REVIEW ESSAY


Ken Jubber
Department of Sociology
University of Cape Town

This important and welcome book of essays represents one of the early fruits of South Africa's democratisation. To celebrate the end of the academic boycott and to liberate the study of ethnicity from its Apartheid and Freedom Struggle distortions and silences, an international conference on 'Ethnicity, Identity, and Nationalism' was held at Rhodes University, Grahamstown, South Africa, from 20-24 April 1993. The conference was attended by 173 scholars drawn from 24 countries. Seventy-three papers were presented and this book consists of the main theoretical contributions made at the conference.

The organisers of the conference and those responsible for this book are to be congratulated for their attempt to stimulate and update the study of ethnicity in South Africa. As has often been remarked, despite their significance as social phenomena, the study of ethnicity and ethnic identity has had a chequered history in South African scholarship. This state of affairs was such that at about the time of the conference Bekker (1993: p. 1) was able to write, 'Astonishing though it may seem to most rank-and-file South Africans, there is little discussion on ethnicity in South Africa at the moment'. One of the main reasons for this is no doubt linked to the blatantly opportunistic way in which ethnicity was fabricated and manipulated by the apartheid state to divide and weaken opposition in South Africa and to implement its segregationist ideology.

Those who challenged this ideology but wished to study ethnicity ran the danger of being used as apologists for government policy. To forestall this meant to limit the study of ethnicity to aspects that could not be used in this way, for example, to highlighting the variability of ethnicity and exposing the artificiality and opportunism underlying apartheid ideology's ethnic units. In either case, comprehensiveness and objectivity were compromised. Most oppositional scholars opted to stay out of the field. The few who did not have now to face the ignominy of admitting to the deliberate one-sidedness of their analyses and declaring their political motivations or having these scholastic improprieties exposed by others (cf. Boonzaier and Sharp 1988; Gordon and Spiegel 1993; Sharp 1997; Douglas 1997).

But institutionalised apartheid was not the only factor discouraging the study of ethnicity. Another was the anti-apartheid movements themselves. Through their nationalist and Africanist ideologies, the African National Congress and the Pan African Congress sought to promote a broad and inclusive South African nationalism. This orientation placed ethnicity in the category of social relations antithetical to liberation and hence something to be superseded.

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Social science itself contributed to the neglect of the study of ethnicity. Rooted in the Enlightenment and modernist propositions of the sociological classics, much social theory inspired the view that forces such as the rise of nation states, industrialisation, the spread of capitalism and socialism, urbanisation, international travel and trade, mass migration, global communication, and so forth, would lead to the demise of ethnicity. As part of this tradition, the theoretical hegemony of Marxist theory over the past three decades, with its stress on class and material factors, had no space for ethnicity in its core conceptual schema and thus directed
attention away from the study of ethnicity.
But time has brought change. South Africa's democratisation and the apparent wide acceptance of inclusivist nationalist and Africanist values and ideas together with constitutionally based tolerance and protection of cultural differences, signal a new era for ethnicity in South Africa. These changes appear paradoxically to be weakening some forms of ethnicity while promoting other forms (for example, Sharp in the book under review highlights the ethnogenesis among the Namaqualand Khoikhoi and coloureds of the Western Cape). Such developments, coupled with the current crisis in social theory, make the present a good time for South African social scientist to begin to pay more attention to ethnicity. The Rhodes conference and this book provide a strong impetus in this direction.

An introduction written by Edwin Wilmsen (one of the editors) opens the book. Included here is the prolegomenon used to organise the conference and Wilmsen's comments on some of the conference papers. According to Wilmsen, '... the shape of the book is designed to pour readers through a funnel from the theorization of, through the operational on, to engagement with ethnic/identity premises; thus, it moves from the widest reflections on ethnicity to the still point of experience' (p.2). Not quite. The strength of the book is its conceptualising and theorising, its weakness is the absence of the voice of direct experience. Even contributors such as Tambiah and Ryan, whom Wilmsen sees as writing from the 'belly of the beast' (p. 15) because of their experiences in countries torn by ethnic strife, write at an academic and theoretical remove from this. Though both call for an anthropological approach which can tap the experiences of the people directly involved in ethnic conflict and violence, neither of them do this, or at least, do not present the fruits of such an approach in their essays.

