



Secession in the Contemporary World

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Within the recent past, five events in the Sudan, Sri Lanka, Abkhazia and South Ossetia, Chechnya, and Xinjiang, China, linked to separatist aspirations, commanded world attention. Most recently, in December 2010, a referendum has finally ended the struggle of the separatists in southern Sudan for a new sovereign state. In August 2008, Russian troops invaded Georgian territory and established two new states in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. In May 2009, Sri Lankan troops achieved military victory over the Tamil Tigers bringing ostensibly to an end a war with LTTE separatists since 1983. In April 2009, Russia ended its war against Chechen rebels, seemingly quelling a war since 1992 for Chechen sovereignty. In July 2009, Uighurs in the province of Xinjiang in China rioted, underscoring the persistence of grievances against Han Chinese occupation of their homeland and a demand for a separate state. Apart from these events, similar violent strifes linked to self-determination struggles continued elsewhere, bringing in their wake many casualties.

Perhaps the greatest frequency of open and violent ethnic conflicts over the past two decades responsible for most deaths and human dislocations in war has transpired when sub-state ethno-cultural groups sought self-determination from the state (Gurr 2000: 195). Ethnopolitical or separatist movements refer to sub-state groups in multi-ethnic states set apart by self-ascribed cultural characteristics which are politically mobilised to address collective grievances against the state. They generally challenge the very territorial definition of the state seeking independence, or short

of that aim, settle for internal autonomy. Hardly any state, with the rare exception of St. Kitts and Nevis in the Caribbean (Premdas 2000: 447-484), has established a constitutional process for a community exiting peacefully preferring instead to confront the separatists. Frequently, separatist struggles are prolonged, punishing, and prohibitively costly and are fought with fanatical intensity and uncompromising stubbornness involving high civilian casualties. (Barkus 1999; Coppieters and Huysseune 2002; Premdas 1996b; Stavenhagen 1996). The Peace and Conflict Ledger at the University of Maryland has estimated that since the 1950s some 71 ethno-regional groups had conducted armed struggles for autonomy or independence discounting the former European colonies that sought self-government (Gurr & Marshall 2005:19) As early as 2005, some 35 armed self-determination movements were still operating the most prominent of these include the rebels of Darfur in Southern Sudan and the Chechens in Russia. Some minor cases include the Assamese, Kashmir Muslims, Tripuras, and the Scheduled Castes in India; the Karens and Shan in Myanmar; the Basques in Spain; the Kurds in Turkey; the Ijaw in Nigeria, the Malay-Muslims in Thailand; and the Achenese in Indonesia.

In the period since World War II, never have there been so many ethno-political conflicts, about a score classified as high intensity and a hundred as ongoing, requiring the deployment of over 70,000 UN peacekeepers costing more than (US)\$4 billion annually to maintain. Refugee flows have reached about 15 million externally and about 25 million internally, most

associated in one way or the other with ethnic and ethno-regional conflicts. In a short time many persons uprooted voluntarily or involuntarily have experienced a radical change of identity and citizenship in a world that seems at once to be contracting as a site of a common global survival and expanding with a proliferation of identity communities. The crux of the conflicts seems to revolve around the right to self-determination of 'peoples', ostensibly referring to any self-differentiating group which can make a credible case for its claims to nationhood. Any resolution must address the issue of establishing a just order in the midst of the deeply distrusting regional and communal components in these internally fractured states. Implicated in all of these are vexing issues related to status and recognition of sub-state ethno-cultural communities which express fears of discrimination and domination as well as charges of skewed state policies regarding resource allocation. When frustrated in their quest for recognition and resources, they generally challenge the very political and territorial definition of the state; they demand self-determination as Ted Gurr noted: 'Their main political objective is "exit", that is, they proactively pursue independent statehood or extensive regional autonomy' (Gurr 1994: 354). Most of the casualties and displacements in wars since the early 1960s have been assigned to conflicts associated with struggles to re-define the state.

