

## ROUNDTABLE ARTICLE

# Separation or Unity? A Model for Solving Ethnic Conflicts

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**Abstract.** This article outlines a consistent and rational model for solving ethnic conflicts. We argue that ethnic separation should be regarded as an alternative to national unity, and not simply dismissed as impossible. A decision on separation or unity should be made democratically by the group whose separation has been proposed. If separation is approved, migration over the border between the newly formed states should be part of such a solution. The article has three main parts: (1) a model for solving separatist demands; (2) an analysis of the evolutionary background to ethnic conflicts; and (3) a discussion of principal objections to the proposed model. The present international impotence in situations of ethnic conflict is to a high degree caused by seeing most solutions as impossible—either realistically or morally. This article stresses the virtue of having one model instead of the “flexibility” that currently prevails under the disguise of generally acclaimed, but contradictory ideals.

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FOR A LONG TIME we have seen two developments growing in strength, developments that in some respects are mutually opposed: internationalism and ethnic separatism. Developing models for resolving this conflict is a matter of utmost concern, since conventional morality seems to be quite deficient. An international outlook is generally praised, but nevertheless also combined with various categorical opinions about the right of all peoples to self-determination (that is, a right to their own state). There is, in addition, a people's right to a culture independent of national culture—and multiculturalism is proclaimed the ideal. Still, a separate culture is the *raison d'être* of a separate state.

An inability to distinguish between these opposed principles would be less serious if it were not closely coupled to the problem of war and peace. As many brewing conflicts have an ethnic basis, the lack of a consistent moral approach to this problem is serious indeed. Since the end of World War II, between 7 and 16 million people have been killed in ethnic conflicts (Gurr and Harff, 1988). Why the deficiency exists is easy to explain: in the absence of safe and simple solutions, it is tempting to fall back on a disguised opportunistic flexibility—we lend full support to diametrically opposed principles, and then jump back and forth between them.

Orlando Patterson's reflection twenty years ago still makes a valid point: “We know much, perhaps too much, about the Jews, the Blacks, the Irish, the Poles, but we still know little about the nature and extent of the ethnic revival, and even less about the thing-in-itself we call ethnicity” (1977:1). That the parties in an ethnic conflict regard their situation as a unique injustice may not be justifiable, but it is at least comprehensible. It is more disturbing that the rest of the world, rather than seeking clear principles, contents itself with contradictory universal rules that are applied flexibly on the basis of sympathy, antipathy, and national interests. This is a good example of how ostensible altruistic

benevolence can produce completely unsatisfactory results. Pleasant talk about understanding, mutual respect, and willingness to negotiate is not enough. In a classification by Nielsson (1985), only 45 out of 164 states were national states with a homogeneous population. As Stanley Hoffman put it, "The world is full of Austria-Hungaries" (quoted in Ryan, 1990:xv). The goal should be to find, not the perfect solution for the best of all worlds, but a sound solution for a quarrelsome world.

Much of the foreign support for separatist movements is due to the outsider's concern about other matters. The wider context is often decisive. Thus, Croatian separatism was long tarnished by the Ustashe fascists who aided the Nazis during World War II, but this same Croatian separatism became more appealing later because of the dominant view of Serbia as a tool of old communists. Likewise, Palestinian terrorism has been used as a weighty argument against a Palestinian state.

On the other hand, dislike of the central governments in Franco's Spain and the Soviet Union often encouraged approval of separatists in those states. To an outsider, the overriding conflict may actually be perceived as between democracy and dictatorship, East and West, or rich and poor—a struggle in which separatist movements become allied forces. When we endorse separatism, then, its allure often really lies elsewhere.

This article is structured in three major parts. We first discuss current treatment of ethnic confrontation and present a new model. Secondly, we analyze the evolutionary background to ethnocentrism. Third, we anticipate and answer potential criticisms of our model.

## The Weaknesses of Separatist Solutions

A great drawback of the separatist concept is that it rarely advances a viable solution to the problem it addresses. The dissatisfied minority ceases to be a minority in the new state, yet new minorities arise, showing that the essential dilemma has been resolved only in the eyes of extreme optimists. When it comes to carving regions out of the old state, separatism always has high hopes. However, since the secessionist movement will strive to incorporate as many of its supporters as possible, few from the old minority group are likely to end up on the wrong side of a new border, but many from the old majority group probably will. This is especially likely because majority groups frequently migrate into a minority's historical homeland, and historical borders play a key role when a new state is formed.

Thus, separation recreates the old problem with reversed roles: the new state inherits a significant minority from the old majority group. The separatists take a casual view of this outcome—employing propaganda that naturally represents them as better than their opponents—and promise a fairer treatment on minority issues. Sadly, the separatists are being unrealistic, for a separation inevitably exacerbates the

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groups' differences and gives the new country even less chance of thriving with two peoples than the original state had. Separatists are eager to emphasize their democratic virtues, including nondiscrimination and equal human rights, but it would be naive to believe that the ethnic discord that destroyed the old state will suddenly become manageable under a new, benevolent leadership.

Conflict may also arise if a large neighboring state proves sensitive to discrimination, actual or imagined, against its own nationals. In recent upheavals, for example, we have seen some countries disintegrating—such as the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia—that were much larger than their main groups. They are being replaced by states smaller than their own primary national groups. Thus, Serbs number more than half a million in Croatia and 1.5 million in Bosnia-Herzegovina, and there are 25 million Russians outside Russia. If separatism is to solve the problems it claims to cope with, its perspective must be adjusted. The sacredness of a given border is seldom obvious. Since both the former border and the new "rightful" one are the results of coercion and war, strong grounds for changing the status quo are required. As with any change, a qualitative improvement should be demanded to justify the cost and trouble involved.