Though rooted in directly observable phenomena, the term 'ethnicity' denotes something compound and abstract. The character of its denoted object as well as the varied meanings attached to the term make for ambiguity, overlapping, misunderstanding and, even, contradiction. As Pieterse (p.25) reminds us, the term is derived from the Greek word ethnos (nation) and ethnikos (non-Christian and non-Jewish nations; a word referring to Gentiles, heathens and pagans). Some ambiguity was thus inherent in the term from its inception and while ethnicity for most of this century was generally understood to refer to minority groups identified through, and bound by, common ties of descent, nationality, and culture, the term is now also used to describe dominant and subordinate groups. This universalising of the concept is contested and the contributors to this volume adopt different positions. For example, while Wilmsen maintains that 'dominant groups are never ethnicities' and that the white English-speaking populations of South Africa, the USA and elsewhere are not 'tribal ethenes' (p.4), Pieterse grants that 'ethnicity' is now also stretched to refer to the cultural politics of dominant groups, (p.25). For reasons dealt with in many essays in the book, the contemporary world is witnessing increasing ethnogenesis rather than the waning of ethnicity and, as oppressed and marginal people use ethnicity to build self-esteem and solidarity for social ends, there seems to be a corresponding ethnocisation in the ranks of dominant groups. These developments underline the growing need to pay more attention to ethnicity.

Since the book stands as a typical product of the engine room from which it emanates, a conference of established scholars communicating with their well initiated peers, it poses challenges for the uninitiated and the less well initiated reader. This is particularly the case as far as theories of ethnicity are concerned. The papers are written for readers familiar with existing theories and they proceed to do battle on that assumption. Theories are lumped together in the questionable 'primordialist/constructivist' dichotomy or the equally questionable
primordialist/constructivist/instrumentalist' trichotomy and found wanting. The most extreme
critique is provided by Comaroff who regards the whole theory construction enterprise as
misguided and self-defeating. He does not believe that ethnicity can be defined in the abstract
and hence, '... there cannot be a theory of ethnicity ... per se, only a theory of history capable of
eulicating the empowered production of difference and identity'. He drives home his argument
by exposing the weaknesses of recent attempts at theory. Theories which attempt to synthesize
primordialism and instrumentalism are dismissed as 'theoretical bricolage' which leave the
suspect bedrock of essentialism intact (p. 165). Constructivism and instrumentalism fare no
better and are dismissed as not even constituting theories.
The general sense of dissatisfaction with existing theories of ethnicity which emanates from
these essays strikes me as somewhat self promoting and unfair. The state of theory in the field of
ethnicity is not as parlous as many of these critics make out and its weaknesses are those of the
social sciences in general because as Nash (1989:p.7) notes, '... the study of ethnicity is the
attempt to study all of social science under that single rubric. The reason that ethnic studies have
had no more than limited success ... results largely from overlooking this fact'. But advances
have been made, some quite significant, and it seem to me that the general failure of essays in
this book to fairly acknowledge these perpetuates the common perception that there has been no
advance. Since theories of ethnicity are largely derivative (cf. Nash 1989:p.7), these theories
benefit from advances in the theories from which they are derived. Some of the authors in this
book seem not to appreciate this and continue to operate with crude prototypes and outmoded
stereotypes of the theories they comment on. For example, rather than dignify primordialism or
constructionism with the label 'theory', Wilmsen refers to them as 'insidious ideological
discourses'. This, according to him, because the former, '... posits genetic variability to be an
attribute not of individuals but of groups and thus to be unamenable to social intervention', while
the latter, '... makes the makers of ethnicity out to be cultural fools, doomed to reproduce their
world endlessly and mindlessly ...' (p.21). It is hard to tell from what contemporary theories of
ethnicity Wilmsen extracts such crude claims and even harder to understand why a person who
knows better would want to malign the state of theory in his field of study in this way. Since it is
clear that he and most of the authors in this book have a distinct take on ethnicity he would for
this reason want to distance himself from 'primordialist' theorists. Yet thinkers who are often
viewed as such - not always with good reason - such as van den Berghe (1978;1981), Wallerstein
(1979;1991), Moynihan (1994) and Smith (1991; 1992) - are hardly proponents of a 'species of
biological racism' (p.21) as Wilmsen avers.
The mistake that is repeated in this book is that too many disparate works, dating from different
times and of vastly different validity, are lumped together in the 'primordialist' and constructivist'
categories and the criteria for such judgments are not consistently or rationally applied. It is
revealing, for example, that Wilmsen does not regard Ryan, one of the contributors to his book
as a 'primordialist' or a 'constructionist'. In his essay, Ryan describes universal psychological
reactions to violent intercommunal conflict. These reactions are found in different intensities but
'they seem to exist whenever ethnic groups engage in violent conflict' (p. 144). One such
universal reaction is the demonising of the 'other', something 'we may all be prone to in differing
degrees' (p. 153). Ryan also notes the emotions that often underpin extreme ethnocentric feelings
and how conflict produces memories which get transmitted from generation to generation (p.
159). These are all examples of elements of primordial and constructivist theory and yet they are
not read by Wilmsen as such. It is interesting to note that labels such as 'primordial' and
'constructivist' are repudiated by some of those to whom they have been applied. Van den Berghe
has himself provided a critique of 'primordialism' and sees the 'primordialist/instrumentalist' debate as based on a 'simple-minded antimony' serving 'little purpose other than to help Ph D candidates organize their examination answers' (van den Berghe 1981:p.18). He says of his book *The Ethnic Phenomenon* that it is intended to show that both positions are correct, though not in the way the protagonists envisage. In view of the above comments, it seems that it would advance the study of ethnicity considerably if these categories were abandoned or reserved only for those works which truly merit them. They hark back to the nature/nurture debate which social science transcended some time back.