Ted Gurr who had catalogued these groups and associated conflicts which had emerged as a significant event after WWII and steadily increased in frequency culminating with its highest critical mass after the end of the Cold War argued that they had 'reshaped the political landscape in all world regions' (Gurr 2000: 3) and 'raised grave doubts about the future of the international system of states and the security of citizens' (Gurr 2000: xiii). The disintegration of the former USSR into 15 independent states as well as Yugoslavia and Ethiopia into warring ethnopolitical camps added to the apocalyptic scenario.

Towards the end of the twentieth century, the peak of this ethno-political scourge seemed to have run its course. Reported Gurr: 'By mid-1990s, armed conflict within states had abated. There was a pronounced decline in the onset of new ethnic wars and a shift from

fighting to negotiations.' (Gurr 2000: xiii). This was only partly reassuring since human society, organised from time immemorial into ethno-cultural settlements, has always engendered inter-communal strife over a full range of issues which remain with us today. Walker Connor calling 'for a longer view of history' underscoring the historical cycles of troughs and swells of ethnic conflict, warned 'that a relative lull should not be construed as endless', and offered some cautionary remarks that 'explanations for today's ethnically predicated conflict should not be sought in terms of post-Cold war factors'. (Connor 2004: 27). The ethnic factor, in all its heterogeneity and pluralism, whatever its nature, clearly is a permanent feature of human social organisation, even preceding the emergence of the state (Smith 1986) and will continue to be a critical part in future crises. Ethno-political conflicts are destined to remain as part of the international state system and in this essay I shall offer a brief survey of the main ones which have persisted at the outset of the twenty-first century. It is however necessary to preface this aim by providing a background into the state, nationalism and self-determination which explain the contemporary persistence of secessionist movements.

This essay then examines the secessionist phenomena in the contemporary world. It begins in Part A. by offering a historical background of the state and its relationship to self-determination. It proceeds next in Part B. into an exposition into the very nature and behaviour of separatism. This then gets us into a description and analysis in Part C. of contemporary separatist movements. In Part D, because of its widespread application, I look at the promise and limitations of decentralisation and internal autonomy in resolving separatist claims. Finally, in Part E. I discuss the future of these contemporary separatist movements especially in the light of globalisation and mass migration.

A. The State and Self-Determination: Historical Background

A major argument that seeks to explain the source of these self-determination conflicts traces their locus to the very nature and history of the territorial state rais-

ing several critical interrogations: Does the concept of the state institutionalised in international law understood as a juridical entity with claims to exclusive territory, undivided sovereignty, and unequivocal loyalty, become so ossified and inflexible as to render the claim for ethnonational self-determination into an all or nothing symbolic struggle? Clearly, issues related to nationalism as a cement of state unity as well as the borders and integrity of the state loom large in this explanation.

It is easy to forget that the state as a unit of international organisation is a recent invention its origins often traced back the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648. Ernest Gellner, in arguing that both the state and its ethno-collective consciousness expressed in nationalism were not ancient events concluded that 'the basic characteristic of the modern nation and everything connected with it is its modernity' (Gellner 1989: 49). Eric Hobsbawm posited that the modern state was first established around an exclusive territory and a central political authority in response to the intrinsic needs stemming from rise of capitalism and the industrial revolution (Hobsbawm 1990). As it evolved, the state became centralised and armed with a new doctrine of sovereignty and self-determination (Burchett 1978; Cobban 1944; Hannum 1990). The boundaries of the territorial state were first established before a collective consciousness of citizens emerged according to this argument. The counter argument advanced by Anthony Smith argued that while it was true that the state emerged only recently and was constituted on several discrete ethnocultural communities, it was not a sociologically invented unit but was a receptacle that embodied and was dominated by a central ethno-cultural core (Smith 1987). While at its founding, it was not a cultural self-conscious artifact, it became so after the French Revolution. Thereafter, the congruence of culture and state was set forth as a principle of state formation triggering over the centuries bursts of ethnic cleansing, repression, population expulsions, etc. As the European powers established overseas empires, the state model was engrafted to the newly acquired colonies but indiscriminately incorporating diverse ethno-cultural communities into their boundaries. This process

