. When Yugoslavia was submerged in the blood of its own people, these Yugoslavs and the identity to which they still clung, were washed away into a river of poisoned history.”<sup>16</sup>

The river of history need not, of course, have been so thoroughly poisoned. Lebanon aside, perhaps Liberia, perhaps Sudan, it has not been, so far anyway, in many countries, the overwhelming majority so far as mere numbers go, internally beset by cultural fault lines—Indonesia, the United States, India, Egypt, Kenya, Guatemala, Malaysia, Belgium. Canada still holds together, and if (as at the moment seems unlikely) it turns out to be unable to do so, it should be able to achieve the sort of velvet divorce that Czechoslovakia did, and before that Singapore and Malaysia did. Sri Lanka may yet contain its tensions within some sort of pliant and tractable constitutional structure as South Africa, a few short years ago surely the country thought least likely to succeed in such an effort and to descend into multisided chaos, is at least beginning to do. Even Yugoslavia might have avoided the worst if, as Glenny suggests, “the European Community and the United States [had guided] the inexperienced or opportunist leaders toward an agreed breakup of the country,” and if the horror is not to spread to the southern Balkans, they will have to do so still.<sup>17</sup> Much depends upon how these things are managed.

We seem to be in need of a new variety of politics, a politics which does not regard ethnic, religious, racial, linguistic, or regional assertiveness as so much irrationality, archaic and ingenerate, to be suppressed or transcended, a madness decried or a darkness ignored, but, like any other social problem—inequality say, or the abuse of power—sees it as a reality to be faced, somehow dealt with, modulated, brought to terms.

The development of such a politics, which will vary from place to place as much as the situations it faces do, depends on a number of things. It depends on finding out the springs of identity-based differentiation and discord in this case or that. It depends on developing a less simplistically demonizing, blankly negative attitude toward it

as a relic of savagery or some earlier stage of human existence. It depends on adapting the principles of liberalism and social democracy, still our best guides for law, government, and public department, to matters with respect to which they have been too often dismissive, reactive, or incomprehending; philosophically blind. But perhaps most important, it depends on our constructing a clearer, more circumstantial, less mechanical, stereotypic and cliché-ridden conception of what it consists in, what it *is*. That is, it depends on our gaining a better understanding of what culture, the frames of meaning within which people live and form their convictions, their selves, and their solidarities, comes to as an ordering force in human affairs.

And this, once more, means a critique of conceptions which reduce matters to uniformity, to homogeneity, to like-mindedness—to consensus. The vocabulary of cultural description and analysis, needs also to be opened up to divergence and multiplicity, to the noncoincidence of kinds and categories. No more than countries can the identities that color them, Muslim or Buddhist, French or Persian, Latin or Sinitic ... Black or White, be grasped as seamless unities, unbroken wholes.

### **What Is a Culture if It Is Not a Consensus?**

There is a paradox, occasionally noted but not very deeply reflected upon, concerning the present state of what we so casually refer to as “the world scene”: it is growing both more global and more divided, more thoroughly interconnected and more intricately partitioned, at the same time. Cosmopolitanism and parochialism are no longer opposed; they are linked and reinforcing. As the one increases, so does the other.

The growth of technology, most particularly of communications technology, has knit the world into a single web of information and causality, such that, like the famous butterfly beating its wings in the Pacific and bringing on a storm in the Iberian Peninsula, a change of conditions anyplace can induce disturbances anyplace else. We are all at the mercy of American money managers speculating in Mexican equities or British bankers in Singapore gambling on Tokyo derivatives. Kobe earthquakes or Dutch floods, Italian scandals or Saudi production targets, Chinese arms sales or Colombian drug smugglings, have near instant impacts, diffuse and magnified, far from their sources. CNN brings Bosnian slaughter, Somali starvation, or Rwandan refugee camps into the world's living rooms. Places normally quite obscure, provincial, and self-absorbed—Grozny, Dili, Ayodhya, or Cristobal de Las Casas; Kigali, Belfast, Monrovia, Tbilisi, Phnom Penh, or Port-au-Prince—momentarily challenge the great metropolises of the world for the world's attention. Capital is mobile and, as there is hardly a people, not even the Samoans, without a diaspora, so is labor. There are Japanese companies in the United States, German ones in Indonesia, American ones in Russia, Pakistani ones in Britain, Taiwanese ones in the Philippines. Turks and Kurds send money home from Berlin, Maghrebians and Vietnamese from Paris, Zairis and Tamils from Brussels, Palestinians and Filipinos from Kuwait City, Somalis from Rome, Moroccans from Spain, Japanese from Brazil, Mexicans from Los Angeles, a few Croats from Sweden, and just about everyone from New York. All this vast connection and intricate interdependence is sometimes referred to, after cultural studies sloganeers, as “the global village,” or, after World Bank ones, as “borderless capitalism.” But as it has neither solidarity nor tradition, neither edge nor focus, and lacks all wholeness, it is a poor sort of village. And as it is accompanied less by the loosening and reduction of cultural demarcations than by their reworking and multiplication, and, as I have pointed out above, often enough their intensification, it is hardly borderless.

