Political Geography

Second Edition

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In our discussion of the term *nation* we observed that it properly refers to a group with a common culture, of which two major components are religion and language. Much has and will continue to be written about these two cultural elements, but we are concerned here with their political aspects and relationships and in particular those that are linked with geography. One problem we face is trying to separate the two. There is certainly no necessary correlation or linkage between religion and language, yet many nations (or peoples or ethnic groups) have both distinctive religions and languages. Thus an ethnic minority in a country may demand cultural autonomy that would include both or may simply be distinguishable from other groups because of both. The Québécois, for example, are distinguished from their fellow Canadians not only by being predominantly French-speaking, but also by being overwhelmingly Roman Catholic in an otherwise largely Protestant country, although language has been the basis of the separation movement. Thus, in this chapter, as we refer to an ethnic group (or people or nation), we may be referring to linguistic or religious factors or both.*

**Religion**

No longer, as in centuries past, is religion a dominant force in the determination of State boundaries or even in the creation of States. In the twentieth century the partitions of Ireland, Syria, India, and Palestine were all designed to create separate political units for Catholics and Protestants, Christians and Muslims, Muslims and Hindus, and Jews and Arabs, respectively. In each case, however, while the political map of the world was altered and the course of history changed accordingly, minority groups were included in the new units, and some of them have continued to pose problems of integration into the national system. These partitions, furthermore, led to the creation of only four new States out of more than a hundred born in this century. And religion was an insignificant factor in the breakup of the USSR and Yugoslavia and the reunification of Germany. It was, however, as we pointed out in Chapter 17, an instrument of Tsarist Russian imperialism, and missionaries were vitally important in establishing all of the great overseas empires.

No longer are new religions sweeping across the face of the earth, gaining adher-

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*The term ethnic is used loosely to include inherited physical features that some people imply in the term "race." While physical characteristics may be important in the identification of some groups, including self-identification, there is no necessary connection between race and either language or religion. We therefore ignore "racial" factors here. The species *homo sapiens*, in fact, constitutes a single biological race and the common concept of "race" is purely cultural and not biological.
ents by the millions, often under threat of the sword. The only religions gaining significant numbers of new adherents today are Islam, primarily in the northern parts of East and West Africa, and Christianity, in much of Africa. There is also a steady growth of a number of Protestant and other denominations in 'nominally Roman Catholic Latin America and of the Baha'i faith worldwide. Generally speaking, however, we are in a period of relative religious stability, in which the major changes are taking place within religions.

Although the religious wars that characterized Europe for centuries are fortunately behind us and we are living in an era of religious toleration, there has been no shortage of local religious wars and domestic conflicts in which religion has played a significant role. In Northern Ireland, for example, the conflict is not clearly between Catholics and Protestants; that is, it is not a war over religion but rather of different positions and orientations of the various communities within the province. Many members of the large Catholic minority want the province to be reunited with the dominantly Catholic Republic of Ireland, while most of the Protestants want to remain united with Great Britain. Catholics over the centuries have been discriminated against in employment, and even some Protestants feel discriminated against by English control of the Ulster economy. But while the religious lines in Ulster are not rigidly drawn and economic and ideological factors are important components of the conflict, it is the religious component that attracts attention and tends to polarize people not only in Ulster but also in Britain, Ireland, and elsewhere.

The Nigerian civil war, which lasted for 30 months in the late 1960s, was particularly bloody. Again, the war had many causes, but because the Ibo nation, largely Roman Catholic, felt that it was not being, and could not be, treated fairly in largely Muslim and animist Nigeria, it broke away to form the State of Biafra. The Ibo lost the war and Biafra was obliterated, but it seems that the Ibo nation is being treated more fairly now in reorganized Nigeria.

A similar uprising, but one more drawn out and less well organized, is the continuing one of the Moro National Liberation Front in Mindanao and the Sulu Archipelago against the government of the Philippines. This group represents many of the Muslims who form a majority in five of the 13 provinces of these islands, and they have been fighting for autonomy in a chiefly Christian country.