would in part sow the seeds of most contemporary ethnopolitical secessionist movements (Premdas 1990b). In the twentieth century this was confirmed in the Treaty of Versailles by President Wilson after WWI. It has been contended that the fall of the USSR spawning a proliferation of self-determination movements was a delayed reaction in the late twentieth century to this process of state formation that was witnessed at the earlier part of the century when the Ottoman and Hapsburg Empires collapsed into nation-state units (Hobsbawm 1990).

The self-determination principle has become firmly fixed to the nature of the state and has been enshrined in Article 1 and 6 of the United Nations Charter: All peoples have the right to self-determination; by virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social, and cultural development'. Any internal cultural minority however that seeks its own self-determination through external assistance runs into Article 6 of the United Nations Charter that seems to license repression: 'Any attempt aimed at a partial or whole disruption of the national unity and the territorial integrity of a country is incompatible with the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations'. In turn, this has triggered a wide-ranging debate regarding the terms under a self-determination movement can be justified (Moore 1998). There seems to be a tentative consensus even though there are many dissenters that, under a limited set of circumstances such as genocide and illegal acquisition of the contested territory, the creation of a new sovereign state through secession can be justified (Buchanan 1998: 14-33). It remains a fact however that before the USSR had dissolved only three cases of separation movements had succeeded in the twentieth century, namely, Norway, Singapore and Bangladesh. Since then several new states have been created through self-determination drives from the former USSR, Czechoslovakia and Ethiopia (Brubaker 1998).

There are many more knocking at the door and while many sub-state ethnopolitical communities seem moribund, they tend to come alive again under the right circumstances bringing into play all the familiar pattern ethno-cultural conflicts and their con-

sequences (Premdas 990a). In the contemporary international scene, however, more multi-ethnic states are tolerant of minorities and have accorded recognition for pluralism successfully containing a number of these ethnopolitical movements. Scholarship in this area of self-determination and ethnic conflicts has shifted from the dominant role of historians and international lawyers (Burchett 1978; Cobban 1944; Hannum 1990) to political scientists and philosophers (Buchanan 1998: 14-33; Horowitz 1998b: 181-214; Margalit & Raz 1990: 439-463; Miller 1998:62-78; Philpott 1995: 352-385; Premdas 1990c: 12-29; Premdas 2000: 447-484). The critical burning issue underlying much of this discourse interrogates, especially in the light of increased globalisation, the state as an optimal receptacle of organising human association.

B. The Nature of Separatist Movements

The quest for self-determination by a community within a plural state is often caught up in upheaval. As an act of territorial and political assertion, a secessionist struggle is usually prolonged, punishing, and prohibitively costly. In part, this stems from the fact that hardly any state (with the rare exception of St. Kitts and Nevis) has established a legal and constitutional process for a community exiting peacefully. The idea of dismantling the state is not given a second thought; the state in its unity is deemed eternal. It is therefore usual for the demands of secessionist movements to be resisted, conceded with utmost reluctance, more often described as demonic, dealt with by fierce counter force, and deemed traitorous, and deserving of destruction. In instances where the confrontation has degenerated into open warfare, however badly beaten and savagely brutalised, rarely are secessionist assertions totally and finally annihilated. At times, in seeming defeat, they may appear moribund and may even be forgotten in the preoccupation with other problems, but over time, given the right circumstances, these movements will likely be awakened in all of their old fury. It comes and goes, ebbs and flows, unsundering from generation to

generation, in a logic of their own. They die hard if ever.

