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and Governance**

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Ethno-Racial Divisions and Governance: The Problem of Institutional Reform and Adaptation

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Most states in the international system are polyethnic. The cleavages that divide these states are many, among the most prominent are race, religion, region, language, and values. In most of these cases, the cleavages are multiple and coinciding, creating deep divisions which render inter-communal accommodation and reconciliation difficult if not intractable. An ethno-cultural community constructs its collective consciousness and shared identity on putative commonalities in region, religion, race, language and/or values. While such claims may be fictive and imagined, they are the bedrock that confers belonging and serve as the means of mass mobilisation in quest of recognition, resources and influence in the state.

There are several variants of ethno-cultural or ethnic communities with some marked by the salience of a particular trait such as language creating thereby what be deemed an ethno-linguistic community as in Quebec and Sri Lanka.¹ Similarly, those that are marked mainly by religious cleavage may be called ethno-religious such as in Northern Ireland and Kashmir; by regional divide, called ethno-regional as in Spain and the Canadian West; by racial division called ethno-racial such as Fiji and Guyana.² To be sure, most multi-ethnic communities are carriers of multiple cleavages but often one may be dominant and defines the cultural character of the group. Generally, ethno-cultural communities in practically all polyethnic states tend to compose their claims to a distinctive identity by attributing to themselves in their narratives of origin not only cultural and historical differences but racial myths of superiority over rival groups. With rare exceptions, racial claims tend to be implicated in the construction of cultural identities. Some of these racial claims have tended to be quite explicit as in the old apartheid South Africa but in many others, the racial claims are less evident, intermixed with other factors, and frequently denied altogether.

The paper focuses on those states in the international system that are distinctive because they are constituted of ethno-racial communities. In these instances, racial myths are articulated into a mix of cultural, religious, linguistic and other differences and turned into a mode defining inter-group relations leading to ethno-racial differentiation, discrimination and oppression. Some obvious cases include South Africa, USA, Fiji, Malaysia, Guyana, Mauritius, Trinidad, Canada (indigenous peoples), etc where solidarity communities are categorised and ideologised in part by their culturally constructed racio-phenotypical traits. In this instance, racial categories are not accurately described or scientifically grounded but nevertheless perceived to be true becoming part of a social map that guides daily interaction. Racio-cultural pluralism in these states has bred oppressive regimes marked by racially discriminatory policies and practices that have triggered internal struggles often spilling their borders, destabilising international peace and security, and creating several costly and cruel humanitarian crises. Fiji stands as good examples of this pattern.

Apart from a number of obvious cases of states with plural ethno-racial communities, there are several others, where despite racial homogeneity in the population, racial differences are invented and assigned by the dominant class to subordinate and minority groups as a means of justifying

discrimination. Among these are Rwanda, Burundi, Northern Ireland, Bosnia, Sri Lanka, Haiti, etc. Racial myths can occur within the same putative racio-biological group as a means of justifying class oppression. In the Rwandan case, the idea that Hutus, Tutsis, and Twas were members of separate racial stocks was largely a colonial invention.³ In 1933, the Belgian colonial administrators introduced identity cards that pigeon holed everyone into categories of Hutu, Tutsi, and Twa. This classification suited Belgian colonial interests and preferences that elevated those that they called Tutsis and marginalised those that they saw as Hutus. An elaborate myth of this “racial” distinction that asserts that the Tutsis and of the “Hamitic” race and the Hutus and Twas of the “Bantu” became common currency with imaginary phenotypical, economic, and cultural traits invented and assigned to these groups. In Haiti, a similar racialisation and categorisation has occurred between the mulatto and black population.⁴ In Sri Lanka, Sinhalese mythology describes themselves as Aryans and the Tamil minority as Dravidian, a classification with strong racial connotations. The paper will allude to these cases.

In most states with ethno-cultural divisions, including the ethno-racial type, the crux of the political challenge pertains to the establishment of a generally acceptable, just, and democratic government that will accommodate the divergent claims of the respective communities for equality, equity and autonomy. Implicated are vexing issues related to the status and recognition of all communities equally, the removal of discrimination and domination, and the institution of policies regarding the equitable distribution of resources.

Over the past two decades, a variety of institutional forms and formulae have been advanced to design democratic governance in these deeply divided states.⁵ All of these proposals tend to be aimed at multi-ethnic states generally and not to ethno-racial cases in particular. Most of the problems thrown up by these divided states however tend to be similar in that the diacritica that describe their particularity, be it race, religion, or language, are held to be inherent and immutable. We shall look at the more important of these packaged formulations and prescriptions comparatively and critically suggesting what opportunities they offer and their limits. From extensive research for reforming the state, a number of findings have emerged rendering the state more sensitive to the interests of the ethnic and racial communities in promoting more democratic governance.