## A New Alternative

The most sensible course, in our opinion, is to discuss a new border in terms of new criteria and to consider a radical plan. If priority is granted to cultural separation, the first question arises: how can a border be drawn so as to leave as few people as possible in the "wrong" state? A seemingly fair rule is that an equal number from each group should be wrongly placed. The second concern is that the border ought to be as natural as possible. Disconnected enclaves should be avoided, as they invite conflict over barriers and call for cooperation that may be hard to maintain.

A separatist solution is analogous to a divorce. As warmly as we advocate living in harmony and mutual respect, a breakdown in practice means that it is presumably better to divide the domain than to endure unity dominated by conflict. Like a private household, national property is then a stumbling block to be divided. Under present-day procedures, separatists typically receive either nothing or too

much. The majority group does not necessarily lose by getting a smaller country—it gains if a long-term, peaceful solution is established, in which it avoids the problem of a (rightly or not) disaffected minority. Despite the loss of territory, then, both states may actually benefit by having a unified population.

Even if a border is drawn as proposed above, some people will find themselves on the wrong side of it. What can be done? A model could consist of three principles:

- each state is responsible for accepting people of its own nationality;
- each state is entitled to evict members of the other group; and
- each individual may emigrate to the “right” state.

The implications are that a step toward cultural homogeneity is taken, and that whoever is allowed and willing to stay on the wrong side of the border faces worse conditions. Yet these results are inevitable in carrying out the chosen separation. Half measures are not so radical, but neither do they solve the problems that were regarded as insoluble in a shared state.

As for deciding upon separation, a simple majority democratic judgment should not be considered sufficient. This decision is fundamental, and therefore deserves a two-thirds majority, as is required for constitutional amendments in many countries. By the analogy with divorce, it should also be enough that one of the parties wants out. One reason why separatist movements often lean toward terrorism is that the democratic process seems arduous: ideas are opposed by a permanent majority, and in an atmosphere of “us against them.” As for the separatists themselves, it would be a sign of weak faith in separatist ideas if they were to admit that a two-thirds majority within their own group is unattainable.

The rule about equal exchange of populations is reasonable in cases in which the groups have long lived together—as in Sri Lanka, Bulgaria, or Canada. However, when a group has recently arrived, more or less in the baggage of an occupying army, as in the Baltic states or East Timor, the situation is different and a much smaller portion of the redistributed land is merited.

Such ethnic relocation may seem to bear an odor of Stalinist deportation. Allowing everybody to stay put is attractive, but hardly ideal if the groups do not wish to cohabit. A proposal for fair ethnic separation is painful for several reasons. The majority group usually supports “the nation’s sacred frontiers,” while the minority dreams of a large mini-country: one that can hold all of their own group, along with a few others whom they promise to treat fairly. Foreign observers strike an alliance with one side or the other, and then pursue a policy of requesting cease-fires, expressing a willingness to help with negotiations, and offering humanitarian aid. Typically, however, none of this contributes anything substantial toward solving the conflict between the antagonists.

A separation is, in itself, not an appealing solution, because it entails severe costs and tragedies for people who are torn from their homes and friends across the ethnic gap. It inspires heartrending reports in the press and inflames passions. Since none of the combatants see it as a preferred alternative, what is there to say for it? The main point, though, is not whether it will be pleasant, but whether other choices are better or worse. An examination of the alternatives reveals nothing that comes close to solving the problems in the long run. Why should any reasonable person believe that deep, persistent ailments have easy, cheap, painless cures?

Alternative solutions must be compared:

The proper evaluation of theory is always, ultimately, *comparative*. In general, when we try to decide whether or not to accept a theory, the appropriate question is not “Does it explain all the data or solve all the problems?” but, rather, “Is it the best theory available?” In judging the moral views on secession presented here (whether one honors them with the title “theory” or not), the fundamental question is not whether they solve all or even most of the moral dilemmas of secession, but whether they improve significantly upon the current prevalent way of thinking about the issue. In the end, the only way to refute a theory conclusively is to advance a better theory. (Buchanan, 1991:ix)

With our suggested approach, separation is not a welcome escalation of a conflict that has already had terribly negative effects, but a way to resolve the conflict and pass beyond it. Nor is the divorce a means of exacting redress and revenge; both parties would recognize the futility of seeking support for a martyr’s role by exposing old wounds and historical injustices. A happy separation is a romantic illusion, whereas a civilized divorce is a realistic alternative. In the wake of “fundamental incompatibility,” this is perhaps the best solution.

### Alternatives to a Civilized Divorce

Efforts have been made in some countries to divide power and share leadership. Such efforts may succeed temporarily, as in Lebanon until 1976. Proportional representation in government posts was required for Muslims and Maronite Christians, and prominent positions were reserved for particular ethnic groups: the president was to be a Maronite, the prime minister a Sunni Muslim, the Speaker a Shiite. Another example is Zambia, which for some time managed with a policy of “tribal balancing.” Such so-called consociationalism is often advocated by social scientists (e.g., Nordlinger, 1972; Lijphart, 1977; Heraclides, 1991).

Still, a balance is difficult to maintain, as well as, in our view, inconsistent with democratic principle and method. In

a democracy, the basic idea ought to be that all citizens are equal regardless of ethnicity, gender, etc. Therefore, to adopt a quota system and a group mentality is to take a collision course that easily fosters and deepens ethnic division (Schlesinger, 1992), resulting in de facto partition. Minority overrepresentation (Zimbabwe 1980) and ethnic veto (Cyprus 1960) are in conflict with the central norm of universal suffrage.