As a social process, secession may be conceived analytically as constituted of steps and stages, cumulative and precipitating causes, periodically displaying patterns of accommodation and intransigence. A secessionist drive may originate in nothingness in a fabricated and mythical claim built around an invented self-differentiating group, but when mobilised its energies and objectives are real and become a menace that threatens to dismember a material pre-existing state. More often than not, its target of territorial autonomy is met with expressions of incredulity from central authorities if not outright denial of the authenticity of the claims of the separatist community, their leaders described and dismissed as power hungry, demagogic and manipulative of public opinion in their community (Premdas 1977a: 265-283; 1977b.). In 1993 the peaceful 'velvet' separation of the Czechs and Slovaks in the former Czechoslovakia was a rare exception; it is debatable whether the Baltic states in regaining their independence could be said to have engaged in a secessionist movement. The norm has been resistance followed by bloodshed, chaos, and terrorism. The pre-existing state often constituted of many intergenerational communities of residential and matrimonial intermixture of co-existing ethnic 'strangers' must be disaggregated, dismembered and reassembled so that maimed fractions must now become healthy wholes. Territory must be 'halved' and re-constituted, and with it, tenacious memories and long lasting friendships are strained and undone. The struggle for secession is frequently prolonged and incomplete demoralizing all contestants, often creating a garrison mentality and entrenched paranoia, cripples the conditions for tolerance and democratic institutions, breeds fanaticism and after a while, in the irresolution of the strife the citizenry on all sides, accepts helplessly the inevitability of the conflict and a distorted existence as normal and natural. Long and historic struggles, with deaths and painful injuries in practically every family, keep alight the demonisation of each side and justification for the continued struggle celebrated everywhere with cemetery sites and new narratives of heroism and sacrifice passed on from

generation to generation rendering reconciliation difficult if not unthinkable. Few are the cases if any where the parties are not joined in their struggle by foreign interests or states with their own agenda more often than not adding fuel to the sustenance of the struggle. This is the sad tale of secessionist movements as a whole regardless of the legitimacy and authenticity of their claims. They describe cases where procedures for departure are non-existent but do not suggest that missing procedures alone can concoct denial of the claim for secession. Ultimately, the matter may be one of power. The Nevis case stands out as the solitary example where the procedure for secession is clearly spelled out in the constitution but Nevis' departure may yet be determined on the anvil of a power contest. It is to be seen whether Nevis will go via 'the Velvet' solution after one or several attempts at a peaceful referendum or will replicate the struggle and turmoil between center and periphery that has typically happened elsewhere. The case of Tobago more closely resembles Quebec in Canada where no specific constitutional provision exists about procedures for secession. The lack of such a provision is an open invitation for strife.

C: Contemporary secessionist movements: Analysis and Outlook

While in the previous section, I dealt with matters of theory and history pertaining to the separatist phenomenon, in this section I shall look more concretely at contemporary secessionist movements. In a way, this can be regarded as a stock taking exercise that sets forth a picture of the performance of separatist struggles today. Even so, it will not be entirely descriptive, where I offer analysis into patterns and projections.

As noted in the introduction to the first part of this essay, Ted Gurr and his associates had pointed out that as early as 2005, some 35 armed self-determination movements were still operating, the most prominent of these include the rebels of Darfur in Southern Sudan and the Chechens in Russia. In addition to these cases, they noted some minor cases including the Assamese, Kashmir Muslims, Tripuras, and the Scheduled Castes in India; the Karens and Shan in

Myanmar; the Basques in Spain; the Kurds in Turkey; the Ijaw in Nigeria, the Malay-Muslims in Thailand; and the Achenese in Indonesia. Gurr argued that while these separatist movements constituted the primary threat to civil peace and regional security in the 1990s, they had now declined to their lowest level since 1960. He reported that from 2001 to 2004, 13 major self-determination conflicts were settled or contained, but there were some new or renewed secessionist struggles including Darfur and Indonesia's Aceh province.