Recognition

Standing at the centre of these findings is "recognition" referring to the need for all communities in their rich cultural and religious diversity to be accorded juridical and social equality in a state that defines itself as multicultural. Clearly, this in part means that the state's symbols must not neglect or marginalise the presence and practices of other communities in the official ceremonies of the state, in the celebration of festivals and holidays, and the observance of religious events. Recognition of the intrinsic self-definition of a group is as important as and often a prerequisite for equality of access to material resources and political participation. The larger point however is shared membership which admits to a regime that legitimises the right to exist and exist equally and in dignity and security. Partial and qualified citizenship that abridges rights and obligations will likely undermine the system from the start. This in turn requires sensitivity to group rights in appropriate spheres.

Often, ethnically divided states and especially those marked by racial differences have inherited a hierarchical system of status and power from colonial practices privileging a particular group with political, economic, social, and cultural advantages that are embodied in institutions and daily practices. These are frequently the source of invidious internal strife and must be dismantled in the reform of the state. The aim of public policy is to redefine relations at all levels so as to institute an order of equal membership in the state. The equality factor is intimately tied to participation and

access to collective decision making in all aspects of state behaviour. Participation must not only be ritualised merely as a symbolic manifestation but be endowed with substantive political capability for efficacy and powersharing. Finally, the end product of any design for cross-communal conviviality must confer an intangible tenor of fairness in the manner in which life is conducted between state and solidarity communities. This must pervade the society like blood the body. Perceived fairness legitimises governance and may lead to inter-group comity, the mortar that sustains positive inter-group resolution of ongoing differences. Civil society must be recognised and encouraged serving as a critical tier of political organisation that promotes both liberty and accountability in governance. The foregoing cluster of ideas can be deemed a charter of commitment for co-existence serving as a set of mutual guarantees embedded in the very constitution of the state. When this is first agreed upon as founding principle, then the task of designing specific institutions and practices to achieve these ends in the peculiar circumstance of each multiethnic and multi-racial state can be undertaken.

a. Powersharing

With regard to institutions and practices of democratic governance, it is clear that new modes of collective decision-making departing from standard zero-sum, winner takes all, exclusionary parliamentary practices in Western democracies are required. Perhaps, the most crucial institutional design points to the need for powersharing in a consensus-oriented order. At all costs, systems that create permanent political minorities often the victims of discrimination and abuse, and with no investment in maintaining order, must be avoided. Nearly all the cases of failed efforts in democratic governance point to institutions and practices derived from competitive and adversarial majoritarian parliamentary politics. It has been estimated that of some 50 former British colonies that became independent, 34 adopted the Westminster majoritarian system. While two of these (Botswana and Mauritius) remain today, finding an appropriate formula for inter-communal inclusiveness and accommodation in democratic governance remains a main challenge. It is however clear that reform of the institutions of governance in deeply divided states including those marked by ethno-racial features needs to be crafted to produce consensus systems involving all communities in negotiated powersharing and in a stake in upholding the system.

Governance, to be legitimate and win widespread citizenship allegiance, must be inclusive in a system of sharing power at all levels of government including cabinet, parliament, the public bureaucracy, local and regional authorities etc. Apart from a coalition of communal elites, another way of powersharing can be conceived in terms of balance in the distribution of spheres of influence and control as in Fiji and Malaysia. "Balance" assumes asymmetrical areas of dominance and requires reciprocity. Such exchanges are, however, not agreed upon by sentiments of love for another community but are informed by self-interest. Each group needs the resources of the other group to survive and maintain its standard of living. "Balance", however, can only be a short-term solution for inter-sectional conflict and its sustenance tends to revolve around amicable relations among inter-sectional elites. The balancing act is bound to face assault sooner or later by chauvinistic outbidders who, at a moment of opportunity, may want to instigate nationalist adherents not to accept part of the pie but to seize all of it. This occurred in both Fiji and Malaysia. "Balance" then in such a situation would be displaced by "hegemony" and all the consequences this entails, or it can trigger civil strife that can destroy the society.

Another form of powersharing may be referred to as "alternating partisan regimes" under which rival parties alternate control of executive power in an agreed upon time schedule. Alternating partisan regimes may be classified into a pure and mixed types. Pure types are cases where a party that accedes to power governs during its tenure without sharing executive cabinet positions but conducts itself within the constitutional norms which protect human and minority rights. This occurred in Colombia in the 1950s. The mixed type such as were found in Lebanon and Cyprus describes a situation in which the executive power structure was shared so that the Presidency, vice-presidency, Speaker of the Parliament etc were posts held by representatives of different ethnic communities. To

this may be added, the sharing of civil services jobs and local council positions. All of this does not argue for powersharing in one form or the other. All of them share a contrived method of devolving power to different groups unlike what occurs in open competitive democratic systems. However, this may be the only way available to maintain a modicum of democracy and order simultaneously.