Almost lost in the avalanche of news and opinion about the war in Vietnam and neighboring countries from the early 1960s to 1975 was the fact that two indigenous religious groups, the Hoa Hao and the Cao Dai, controlled several important provinces. They fig-
Proposed settlement of Sikh separatist claims in Punjab. In July 1985 then Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and Sikh leader Sant Harchand Singh Longowal agreed on territorial transfers to settle Sikh claims for a state of their own. However, Longowal and Gandhi were later assassinated, opposition to the agreement is strong among both Hindu and Sikh extremists, and implementation of the agreement has been postponed indefinitely.

ured importantly in the domestic political maneuvering, and they maintained their own armies that at various times fought the Japanese, French, Saigon government, and Viet Cong. While armed and militant religious groups of this type are no longer very common in the world, their quarrels can and sometimes do cause great hardship and suffering. The clearest recent example is Lebanon—once a peaceful, prosperous, cosmopolitan, and reasonably democratic country, but now devastated by years of civil war, fragmented into bitterly hostile factions, and occupied by foreign troops.

In the United States, religious groups are not armed and militant, and they do not oppose one another politically, but there is no doubt that religion influences politics in many areas of the country. The Mormon influence in Utah and neighboring states, the Catholic majorities or near-majorities in southern New England and the Middle Atlantic states, the “Bible Belt” of fundamentalist Protestants in the South, the concentration of Jews in the major cities, especially in the Northeast and Midwest—these are just a few religious factors to consider when trying to explain or predict electoral behavior in the United States. Religious doctrines, though no longer as important as they once were in determining candidates for public office and the outcome of elections, are still influential in referenda and in legislative action on certain issues.

Religious minorities often play roles, make contributions, and exercise influence in societies far out of proportion to their numbers. This includes both indigenous and immigrant minorities. Among them are Jews, Parsees, Mennonites, Catholic Iboos, Mormons, Quakers, Armenians, Sikhs, and others. While they tend to focus on the economic sphere and are sometimes excluded from politics, these groups are always political factors, especially in areas where they are concentrated. In some countries, espe-
CASE STUDY—LEBANON

Although its roots go back to ancient Phoenicia, Lebanon under the Ottoman Empire was simply Mount Lebanon in Syria. When the French gained control of Syria after World War I, they added to Mount Lebanon the coastal strip and the Bekaa Valley, and on 1 September 1920, proclaimed there the State of Greater Lebanon—still under French mandate. The people of Mount Lebanon were predominantly Christian (mostly Maronites) and pro-French; the other areas, mainly populated by Muslims, were included within Lebanon to enhance the new country’s political and economic position, and the total population had only a slight Christian majority. Tensions between Christians and Muslims grew until 1943 when they formulated the "National Pact." This provided for proportional representation by religious community in the Chamber of Deputies, as shown in Table 35-1. It was also agreed to continue the tradition of a Maronite president, Sunni prime minister, and Shi’ite speaker of the Chamber of Deputies. Informally, cabinet posts, army and civil service jobs, and other positions were allocated according to religious affiliation, but not necessarily proportionately. This precarious arrangement was upset in 1958 by a number of internal and external factors, and it completely disintegrated after 1975, when civil war broke out and lasted until 1991.

During these 16 years, fighting raged among numerous private militias maintained by religious and political groups, and assorted local warlords and clan chiefs. Most of the fighting was among various factions of Christians, Muslims, and Druzes, with alliances changing kaleidoscopically. The war was also notable for the introduction of two Western multinational forces and an Arab

Table 35-1  Lebanon: Estimated Proportions of Religious Groups in Total Population and Allocation of Seats in the Chamber of Deputies