There are some 4,000 ethno-cultural groups world-wide enclosed in some 187 sovereign states. Ethnonational movements refer to sub-state groups in heterogeneous multi-ethnic states set apart by self-conscious and self-ascribed cultural and other characteristics which are politically mobilised to address collective grievances against the state. This category includes regional and islandic groups (or ethno-regional communities) which may perceive themselves as unique in regard to cultural and other diacritica. With a few exceptions (Japan, Korea, Somalia, Swaziland), nearly all the states are polyethnic with about 40 per cent constituted of 5 or more ethnic communities. Less than a third of the states contain ethnic majorities. From the fact of cultural and regional pluralism has emerged a proliferation of internal strifes that have often spilled their borders and destabilised international peace and security. It will be useful to enumerate the main ethno-national struggles world-wide:

1. Chechens in Russia
2. Georgians in Abkhazia
3. Serbs in Croatia
4. Muslims in Kashmir
5. Hazaris, Tajiks, and Uzbeks in Afganistan
6. Kachin, Karen, Shans and other non-Burmans in Myanmar
7. East Timorese in Indonesia
8. Sindhis and Mohajirs in Pakistan
9. Baluchi and Kurds in Iran
10. Kurds in Turkey
11. Kurds in Iraq
12. Ovimbundu in Angola

13. Tuareg in Mali and Niger
14. Issak in Somaliland/Somalia
15. Dinka, Nuba, and Shilluk in Sudan
16. Hutus in Burundi and Rwanda
17. Mayans in Guatemala and Chiapas
18. Roma (Gypsies) in post-Communist Europe
19. Magyars in Slovakia and Romania
20. Russians in the Baltic states
21. Albanians, Sanzak Muslims, and Magyars in Serbia and Montenegro
22. Llotshampas (Nepalese) in Bhutan
23. Muslims in Myanmar
24. Tibetans and Turkmen (Uighers, Kazakhs and others) in the Peoples Republic of China
25. Berbers in Algeria
26. Copts in Egypt
27. Baha'is in Iran
28. Shi'is in Iraq and Saudi Arabia
29. Afars in Eritrea and Djibouti
30. Kikuyu in Kenya
31. Ogoni in Nigeria
32. Banyarwandans and Luba-Kasai in Zaire
33. Indigenous peoples in Brazil
34. Haitians in the Dominican Republic

Apart from the lists from Ted Gurr and myself, Aleksandar Pavkovic and Peter Radan drawing in part from the work by M.H. Halperin and D.J. Schaffer's Self-Determination and the New World Order (Carnegie endowment 1992) gave three lists which provided a valuable catalogue of separatist movements from which to look at the contemporary scene (Pavkovic & Radan 2007: 257-9):

a. List I describes attempts at secession which gained little or no international recognition from 1945 to 2006:

- Abkhazia from Georgia (1994)
- Biafra (1967)
- Bougainville (1990)
- Chechnya (1991)
- Herzegovina-Bosnia from Bosnia-Herzegovina (1992)
- Katanga (1962)
- Kosovo (1991)
- Punt land (from Eastern Somaliland) (1998)

- Serb Krajina from Croatia (1992)
- Somaliland from Republic of Somaliland (1991)
- South Ossetia from Georgia (1992)
- Transdnestria from Moldova (1990)
- Turkish Republic from Northern Cyprus from Cyprus (1974)
- The Republic of Western Bosnia from Bosnia-Herzegovina (1993)

- b. List II names attempts of secession via referenda
- Nevis (1998)
 - Quebec (1995)
 - Western Australia (1932)

c. List III enumerated regions or groups with ongoing active separatist movements until 2007:

- Albanians in Macedonia (majority Albanians)
- Basque country in Spain
- Cabinda in Angola
- Casemance in Senegal
- Chittagong Hill Tracts in Bangladesh (Buddhist Chakma Tribal group)
- Corsica in France
- Flanders in Belgium
- Jammu and Kashmir in India
- Karenni in Burma
- Kurds in Turkey and Iran
- Mindanao in the Philippines (Muslim population)
- Naga in India (the state of Nagaland)
- Punjab in India (Sikh population)
- Sandzak in Serbia and in Montenegro (Muslim Bosniak population)
- Scotland in the UK
- South Sudan (non-Arab non Muslim population)
- South Cameroon in the Republic of Cameroon
- South Moluccas in Indonesia
- Tibet in China
- Tamils in Sri Lanka
- Taiwan (a sovereign state claimed by China)
- West Papua in Indonesia
- Xinjiang province in China (Muslim Uyghur and Kazakh population)