Powersharing and coalition systems underscore the idea that governance is about resolving collective problems peacefully through compromises and exchanges in which divergent interests are articulated and accommodated in the political institutions and practices of the state. This process is all the more critical in those societies that are deeply divided by race, religion and ethnicity. To nurture such a coalition demands unending vigil so as to avert offending collective ethnic sensitivities and smother challenges to peculiar group practices offensive to individual human rights. Somewhere, somehow it falls apart; there are too many probable ways that may erode cohesion and provoke rupture whether it comes from innocent differences of opinion, aggressive outbidders, misunderstanding, a sense of inequity, intra coalition factionalism etc. As such, ethno-racial and ethno-cultural diversity imposes special demands for tolerance in the reconciliation of rival claims and interests. Consensus making in democratic plural societies calls for perpetual inter-cultural sensitivity and moderate leaders capable of making compromises.

c. Electoral Systems

Often, in a coalition arrangement, powersharing is combined with a set of support institutions and practices such as a particular electoral system, decentralised regional autonomy, proportional distribution of employment opportunities and contracts, minority veto rights, etc. With regard to electoral systems, there has been a debate about the appropriate type of electoral system that best promotes inter-communal accommodation. Because of their capacity to exclude minorities and entrench majorities, there has been a universal rejection of plurality systems, which confer victory to the candidates with the highest number of votes in single seat constituencies. Some argue instead for proportional representation, which allows for minorities to gain representation setting the stage for coalition powersharing in a consociational order. Others advocate the alternative vote or vote pooling, adopted in Fiji in 1997, aimed at fostering inter-ethnic cooperation and coalition building. While each electoral system has the potential to create coalition arrangements, it may not guarantee inter-communal governance and powersharing, however. Hence, a number of other devices have been advocated to effect this end, namely: requiring ethnic or regional mixes in the holders of such strategic positions as the Head of State, Prime Ministers, Speakers of the Parliament; rotation of the presidency; extra seats for losers (Mauritius); entitlement to cabinet seats from a minimum percentage of votes garnered in the elections (South Africa and Fiji); reserved seats for minorities, etc. Generally, both systems have a mixed record of accomplishing their aims.

d. Decentralization and Autonomy

One of the common devices recommended as a means of managing claims and conflict between an ethno-political groups in a multi-ethnic state is autonomy. Often this refers to internal territorial self government either articulated in a federal arrangement or constitutionally entrenched into the organisation of a unitary state. There are other possible forms such as some sort of functional autonomy in which representation of corporate communal interests in national decision-making bodies may be envisaged. Or self-government may be extended beyond the territory of an ethnic community so that wherever members dwell in the state they may enjoy language, educational, and cultural rights. Regardless, the fundamental assumption is that the devolution of autonomous decision-making powers to an ethno-cultural or ethno-racial community creates, in the diffusion of authority, a separate space and confers recognition in self-governing pride. It may successfully serve to foster a culture and protect the identity of a people as well as their resources and environment.

Generally, decentralised autonomy to be credible or meaningful tends to be extensive in the devolution of both administrative and political powers. Decentralisation therefore does not refer to the mere shuffling of the pack but, in a more appropriate metaphor, results in the flattening of the pyramid of power. It is a zero-sum game in which the loss of power at the center is accompanied by gain at the regional level. Decentralization of this kind is rarely conceded peacefully and for this reason it is not frequently found among states.⁶ In nearly all cases, decentralization is undertaken with a view to localizing and legitimating national rule. However, balancing the demand by minorities for maximum internal autonomy with the insistence of the central government for unequivocal loyalty is frequently an issue that threads on a razor's edge. Issues of financial autonomy, like the quantum of devolved powers, are likely sources of ongoing center-regional tugs of war. The uneven endowment of natural resources and disparities in levels of economic development among regions as well as different industriousness and achievements of the different peoples in the multi-ethnic state tend to engender frequent inter-governmental disputes and resentments which can erupt into demands for exit. There are numerous other potentially tempestuous torrents that can break the bounds of reason and fatally buffet the devolution design including the right of residence by ethnic others within the territory of devolved community; exclusive ethnic preferences in allocating jobs, contracts, loans, subsidies, in other words, internal discrimination against minorities in the autonomous region; denial of individual rights in favor of group rights suitable for some persons and communities but not others, etc. In effect, there is endemic jurisdictional tension in the two trajectories in decentralization, one tending towards centrifugal ends and the other towards centripetal interests.

