

Linguistic Hegemony and Minority Resistance*

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On the one hand, cultural differences in the contemporary world seem to vanish rapidly. This is effected through homogenizing processes of economic and political integration into nation-states and into the global system, as well as the globalization of culture brought about through modern means of mass communication. On the other hand, recent decades have seen the widespread resurgence of ethnic sentiments and the revitalization of local cultural identities. This apparent paradox is here seen as an inherent aspect of modernity. The processes of integration into nation-states puts strong pressures on minorities to assimilate. For this reason, many minority languages are threatened. The article compares the situation of several linguistic minorities, focusing on their relationship with the nation-states to which they are subjected, their strategies of resistance, and problems in challenging linguistic hegemony. Perhaps paradoxically, cultural minorities may have to assimilate culturally in important respects in order to present their case effectively and thereby retain their minority identity. A main conclusion emerging from the comparisons is that states need not be *nation*-states relying on nationalist ideologies proclaiming the virtues of absolute cultural homogeneity. Although they may be unspectacular, forms of linguistic oppression are forms of oppression no less, and they demand the attention of peace and conflict researchers.

'Can the . . . vision of a better world based upon sharing a multiplicity of little languages and appreciating a variety of little peoples be tested, confirmed, or revised and refined? Does it have a scientific rather than "merely" a humanistic or philosophical future? I think so . . .'

Joshua A. Fishman (1982, p. 10)

1. Introduction: On Linguistic Minorities in the Contemporary World

This article should be read as a synoptic study of domination and resistance, and an attempt to define conditions for the well-being of humans. The forms of oppression which will be considered are not usually of a physical and spectacular kind. On the contrary, they are often invisible to the casual observer, and they are sometimes not even articulated as forms of oppression. For this reason, the processes with which this article deals have hardly been investigated empirically as forms of systematic repression; instead they have been described

and analysed as processes of modernization or – more generally – as social change, as minority strategies, cultural homogenization, or cultural conflict. The present perspective departs from a conception of *power asymmetry*, where the nation-state is seen as the chief power-holder and its linguistic minorities as being formally powerless at the outset of a conflict. The success of linguistic minorities in retaining their language therefore frequently depends on their ability to mobilize super-national, or informal, sources of support. I shall argue that the standardization of languages and, in particular, the nation-state's insistence on a shared national language, constitutes a serious threat against the well-being of the inhabitants of many areas, who have more or less involuntarily become citizens of some nation-state.¹

The linguists may tell us that there are between 3,000 and 8,000 distinctive languages in the world, the exact number depending on the definition used (Trudgill, 1991). Only a tiny proportion of these languages are given official recognition by governments. Although most of the world's states are *de facto* plurilingual, very few states give equal rights to linguistic minorities. The members of these minorities are

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often forced to become bilingual in the dominant language, which frequently leads to the eventual loss of their vernacular. Both the presence of linguistic minorities and institutionalized bilingualism are regarded as problems by nationalist ideology. By extension, the members of these minorities are defined, virtually by default, as *problems* for the nation-state.

This article falls in three parts. First, the relationship between nationalism, the nation-state and linguistic minorities is presented in an abstract and general way, highlighting the *modern* character of conflicts between nation-state and minorities (see, however, Mannheim (1984) for an interesting 'pre-modern' comparison). A central topic here is the seemingly paradoxical situation in the modern world, whereby cultural differences seem to become simultaneously less important and more important. Several different examples of linguistic dominance and minority resistance are then compared, with the aim of showing variation and similarities in multilingual situations in the contemporary world. Finally, some general principles regarding the prospects for linguistic survival on the part of minorities are enumerated, and implications for further research are outlined. An essential underlying concern is a wish to suggest ways in which research which takes into account the wider social and cultural context of a given conflict can be of value in peace and conflict research.