Charting such demarcations, locating them and characterizing the populations they isolate, or at least set off, is at best an arbitrary business, inexactly accomplished. The discrimination of cultural breaks and cultural continuities, the drawing of lines around sets of individuals as following a more or less identifiable form of life as against different sets of individuals following more or less different forms of life—other voices in other rooms—is a good deal easier in theory than it is in practice.

Anthropology, one of whose vocations, at least, is to locate such demarcations, to discriminate such breaks and describe such continuities, has fumbled with the issue from the beginning, and fumbles with it still. But it is, nonetheless, not to be evaded with dim banalities about the humanness of humankind or underlying factors of likeness and commonality, if only because, “in nature,” as the positivists used to like to say, people themselves make such contrasts and draw such lines: regard themselves, at some times, for some purposes, as French not English, Hindu not Buddhist, Hutu not Tutsi, Latino not Indio, Shi'i not Sunni, Hopi not Navajo, Black not White, Orange not Green. Whatever we might wish, or regard as enlightenment, the severalty of culture abides and proliferates, even amidst, indeed in response to, the powerfully connecting forces of modern manufacture,

finance, travel, and trade. The more things come together, the more they remain apart: the uniform world is not much closer than the classless society.

Anthropology's awkwardness in dealing with all this, with the cultural organization of the modern world that ought, by rights, to be its proper subject, is in great part the result of the difficulties it has experienced, over the course of its vagrant and inward history, in discovering for itself how best to think about culture in the first place. In the nineteenth century and well into this one, culture was, before all else, taken to be a universal property of human social life, the techniques, customs, traditions, and technologies—religion and kinship, fire and language—that set it off from animal existence. Its opponent term was nature, and if it was to be divided into sorts and kinds, it was in terms of the distance one or another piece of it, monotheism or individualism, monogamy or the protection of private property, had, supposedly, moved away from nature, its progress toward the light. With the growth, after the First World War, of long-term, participatory fieldwork with particular groups—a lot of it on islands and Indian reservations, where breaks and edges were easier to discern and the notion that everything fit together easier to entertain—the generical conception began to be set aside, as diffuse and unwieldy, as well as self-serving, in favor of a configurational one. Instead of just culture as such one had cultures—bounded, coherent, cohesive, and self-standing: social organisms, semiotical crystals, microworlds. Culture was what peoples had and held in common, Greeks or Navajos, Maoris or Puerto Ricans, each its own.<sup>18</sup>

After, however, the Second World War, when even putative social isolates, jungle people, desert people, island people, arctic people, encapsulated people, grew fewer in number, and anthropologists turned their attention toward vaster, more mixed-up, iridescent objects, India, Japan, France, Brazil, Nigeria, the Soviet Union, the United States, the configurational view became, in turn, strained, imprecise, unwieldy, and hard to credit. One might plausibly regard the Nuer or the Amhara as an integral unit, at least if one blocked off internal variabilities and external involvements, as well as anything very much in the way of larger history, but that was difficult to do for Sudan or Ethiopia; for Africa, it was impossible, though a few have tried it. An Indonesian minority, such as the Chinese, a Moroccan one, such as the Jews, a Ugandan one, such as the Indians, or an American one, such as the Blacks, might show a certain character special to themselves, but they were hardly to be understood apart from the states and societies in which they were enclosed. Everything was motley, porous, interdigitated, dispersed; the search for totality an uncertain guide, a sense of closure unattainable.

A picture of the world as dotted by discriminate cultures, discontinuous blocks of thought and emotion—a sort of pointillist view of its spiritual composition—is no less misleading than the picture of it as tiled by repeating, reiterative nation-states, and for the same reason: the elements concerned, the dots or the tiles, are neither compact nor homogeneous, simple nor uniform. When you look into them, their solidity dissolves, and you are left not with a catalogue of well-defined entities to be arranged and classified, a Mendelian table of natural kinds, but with a tangle of differences and similarities only half sorted out. What makes Serbs Serbs, Sinhalese Sinhalese, or French Canadians French Canadians, or anybody anybody, is that they and the rest of the world have come, for the moment and to a degree, for certain purposes and in certain contexts, to view them as contrastive to what is around them.