The essays in this book pay particular attention to the fluid and protean nature of ethnicity and this is why they are so critical of theories which tend to suggest that ethnicity is something essentially eternal and unchanging. If anything unites these contributions, it is an acute awareness of the historical nature of ethnicity and the myriad forms that are assumed by phenomena under this rubric. The first essay in the book provides a comprehensive statement of this position. The essay is by Jan Nederveen Pieterse. In it he deals with the varieties of ethnic politics as these have emerged in the present and he explains why the contemporary wave of politics comes at a time when the era of the nation is past its peak. Pieterse sees in current ethnic struggles and the emergence of increased particularity both the repudiation of false notions of universalism such as those enunciated by modernists and Marxists and the possibility of a new universalism and he speculates about what might come after the present moment of fragmentation. He regards external and internal political developments as playing an important part in the genesis and shaping of ethnicity. For him, states and nations are more a cause of ethnicity than they are its product. Global trends such as post-nationalism, the retreat of the state, the global recession, post Cold War politics and democratisation together with such domestic trends as forced assimilation, ethnic discrimination, deliberate ethnic mobilisation, and the increasing use of ethnic discourse by elites and responsiveness of ethnic subalterns to this, are cited as some of the global and local factors accounting for the proliferation of ethnic politics in both its dominant and subaltern varieties. For Pieterse, the intensification of ethnicisation we are currently witnessing is an historical event that holds the promise of a better life. Contrary to those who view ethnicisation negatively, he suggests that this might be a progressive event in that it could lead to a world of tolerated 'hybridity, heterogeneity, difference' (p.43).

Ernesto Laclau's essay is vintage inimitable Laclau. Dense, difficult, but rewarding. He approaches questions of ethnicity and identity via a consideration of universality and particularity and sees the current proliferation of ethnic particularities as resulting from the loss of hegemony of universalistic discourses and regimes such as those of Enlightenment Reason, Colonialism, Soviet Imperialism, and Marxism. He views recent history as having led to the realisation that the chasm between the universal and the particular is unbridgeable. What was taken for the universal until recently was nothing more than a particular which had become dominant. Despite the events which led to it, and despite arguments in its favour, Laclau argues that the appeal to pure particularism offers no solution to contemporary problems and, as a political proposition, it is practically impossible and logically incoherent. Not all particularism can be permitted. Judgments will have to be made and these cannot be made in terms of particularistic principles, for then these would be those of one or other particularity. The judgments that have to be made can only be made in terms of some widely shared or universal principles. But what is the source of such principles now that God, Reason and Marx have been rejected? For Laclau the source of such principles lies in the concrete and particular (in the ideas of contending ethnicities, groups, classes, nations, etc.) and the best available mechanism for
identifying and reaching agreement on these principles at the moment is democracy. In this connection, Laclau writes (p.57), 'If democracy is possible, it is because the universal has no necessary body and no necessary content; differing groups, instead, compete among themselves to temporarily give their particularisms a function of universal representation'.