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<tr>
<td>Christians (54%)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Christians (40%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholics</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maronites</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Greek Catholics</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Armenian Catholics</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Roman Catholics</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>1</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syriacs</td>
<td>1.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chaldeans</td>
<td>0.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Greek Orthodox</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Armenian Orthodox</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>All other</td>
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<tr>
<td>Protestants</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Christians 5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Muslims (39%)</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Muslims (53%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sunni Muslims</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>26</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shiite Muslims</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>27</td>
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<tr>
<td>Others (7%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Others (7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Druze</td>
<td>6.0</td>
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<td>7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jews</td>
<td>0.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>'Alawites</td>
<td>0.5</td>
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*Embedded within these figures are perhaps 1 percent of the total population who are Ismaili Muslims, Syrian Orthodox, Baha’is, and other groups too small to be represented as such in the Chamber of Deputies. Druze and 'Alawites are sometimes considered as Muslims whether or not they are aligned politically with Muslims. There has been no census in Lebanon since 1932, and all population figures, including those of the 1932 census, are very likely wrong, perhaps by a considerable margin. Nevertheless, the political system was based on this enumeration until June 1991, when a new provisional constitution went into effect.
League force composed almost entirely of Syrian troops, an Israeli incursion in 1982 that went all the way to Beirut and precipitated the expulsion of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), the creation of an Israeli "security zone" along the southern border protected by a largely Christian militia armed and trained by Israel, the rise to prominence of at least two fundamentalist Shi'ite factions (complete with their own militias), the return of the PLO, the occupation of nearly all of the country by Syria, the insertion of a United Nations peace-keeping force (UNIFIL) into the southern border region, large-scale flight of Lebanese to safer countries, intervals of relative calm, hostage-taking by many of the factions (including some Western victims), massive physical destruction and human suffering, and many other events and situations, each of which could be the subject of a book. Many are of politico-geographical interest and are discussed in earlier chapters of this book. Now we are concerned with the outcome of the war.

In the autumn of 1989 Lebanese deputies representing most factions met in Taif, Saudi Arabia, and hammered out the National Reconciliation Charter. This document became effective in June 1991 and serves as a temporary constitution, replacing the National Pact of 1943. It is a lengthy document, covering political reforms, disbanding of the militias and reconstitution of the national armed forces, repositioning of Syrian troops and Lebanese-Syrian relations, and "the liberation of Lebanon from Israeli occupation." Briefly, the main provisions for our purposes are:

1. As an interim measure, "until Parliament enacts an election law which is not based on religious affiliation records," seats in Parliament will be allocated much as before except that the Muslims get 9 additional seats for a total of 54 (including Druzes), to equal the number of Christian seats.

2. The president will continue to be a Maronite and the prime minister a Sunni, at least ad interim, but the powers of the president are reduced while those of the prime minister are increased.

3. "Political deconfessionalization is a principal national objective. . . ."

4. Some authority is devolved upon the administrative regions, but the country remains "one unified State with a powerful centralized authority."

Although the wording of the document is frequently very vague and even hortatory, it does express the national aspiration for enduring peace based on elimination of religious (or confessional) affiliation from the political system. We can hope that this will be accomplished soon; if not, resumption of tribal warfare is all but inevitable.

especially in Europe, Asia, and Israel, there are political parties formed by, and representing, particular religious groups. The Christian Democratic parties of Europe and Latin America are generally associated, however loosely, with the Roman Catholic Church, although the influence of the Vatican on them is often exaggerated by their opponents. The National Religious (Jewish) Party in Israel has been a coalition partner in every government since the founding of the State in 1948, and there are other Jewish and Muslim parties as well. The Komeito in Japan and the Jan Sangh in India are similarly parties representing the orthodox wings of major religions, Buddhism and Hinduism, respectively.

Although religious groups are active in politics around the world, there is probably no true theocracy. The last one was eliminated when the Chinese occupied Tibet in the 1950s, drove the Dalai Lama (the spiritual and temporal ruler) into exile, and destroyed the Lamaist Buddhist monasteries that were an integral part of the governing system. The nearest thing to a theocracy today is probably Iran, in which not only does the Shari'a (Islamic law) dominate the society, but all major government posts are held by clerics. In Saudi Arabia, the puritanical Wahhabi sect is still influential and the government takes seriously its role as protector of the holiest places of Islam, but it is still a secular State. Similarly, Libya, Sudan and Pakistan—other countries in which Islamic law has been incorporated into the
civil and criminal codes—continue to be governed by laymen and remain secular States. Other countries have established churches that often receive some degree of financial and other support from the government, but the churches do not control the governments, and generally religious freedom is granted to other denominations. In Japan the official religion until the end of World War II was Shinto, a nationalistic, militaristic indigenous religion, but it was disestablished under the American occupation after the war and the emperor renounced the doctrine of his divine descent.