There are other, preferable kinds of constitutional engineering that have been used to try to hold together ethnically divided societies. Federalism, executive presidents, alternative vote with demands for a majority of the votes (Sri Lanka 1978), and single transferable vote (Northern Ireland 1973) are solutions within the limits of democracy (Horowitz, 1985, 1991a). These possibilities are more promising as preventive measures to avoid a polarization than as remedies in a deteriorating situation. If the situation has already become problematic, such measures will often appear to be tokens for buying time rather than a solution to the problem.

Our point is not to support the incompatibility position—that is, that ethnic diversity and democracy are incompatible (Furnival, 1977; Smith, 1971, 1986)—but we think that a separatist alternative must be a democratic and peaceful possibility. We are, however, more critical of various kinds of consociationalism, seeing them more as temporary compromises than long-term solutions. The strongest alternative to separatism is a liberal society that treats its citizens as individuals and not as members of groups. Instead of being the primary factor in developing identity, ethnic background then becomes simply one of many characteristics that give each individual a unique personal identity.

## **Evolutionary Roots**

Ethnic conflict is a general human phenomenon, and it is therefore reasonable to discuss its evolutionary background. Whereas some writers tend to explain ethnocentrism in terms of extended kin selection (e.g., van den Berghe, 1987; Shaw and Wong, 1989), there are several reasons to see ethnocentrism as a phenomenon with separate properties. The explanation of in-group alliance as extended kin selection is contradicted by the fact that the real genetic connection is commonly weak or nonexistent. We believe that the primary mechanisms behind ethnocentrism are the same as for the general phenomenon that we label group egoism.

The far-reaching flexibility to form in-group alliances is a prime characteristic of humans. For example, social experiments generate in-group preferences and out-group animosity even when the splitting into groups is arbitrary (discussed in Brown, 1986; Ross, 1991), and in-group alliances are easily formed in situations where a coordination of forces is advantageous. For modern man, a union might be an in-group for employees when it is time to settle salaries, whereas the management “them” is incorporated into a broader “we” after wage settlement. Shortly after a change

of employer, “we” gets a new connotation. Therefore, we do not share the view of Shaw and Wong (1989) that kin selection brings about a choice of “the preferred group” and then a decision to go along with that special group.

The hypothesis of “perceived kin interest” as a basis for group choice (Shaw and Wong, 1989) is also problematic. It is important to note that, in spite of belonging to various interest groups, people generally have a keen perception of blood relations and are thus expected to be quite able to separate between kin interests and group interests. Although kin terminology is frequently used in political manipulation to make people feel closer to other members of a certain group (e.g., Holper, 1996), it is difficult to believe that manipulation is successful to the extent that a person cannot separate between the “father” (leader) and his real father, or a “brother” (any man in the group) and his real brother.

The composition of modern hunter/gatherer groups may shed light on the social composition in the Pleistocene environment. At the band level of around 50 individuals, there is a complex sociality with grades of kinship and different levels of reciprocity. However, at the level of the tribe—approximately 500 (Irwin, 1987)—individuals are not well known to each other, and the same amount of fine-graded distinction and interaction is not possible. At this level, it may be functional to create a crude general identity through the use of cultural badges.

A social construction to fuse the interest of kin with the power of group egoism is the clan, a semi-modern invention that sacrifices strict kin selection through a dualism of clan versus non-clan. This structure excludes half of the extended family and equalizes brothers and second cousins, but results in a larger and more cohesive group. In clan societies there is often a preference to marry out-clan cousins, which strengthens the kin selection rationality of the clan construction (van den Berghe, 1990).

It seems as if humans have a general tendency to dichotomize when analyzing the environment. Such divisions of phenomena into edible-inedible or dangerous-harmless are hardly sophisticated, but they may save time and energy in decision-making. The we-they classification commonly made in a group context fits smoothly into this way of functioning. Thus, the mechanisms behind kin selection and group egoism are different—whereas kin selection is

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individualistic and differentiated, group egoism is collectivistic and dichotomous.

In conclusion, we see ethnocentrism, and group egoism more generally, as a phenomenon that is clearly separated from kin selection. The function of group egoism is for the individual to join forces with other individuals in order to gain strength in the competition and conflict with other human groups (Alexander, 1987). There is no assumption of group selection in the group egoism concept, which is entirely based on individual advantage. Since the original human groups consisted of close kin, kin selection may well have been a stepping stone in the evolution of human group egoism, just as it might have facilitated the evolution of reciprocity (see discussions in Axelrod and Hamilton, 1981; Masters, 1983). On the other hand, it is important to note that group cohesiveness can be selected for among unrelated individuals, that is, without having kin selection as a prerequisite (Hamilton, 1971). Moreover, although kin and group interests often coincide, they need not do so, but may in fact be in conflict. A modern example would be when a sect group membership leads to a break with the family.

In our scheme, which is based on the function and evolution of behavior, there are four natural categories: egoism, kin selection, reciprocity, and group egoism (Tullberg and Tullberg, 1994). These categories can be understood in terms of selfish genes, a concept that tends to explain everything as inclusive fitness. However, most writers think that it is reasonable to distinguish reciprocity from kin selection, since a reciprocal consideration can function independently and also overrun the priority of kin (it may make sense to give priority to a reciprocal cousin over a nonreciprocal brother). Also, there are conflicting interests between an individual and his or her kin (e.g., classical parent-offspring conflicts) which justifies separating egoism and kin selection. Using the same logic, we hold that group egoism belongs to a separate behavior category.