The autonomy strategy for managing ethnic difference and communal identity may not therefore be a simple proposition. Besides it tends to be costly and wasteful in setting up parallel political and administrative structures as well as harbouring and nurturing rival bases of power to the national government. It may conceal and protect inefficiency and corruption and local authoritarian practices under the rubric of a sacred decentralist ideology of self-determination. Ultimately, it survives or dies not on the architectural elegance or structural features of the center-regional organizational form but on trust that the region will not take the next inviting step to independence and the central authorities will not see every assertive act of internal autonomy as disloyalty requiring rapid and invasive intervention.

Decentralization has many exposed and vulnerable parts of sensitivity both of a symbolic and material nature. Territory is a sacred entity often embodied emotively as a "homeland" or "motherland" and which easily combusts into militancy under the slightest of imagined violation.⁷ For these reasons, some analysts do not regard devolution as a useful but a dangerous device for managing and accommodating ethnic diversity. They often prefer accommodation via a system of guaranteed constitutionally entrenched special rights; corporate representation in the national legislature; or constitutional group rights while preserving the unitary structure of the state. In part, these measures have the virtue at once of conferring recognition of group rights as well as decreasing the likelihood of isolating an ethnic community in an enclave in which separatist politics tend to fester. Territorial decentralization may militate against the growth of unifying bonds with other communities it is often argued but countered by the riposte that by protecting the identity of a community, such decentralization may enable a minority to evolve confidence and dignity enabling a healthier relationship with other groups.

Federalism is frequently offered as a recommended form of decentralization aimed at managing communal sectionalism. Its main advantage consists of defining a sphere of quasi-sovereign power for a region while sharing some parallel and overlapping functions with the center thereby sustaining cooperative links with the state. However, it has had a chequered career. It worked for periods of time in Nigeria (1962] and the Sudan (1972). In India and Spain it has fared much better although separatist movements in these states persist. It did not contain the acrimony between Czechs and Slovaks which entered a "velvet" divorce". In a few notable cases where federal structures have

been arbitrarily removed accompanied by recentralization (Sudan, 1983 and Eritrea, 1962], this has triggered civil war. Switzerland's application of a federal structure to accommodate sectional interests called "micro partition" by John McGarry and T. O'Leary seems to be unique in its success and of limited transfer value.⁸ Clearly, as Rodolfo Stavenhagen noted "federalism is no guarantee of ethnic harmony and accommodation in the absence of other factors".⁹ Among those factors are such items as powersharing, equality, non-discriminatory policies of the state, etc. Even with the most ideal support institutions, a federal system may still fail to contain the politics of intra-regional leadership outbidding that takes center-periphery relationship to the brink. Similarly, even where a loose confederal arrangement evolves such as in Quebec, this does not necessarily promote cooperative and constructive inter-governmental relations. The critical point is that territorial autonomy is not an unqualified panacea for accommodating ethnic diversity.

Doubtlessly, some sort of territorial and/or corporate devolution can assuage fears of external interference in the internal affairs of a community and may facilitate inter-ethnic harmony. Crawford Young argues that federalism in dispersing power, localises conflict in multiple sites so that it can then be more easily managed.¹⁰ Lijphart contends that territorial devolution should be combined with non-territorial devolution but devolution exercises are likely to succeed only if the ethnic communities are clustered into discrete regional areas in what he calls a "federal society".¹¹ Many Third World societies had evolved traditional ways of regulating and accommodating internal regional diversity well. So have diverse empires such as the millet system used by the Ottomans. It may be useful to re-examine these sources for insights. The decentralization strategy is not to be taken in isolation from other variables which define inter-ethnic diversity in a state. Clearly, decentralization needs to be combined with other support structures. It guarantees nothing by itself.

e. Resource Allocation and Cultural Symbolism

Resource allocation in ethnically and racially divided states often bedevils inter-group relations becoming a perennial problem in finding a formula for acceptable accommodation. Generally, it refers to claims over the distribution of material resources such as public jobs, state projects and subsidies, as well as more general issues regarding equality and distributive justice.¹² As often occurs in colonially restructured plural societies, such resources and economic sectors tend to be dominated by different ethnic segments. At the public level especially regarding public employment and contracts, the problem derives in some cases from zero-sum competitive majoritarian politics which confer most benefits and privileges to electoral winners in an invidious game of "winner-takes-all". Usually, especially in the Third World, the government is the largest employer. Government jobs are prized not only because they award stable salaries but because they bring much prestige to a communal group and personalized access to services. How these jobs are allocated has emerged as persistent problem in inter-ethnic relations in the polyethnic states. An examination of many ethno-political movements shows that among the compendium of

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