(Source: M.H. Halperin and D.J. Scheffer, Self-Determination and the New World Order (Carnegie

Endowment 1992), p.258

Looking at these lists in the light of what have transpired up to the year 2009, I identify three categories for discussion:

- Most violent and dramatic;
- Simmering low intensity and sporadic conflict;
- Relatively dormant

1. Most violent and dramatic

This category includes the following cases: Chechnya, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Abkhazia from Georgia, Xinjiang province in China (Muslim Uyghur and Kazakh population), Karenni in Burma. The category includes those movements which are either in struggle right now or tend to blow up violently but sporadically. In the case of Chechnya, even though Moscow declared that it was terminating its so-called 'anti-terrorist campaign' because it felt that it had extinguished the Chechen rebels, evidence abounds that separatists are very much alive and continue their own campaign of sabotage and violence. Moscow's trust in new Chechen President Ramzan Kadyrov who uses almost indiscriminate violent methods to suppress the separatists, may well be more wishful thinking than based on facts on the ground. In the Sri Lankan case, while the leadership of the Tamil Tigers (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam- LTTE) has been partly destroyed, the fundamentals of the situation pointing to extensive grievances about discrimination of Tamils remain untended. The Sri Lankan separatists are likely to re-emerge in a different form. In Abkhazia and South Ossetia, these new states are now the dependencies of Moscow and have gained diplomatic recognition as sovereign states only from Nicaragua and Venezuela. In China, both Tibet and the Uyghur's pose fundamental threats against the territorial integrity of the state. The Uyghur's are about half of the 12 million residents of Xinjiang province which is their traditional homeland. Like in the case of Tibet, sponsored Chinese mass migration of the dominant Hans to Xinjiang, is the source of continuing malaise among the native population. As long as the Red Army is strong, it would be difficult to dislodge Chinese control of these areas but this will not be able to terminate

riots and sabotage. The Sudan continues as the single most active and violent separatist movement today with the non-Muslim rebels' intent on gaining independence. Finally, in Myanmar, while the recent riots were mainly about repressive governance by the military government, these disruptions have underscored the denial of minorities especially the Karens, Shans, and Karenni groups which have established virtual autonomy over their traditional homeland areas for many decades.

2. Simmering low intensity and conflict

These cases sit on the borderline of being low level violent and open violence with an air of unpredictability on their being transformed at any time for the least provocation. I shall only identify these cases here: Kosovo, West Papua in Indonesia, Basque country in Spain, Jammu and Kashmir in India, Kurds in Turkey and Iran, and Tibet in China; southern Thailand insurgency, Tibet in China, Taiwan (a sovereign state claimed by China), Abu Sayyaf group in Mindanao in the Philippines (Muslim population), Naga in India (the state of Nagaland), Cabinda (Angola), Kashmir (India)

3. Relatively dormant

These cases are quiet but not extinguished as under the right circumstances, they can quickly ignite. They are: Bougainville (1990), Nevis (1998), Quebec (1995), Western Australia (1932), Corsica in France, Flanders in Belgium, Punjab in India (Sikh population), Sandzak in Serbia and in Montenegro (Muslim Bosniak population), Scotland in the UK, South Moluccas in Indonesia.