If group egoism is a product of natural selection, it follows that it has been rational in the sense that it has increased individual survival and reproduction. The historical rationality has caused innate propensities that support the behavior, and it is hard to see how humans could abandon this way of functioning. We therefore consider group egoism much too strong to be eliminated by any kind of moralistic campaign; a crusade against group egoism is probably as futile as a campaign against egoism or kin selection. This judgment does not imply that group egoism automatically leads to a dominant ethnocentrism. La Rochefoucauld wrote about egoism: "What frequently prevents us from abandoning ourselves to one vice is that we have several" (La Rochefoucauld, 1665; cited in Smith, 1962:466). That reflection also holds true for group egoism. There is no reason to believe that a person will necessarily identify with just one group, instead of several. One problem with ethnocentrism is that other group identities may fade away to let the ethnic one dominate. This is, in our view, avoidable, and also not even very common today, but rather the exception.

## Manipulation and Rationality

Because individuals seek their genetic self-interest through egoism, kin selection, reciprocity, and group egoism, a common—and ethically correct—way of social interaction is to obtain advantages for oneself by considering other people's desires in these categories. Less ethical, but sometimes more rewarding, is deception by promising advantages that are not delivered. The creative manipulator tries to court others with proposals attuned to their interests.

When ethnic leaders seek support, they may use fallacious claims: reciprocal advantages (God gives an eternal life to his warriors), kin interests (the leader is the "father," and the other group members are "brothers" and "sisters"), group egoistic rationale (this sacrifice will bring great benefit if we all hang together), and selfish advantages (prestige and status to the warriors).

In addition to the natural categories discussed above, there is a fifth, altruism, which denotes self-sacrificial behaviors that cannot be explained in terms of selfish genes. Altruism is not a likely product of natural selection, but rather of culture, and the proponents of ethnocentrism often claim to reach altruistic goals as well. Thus, they may proclaim it a duty to make sacrifices for a supreme culture on a historic mission. When gains in the four natural categories seem too small to motivate people, the fulfilling of an altruistic duty may be added.

Manipulation is not a new phenomenon. Since the evolution of language, it has been an instrument not only for information, but also for disinformation. The Machiavellian theory of human intelligence proposes that disguising and detecting plots is a prime reason for our brain capacity (Byrne and Whiten, 1988). Accordingly, people are likely to be distrustful and will often recognize attempts to manipulate them. Not only the leaders, but humanity in general is a *zoon politicon*, according to Aristotle, and that judgment seems accurate. There is no reason to fear that ethnic claims *per se* are so strong that they will not be questioned.

Of the various claims of ethnocentric rationality, the claim of group egoism is probably the most important. We certainly support Russell Hardin's thesis that "collective interests are stronger when they are consistent with individual interests and they are weaker when they are not" (1995:140). We would even take this reasoning one step further—if ethnocentric claims are in accordance with group egoism, it is both feasible and ethical to make adjustments. A crucial question, then, is to distinguish between real group interests and deceitful claims. An important presumption in democracy is that the choice of the people not only reflects perceived interests, but has a significant correlation to real interests. Therefore, we think the people's judgment should be the deciding factor. To promote interests through ethnic alliance has been a reality in history and will continue to be so. It seems futile to try to rid humankind of ethnocentrism by declaring it outmoded or calling it a mental malady, xenophobia.

Several writers consider ethnocentrism irrational (e.g., Connor, 1994), in that it is ultimately not tied to real interests, even if ethnocentric proponents refer to such interests. We disagree with this view, and think that group egoism is consistent with a crude rationality and therefore ethnocentrism also has a rational foundation. *Ceteris paribus*, it is rational to prefer one's own language and culture to others that one masters less well. A monolingual society has an obvious practical advantage over a multilingual society. Control over one's own natural resources and labor market is also advantageous—outside control of resources and job competition with immigrants can be harmful to the welfare of one's own group.

In a complicated world, crude rationality does not always lead to rationality in practice. Many times, the politics of "class interests" have also proven illusory when considering the results for the group expecting improvements. Such defects are, however, insufficient for regarding group egoism as irrational, as a primordial instinct lacking adaptive value. Instead of moralizing against the vile nature of ethnocentrism, its rationality as group egoism in each situation should instead be challenged. This is most often the weak spot. Are the separatists supporting their case with false arguments? From a selfish view, the risk of being killed is often underrated, and the reciprocity of heaven is probably an illusion. The violence that is advocated is not only a threat to the families of enemies, but also to their own. And most important of all, the costs of separation may greatly outweigh the benefits for members of the group in general.

Inclusive fitness or group egoistic goals hardly seem to have been enhanced for the warring groups in Lebanon, Yugoslavia, or Sri Lanka. There are many losers, but few winners. A good question is posed by Horowitz (1991b): Why are there so few irredentas and so many secessions? Irredentist movements in the retrieving country often receive more substantial support than the unreliable tokens the secessionists receive from their allies (usually the enemies of their enemies). Between the fall of the colonial empires and the breakup of the Soviet Union, secessionists have had just two successes, Bangladesh in 1971 and the partition of Cyprus in 1974. These were won by Indian and Turkish forces respectively, and come close to irredentas in this important military aspect. That irredentas are so seldom chosen is hard to explain for any reason other than that the leadership of the minority prefers being the ruling elite of a small entity to being integrated into a larger unity of the common creed, language, etc. A secession policy might be seen as hypocritical when a cultural factor is praised as so fundamental that it justifies splitting one state, but is not sufficient to motivate a merger with another state sharing that same culture.