Both the territorial compactness and the localized traditionalism that islands, Indian reservations, jungles, highland valleys, oases, and the like provided (or, anyway, supposedly provided, for even this was a bit of a myth) and the integral, configurational, it all goes together, notion of cultural identity—The Argonauts of the Western Pacific, The Cheyenne Way, The Forest People, The Mountain People, The Desert People—that such compactness and localization stimulated seem more and more beside the point as we turn toward the fragments and fragmentations of the contemporary world. The view of culture, a culture, this culture, as a consensus on fundamentals—shared conceptions, shared feelings, shared values—seems hardly viable in the face of so much dispersion and disassembly; it is the faults and fissures that seem to mark out the landscape of collective selfhood. Whatever it is that defines identity in borderless capitalism and the global village it is not deep-going agreements on deep-going matters, but something more like the recurrence of familiar divisions, persisting arguments, standing threats, the notion that whatever else may happen, the order of difference must be somehow maintained.

We do not know, really, how to handle this, how to deal with a world that is neither divided at the joints into ingredient sections nor a transcendent unity—economic, say, or psychological—obscured by surface contrasts, thin and concocted, and best set aside as inessential distractions. A scramble of differences in a field of connections presents us with a situation in which the frames of pride and those of hatred, culture fairs and ethnic cleansing, *survance* and killing fields, sit side by side and pass with frightening ease from the one to the other.

Political theories that both admit to this condition and have the will to confront it, to expose and interrogate the order of difference, rather than perfecting classroom visions of Hobbesian war or Kantian concord, only barely exist. Much depends upon their growth and development: you can't guide what you can't understand.

In any case, if the elementalism of anthropology, its focus on consensus, type, and commonality—what has been called the cookiecutter concept of culture—is of doubtful use in promoting such growth and refinement, its cosmopolitanism, its determination to look beyond the familiar, the received, and the near at hand, is perhaps more valuable. The resolute undermining of all sorts of exceptionalisms, American, Western, European, Christian, and all sort of exoticisms, the primitive, the idolatrous, the antipodean, the quaint, forces comparison across the established realms of relevance and suitability—the considering together of what normally is not considered considerable together. In connection with the developments of the past half century, and most especially the past half dozen years that is our subject here, such ungrammatical comparison makes it possible to avoid the most pervasive misdescription of those developments: that they are divided into Western and nonwestern varieties and that the non-western variety is essentially recapitulative, a rerun of history the West has passed through, and more or less triumphed over, rather than, as is in fact the case, the edge of the new, premonitory and emblematic, of history to come.

This is particularly clear if one turns to the alterations of the political landscape in Asia, Africa, the Pacific, the Caribbean, and certain parts of Latin America after 1945. The dissolution of the great overseas empires—British, Dutch, Belgian, French, Portuguese, in a somewhat different way American, German, Italian, and Japanese (even Australia, after all, had a Protectorate, even if it had to inherit it from the Germans a bit late in the game)—made thoroughly plain that, despite the passionate solidarities of colonial revolt, the collective identities that drove that revolt and that suffuse the lives of the countries it created are ineradicably plural, compound, inconstant, and contested. The contribution of the Third World upheaval to the twentieth century's self-understanding lies less in its mimics of European nationalism (which were in any case a good deal less intense in, say, Morocco, Uganda, Jordan, or Malaysia, than they were in, say, Algeria, Zaire, India, or Indonesia) than in its forcing into view the compositeness of culture such nationalism denies. We may come in time to see Asia's and Africa's political reconstruction as contributing more to transforming Euro-America's view of social selfhood than vice versa.

The reason for this is not that the nature of the countries formed out of the collapse of colonial empire is radically different in kind and construction from that of those which came into being earlier on in the West after similar collapses of similarly overstretched political, or politicocultural, imperia. It is that their nature is more open to view, less shrouded in buried history; like Bismarck's sausages, we have seen them made. More recent, as well as more rapidly and more deliberately established—countries aforethought—they have been born in the full light of history, the accidents and happenstances of their formation still plain and showing. The contingencies that produced them, and that virtually everywhere continue to maintain them, are not only evident, they are, in some ways, the most striking thing about them. France may seem, at least by now, a natural given. Even Italy may, or Denmark. It is hard to think that of Angola or Bangladesh.