1.1 *Languages, States and Ethnicities*

The conceptual cluster of nationalism, ethnicity and nation-state requires a distinguishing remark or two. Nationalism is a political doctrine which holds that the boundaries of the state should be coterminous with the boundaries of the cultural group (Gellner, 1983). Very few nation-states are nation-states proper, since most states contain minorities who do not define themselves as members of the group represented through state nationalism. Many nation-states try to assimilate these minorities and thus create cultural homogeneity; some do so through violent means, through the extermination or expulsion of minori-

ties. It is perhaps characteristic that a paradigmatic vision of a democratic society is the ancient Greek city-state. Just as one tends to forget the dark side of that society, including slavery and lack of women's rights, one tends to forget that the 'democratic' unity of a modern nation-state is nearly always parasitic on those whom it excludes from its unity – be they outsiders or insiders – or those who are compelled to join against their will.

In the Europe of the late nineteenth century, according to Worsley (1984, p. 260), there were two rivalling views on the relationship between state and nation. The Serbs represented one view. They argued that the nation's (or ethnic group's) quest for cultural self-determination could be satisfied even if the nation was divided between different states, or if several nations shared a state. The other view, represented by the Hungarian revolutionary Kossuth, was that each nation ought to have its own state. 'It was the latter conception which was to win out,' Worsley (1984) comments. The idea of a multicultural, multilingual state seems unnatural and impractical to contemporary nationalists, who seem unaware of the fact that their notions of unity between cultural group and state are a recent invention. Europeans laugh sadly at the 'artificial' African states, which may include forty or more linguistic communities. However, most European states *were* multilingual only a century ago, and, moreover, they indeed still *are* multilingual (the only nearly monolingual ones are Iceland and Portugal). The USA is *de facto* a highly multilingual country, despite a strong monolingual dominant ideology.

Ethnicity can be defined in many ways. Here, the term means the systematic and sustained reproduction of basic classificatory differences between groups, whose members thereby define themselves as being culturally distinctive from the members of other groups, which are defined in a similar way. Ethnicity is thus created and maintained through the ongoing reproduction of socially relevant *contrasts*. The minimal unit in ethnic relations is therefore not one ethnic group, but a *relationship between two*

groups. Ethnic groups nearly always have rules of marital endogamy which are practised with highly varying degrees of rigour. One could add further criteria, but that does not seem necessary here. In the present context, the main point about ethnicity is that collectivities of people who define themselves as culturally distinctive may see their identity as being threatened from the outside, and that they may react in different ways against such a perceived threat.

Nationalism and ethnicity may sometimes be interchangeable terms. Many collectivities which are officially defined as ethnic ones, regard themselves as nationalist movements. This distinction pertains to their relationship to the state. If a social or political movement aspires to create its own, culturally homogeneous or hegemonic state, then it is a nationalist movement. For example, in defining Biafran rebels as an ethnic movement, the Nigerian authorities indicated that they did not acknowledge nationalist tendencies in Biafra as legitimate; the only relevant national unit was here defined as Nigeria. There are also ethnic movements which cannot be described as nationalist ones. Urban minorities and indigenous populations tend not to be nationalists, in so far as they have no ambition of founding an independent nation-state (see Eriksen, 1991, for a fuller discussion).

The distinction between *nationalism* and the *nation-state* can be an important one. Several rivalling nationalisms may exist within one nation-state; usually, one of them is dominant and may refer to the others as 'ethnic', 'secessionist', 'regionalist' or even 'tribal' ideologies. The nation-state represents itself through nationalist ideology; that is, an ideology proclaiming the essential cultural unity of all its citizens. It is not difficult to understand, therefore, that serious conflicts may arise if many of the citizens do not regard themselves as being culturally represented in the state – in other words, that the dominant nationalism is not an ideology with which they identify.