Finally, we should note the numerous religious communal settlements around the world. By their very nature, they are generally uninvolved in politics, sometimes even refusing to acknowledge citizenship in the host State. Nevertheless questions of land ownership, water rights, education, taxation, military service, and so on often involve them in politics willy-nilly. Cultural geographers have long been interested in these settlements, but they deserve the attention of political geographers as well.

What pattern emerges from all these observations about the politics of religion today? Generally, it is a picture of a world in which religion no longer dominates the lives of people as it once did. Despite survivals of past orthodoxies and occasional revivals of religious feeling and activity (such as in Islam today), we are living in a secularizing world in which religion remains important to many individuals and is locally important politically, but is no longer a force that shapes history. Religious wars and massacres still break out from time to time in some countries, but seldom do these spill over into other countries and not for a long time have they generated massive crusades. Nationalism, it would seem, is a more powerful influence on most people in the world than religion, though it will not necessarily remain so. In fact, there are already growing strength and passions among militant fundamentalist groups within several religions.

Language

Throughout this book we have repeatedly referred to the strength of nationalism in the world today. One of the most important components of nationalism has long been language. The European nation-state evolved out of a desire of people to be ruled by people who spoke their language; that is, who were of the same nation. Other cultural components, of course, go into the blend of symbols and feelings and attitudes that bind together a nation, but historically, few even approach language as the most important single element.

Ethnic minorities within many countries cling to their native languages in the face of cultural imperialism of the majority or even the obsolescence of the language in the face of technological change. It is a badge of identification, of belonging to a distinctive group with a proud tradition of its own. Cornish has died out, but Gaelic (both Scottish and Irish varieties), Welsh, and Breton of the old Celtic languages are preserved still and used by ardent nationalists as touchstones of their movements for greater autonomy or even independence. In France, Italy, The Netherlands and other European countries, formerly dying and even proscribed regional languages, such as Occitan (Provençal), Friulian, and Frisian, are being revived, officially encouraged, and even financed by a bureau of the European Union. The political significance of this trend is immense: As Europe slowly unites and English spreads as its lingua franca, State governments have come to understand that local cultural diversity can be valuable in the face of economic and eventual political unity.

Of all the ancient languages, however, only Hebrew has been revived in modern times, updated, and firmly established as the national language of a modern State, in everyday use by the great majority of the population of Israel. One reason for the survival of Hebrew through nearly 2000 years of the dispersion of its users throughout the

*Vatican City may be considered a theocracy since the Pope is both spiritual and temporal ruler and all officials are clergymen, but this is a very special case.*
Religious minorities far from their places of origin. Top: These Hutterite women hoeing a field in Alberta are among the some 14,000 members of the Hutterian Brethren living in about 115 communal farm settlements in the Canadian prairie provinces, the Dakotas, Montana, and Washington. This Mennonite sect originated in Austria in 1528, fled to Germany after persecution in Switzerland, then to Bohemia, to Hungary, and eventually to Russia in the eighteenth century. About 400 members of the sect came from Russia to South Dakota in 1874–77 to begin the North American settlements. (Photo courtesy of the National Film Board of Canada) Bottom: Khúhane-A is a Circassian village in Upper Galilee, Israel, one of two in the country. These people are Sunni Muslims from the Caucasus who fled Russian persecution in the nineteenth century to settle in Turkish Palestine. They have nearly abandoned their own language in favor of Arabic, but retain their religion and pastoral farming economy. (Martin Glassner) Both of these minority peoples live in peace within the dominant cultures of their refuges, but others around the world are not so fortunate.
world was its retention as a liturgical language. Other liturgical languages, such as Latin, have also served as unifying elements among peoples who share a religion but little else. No other, however, has retained the almost mystical loyalty of a people for so long as Hebrew among the Jewish people. It never really died out as an everyday language in its homeland either, as clusters of Jews have always lived there, using the ancient language regularly. When they were joined by East European Zionists beginning in the nineteenth century, the newcomers adopted the traditional tongue. By 1948, when the State of Israel was born, the debate over a national language among the 600,000 Jews of Palestine had been settled: Hebrew had won out over Yiddish, English, and other candidates. It was a symbol of the rebirth of the ancient Jewish State, a matter of enormous political significance.