D. Decentralisation and Autonomy

One of the common devices recommended as a means of assuaging and managing ethnic claims and conflict between an ethno-political group and a state in the establishment of a government of cross-sectional unity is autonomy. Often this refers to territorial self governing autonomy either articulated in a federal arrangement or constitutionally entrenched into the organisation of a unitary state. There are

other possible forms such as some sort of functional autonomy in which representation of corporate communal interests in national decision-making bodies may be envisaged; or self-government in which the central or federal government is confined to defense and foreign affairs. It may be extended beyond the territory of an ethnic community so that wherever members dwell in the state they may enjoy language, educational, and cultural rights. Regardless, the fundamental assumption is that the devolution of autonomous decision-making powers to an ethnic community creates in the diffusion of authority a separate space and confers recognition in self-governing pride. It is pre-eminently a political arrangement. It may successfully serve to foster a culture and protect the identity of a people in the end appeasing secessionist impulses, although equally, it may set the stage for ever increasing demands culminating in the surge for sovereignty. Generally, decentralised autonomy to be credible or meaningful tends to be extensive in the devolution of both administrative and political powers. Decentralisation therefore does not refer to the mere shuffling of the pack but in a more appropriate metaphor results in the flattening of the pyramid of power. It is a zero-sum game in which the loss of power at the center is accompanied by gain at the regional level. Decentralisation of this kind is rarely conceded peacefully and for this reason it is not frequently found among states (Maddick 1996; Premdas 1982; White 1931: 33-34).

In nearly all cases, decentralisation is undertaken with a view to localising and legitimating national rule. However, balancing the demand by minorities for maximum internal autonomy with the insistence of the central government for unequivocal loyalty is frequently an issue that threads on a razor's edge. Territorial decentralisation may militate against the growth of unifying bonds with other communities it is often argued, but countered by the riposte that by protecting the identity of a community, such decentralisation may enable a minority to evolve confidence and dignity enabling a healthier relationship with other groups.

Issues of financial autonomy, like the quantum of devolved powers, are likely sources of ongoing center-

regional tugs of war. The uneven endowment of natural resources and disparities in levels of economic development among regions as well as different industriousness and achievements of the different peoples in the multi-ethnic state tend to engender frequent inter-governmental disputes and resentments which can erupt into demands for exit. There are numerous other potentially tempestuous torrents that can break the bounds of reason and fatally buffet the devolution design including the right of residence by ethnic others within the territory of devolved community; exclusive ethnic preferences in allocating jobs, contracts, loans, subsidies, in other words, internal discrimination against minorities in the autonomous region; denial of individual rights in favor of group rights suitable for some persons and communities but not others, etc. In effect, there is endemic jurisdictional tension in the two trajectories in decentralisation, one tending towards centrifugal ends and the other towards centripetal interests.

The autonomy strategy for assuaging and managing ethnic difference and communal identity may therefore not be a simple proposition. Besides it tends to be costly and wasteful in setting up parallel political and administrative structures as well as harbouring and nurturing rival bases of power to the national government. It may conceal and protect inefficiency and corruption and local authoritarian practices under the rubric of a sacred decentralist ideology of self-determination. Ultimately, it survives or dies not on the architectural elegance or structural features of the centre-regional organisational form but on trust that the region will not take the next inviting step to independence and the central authorities will not see every assertive act of internal autonomy as disloyalty requiring rapid and invasive intervention. This point is exemplified by the case of the Tamil quest for Eelam in Sri Lanka where deep distrust has torpedoed even the most reasonable organisational concessions for decentralisation. Similarly, in the case of Bougainville, until third party intervention led to a resolution in decentralisation and local autonomy for the island of Bougainville within a larger Papua New Guinea nationhood.