Linguistic processes taking place in a society can be regarded as indicators of many other aspects of that society. When

languages die and give way to majority or dominant languages, this indicates that the groups inhabiting the area in question become culturally more like one another and, usually, more tightly integrated at the abstract level of the state. Linguistic unification, or homogenization, is thus an integral aspect of most nation-building projects. The transition towards such forms of integration may be a painful one for the minorities involved, and it need not succeed in every respect. The outcome of such 'acculturation' has frequently been the loss of tradition and cultural autonomy of groups whose members remain unable to measure up to the exigencies of modernity. When, on the contrary, minority languages survive despite external pressure to surrender, such stubborn survival is an indication of the continued social relevance of minority identity. Further, when minority languages or unofficial languages are neglected or systematically discriminated against by the state, there is every chance that the state may lose its legitimacy among the speakers of these languages.

A main purpose of the present discussion is to argue that a state need not have a national language, and that linguistic diversity should therefore be tolerated, if not encouraged. Such a focus does not imply that factors other than language should be considered unimportant in situations where cultural distinctiveness is confronted by the nation-state. In deciding on linguistic difference as the nexus of the conflicts to be considered, I have wanted to call attention to some of the less visible aspects of group domination in the nation-state and to the complex interplay of the organizational (political) and symbolic (meaningful) aspects of social identities such as ethnic and national ones.

1.2 *Questioning the Nation-state*

The loss of cultural universes or world-structures through the disappearance of minority languages can be regarded as a tragedy for mankind as a species; to those humans whose language is lost, considerable suffering and discrimination are frequently inflicted. Studies of *ethnocide*, in its literal

always filtered through a literate, reflexive consciousness postulating a unity of will and culture among an enormous number of people who will never meet. The difference between traditional society and *traditionalist* movements which seek their roots in traditional society is of great importance. The loss of innocence entailed by modernization is irreversible. Although their organizations often call for a return to pre-modern society, it is impossible for the members of minorities to undertake such a return. They are now increasingly literate wageworkers, and it is unrealistic for them to 'forget' their conversion to modernity. This loss of tradition, I shall argue, paradoxically presents a comparative advantage concerning linguistic survival. A related paradox is the fact that cultural *brokers*,² those individuals mastering both the code of the dominator and that of the dominated, are simultaneously the minority members farthest removed from the traditional culture and those best equipped to serve their interests.

As the value of *air* becomes evident only from the moment the air becomes polluted, so does the significance of belonging to 'a culture' – or a linguistic community – become an issue for reflection and political action only from the moment when the community seems threatened by extinction. Such a development could provide a partial explanation for the linguistic revival witnessed in many parts of the world since the 1960s.

Representatives of minority languages or ethnic minorities now perceive themselves as representing a distinctive 'culture', and are concerned to retain their distinctiveness. This self-conscious identity relies crucially on contact with, and a certain understanding of, that which it is distinctive *in contrast to* – which is usually the majority or dominant group. Ethnic identity is always defined through the cultural creation of contrasts *vis-a-vis* other identities. The 'original cultural forms' which ethnic movements seek to revive were not, therefore, necessarily *ethnic* identities. The traditional form of life of say, the Canadian Inuits (Eskimos), did not rely on the contrast provided by mainstream Canadian society. In a sense, it was

reproduced unwittingly. The traditional Inuits labelled themselves *Inuit*, which simply meant *the human beings*. Contemporary Inuits, on the contrary, define themselves as a *minority*. Their identity is meaningful in so far as it can be contrasted with other identities, which become relevant only within the framework of a nation-state. Since contacts between groups defining themselves as being culturally different increase in intensity and frequency with ongoing integrative processes of economic and political change (*viz.* capitalism and nation-building), it can therefore be argued that ethnicity, which was long regarded as parasitical on modernity, is an intrinsic part of modernity.

Ethnicity is sometimes regarded as a purely political kind of process whereby individuals seek to maximize power. Its symbolic, or meaningful, aspects should also be appreciated. For if the call for traditional culture represented by ethnic revivalists did not respond to some deeply felt need among their listeners, then ethnic movements would never have been successful. Ethnic identity does not rely on political carrots in order to be meaningful. To members of many minorities, ethnic revitalization can signify the end of a long history of discrimination and neglect, and an investment of pride and dignity into a formerly stigmatized cultural identity.