The case of Namibia, another former League of Nations mandate, is different. There, the leaders decided to abandon Afrikaans as the official language when the country became independent in 1990, and rejected all other native languages as a substitute. They chose English, mother tongue of only 5 percent of the population, as the new official language. Afrikaans, however, is likely to continue to be the *lingua franca* of the country for a time, and German will continue to be used as well as the local languages. In South Africa, a very different policy was adopted in May 1994, when a new democratic government took office under a new constitution. The former official languages, Afrikaans and English, are now only 2 of 11 official languages, though, of course, still the most widely used.

The multitude of languages in the world and the tendency of all languages to change through time have created a need for *linguae francae*, languages used in trade and general communication among peoples who speak other languages of their own. Some of these evolved naturally and have been accepted by the people as, at least in part, their own. Examples are Swahili in East Africa, Hausa in West Africa, Pidgin in the South Pacific, and Tupí-Guaraní in Brazil and nearby areas. Others, however, have been introduced by conquerors and either adopted willingly by natives wishing to advance under the new rulers or imposed by the rulers as instruments of cultural imperialism. Quechua, Arabic, French, Latin, Spanish, and English are only a few of the languages spread far and wide in this manner. By now there are literally hundreds of pidgin and creole languages, derivations from or amalgamations of established languages, and many more have become extinct.

Since World War II English has replaced French as the nearest approximation of a worldwide *lingua franca*, not because of any inherent virtues it might have, but because the United States emerged from the war as the world's most powerful country, with its troops, businesspeople, teachers, scholars, scientists, and tourists penetrating the farthest reaches of the globe—and often unwilling to learn the local language. American influence, added to British influence within the Commonwealth and beyond, has made English the world's most important language—for the present. Already Spanish has replaced French as the most popular foreign language for Americans to learn, and the Spanish-speaking population of the United States is growing rapidly. Some observers estimate that early in the twenty-first century the United States will be a bilingual country, which should not be a disturbing prospect at all. It could lead, in fact, to closer relations with the Spanish-speaking world.*

Esperanto, the most successful of many invented languages, was devised by Lazarus Ludwig Zamenhof (1859–1917), a Jewish physician and linguist of Russian Poland, in the hope that it would become a worldwide, nonpolitical, value-free *lingua franca*. Only 20 years after he published the first tract on his new language, two "reformed" versions of it were developed in France. Since then it has indeed spread around the world, and

*Politically motivated or fear-induced movements in the United States favoring "Black English" and "English first" and their variations have fortunately not won widespread support for they are truly divisive. Bilingualism, on the other hand, is a unifying force.
Survival of an ancient language. Around the world many linguistic minorities are trying to preserve their languages in the face of enormous pressures to abandon them in favor of the dominant languages of their countries. Use of the Manx language, for example, has declined drastically in the past half century but survives as a badge of distinctiveness on the Isle of Man, a dependency of the British crown. This bilingual sign is an example. (Photo courtesy of the British Tourist Authority)

there are numerous publications, including periodicals, in the language. But it has never attracted more than perhaps 3 million speakers altogether, and today there are probably no more than half a million, mostly intellectuals. In the United States it was for a time identified by ultraconservatives as an instrument of "one worldism" propagated by communists, and therefore anathema. Politics aside, it has no chance of replacing a major world language, such as English, as a preferred second language or lingua franca.

A bilingual country is one in which two languages are dominant rather than one. Examples are Belgium (French and Flemish), Canada (English and French), Sri Lanka (Sinhalese and Tamil), and Paraguay (Spanish and Guaraní). In a recent case close to home, the governor of Puerto Rico on 5 April 1991 signed into law a bill that disestablished English, which had been imposed as an official language in 1902, leaving Spanish as the sole official language of the commonwealth. This was by no means an anti-American act, however, only a recognition of an existing fact, and English would continue to be widely used with no penalties. Puerto Rico remains, moreover, an integral part of the United States. Pro-statehood forces, in fact, were successful in 1993 in having English reestablished as an official language, and in a 1993 plebiscite, only 4.4% of the votes were cast for independence.