The cultural make-up of the countries that emerged from the wreckage of what has come to be called, as though it were some sort of Enlightenment experiment conducted for the edification of political scientists, "the colonial project," is, of course, almost everywhere extremely heterogeneous, a collection of peoples, in many cases almost haphazard—the borders are where the ins-and-outs of European politics happened to place them. (Why are people who live in Abidjan Ivoiriens, people who live in Accra, a couple hundred miles along the same coast, Ghanaians? Why is half of New Guinea in Indonesia, half in the PNG? Burma a separate country, Bengal not? Why are some Yorubas Nigerian, some Benin? Some Thai Laotians? Some Afghans Pakistanis?) Language, religion, race, and custom meet at all sorts of angles, on all sorts of scales, at all sorts of levels, impossible for even the most passionate of nationalists to rationalize, obscure, or explain away as destined and inevitable.

It is not, however, the simple fact of cultural heterogeneity as such, and the great visibility of it, that is so instructive, but the enormous variety of levels at which such heterogeneity exists and has an effect; so many, indeed, that it is difficult to know how to organize a general picture, where to draw the lines and place the foci. As soon as you look into the details of the matter in any particular instance, the more obvious demarcations, the ones you can read about in the newspapers (Tamils and Sinhalese, Shi'is and Sunnis, Hutus and Tutsis, Malays and Chinese, East Indians and Fijis) are almost overwhelmed by other demarcations, both those finer, more narrowly and exactly distinguishing, and those grosser, more broadly and generally so. It is difficult to find a commonality of

outlook, form of life, behavioral style, material expression ... whatever ... that is not either itself further partitioned into smaller, infolding ones, boxes within boxes, or taken up whole and entire into larger, incorporative ones, selves laid on top of selves. There is, at least in most cases, and I suspect in all, no point at which one can say that this is where consensus either stops or starts. It all depends on the frame of comparison, the background against which identity is seen, and the play of interest which engages and animates it.

Indonesia, a country I have myself studied up close, and over an extended period of time (though most of it remains beyond my ken—encapsulated people and flung-out places, more heard about than known), demonstrates this difficult intricacy with particular force.<sup>19</sup> The country is, of course, one of the most complicated, culturally speaking, in the world, the product of an incredible stream of warring mind-sets—Portuguese, Spanish, Dutch, Indian, Chinese; Hindu, Buddhist, Confucian, Muslim, Christian; Capitalist, Communist, Imperial Administrative—carried by means of those great world-historical agencies, long-distance commodity trade, religious missionization, and colonial exploitation, into a vast, thousandisland archipelago occupied mainly (though not exclusively) by Malayo-Polynesians, speaking hundreds of languages, following hundreds of cults, and possessed of hundreds of moralities, laws, customs, and arts; hundreds of senses, subtly different or grossly, reasonably concordant or deeply opposed, of how life ought to go. Articulating its spiritual anatomy, determining how in identity terms it is put together and, so far anyway, holds together, indeed holds together surprisingly well given what it has to contend with, is a virtually impossible task. But it is one that anybody who has seriously to do with the place, either from within or without, is inevitably constrained somehow to attempt.

The usual way this is done, also whether from within or without, is by what might be called (indeed, in my still rather classificational, *âge classique*, discipline, is called) “peoples and cultures” discourse. The various “ethnic” or quasi-ethnic groups—the Javanese, the Batak, the Bugis, the Acehnese, the Balinese, and so on down to the smaller and more peripheral examples, the Bimans, the Dyaks, the Ambonese, or whoever—are named, characterized by some configuration of qualities or other; their subdivisions are outlined, their relations to one another defined, their position within the whole assessed. This yields again a pointillist view, or perhaps better here, given the indexical character of the ordering, a file card view, of the cultural compositeness of the country. It is seen as a set of “peoples,” varying in importance, size, and character, and held within a common political and economic frame by an overarching story, historical, ideological, religious, or whatever, that provides the rationale for their being thus together, enclosed in a country. All the levels and dimensions of difference and integration, save two—the minimal consensual grouping called “a culture” or “an ethnic group” and the maximal one called “the nation” or “the state”—are occluded and washed out. Unfortunately, the matters that in the course of collective life actually work to align individuals in cooperative enterprises or to divide them from one another in clashing ones, the practices, the institutions, and the social occurrences within which difference is encountered and somehow dealt with, are occluded and washed out with them. The file cards are assembled, and the appropriate notations made. But they are not crossindexed.