There is a strange tendency to accept ethnocentric claims as having group egoistic rationality, but, at the same time, to maintain that they are too problematic to implement for practical reasons. A common attitude is that organizations like the IRA and the ETA represent the true interests of the

Catholics and Basques respectively, and that other parties drawing more support from those ethnic groups have horse-traded real interests for respectability and influence. Other minor political parties are seldom seen as such trustworthy heralds for the true interests of the people. There are thus good reasons to see many extremists as basically supporting their own personal interests and not the interests of the ethnic group.

## Difference and Antagonism

Certain distinctions may at times create an identification persuasive enough to provide grounds for ethnic separatism. Yuwa Wong (1994) lists five recognition markers: language, religion, phenotype, homeland, and myth of common descent. However, different cultures and different appearances do not by themselves create an emotional powder keg; the origins of ethnic opposition, nearly without exception, lie in conflicts many generations old. Mutual ignorance leads to noncommitment, perhaps even to condescension, but not to hatred. Physical conflict presupposes proximity, and neighbors are usually similar in many respects. The explosiveness comes from negative experiences—historic animosity outweighs difference.

One consequence of seeing great dissimilarity as the main cause of group conflicts is yielding to a facile sort of solution: a bit of education, more understanding and respect, and more personal experience of the opposite group will soften the antagonism. This "contact-hypothesis" has been effectively criticized (Darby, 1986; Foster and Finchilescu, 1986; Hewstone and Brown, 1986; Feger, 1991). In order to change attitudes, there is a need for constructive cooperation, because only a strong "you and me" relationship can wipe out a negative "us against them." Contact per se is not enough.

That an increased level of education should result in a more tolerant view of other groups seems to be a reasonable forecast, but unfortunately there is weak support for such a proposition. From a number of international studies of divided societies, Donald Horowitz (1991a:140) draws the disturbing conclusion that "there are some studies indicating that elites are less ethnocentric than their followers, but there are more showing that ethnocentrism increases with education."

Many kinds of groups—not just ethnic groups—interpret themselves as distinct categories. There are feminists, for example, who consider women to be a group comparable to an ethnic minority (although the parallel is misleading—a woman typically has a close relationship to her son regardless of her relation to feminism). Nor do social classes constitute ethnic groups in this context, because even if classes live apart, with little social interaction, they are economically integrated. Society is full of subcultures, so we must place limits on what amounts to an ethnic group, since it cannot be a right for everyone claiming group membership

to form a breakaway state. The present argument is not to favor opportunities for free financial monarchies and local hippie communes. In order to “qualify,” suitable requirements are at least a century of traditions within the country, and a minimum number of individuals. If the separating group has the intention of merging with another state, it is fair to lower the minimum.

Though lacking the status of ethnic groups, subcultures are an interesting aspect of the problem. Countless people regard their connection with one or more subgroups as essential, and a partition of the state has an impact on the subgroups. For a pro-environmental entrepreneur, the issue arises of how his or her concerns will be influenced by an ethnic division of the country. There is no mechanism for preferring ethnic identity over other loyalties or priorities. Nor should allegiance to the existing state be forgotten; one can surely see oneself first and foremost as a Czechoslovak, rather than as a Czech or Slovak.

It is often stated that in the choice between nationalism and patriotism—as in the choice between nationalism and class—nationalism is most popular (van den Berghe, 1987; Shaw and Wong, 1989). But as often pointed out, nationalism can be fragmented or fused. Scottish nationalism might be split into highlanders and lowlanders, or it might develop into a British nationalism. Some scholars date the emergence of nationalism some 600 years ago, but most see it as a post-French Revolution phenomenon (e.g., Connor, 1994). However, why did something as strong and profound as nationalism emerge so late? If it is so primitive, how can the trigger mechanisms be so loosely connected to recognition markers? These questions resolve themselves if nationalism is not regarded as such a new and separate phenomenon (as most political scientists seem to regard it). Instead, it can be seen as a variant of ethnocentrism, somewhat different from more regional affiliations that may now be less appropriate vehicles for group egoism.

One idea for getting away from the in-group versus out-group confrontation is to expand the in-group to all of humanity by focusing on universal interests such as the environment. Unfortunately, this approach is not likely to succeed. When talking about “code of amity and code of enmity” or “in-group cooperation and out-group competition,” it should be recognized that positive feelings of belonging are often outweighed by negative feelings. “Conformity” might be a more appropriate term than cooperation, and conformity is only chosen when there is competition or threat from another group. If the ecological movement or humanism should tap into the forces of group egoism to replace ethnocentrism, it will probably be done the old-fashioned way—an out-group will be ostracized and condemned, perhaps as “humans against humanity.” A genuine unification of humankind will require something like an invasion attempt from outer space.

The larger a group, the smaller the proportion of its members that can have a high status. In any group there is just one “alpha male,” and the leadership group does not

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expand with group size at the same rate as the rank and file. Frank (1985) has convincingly argued that being a low-ranking member of a group is such a strain that compensation is needed, or else the person will withdraw from the group if possible. One way to compensate for low rank is to emphasize superiority versus the out-group. Wilson (1979) makes the generalization that the poorer the in-group, the more “group narcissism” is generated as compensation. To support and legitimize antagonism, the out-group is often placed outside humanity—“pseudospeciation” in the words of Erikson (cited in van der Dennen, 1990). But if the out-group is simply different, and not perceived as a threat, the comparison loses its relevance. Low-status groups in rich countries take little comfort in knowing that they have a superior standard of living compared to people in developing countries.

In addition to the problem of rank, the larger group also has difficulty giving focused advantages to its members. Thus, a smaller group representing the special interests of its members can be more effective in this respect. These two disadvantages are sometimes outweighed by the higher power potential of a larger group; but again, this power is only essential if it is necessary to avert competition or threat. Human cooperation in reciprocal exchange is driven by the advantages of a division of labor, but the process of expansion on the political level is driven basically by the need to balance power, to keep up with the might of the neighbors (Alexander, 1987).