Aletta Norval titles her essay, 'Thinking Identities: Against a theory of ethnicity'. Clearly a member of the historical camp, she commences with a reference to Foucault and what he regards as the mistake scholars and theorists make when they impose their categories and principles of coherence onto past or very different societies. Taking Foucault's lead, she suggests that what primordialists take to be early forms and pre-cursors of modern ethnicity might have been nothing of the sort, they are simply imposing the present onto the past. With this opening she is able to challenge primordialist claims that modern ethnicity and nationalism derive from pre-modern forms and elements of ethnicity. In place of primordialism, she draws on Derrida's notion of a constitutive outside and Lacan's discourse on the production of imaginaries to propose her alternative. Ethnicities and their associated identities are rooted in imaginary constructions, constructions which include the drawing of political frontiers and the conscious description of self and other. This process is not a process of pure subjectivism or of simple exclusion and inclusion, but takes place in a given context and force field. The complexity of this process is illustrated with reference to the construction of apartheid discourse. Considering post-apartheid South Africa, Norval argues that the ethnic identifications objectivated by apartheid will have to be recognised and contested politically.

They are now political realities and to imagine that ethnic identifications will easily fade away would spell political suicide for the left. Hence, she argues, the promotion of a democratic South Africa means that allowance will have to be made for ethnicity in its legitimate forms while curbing its reactionary potentials.

Norval advocates and sees as possible, an alternative between homogenising, unifying nationalism and divisive, destructive ethnicity of the Zulu and Afrikaner ethno-nationalistic form. For her, between the poles of apartheid and non-racialism lies the possibility of a tolerance of ethnic difference without absolutism or closure. She expresses this as follows, 'Insofar as non-racialism is engaged with continually, as a finite political project, it offers a space of identification in which we can live in the tension between the universal and the particular. This is the space proper to a radically democratic and plural post-apartheid South Africa' (p.69). This solution to South Africa's pluralism problem is reiterated and elaborated in her recently published book *Deconstructing Apartheid Discourse* (1996). In this she argues that South Africa's adoption of the imaginary of non-racialism offers the possibility of transcending the friend/foe social division of apartheid. What becomes possible is a new order of social division constituted by 'difference' rather than by 'otherness'. Non-racialism evokes respect for, and tolerance of, the difference of the other.

Though her emphasis on discourse and the imaginary could easily have led to a purely idealistic solution, Norval avoids this by keeping the material firmly in mind. She recognised that if the proposed radical pluralism is to have a future, the pluralisms of economic resources and power will have to be dealt with. Radical cultural and ethnic pluralism are only possible through a radical reduction in economic and political pluralism.

The next essay in the volume is by William Roseberry. Its main focus is on the problematical theorising of language and the social and on the utility of Gramsci's understanding of hegemony in the analysis of languages of contention such as those of class, ethnicity and nation. As regards language and the social, the collapsing of the social into language is rejected by Roseberry as is
the temporal ordering which sees language as somehow prior to and constitutive of the social. While recognising language as an indissoluble element of the social, he argues that the non-linguistic dimensions of the social, such as the material fields of social, economic, and political force, must be recognised as equally co-present and indissoluble. He sums this up by writing, 'the social is constituted in language, and language is constituted in the social' (p.75). This conclusion leads on to his discussion of hegemony which he maintains should not be understood as 'ideological consensus' as it so often is. He argues that for Gramsci hegemony was a more material and political concept, referring to the problematical, contested political process of domination and struggle against domination. What hegemony achieves is a shared discursive framework in which both dominant and subaltern participate to pursue their separate agendas. Since it is typically the state which formulates the encompassing discursive framework, contending groups have little alternative but to recognise and legitimise this framework through the use they make of it. But this framework is fragile and for this reason it is more accurate to consider it a necessary but always unfinished and unfinishable state project rather than as a final achievement. Contending languages of ethnicity, class, and nationalism prevent this achievement and imply a continual dynamic between common and contending discursive frameworks. As regards ethnic and national discourses, Roseberry views these as drawing on images of primordial associations and identifications in order to serve as languages of contention and opposition.