The fact is, however, that it is precisely in the cross-indexing that the various identities the cards isolate are formed and play against one another. They are not, these separated “cultures,” or “peoples,” or “ethnic groups,” so many lumps of sameness marked out by the limits of consensus: they are various modes of involvement in a collective life that takes place on a dozen different levels, on a dozen different scales, and in a dozen different realms at once. The making and dissolving of village marriages and the governmental codification of family law, particular forms of worship and the officialized role of religion in the state, local patterns of sociality and overall approaches to government—these, and an enormous number of similar intersections of outlook, style, or disposition, are the bases on which cultural complexity is ordered into at least something of an irregular, rickety, and indefinite whole.

It is not possible to go into the details here—it is barely possible to go into the generalities; but the cultural variousness of Indonesia (which, so far as I can see, is as vast as ever, despite the supposedly homogenizing effects of television, rock, and high late capitalism) finds expression in the form of struggles over the nature of this whole. The way in which, and the degree to which, the contrasting aspects of the overall conglomerate are to be represented in the formulation of Indonesian identity is the heart of the matter. It is less consensus that is at issue than a viable way of doing without it.

So far as Indonesia is concerned, this has been achieved, to the degree, very partial, uneven, and incomplete, that it has been achieved, by developing a form of cultural politics within which sharply disparate conceptions of what sort of country the country should be, can be represented and blunted, celebrated and held in check,

recognized and covered over, at the same time; what has well been called a working misunderstanding. It has not, of course, always worked. The 1965 massacres in Java, Bali, and parts of Sumatra, thousands dead, perhaps hundreds of thousands, was at base a movement of this multisided struggle for the country's soul to the level of violence. There have been ethnic revolts and religious ones, back-country upheavals and urban riots; as well as, as in East Timor or West New Guinea, the brute application of state power—consensus out of the barrel of a gun. But, so far, anyway, it has lumbered along, like India or Nigeria, a bundle of parochialisms that somehow adheres.

The grand particularities of the Indonesian case, admittedly a bit along toward the limit of things, aside, this overall picture of cultural identity as a field of differences confronting one another at every level from the family, the village, the neighborhood, and the region, to the countryside and beyond—no solidarity but that it is sustained against jealous internal divisions, no division but that it sustains itself against ravenous incorporative solidarities—is, I think, very close to general in the modern world; there is nothing “underdeveloped,” “thirdworldish,” or (that euphemism we have come to use to avoid saying “backward”) “traditional” about it. It applies as fully to a France beset by tensions between *civism laique* and an inrush of Maghrebian immigrants who want to cook with cumin and wear headscarves in school, a Germany struggling to come to terms with the presence of Turks in a descent-defined *Heimatland*, an Italy regionalized into competing localisms only reinforced by modernity and uneven development, or a United States trying to remember itself in a multiethnic, multiracial, multireligious, multilinguistic ... multicultural ... whirl, as it does to such more brutally torn places as Liberia, Lebanon, Myanmar, Colombia, or the Republic of South Africa. The European (and American) exceptionalism that seemed, at least to Europeans (and Americans) so plausible before 1989—we have the nation-state, and they have not—has become increasingly implausible since. Yugoslavia, the former ex-, was, is, both the place where that idea seems to have died and—“the back porch of Europe is burning”—its last stand.

By rights, political theory should be what I take it Aristotle wanted it to be, a school for judgment, not a replacement for it—not a matter of laying down the law for the less reflective to follow (Ronald Dworkin's judges, John Rawls's policy makers, Robert Nozick's utility seekers), but a way of looking at the horrors and confusions amidst which we all are living that may be of some help to us in surviving and quieting them, perhaps even occasionally in heading them off. If so, if that is in fact its vocation, it needs to devote a good deal more of its attention to the particularities of things, to what's happening, to how matters go. It needs to do this, not in order to turn itself into a running commentary on how awfully complicated everything is, and how intractable to logical ordering. That can be left to history and anthropology, the *complexificateurs terribles* of the human sciences. It needs to do it in order to participate in the construction of what is most needed now that the world is redistributing itself into increasingly various frameworks of difference, a practical politics of cultural conciliation.

Like any other politics, such politics will have to be targeted, tailored to circumstances, to times, and places, and personalities. But, like any other politics, it must develop, nonetheless, certain commonalities of diagnosis, of strategy and direction, a certain unity of intent. What it seeks in Diyabakar or Srinagar, it must seek as well in Trois Rivieres or South Los Angeles. Algerian *kulturkampf* must be juxtaposed to Irish; the velvet divorce of the Czechs and the Slovaks, to that, some years earlier, but oddly reminiscent, of Malaya and Singapore; the double pull, Germano/Latin, exerted upon Belgium to that, Graeco/Turanian, exerted upon Cyprus; the marginalization of America's Indians to that of Australia's Aborigines; the disassimilationism of Brazil to that of the United States. There is indeed a definable subject here. The trick is to define it, and having defined it, put it into some sort of order.