### Peaceful Problem Solving

Up to this point, we have (1) discussed ethnocentrism in a broader context; and (2) outlined a model for dealing with separatist conflicts. Various important questions await refinement after our brief discussion, but the basics of this approach to separatism should now be clear. Still, we know there is commonly a deep aversion to a systematic model. When reflecting upon such skepticism, it strikes us as unwise that each instance of ethnic conflict has been handled as a special case, without consistent reference to others. The usual principles of the debate cannot be taken seriously as attempts to fulfill the criterion of universality. Sentimental, sticky humanism readily mixes with naked group egoism, and sometimes hard-boiled separatists are touted as

bicultural enthusiasts once they gain power. The distinction between good and bad separatists seems based more on emotional preference than on principle.

One key advantage of the proposed treatment is that it gives separatists a democratic option, enabling them to act within the system and to make nonviolence more fruitful than a war of ethnic liberation. Many separatist movements lack the popular support that they believe or say that they have. With the proposed model, they can obtain a decision from the people whose wishes they claim to represent. Democratic judgment has often helped to calm excited demands; in most cases, there will probably be a reduction of ethnic antagonism, and it will eventually resemble the relations among other subgroups. Ethnic affiliation may be widely valued, yet it need not cause any profound rift between a particular group and the rest of society.

Considering the dim possibilities of success and the grim dangers of a separatist war, it is reasonable to ask, "Why do the separatists go ahead?" A reflection on general human behavior in decision-making provides some clues. The most common behavior is risk aversion: in a choice between two alternatives with equal mean expected value, people will select the conservative alternative with the smaller but safer gain over the larger but less likely gain. But this pattern is only true in a gain situation; in a loss situation there is a risky shift. Instead of choosing the conservative alternative implying a moderate loss, people will prefer the radical alternative that might carry a large loss but has some possibility of eliminating the loss altogether (Kahneman and Tversky, 1979).

In a desperate situation, people will risk much more in the hope of breaking even rather than having to accept a limited loss. Such behavior can be seen in unsuccessful stockbrokers, lying politicians, and losing generals. It seems reasonable to think that many people in ethnic minority groups believe that they are in a desperate situation—if they remain part of their current state, they foresee increasing oppression and worsening conditions. This is clearly a loss situation. A liberation war is not only worse as a short-time alternative, but it might also be a long-term disaster. But it might—just might—be successful, and it is the only alternative that has a scenario, however unlikely, that is positive. This pattern of human behavior highlights the need for an alternative that can bring about an acceptable solution, thereby eliminating the "risky shift" as a lever for ethnic conflict.

Once an international model has been developed, the first step is to ensure that democratic states apply it. However, no international military guarantee should be given for such a policy, as a guarantee would contradict the restrictive approach we think advisable (strict anti-aggression between states should be militarily enforced, but not "involvement in internal affairs"; democracy and freedom should, in our view, be won by internal forces—not imported by pro-democratic imperialism [Tullberg and Tullberg, 1994]). But a broadly accepted principle can be of vast significance even

without a guarantee. In dictatorial states, this principle could stimulate an alliance between separatist movements and the democratic opposition; and with an established model for deciding differences of opinion about national unity, the separatists could devote all of their energy to supporting the country's democratic movement as a whole.

Peaceful, democratic solutions to the separatists' special problems are the second step. Far from being a plot to deceive the separatists, this is a realistic plan for change, since totalitarian regimes are usually quite unwilling to relinquish territory. To get "the Russians out of the Baltic States," one must begin by getting "the Bolsheviks out of Russia." A common attitude toward separatists is to be positive in specific cases while hinting criticism in general. This attitude stems from the prevailing belief that there ought not be any separatists in a well-functioning democracy; if they do exist, something is wrong, but the flaw should be corrected instead of splitting the country. However, we think it would be wiser to grant the separatists a solid opportunity to prove the appeal of their ideas. When they meet with strong support, the existing relations between ethnic groups are likely to warrant separation as an appropriate solution anyway.

In the great majority of situations, the separatists will not win enough support—the proposal outlined above is not so attractive that it would automatically earn an ethnic group's support for separation. We would be overestimating the power of nationalism if we assume that it will always engulf a group in euphoria as soon as it is allowed to emerge, or that giving separatists a chance will open Pandora's box and shake every country with internal schisms. Such suspicion is due largely to mistrust of the democratic premise that people understand their own interests. Many a demagogue's programs plead to vices like envy and self-pity. Separatists are not necessarily worse than other politicians.

What counts most in the end are actual conditions, not propaganda. If one group is exploited by another, the seeds of separatism are sown; but if the conditions are good, the possibility of arousing dissatisfaction is much more limited. Sometimes a devilish scenario unfolds: when one group is sufficiently hateful and devious, it defeats more decent parties, victory going to those who hit below the belt. Evidence of this happening is scant in democracies, though. Even if the separatists' arguments are expected to be outrageous, there is no reason to expect that they will reap an easy harvest.

Democracy faces a much more difficult task in dealing with terrorism, however little support the latter has. If separatism can gain adherents by adopting peaceful behavior and abandoning terrorism, the overwhelming winner is social harmony. Society is better off with ten democratic separatists than with one separatist terrorist.