John Sharp begins his essay on 'Ethnogenesis and Ethnic Mobilization' with an example of the kind of ethnic discourse Roseberry alludes to: the discourse of primal unity and difference espoused by Max Gros-Lois, Grand Chief of the Hurons of Quebec, in his struggle against Canadian settler culture and settler domination. Sharp then considers the erratic responses of governments, media and academics to such discourses and highlights the dilemma faced by academics who, in deconstructing the primordial claims of ethnic groups, play into the hands of reactionaries and racists. Consistent with the arguments and evidence of the historical camp, Sharp notes that the use of primal unity arguments by indigenous minorities is a relatively new phenomenon triggered by threats to such minorities within particular countries and the influence of ethnic struggles internationally. Ethnogenesis in first world countries is linked, according to Sharp, to the move away from earlier assimilationist policies to policies which tolerate difference. A move which, for him, is tinged with paternalism since it is a clear sign of the unassailable position of dominance of the majority. Turning to consider contemporary ethnogenesis in South Africa, Sharp examines the case of the people in the Namaqualand reserves who have begun to assert an unbroken continuity of culture and identity between themselves and the pre-colonial Khoikoi and on the strength of this to advance their land claims. This move, according to Sharp, is not the result of a sudden rediscovery of ancestral roots, but a conscious strategy to use well known associations for economic and political ends. He makes clear that this strategy stems in part from political developments in South Africa and from informational exchanges with ethnic minorities similarly engaged elsewhere.

Other South African cases of ethnogenesis are considered by Sharp: contemporary Zulu and Afrikaner nationalism on the one hand and Black Consciousness and 'coloured' identity on the other. In concluding his essay Sharp attempts to make a case for accepting certain varieties of ethnogenesis while rejecting others on the basis of their implications for democracy. Thus he accepts the Black Consciousness movement, the nascent Khoikoi ethny of Namaqualand and 'coloured' ethnicity while rejecting Zulu and Afrikaner nationalism because the latter favour ethnic and racial separation. This line of argumentation is problematical as is the further criterion
Sharp introduces to sustain his acceptable/unacceptable ethnicity dichotomy. This further criterion is the extent to which different ethnic discourses are reflexive and appreciative of the fact that the past is an ambiguous resource. He considers Black Consciousness, Khoikoi and coloured ethnic discourse as satisfying this criteria while Zulu and Afrikaner nationalism do not. It is difficult to agree with him here as it is not clear what the evidence for this judgment is. On the face of it it seems likely that each of these existing ethnicities or potential ethnicities exhibit some consciousness about the arbitrariness and ambiguities of their claims while also making primordialist and absolutist claims. Indeed, Sharp himself notes some of the latter in the Black Consciousness movement. It might be that reflexivity and a sense of ambiguity about the past and the heritage being claimed characterise emerging ethnicities more than established ethnicities but this seems insufficient ground to justify Sharp's distinctions. The fact that Sharp regards the Black Consciousness movement as an ethnic movement is also problematical and underlines the imprecise phenomenon that ethnicity is.