The central dynamic of this subject seems, as I have been saying, perhaps all too repetitively, to consist in two continuously opposing tendencies. On the one hand, there is the drive toward creating, or trying to create, *pur sang* droplets of culture and politics; the pointillist picture that both ethnic cleansing and the convergent conception of collective agency—“nation-ism”—aim to produce. On the other, there is the drive toward creating, or trying to create, an intricate, multiply ordered structure of difference within which cultural tensions that are not about to go away, or even to moderate, can be placed and negotiated—contained in a country. Such structures are, themselves, going to be different from one such country to another, the possibility of constructing them variously real. Positioning Muslims in France, Whites in South Africa, Arabs in Israel, or Koreans in Japan are not altogether the same sort of thing. But if political theory is going to be of any relevance at all in the splintered world, it will have to have something cogent to say about how, in the face of the drive toward a destructive integrity, such structures can be brought into being, how they can be sustained, and how they can be made to work.

This brings me to the final issue I want to address here, all too cursorily. This is the much discussed, but not much

decided, capacity of liberalism (or more exactly, so that I am sorted with Isaiah Berlin and Michael Walzer and not with Friedrich von Hayek and Robert Nozick, social democratic liberalism) to rise to this challenge, its ability to involve itself in the rancorous, explosive, and often enough murderous politics of cultural difference; indeed, to survive in its presence. The commitment of liberalism to state neutrality in matters of personal belief, its resolute individualism, its stress on liberty, on procedure, and on the universality of human rights, and, at least in the version to which I adhere, its concern with the equitable distribution of life chances is said to prevent it either from recognizing the force and durability of ties of religion, language, custom, locality, race, and descent in human affairs, or from regarding the entry of such considerations into civic life as other than pathological—primitive, backward, regressive, and irrational. I do not think this is the case. The development of a liberalism with both the courage and the capacity to engage itself with a differenced world, one in which its principles are neither well understood nor widely held, in which indeed it is, in most places, a minority creed, alien and suspect, is not only possible, it is necessary.

In the last few years, the years in which liberalism, of both the economic, market utopian and the political, civil society sorts, has moved from being an ideological fortress for half the world to being a moral proposal to the whole of it, the degree to which it is, itself, a culturally specific phenomenon, born in the West and perfected there, has become, paradoxically, much more apparent. The very universalism to which it is committed and which it promotes, its cosmopolitan intent, has brought it into open conflict both with other universalisms with similar intent, most notably with that set forth by a revenant Islam, and with a large number of alternative visions of the good, the right, and the indubitable, Japanese, Indian, African, Singaporean, to which it looks like just one more attempt to impose Western values on the rest of the world—the continuation of colonialism by other means.

This fact, that the principles that animate liberalism are not so self-evident to others, even serious and reasonable others, as they are to liberals, is evident these days everywhere you look. In the resistance to a universal code of human rights as inapplicable to poor countries bent on development and indeed a device, mischievously contrived by the already rich, to hinder such development; in the father-knows-best moralism of a Lee Kuan Yew, paddling truants, journalists, and bumptious businessmen as insufficiently Confucian, or a Suharto, opposing free trade unions, free newspapers, and free elections as contrary to the spirit of Asian communalism; and in a broad range of discourses praising ritual, hierarchy, wholeness, and tribal wisdom, it is clear that Locke, Montesquieu, Jefferson, and Mill are particular voices of a particular history, not equally persuasive to all who hear them or their present-day champions.

Those who would therefore, promote the cause for which these names, and others more nearly contemporary—Dewey, Camus, Berlin, Kuron, Taylor—in their various ways variably stand (for “liberalism,” too, is neither compact nor homogeneous, and it is certainly unfinished), need to recognize its culturally specific origins and its culturally specific character. They need ... we need ... most especially, to recognize that in attempting to advance it more broadly in the world, we will find ourselves confronting not just blindness and irrationality, the passions of ignorance (those we know well enough at home), but competing conceptions of how matters should be arranged and people related to one another, actions judged and society governed, that have a weight and moment, a rationale, of their own; something to be said for them. The issue is not one of “relativism,” as it is often put by those who wish to insulate their beliefs against the force of difference. It is a matter of understanding that talking to others implies listening to them, and that in listening to them what one has to say is very unlikely, not at the close of this century, not in the opening of the next, to remain unshaken.