In nearly all bilingual countries, other languages are also spoken, but generally by small numbers of people. In a great many countries, the overwhelming majority, in fact, many languages are spoken by the native peoples. In most of these multilingual countries, one or two languages have achieved dominance, either because they are spoken by the largest groups of the population or because they are the languages of the ruling elites. Sometimes these dominant languages obscure the basic multilingual character of the country. Mexico, Nigeria, South Africa, India, China, and Russia are only a few of the more prominent multilingual States.

In some bilingual and multilingual States, attempts to introduce (or impose) an official "national" language or to suppress a local language have led to vigorous protests, bloody riots, and even full-scale rebellion or attempted secession, as in India, Sri Lanka, Belgium, Spain, and South Africa. In most of them, however, a modus vivendi has been reached among the various language groups, and the selection of a national language or languages has been accomplished peacefully.

In some countries, such as Norway and Britain, social groups are identified by the
The importance of language in both domestic and international politics. Many countries issue stamps with inscriptions in two languages, since many are bilingual. Switzerland, however, has issued sets of three stamps in three of the four official languages, all three languages on one stamp, and the country's official name in Latin. More recently, Swiss stamps handle the language problem by just saying "Helvetia." Southwestern Africa (now Namibia) issued two se tenant sets of stamps in 1967 in Afrikans, English, and German. In the fourth row are stamps touting the international binding force of the French and Spanish languages. In the next row a Polish stamp honors the Polish inventor of Esperanto, an Israeli stamp commemorates the centennial of the Hebrew Language Council (all Israeli stamps have the country's
dialect of the national language they speak. In others, regional dialects label people and sometimes restrict their participation in political life. In still other societies secret or ritual languages confer power or prestige on the few initiates. In others, mastery of a classical or literary language or dialect is essential for advancement in society.

On the other hand, Jean-Bertrand Aristide was elected President of Haiti in January 1991 in the first democratic elections in the country’s history, supervised by the United Nations, largely because he campaigned among the masses in Creole, their native language, while the other candidates used only French, the language of the country’s tiny elite. And in Taiwan, where the Nationalist government that fled the mainland of China in 1949 had imposed Mandarin as the official language and banned all use of Taiwanese, the local language has not only become respectable again, but it is now seen as essential for success in the country’s politics. This is a reflection of both the democratization of Taiwan and the growing movement for official and permanent, not just de facto, independence from China.

Nearly everywhere in the world language has political as well as cultural significance. But, if language is such an important component of nationalism and if nationalism is as powerful a force in the world today as we have indicated earlier, why do the political boundaries of the world not conform to linguistic boundaries? Part of the explanation lies in the mobility of people. Throughout history peoples have migrated, often over considerable distances, carrying their cultural baggage with them. Although they may have returned to their homelands or amalgamated with the local people, their languages—or traces of them—remain to distinguish regions that otherwise may not differ greatly. Language then becomes only one element, and sometimes a subordinate element, in the culture. Even culture as a whole may not determine boundaries. As we have seen, military, economic, dynastic, physiographic, and other factors are often determinative in boundary making, and language may be ignored. In twentieth-century Asia and Africa, anticolonialism has often been the strongest component of nationalism, a rallying cry that unites most people in a colony, regardless of the language they speak. And, as we have also seen, most colonial boundaries have remained intact after independence as a matter of policy, even though they frequently cut across linguistic lines.*

**Ethnic Minorities and Polycultural States**

There are few true nation-states in the world today. Most countries are home for two, three, or numerous cultural or ethnic groups. It is not just the largest countries, such as the former Soviet Union or China, that are polycultural or plural societies, but even many of the smallest, such as Mauritius, Fiji, Comoros, and Trinidad and Tobago. Cultural pluralism, in fact, is not only worldwide but also a prominent element in political unrest nearly everywhere.

Nigeria and Lebanon are not the only countries in which a census is more than just a useful source of routine statistical information but a sensitive political issue as well. In 1976, for example, the Slovenes of Carinthia

*In the late 1980s the Organization of African Unity was actively promoting use of indigenous languages in place of colonial ones, under the rubric of “the linguistic liberation and unity of Africa.”