In their essay 'European concepts of nation building', Jan Blommaert and Jef Vershueren consider recent and current changes in Europe as these relate to ethnicity and nationalism. They note that from a Western perspective the economic collapse of Eastern Europe, the splintering of the former Soviet Union and the armed conflict in Yugoslavia, were all due to some extent to the suppression of legitimate ethnic claims and identities. As a contribution to understanding the West's responses to these events, and especially its lukewarm response to the bloodshed in Yugoslavia, the authors attempt to uncover and describe the ideology of the West in terms of which ethnicity and ethnic conflict are thought about and dealt with. They do this through a detailed study of the Belgian migrant debate. Using the method of linguistic pragmatics described by Levinson (1983), they surveyed Belgian mainstream discourse about migrants over a three year period. This method, it is claimed, allows research to penetrate below the level of explicit discourse to uncover what is implicit. It is a means to reach the deeper, largely unconscious layer of ideology which lies beneath thought and speech. What they found was that below an explicit discourse of anti-racism and tolerance of ethnic diversity lay a xenophobic ideology which they label homogeneity. This ideology is characterised by antipathy towards fundamental forms of diversity and a hankering for the re-homogenisation of society. Its tolerance and openness is conditional on migrants honouring the existing legal system and behaving according to the basic norms of the majority. The differences that are tolerated relate to those things that do not disturb the established order. What this boils down to typically is a cosmetic tolerance of the art, music, dance, cuisine, and home language of the migrant group. Brief considerations of other Western countries lead the authors to conclude that the ideology of homogeneity is widely shared in the West and they suggest that this is a factor which helps explain the West's ready acceptance of ethnonationalism in Europe and its failure to act decisively in Yugoslavia. Western countries were restrained from acting because the events there were consistent with their underlying ideology of homogeneity. The countries of Eastern Europe were on the road to re-establishing the homogeneity unconsciously wished for by dominant groups in the West. This essay adds a new dimension to the understanding of ethnic relations in contemporary Europe and highlights anew the vexing and complex questions posed by migrants. While their essay presents a sustained criticism of the West's general hypocritical and discriminatory treatment of migrants, the authors offer no suggestions as to what the solutions are. They also provide no explanation for the shared homogeneity ideology which they claim underlies most main-stream Western discourse about migrants and ethnic minorities. If they are correct about the transnational nature of this ideology, it is certainly something which merits
further attention. It might be that they have uncovered something that is global and if that is so, it raises some very important theoretical questions. The much maligned and rejected primordialist perspective suggests that homogeneism might be a universal feature of human societies. Some evidence for this thesis comes from Robins (1997) who reports on the fear and mistrust of recent immigrants expressed by Namaqualanders. A spokesperson for residents of this remote part of South Africa articulated their version of 'homogeneism': 'The civics educate people that if a Black man or a White man wants to come and stay in Concordia, he's welcome. But he must just fall in with the norms within the community. That is basically what we want' (Robins 1997:p.36).

Stanley Tambiah's essay deals directly with the relation between ethnicity and nationalism in the contemporary world. According to him, the closing decades of the twentieth century are witnessing a struggle between two forms of nationalism. The challenge is to find a way of reconciling them. The first form, initially conceived and realised in Europe, is the nationalism of the nation-state with its central premise the demotion and/or elimination of the political significance of ethnicity. The second form, which has recently surfaced in many parts of the world, is ethnonationalism, the nationalism pursued by ethnic groups. Capitalising on the strengths of the nation-state, the nations of Europe imposed their form of the state on the territories they seized during the era of colonialism. This initiated the dialectic between nation-state and ethnonationalism which has now brought the state and state-nationalism in many parts of the world to a crisis. Tambiah briefly traces the salient moments in this dialectic in a number of third world countries. The first moment was 'decolonisation', which saw the birth of many new countries as 'nation-states'. The second moment was that of nation building. A moment which featured an emphasis on inclusive nationalism and concerted attempts to build a national consciousness and culture. The third moment, in which the world now finds itself, is characterised by the eruption of ethnic conflicts and demands by ethnic groups for self-determination, independence, and so forth. The state, previously looked to for unifying and even homogenising social diversity, is now looked to to arbitrate conflict and protect and preserve diversity. Tambiah notes four factors which have contributed to the state of crisis of the (third-world) nation-state in particular. They are: failure to deal with the language issue adequately; the creation through high birthrates and modern education of a mass of disaffected young people; mass internal migrations of people of different ethnicity; and the enduring significance of religion in politics and the public sphere. Ethnically conflictual as nation-states currently are, Tambiah reminds us that the establishment of ethnonational-states will not necessarily usher in peace and democracy. Even if they opt for electoral politics and representative government, such states will still contain ethnic minorities and the danger of discrimination will persist. It might even intensify.

Ryan's essay is concerned with the spiral of intensifying violence which ethnic conflict is often associated with when it enters a violent phase. Rather than the suffering and cost of the violence bringing the warring parties to their senses and facilitating a prompt resolution, such violence typically begets further and more extreme violence. Ethnic identities are more deeply etched and the cartography of ethnic belonging and exclusion more rigidly drawn. Associated with these developments is the emergence of an uncompromising worldview in the ranks of the antagonists and a progressive collapse of rational politics. In seeking to enhance our understanding of these developments, Ryan looks briefly at some of the answers that have been provided. Among the processes and factors which play a key role in escalating ethnic conflict he identifies the following: militarisation: exaggerated ethnocentrism; physical separation and the
sharpening of territorial boundaries; psychological distancing (stereotyping, dehumanising, etc.); sanctification of own group and demonising of the 'other'; entrapment and overcommitment; economic underdevelopment; and a sense of cynicism and powerlessness.