The argument that I set out at the beginning of this essay, that political theory is not, or anyway ought not to be, intensely generalized reflection on intensely generalized matters, an imagining of architectures in which no one could live, but should be, rather, an intellectual engagement, mobile, exact, and realistic, with present problems presently clamorous applies with particular force to liberalism, given as it sometimes has been to a certain indifference to the actuality of things, a certain taking of wish for accomplishment.

It must be reconceived, that is, its partisans must reconceive it, as a view not from nowhere but from the special somewhere of (a certain sort of) Western political experience, a statement (or, again, as it is no more unified than that experience has been, a set of statements reasonably consonant) about what we, who are the heirs of that experience, think we have learned about how people with differences can live among one another with some degree of comity. Faced with other heirs of other experiences who have drawn other lessons to other purposes, we can hardly avoid either pressing our own with whatever confidence we still feel in them and subjecting them to the risks of running up against these others and coming out at least somewhat, perhaps a good deal more than

somewhat, banged about and in need of repair.

The prospect of a new synthesis—not that there ever really was an old one—seems to me quite remote. The disagreements and disjunctions will remain, even if they will not remain the same disagreements and disjunctions. Nor does the simple triumph of what that thoroughly English, quite disabused, and intransigently liberal, E. M. Forster, who did not expect it either, called love and the beloved republic look like much of possibility. We seem condemned, at least for the immediate future, and perhaps for a good while beyond it, to live at best in what someone, thinking perhaps of Yugoslavian truces, Irish ceasefires, African rescue operations, and Mideastern negotiations, has called a low-intensity peace—not the sort of environment in which liberalism has normally flourished. But it is the sort of environment in which it will have to operate if it is to persist and have an effect, and to maintain what seems to me its deepest and most central commitment: the moral obligation to hope.

## Notes

- 1 S. Huntington "The Clash of Civilizations," *Foreign Affairs* (Summer 1993: 22–49). cf. S. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996.
- 2 C. Taylor, "Shared and Divergent Values," in his *Reconciling the Solitudes: Essays on Canadian Federalism and Nationalism*, Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1993, pp. 155–186.
- 3 *The Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971 [1928], 1:1078. For a more extensive and circumstantial discussion of vocabulary change in the English case, 1500–1650, see L. Greenfield, *Nationalism. Five Roads to Modernity*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press 1992, pp. 31–44.
- 4 *The Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary*, 2: 661–662.
- 5 *Ibid.*, pp. 849–853.
- 6 *Ibid.*, pp. 359–360. All the terms reviewed here have, of course, allied meanings not directly involved in the semantic field I am describing—"people" denotes human beings as opposed to animals, "country" denotes rural ("the countryside") as opposed to urban, "society" denotes fashionable as in 'high society,' etc.—which would need to be taken into account in a full analysis.
- 7 *Ibid.*, 1: 30–31. The definitions given in *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language* (3rd ed., Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1992, p. 1203) present the crystallized, fully multiplex, modern consolidation: "1. A relatively large group of people organized under a single, usually independent government; a country. 2. The government of a sovereign state. 3. A people who share common customs, origins, history, and frequently language; a nationality. 4. A federation or tribe ... 5. The territory occupied by such a federation or tribe."
- 8 See, for example, E. Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1983, but the view is widespread.
- 9 B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, London: Verso, 1983, p. 123. Anderson's book is perhaps the strongest statement of the diffusionist, world-historical view "by which the nation came to be imagined, and once imagined, modelled, adapted and transformed" (p. 129), and, it might be added, in his view purified, in the independence movements of the fifties and sixties.
- 10 W. Zimmerman, "Origins of a Catastrophe: Memoirs of the Last American Ambassador to Yugoslavia," *Foreign Affairs* (March/April 1995): 7. For the "ethnic-civic" opposition, see M. Ignatief, *Blood and Belonging: Journeys into the New Nationalism*, New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1993; for "official-popular," B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities*; for "divisive-unificatory," "Habsburg-Liberal," "eastern-western"), E. Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*. (The attempt to draw the bad nationalism/good nationalism line between Balkan "atavism" and West European "maturity," now much reinforced by the Yugoslavian tragedy and the failures of the European Union in the face of it, is part of the European exceptionalism view of things I shall discuss further below.)
- 11 C. Black, "Canada's Continuing Identity Crisis," *Foreign Affairs* (March/April 1995): 99–115, quotation at p. 101. In the following I am especially indebted to an unpublished paper (1995) by Russel Barsh, associate professor of Native American Studies at the University of Lethbridge, Alberta, "Re-imagining Canada: Aboriginal Peoples and Quebec Competing for Legitimacy as Emergent Nations," and, *inter alia*, C. Taylor, *Reconciling the Solitudes*; M. Ignatief, *Blood and Belonging*, pp. 143–177; R. Handler, *Nationalism and the Politics of Culture in Quebec*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988. For a review of the constitutional efforts to put Canada in order, see J. Tully, *Strange Multiplicity: Constitutionalism in an Age of Diversity*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995. For an attempt to understand that multiplicity in terms of a contrast between "civilization" and "culture," see D. Verney, *Three Civilizations, Two Cultures, One State: Canada's Political Traditions*, Durham: Duke University Press, 1981. For French Canadian views, J. Letourneau, *Le question identitaire au Canada Francophone*, Quebec: Pres Université Laval, 1997.
- 12 C. Black, "Canada's Continuing Identity Crisis," pp. 112–114; the figure for the outward migration of Anglophones from Quebec is from M. Ignatief, *Blood and Belonging*, p. 171. For Quebec, the (Cree) Indians, and the development of natural resources, *ibid.*, pp. 163–167, and Barash, "Re-imagining Canada."
- 13 I depend here mainly on two books by S. J. Tambiah, *Sri Lanka, Ethnic Fratricide and the Dismantling of Democracy*, Chicago, 1986, and *Buddhism Betrayed? Religion, Politics, and Violence in Sri Lanka*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992, and on W. H. Wriggins,