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name in Hebrew, English and Arabic), and a Somali stamp notes—in four languages—the Second International Congress of Somali Studies. Finally, Norway has traditionally used the country’s name in the Riksmål (Bokmål) version of Norwegian, which is largely Danish and spoken in the urban centers and in the eastern part of the country. Recently, as on the stamp on the right, the Landsmal (Nynorsk) version, invented in 1850 and used in Western Norway and in rural regions, has been used on some stamps. (Martin Glassner)
Ethnicity and political boundaries in the former Soviet Union. Although each of the 15 constituent republics of the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics is now an independent State, there is no reason to believe that the fragmentation of this huge and ethnically complex territory has ended. This map shows only the more important of the numerous claims and demands for territorial changes on ethnic grounds.
Ethnolinguistic Groups in the Caucasus Region.
in Austria, supported by Yugoslavia and opposed by German-speaking Austrian nationalists, vigorously protested a proposed ethnic census in their province. And Saudi Arabia has yet to conduct a formal census and publish the figures, at least in part because it would inevitably show that the native population is quite small and the number of foreigners, mostly Palestinians and other Arabs, is large.

But cultural pluralism need not lead to political instability. In few countries, in fact, are the ethnic groups as bitterly hostile as in Cyprus or Lebanon or Sudan. In most, ethnic differences have been at least temporarily sublimated or suppressed by nationalist or repressive governments. Where the harmony is only superficial and ethnic animosities simmer close to the surface, we may witness in the near future more outbreaks of communal fighting based on racial, religious, linguistic, tribal, or other cultural rivalries. But if such outbreaks can be postponed long enough for a true sense of national identity to develop, for people to be identified and judged as individuals and as members of a larger society instead of as members of a particular ethnic group, we can find a gradual reduction in intercommunal tensions and thus in civil and international strife.

As pointed out in Chapter 18, however, tribal warfare broke out in the former Soviet Union and in Yugoslavia as repression in these countries, particularly the former, was relaxed and rickety economies collapsed during the 1989–92 period. Similar conditions prevail throughout Central and Eastern Europe, Southeast Asia (including the islands), and the Middle East. All of these areas face similar ethnic explosions unless political, economic, and social democracy can be established to an acceptable degree before the pressures build up to explosive force. Otherwise, all of these regions will continue to be shatterbelts, and the Balkans may once again become "the tinderbox of Europe."

Perhaps the world's best current example of a plural society that has welded itself into a nation-state is Switzerland. With four major languages and two major religions, it could be a land of strife, but it is not. There are a number of reasons for this.

First, there is no correlation between language, religion, place of residence, and socioeconomic status. German- and French-speaking Catholics, for example, live in both cities and countryside, and are found at all socioeconomic levels. Thus, people identify with one another in a number of ways depending on the situation, but always as Swiss, clearly distinct from those across the borders who might share their language or religion.

Second, the peoples of Switzerland came together (usually voluntarily) over a long period of time, from 1291 to 1815, partly to protect themselves against more powerful countries surrounding them and partly to share the advantages of a central location in Europe. In order to preserve these advantages, and to avoid taking sides in outside conflicts that might prove internally divisive, Switzerland has since 1815 maintained a stance of permanent, armed neutrality.

Third, the country is not just a federation, but a confederation, in which the cantons retain a large measure of authority, both by exercising primary responsibility in certain areas and by executing many federal laws. Since religion and language often cut across cantonal lines, many cantons have to reach compromises in most political matters. Finally, Switzerland, more than any other country in the world, practices direct democracy, involving frequent use of the initiative and referendum (even permitting referenda on certain types of treaties), so the likelihood of any ethnic group imposing anything on any other is very small.*

We are not implying here that Switzerland is a model to be emulated by other plural societies. Switzerland is the product of unique circumstances and of 700 years of

*Although the Swiss are generally quite conservative, their system does have some flexibility. In 1975, the French-speaking population of predominantly German Berne canton won the right to secede from Berne, and in 1978 the new canton of Jura was admitted into the confederation.
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trial and error. Nevertheless, it is a living example of a country whose people live in harmony despite differences of language and religion. These differences can be tolerated in order to attain mutually beneficial objectives, not only here, but elsewhere as well.

Considering that the politics of religion and language touch the lives of most people in the world at some time or another, it is remarkable how little serious work had been done in this area by political geographers until recently. We could use many more studies, especially for areas outside Europe.