Some of Ryan's observations are relevant to South Africa. They both help us understand where this country was headed and what now requires attention in order to reduce the potential for ethnic conflict and to secure democracy and economic development. What Ryan's essay does not assist in is understanding how South Africa escaped from the spiral of racial/ethnic violence it was in for most of this century. According to his model, violence should have kept intensifying until things literally blew apart. Despite this puzzle, the factors identified by Ryan provide a yardstick against which to measure the distance South Africa has pulled back from the brink of the great race war towards which it seemed headed. Though complacency would be dangerous, post-apartheid South Africa is now headed in a different direction in terms of most of Ryan's factors. Concerted efforts have been made to demilitarise South African society; the nation building agenda of the ruling elites and major political parties and their general acceptance by the bulk of the population appear to be diminishing ethnocentrism; while residential separation is still very marked and not much progress has been made here, micro-separation such as that imposed by petty apartheid is a thing of the past though its echo still lives on in the largely group specific audiences and participants in sport, religion, and entertainment; there are signs that psychological distancing is decreasing and its major forms such as racist and hate speech are now legally forbidden; sanctification and demonisation seem also on the wane as are tendencies to entrapment and overcommitment; free from military engagement and the wastes of the apartheid system the country is no longer in the same state of self-imposed underdevelopment as previously and there are good prospects for sustained economic growth; the success of the liberation struggle and achievement of democracy has no doubt reduced widespread feelings of powerlessness and cynicism though there are indications that these debilitating mind sets are now affecting members of the previously privileged minority. To conclude this brief audit, Ryan's recommendations for overcoming ethnic conflict are widely discernible in South Africa: win-win thinking, acceptance of cultural diversity and tolerance of difference. Most of the foregoing portend well for the future.

In the last essay of the book, John Comaroff deals with the awkward questions raised by the intensification of ethnic and national struggles in the contemporary world and the failure of social science to predict this development or offer an adequate explanation for it. He notes that social science was not alone in getting this wrong. The media in the USA during the 1950s and 1960s propagated the illusion of the melting pot, post-war Britain anticipated absorbing its commonwealth subjects into a colour blind population, the USSR saw signs everywhere of the appearance of socialist man who would irrevocably resolve national and ethnic questions. Piling awkward question on awkward question, Comaroff asks why, if as is often recognised, numerous ethnicities and identities were the product of imperial and colonial invention, have these not been undone by decolonisation and postmodernism? Answers to these questions cannot be found in existing theory, according to Comaroff, since this theory is 'banal' and 'has changed little in the past decades, despite the fact that existing approaches have repeatedly been discredited' (p. 164). These damning judgments are supported by a brief critique of the dominant approaches to ethnicity to which reference was made at the beginning of this review. This is followed by a consideration of contemporary developments and their impact on ethnicity and nationalism. What Comaroff sees is a world in an epoch of revolution characterised by globalisation, the weakening of the nation-state, the rise of new politics of identity and a crises of representation in
the human sciences. He pays particular attention to those global forces - such as the information and communications revolution; the growth of trans-national institutions, movements and diasporas; the transnational division of labour; the integrated world commodity market; the transnational legal order; and the world wide commercial arbitration system - which are undermining the nation-state. The weakening of the state, Comaroff argues, has led to defensive responses from national governments and is responsible for the dramatic and widespread explosion of ethnic and identity politics so characteristic of the present. These developments which signal the emergence and growth of a global cultural order raise the questions about the future of cultural differences. In particular, as Comaroff phrases it, 'How much credence should we give the popular notion that a universalizing world capitalist culture is destroying local cultures everywhere?' (p. 173). Contra those who regard globalisation and localisation as opposite processes, Comaroff's view is that they are complementary sides of a single historical process. He sides with those who see local cultures as responding to globalising forces through their domestication and localisation. He argues that since there is no such thing as a universal symbol or image, all globally circulating symbols and images can only be appropriated through localisation and domestication. The line of reasoning being followed here, though dialectical, seems to credit the local with too much power and autonomy. This exaggeration of the power of the local seems to be a common Comaroff failing. Mafeje (1996:p.16) recently made a similar criticism with regard to the claim made by the Comaroffs in their 1992 book. *Ethnography and rlie Historical Imagination*, to the effect that the subjects and objects of colonialism reciprocally shaped one another and mutually determined the contexts in which this was done. Mafeje retorts that if this is accurate then there would be no need for the decolonisation and deconstruction of colonial systems of thought and practice.