- Ceylon: Dilemmas of a New Nation* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1960. I briefly reviewed the initial phases of, as it then was, Ceylon's ethnic conflict in C. Geertz, "The Integrative Revolution, Primordial Sentiments and Civil Politics in the New States," in C. Geertz, ed., *Old Societies and New States*, New York: The Free Press, 1963, pp. 105–157, esp. pp. 121–123. My statistics come from the above works, and from *World Development Report, 1992*, The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, Oxford, 1992, and E. V. Daniel, *Charred Lullabies: Chapters in an Autobiography of Violence*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996.
- 14 *World Development Report 1992*, 1992, op. cit., tables 1, 26, 28. Relative to some of its neighbors, Sri Lanka's advance has been somewhat less impressive in recent years, in part as a result of its communal troubles which have led to a significant diaspora to Europe, the Gulf, and the United States, but it still remains reasonably effective.
- 15 There has been so much in the world press over the last several years, as well as numerous books, articles, and commentaries, to say nothing of TV footage, that I need not cite sources here for what are in any case but generalized and quite unauthoritative remarks. I have relied heavily on Misha Glenny's detailed, insightful *The Fall of Yugoslavia: The Third Balkan War*, 2nd ed., New York: Penguin, 1994, to keep things straight factually and chronologically. Zimmerman, "Origins of a Catastrophe," has also been useful in this regard. Ignatieff, *Blood and Belonging*, pp. 19–56, though it deals only with Croatia and Serbia, invokes the devastation with great force, as does, for Bosnia-Herzegovina, D. Rieff, *Slaughterhouse: Bosnia and the Failure of the West*, New York: Simon and Schuster 1995, which also addresses the policy issues from a strongly interventionist standpoint.
- 16 Glenny, *The Fall of Yugoslavia*, p. 161.
- 17 *Ibid.*, p. 236.
- 18 There is, of course, a history of cultural configurationalism aside from and prior to ethnographical practice since Malinowski or whomever, most especially that connected with Herder, the Humboldts, and the neo-Kantians, which had in fact a shaping impact on anthropology; for a good recent review, see S. Fleischacker, *The Ethics of Culture*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994, esp. chapter 5.
- 19 For a discussion of Indonesia's ethnic and religious composition, and the way in which it is being addressed, see my *After the Fact: Two Countries, Four Decades, One Anthropologist*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995, esp. chapters 1–3. I have not tried to include here the developments, most of which reinforce my arguments, that have followed upon the collapse of the rupiah, the resignation of Suharto, The Separation of East Timor, and the move, hesitant and confused, back toward popular government. See, also, my "Ethnic Conflict: Three Alternative Terms," *Common Knowledge* 2, 3 (1992): 55–65.

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The World in Pieces: Culture and Politics at the End of the Century, in: *Available light: anthropological reflections on philosophical topics*. Princeton/N.J./USA: Princeton University Press, pp. 218-263.

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