In situations of ethnic conflict, there is, however, a vicious circle of increasing ethnic identification and indignation; crimes encountered are remembered, invented, and magnified, while crimes committed are diminished, denied,

and pardoned. It would be a mistake, though, to see history as just myths or interpretations, since there is a history of real events. With time, antagonism is built up, superficial to a degree, but also founded on sincere reactions to real historic events that cast long shadows upon the living. When very high levels of animosity exist, it may be time to consider a solution other than reconciliation. Generous forgiveness is probably unrealistic, but stopping short of retaliation might be within reach. Separation is a possible solution when there is no belief in, no trust in, and no passion for a new start.

## Objections

There are several objections to our proposed solution. The most fundamental are those that are opposed not only to the specific principles proposed here, but to stringent principles as such. These are seen as mechanistic, simplistic, and destructive. This fundamental critique can be divided into four alternative perspectives: time, sympathy, authority, and jurisdiction.

### Time

The world economy is rapidly integrating, and an international culture is emerging under the influence of the mass media, travel, immigration, and multinational companies. Formerly divergent groups are becoming closer in habits and interdependence. As a result, separatism should be a phenomenon of the past. What we see now, it is argued, is the emergence of a single international culture.

It is easy to be persuaded by this line of reasoning—that time will make ethnic conflict obsolete. This might indeed be the long-term development, but the political development of this century has been the reverse: the disintegration of several multicultural empires and a continuous creation of new states.

Even if a global monoculture will be the future of humanity, the present trend of state disintegration could very well continue for some time. In the absence of external threats, which have always been a reason for staying together, break-away states may be able to prosper. Regional organizations like NATO now provide a security that previously could only be provided by a strong state. Thus, Belgium could now be split without threats of foreign annexation.

Similarly, organizations for economic cooperation—like EU or NAFTA—increase the possibilities for an economy of scale without a substantial national home market. The solution for Africa might be an increased number of states combined with an organization for free trade and economic cooperation.

A related objection is that much of the new ethnicity is fake (e.g., Schlesinger, 1992). Patterson (1977) makes “re-vivalist” a main category of ethnocentrism. Thus, some American blacks are reexamining their roots in order to create an ethnic identity and turn themselves into

“Afro-Americans.” For emerging nations like the Ukraine and Palestine, there is a special need to create an ethnic identity with a separate and continuous history. The attraction of the National Socialists for a glorious Aryan past was not an exception, but the rule. Unfortunately, unreal myths have not made conflict and war any less real.

### Sympathy

The main concern of someone with a sympathy perspective is not to distinguish between right and wrong actions, but to decide which side to support. One rule of this perspective is to take sides with the group in a conflict that has similarities with your own. Although common, this is hard to defend as an intellectual rule with ethical relevance for people belonging to other groups. A more respected norm is that one should support the weak against the strong—an attitude we label “pity priority.”

This attitude might seem virtuous, but it is disastrous if peace is considered to be of value. It is hard to find a more effective way to prolong war and conflict than to support the weaker side. There is wisdom in Helmuth von Moltke’s old advice that the most humanitarian way to make war is to make it decisive and short. A *coup d’état* might sometimes be effective, but a guerrilla uprising that slowly escalates into a long civil war has scant possibilities of bringing benefits that justify the suffering. The United Nations, with its preference for cease-fires and negotiations, has a tendency to prolong conflicts by giving the weaker combatant some shelter and opportunity to grow in strength.

The second fatal weakness of pity priority is that situations change quickly, making today’s villains tomorrow’s victims. Some relatively prosperous groups, like Jews, Kulaks, and Tutsis, have been criticized for being overprivileged—for being the oppressing villains. For these groups, drastic changes took place: from overprivilege to the ultimate underprivilege—being targets of genocide. And sometimes one group, like the Turks, plays both roles. Thus, Turkey objects indignantly to Bulgaria’s forced assimilation of its Turkish minority; at the same time, Turkey pursues a very similar policy against the Kurds in Turkey.

That the poor man has a heart of gold is an attractive populist thesis, but it is not sufficient to make stringent rules. In most conflicts, both sides can convince their supporters that they are the prime victims of the conflict, and deserve sympathy according to the rule of pity priority. In addition, the weaker combatant is often excused for voicing master myths of the past, and dominant aspirations for the future. The old opposition becomes the new oppressor, and national liberation has often meant liberation for one group and subjection for others.

### Authority

Another objection is that the problem with separatist conflicts is not a lack of useful principles, but a lack of authority.

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## The United Nations now has the means to end conflicts, but its inability to accomplish this cannot be covered up by demands for more soldiers and more money

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This is, of course, the backbone attitude of any politician: he has the solution; all he needs is the means, a mandate, and a go.

This objection was stronger ten years ago. The United Nations now has the means to end conflicts, but its inability to accomplish this cannot be covered up by demands for more soldiers and more money. An omnipotent Leviathan could bring peace, but that possibility is not attractive for most of us, even if it could be realized.

Several states have tried forced assimilation, but the results have been counterproductive. It can be argued that strong dictatorships have succeeded in suppressing secessionist movements, but that is hardly an attractive solution. Locke's objection to Hobbes's solution comes to mind: Is it reasonable to put oneself at the mercy of a lion to avoid the threat of a fox?

The democratic precondition is that rulers not have sufficient power to require everybody to obey whatever decision is reached. The decisions have to be reasonable enough to be accepted even when in conflict with short-term interests; that is, they have to be perceived as legitimate. Thus, authority is not enough; the proposed solution must be within the range of legitimate options.

When authority is highlighted, legitimacy is forgotten and unrealistic expectations are attached to "top-level meetings." However, it is difficult to reach a sudden peacemaking agreement without a previous peacebuilding process that prepares your supporters for peace and compromise instead of a war for total victory (Ryan, 1990).