While it makes sense to consider globalisation and domestication as complementary processes, Comaroff’s reluctance to view the globalisation process as dominant or to acknowledge that every localisation of the global changes the local spoils his argument. As he suggests, the contemporary animated politics of identity and the explosion of ethnonationalisms are complementary local responses to globalisation. Thus, by his own admission, the local reacts and the global initiates. This implies an unequal relationship with globalisation providing the stimulus and direction of change even if the exact trajectory is open to local influence. It seems to me thus more valid and accurate to read the signs of the times as signaling increasing global homogeneity - the view that Comaroff rejects. Globalisation is a process that has been underway for hundreds of years but is accelerating at the moment and bringing ever more aspects of the local into its ambit. The force field between local and global increasingly favours the latter. Many global items are difficult to localised or resist except in trivial ways. Elites are increasingly transnational citizens and, since they play an important part in localising the global, as they become more global in consciousness, their localising of the global drifts towards global consensus. Furthermore, to hark back to McLuhan, the globalising world of commodities carries with it its own power of homogenisation, the medium is the message. As the world becomes more commodified and as people buy into the same technologies and products, people everywhere are increasingly receiving and responding to the same 'messages'. The local gloss put on this hardly matters. We have come a long way from the Samoans wearing alarm clocks for decoration or Britons planting biltong.

To end his essay, Comaroff offers an ideal type discussion of ethnonationalism, euronationalism (Tambiah's 'state-nationalism') and heteronationalism. He links each of these to the dominant accounts of ethnicity. Thus ethnonationalism is rationalised in primordialist terms,
euronationalism in constructivist terms and heteronationalism in neoprimaldial instrumental terms. He sees South Africa's current complex political mosaic embodying all three nationalisms and forms of rationalisation. Conservative Afrikaners and Inkatha supporters are ethnonationalists, the core doctrine of the ANC is euronationalist though the party in power shows signs of moving in the heteronationalist direction. The National party, for all the years of apartheid clearly an ethnonationalist party, is now reconstituted as a heteronationalist party. If he is correct. South Africa is faced with potentially severe conflict because, on his view, euronationalism (state-nationalism) and ethnonationalism are ontologically opposed. Considered overall, Comaroff regards the current world wide increases in ethnic consciousness and the rise of ethnonationalism with misgiving. These seem destined to entrench rather than erase existing forms of disadvantage and disempowerment and make it difficult to mobilise on the basis of class, race, gender and generation. He ends by calling for defensible alternatives to the direction in which ethnic and national politics are moving, alternatives which for him require, '... situating ethnicity and nationalism in the broader context of the consciousness and claims of class, race, gender and generation' (p. 181) and being part of realpolitik. Viewed as a whole, this is a thought provoking book which admirably illustrates the importance and challenging nature of the study of ethnicity and constitutes a significant contribution to contemporary debates on ethnicity and nationalism. Despite its considerable merit, the major weakness of the book, as was noted at the beginning of this review, is the uncritical and unscholarly way in which many of the authors dismiss in toto the claims of socio-biologists, primordialists, instrumentalists, constructionists, and so forth. While reading some of the essays this reviewer got the distinct impression that it was raining bathwater and babies. Some essays, Comaroff's in particular, suggested a deliberate attempt to be outrageously radical and provocative while also remaining timidly politically correct. It seems to me that ethnicity is a complex and overdetermined phenomenon the understanding of which requires insights from numerous sciences ranging from the biological through the psychological and social to the economic and historical. It also, if the travesty of Expose Analysis is to be avoided and the interests of knowledge served, requires the courage to be politically incorrect if this is what is needed. The stress on the fluid nature of ethnicity and the advocacy of approaching ethnicity historically which characterises this volume calls to mind the idiothetic-nomothetic distinction of the last century with most of the contributors opting for the idiothetic. The way forward now as it was then, is to go beyond this false and distorting antimony. To comprehend ethnicity requires understanding the relatively invariant, the recurrent and the ever-changing.

References


Ken Jubber
Department of Sociology
University of Cape Town
Private Bag
Rondehosch 7701
South Africa