Federalism is frequently offered as a recommended

form of decentralisation aimed at managing communal sectionalism. Its main advantage consists of defining a sphere of quasi-sovereign power for a region while sharing some parallel and overlapping functions with the centre thereby sustaining cooperative links with the state. However, it has had a checkered career. It worked for periods of time in Nigeria (1962) and the Sudan (1972). In India and Spain it has fared much better although separatist movements in these states persist. Most recently, decentralised autonomy has facilitated the containment of Naga grievances in India. However, it did not contain the acrimony between Czechs and Slovaks which entered a 'velvet divorce'. In a few notable cases where federal structures have been arbitrarily removed accompanied by recentralisation (Sudan, 1983 and Eritrea, 1962), this has triggered civil war. Switzerland's application of a federal structure to accommodate sectional interests called 'micro partition' by John McGarry and T. O'Leary seems to be unique in its success and of limited transfer value (McGarry & O'Leary 1993: 1-10). Clearly, as Rodolfo Stavenhagen noted, 'federalism is no guarantee of ethnic harmony and accommodation in the absence of other factors' (Stavenhagen 1996). Among those factors are such items as power sharing, equality, non-discriminatory policies of the state, etc. Even with the most ideal support institutions, a federal system may still fail to contain the politics of intra-regional leadership outbidding that takes centre-periphery relationship to the brink. Similarly, even where a loose confederal arrangement evolves such as in Quebec in Canada, this does not necessarily promote cooperative and constructive inter-governmental relations. The Quebec separatists are still well organised and their current quiet must not be mistaken for an end to their effort to create a new sovereign state. The critical point is that decentralised territorial autonomy, be it in one form or the other, is not an unqualified panacea for accommodating ethnic diversity and ethno-political aspirations for a sovereign state. A more recent alternative territorial solution that moves in the opposite direction from conceding a separate existence outside the existing state is integration of the troubled state within a larger community of states such as the European Union. It

still is too early to evaluate the effectiveness of this strategy.

E: Secession and Self-Determination in a Post-State De-territorialisation Scenario

Decentralisation and federalism are structures which derive their salience in relation to the rigid doctrine of the state insisting on territorial integrity. In the larger perspective, it may be asked whether the search for security and identity needs to be territorially bound locked into the definition of the state. In effect, when the state as a unit of international society is under assault to a critical point where the old definition of statebound identities is challenged everywhere, this condition may impel substate ethno-cultural communities to re-evaluate their security and general welfare in relation to their traditional territory. It is conceivable that in a post-state scenario especially related to ethno-cultural communities which have migrated in large numbers into numerous diaspora sites to re-define their identities without exclusive attachment to a compact autonomous territorial state so that their internal cohesiveness is functionally maintained territorially as well as via e-mail, faxes, the internet, travel etc. The de-territorialisation of the state and the reconstruction of identity around functional links may be prompted by the dispersal of an ethnic community through migration for better pastures over a long period of time. However, while we do witness the de-territorialisation of some groups more than others and a general movement of peoples to other destinations, the opposite trend in reclaiming the state as the site of culturally compact and coherent communities is also at work in ethnonational demands for separation and exclusive territorial homelands.

The state system in its history has always been fluid, with some periods more stable than others. The dissolution of the Ottoman, Hapsburg, Russian and post WWII colonial empires has all witnessed the proliferation of new states. To this have been added most recently, the collapse of the USSR and Yugoslavia, adding even more states. However, in all these in-

stances, the state system retained its vibrancy and the state its pre-eminent position as the main actor in international organisation. However, in the contemporary world in the wake of new forces of globalisation, the territorial aspect of citizenship and community is under new relentless interrogation and scrutiny. It is not a clear picture with numerous ethnonational claims asserting the state as a suitable repository of identity and community while many of its members construct a new dispersed identity living happily in diaspora in multicultural states elsewhere. What is however clear is the unleashing of a sphere of contestation which interrogates the polyethnic state as an artifact of meaningful human association. The modern person in quest of personal identity finds that the modern state increasingly assumes the fissiparous form of a fragmented place of exile lacking a centre of gravity in a sea of cacophonous contestations over shares, equity, redress, rights, wrongs, etc. While from the inside the state is assaulted as a repository of personal meaning, from the outside it is buffeted by globalising transnational forces that ignore its sphere of governance. The secure self needs new boundaries of belonging, more intimate and reliable than the state, maybe in a non-territorial entity since increasing transnational organisations and the comprehensive communications networking of the globe all point to the world as an integrated single site of survival. While it is not unequivocally clear as to where all of this will converge, it is clear that the contemporary ethnic resurgence occurs at a moment when it is least functional for global co-existence. Tribalising and de-tribalising currents are at once operating to do and undo what is and will be.

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