The range of decisions that can be considered legitimate is of course influenced by a group's own agitation—a cause declared sacred cannot easily be compromised. Parties close to gaining control of government have a relatively strong incentive to adjust their message—to sacrifice some pre-election attractiveness generated by excessive promises—and attempt to increase legitimacy for hard but necessary priorities. Parties far from a point of responsible implementation are more inclined to simply maximize their attractiveness. Unfortunately, the international commentators are often basically just irresponsible co-actors, more interested in what the conflict can do for their image than in what can be done to solve the conflict.

The authoritarian view promotes free hands for the deal-makers, because each problem is seen as highly complex and unique. Exclusive information, personal chemistry, and the

dynamics of the process are essential components, so of course there has to be an *ad hoc* solution. Bystanders encourage the process through supportive sweet talk about vague or limited goals. Thus, children writing postcards for peace and clergy issuing condemnations of war are viewed as valuable contributions.

Aristotle noted that good law makes good order. Laws with low legitimacy are hard to enforce even for a powerful police force. Authority is supported not only by respect for the police, but also by respect for the law. So, contradictory rules in this area, not a lack of charismatic leaders, are, in our opinion, the main problem. A central virtue of law is that it is seen as rational from a broad perspective, and thus fair even if it goes against one's own immediate interest. A prerequisite is that the actual case be seen as belonging to a larger category that should be treated according to the same principle. When every case is considered unique, it is very difficult to convince people that they should back off from their demands in order to support a common principle.

### *Jurisdiction*

Many times efforts have been made to transform separatism from a political to a juridical question; ethnic demands past a certain level are then outlawed. It is possible to draw a fairly clear line between demonstrations and terrorism, but no clear line may be drawn between ethnicity and separatism. Stephen Ryan (1990) uses the term "ethnic group" for the former and "nation group" for the latter. Alexis Heraclides (1991) differentiates between various types of secession: *stricto sensu*, incremental, irredentist, and mergers. The views of the majority about separatist claims can also be considered, and not just the beliefs of the minority (Lustick, 1993).

An ethnic movement can start with minor demands and then develop into incremental secession and later on into a movement for secession *stricto sensu*. Thus, forbidding the making of claims to be a national group would simply force a minor adjustment in the way opinions were advocated. Free speech would also be tarnished, and nothing substantial gained.

The proponents of unity ought of course to argue their case as best they can, but there is no way to guarantee success. With a loss of the souls to the separatists, there must be, in our opinion, an alternative plan. Separatism cannot be transformed from a political choice to a matter of policing. The need is to make this political decision a choice between solutions that are realistic and acceptable.

### **If This Is Such a Good Solution, Why...?**

The question, "If this is such a good solution, why has it not already been implemented?" is reasonable, provided it is a real, and not just a rhetorical question. We think there are good arguments, not only for why the proposed solution

makes sense, but also for why it is not an established rule. To the previous four explicit doubts, we can add informal reasons that are important in explaining the present preference for *ad hoc* solutions.

Even democrats do not want to apply a democratic solution when they believe that democracy will not solve a problem. Unfortunately, many democratic bystanders share with fanatics a belief that separatist conflicts cannot have civilized solutions. Many democrats wrestle with a problematic situation because they do not find it feasible to argue that democracy has shortcomings. The carnage of civil war cannot be openly defended as a treatment for separatism, but the reasoning is often there, even if implicit. The deaths of a million Ibos might be seen as an acceptable price for avoiding total African chaos. If no peaceful solution is possible, the civil war consequence will dampen the enthusiasm for separatism, but at some point the price for the deterrent effect might be regarded as too high, and an exceptional concession must be made.

Thus, regrets over bloodshed in ethnic conflict are expressed at the same time that such casualties are seen as necessary restrictions. One country's nightmare might be another's sobering cold shower. So ghoulish a treatment for separatism is too repulsive to be actively advocated, but also too brutal and destructive to be passively supported if human costs are skyrocketing.

We have already touched on some of the attraction of retreating to a vague humanistic attitude. We do not think it is always a calculated strategy, but a solution spontaneously attractive for politicians or, for that matter, scientists. Why get dirty? It is better to show a realistic perception by saying that no end of the conflict is in sight. Pessimism has an attractive ambience of intellectual insight and integrity, and it mixes nicely with a contrasting vision about a world molded to one's own values.

## Conclusions

Undoubtedly, not all readers will accept our concrete proposals, yet, it is highly probable that these constitute a potential basis for finding the solutions required. Popular talk about peace, love, and understanding is of little help. Bad deeds are always in great need of pleasant words, which results in slogans like "national independence," "liberation war," and "fight for a society free of human suffering." The higher the goal, the better the excuse for violence against opponents. Furthermore, the mortal risk and the crucial sacrifices of one's supporters also need motivation and rationalization. Altruistic ideas camouflage group egoistic conflicts, while ostensibly noble but unrealistic principles and visions mask factual bestiality.

The more balanced views of many scientists indicate reluctance to support a general framework such as we propose. The following quotation from Donald Horowitz is probably representative:

"Population transfer" only sounds hygienic. Still, protracted civil violence or warfare may be worse, and prudential judgments will have to be made. The point is not that partition is always avoidable, only that, with rare exceptions, it ought to be not the policy of choice but of desperation. (1985:592)

By contrast, we would like to point out the potential of choice to avoid desperation.

Most people claim that ethnic wars are insane, but there is a shortage of sane solutions. A cease-fire is too little, while expecting peace, love, and understanding is too much. Apart from belief in a holy, eternal marriage, or a justified liberation war, we should consider the "civilized divorce."

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