On the one hand, modernization reduces the scope of cultural differences worldwide. On the other hand, the emerging cultural self-consciousness (or reflexivity) brought about through modernization and incorporation into nation-states has led to the formation of self-consciously distinctive ethnicities which strongly stress their uniqueness. One may put it like this. While (say) one's grandparents lived as traditional Saami (Welsh, Kurd. . .) without giving it any thought, and one's parents took great pains to escape from a stigmatized ethnic minority position and to become assimilated and modern, ego does everything in his power to revive the customs and traditions which his grandparents followed without knowing it, and which his parents tried to forget.

One might also put it like this: Australian

aboriginals nowadays study anthropological monographs about their culture, in order to use the ethnographic material as evidence when presenting their case as that of an impoverished and oppressed minority to the Australian government. In looking at such cases of ethnic revival, we should avoid the pitfalls of distinguishing between 'authentic' and 'artificial' culture, which is sometimes implicitly suggested by students of these phenomena. Although it is important to understand the difference between tradition and *traditionalism*, the latter being a modern phenomenon, there is no valid reason to designate one as being more 'real' than the other. If we do so, we shall commit a typical nationalist error through romanticizing and glorifying the past. Moreover, if we unthinkingly praise the virtues of 'traditional Inuit life', for example in viewing it as a better form of life than the prospective futures of the Inuits, then we shall inadvertently demonstrate a lack of respect for the Inuits themselves. Our 'noble savages' may actually want some of the benefits offered by modernity, and we should be cautious to listen to their articulated demands, lest we take these indigenous peoples hostage to our own self-contempt (see Kapferer, 1988, for a similar point).

2. The Nationalist Quest for Linguistic Integration

2.1 Nationalist Ideology and Linguistic Unification

Writing on French linguistic unification since the Renaissance, Pierre Bourdieu remarks that before the 1789 revolution the merging of dialects and the introduction of standard forms was an integral part of the development of the monarchical state. There was hardly any linguistic legislation; the project of cultural unity associated with the nation-state had not yet begun. The dialects, which were 'sometimes endowed with some of the characteristics which one usually attributes to "languages" . . . were gradually being replaced . . . by the common language which was being elaborated in the cultivated milieux of Paris' (Bourdieu, 1982, p. 29, own translation).

After the Revolution, language planning *from above* took the place of gradual linguistic change. French was to be purged of local idioms because France was to become a nation proper. In the name of revolutionary equality, local languages related to standard French were systematically discriminated against. Says Bourdieu:

It would be naïve to attribute the policy of linguistic unification exclusively to the technical need of communication between the different parts of the territory. . . . The conflict between the French of the revolutionary intelligentsia and the local idioms or *patois* is a conflict over symbolic power whose end is the *formation* and *reformation* of mental structures (1982, p. 31, own translation).

What was later to become the standard French not only of France but also of her former colonies was, in other words, identified by the country's revolutionary leadership as the language of progress. Other idioms were reactionary, backward or primitive, *restricted codes* (see Bernstein, 1964); crude *parlers* or jargons which were deemed inadequate as means of advanced communication in a modern society. The French language, it should be noted, was also seen as a prerequisite for social mobility and equality.

Bourdieu's description of French language change illustrates general aspects of linguistic hegemony and power. In defining minority languages as deficient, the hegemonic (national) language justifies its exclusive use in education and other official contexts, and thus efficiently prevents non-fluent users from attaining power. Further, such a ranking of languages, when sanctioned in several sectors in society such as the school system, the mass media and the political system, also encourages a mass of inferiority complexes and the eventual abandonment of maternal languages among minorities. As a Mauritian friend, fluent only in the despised Kreol language, once told me: '*Kreol pa enn lang sa, enn parle quoi, selman enn patwa.*' (Kreol is not a language; it's a jargon, right; it's just a patois.) The creation and continuous confirmation of this form of self-contempt is possibly the most widespread form of linguistic domination.³ It is perhaps not surprising that we

have some of the best descriptions of this subtle oppression from authors writing in French (many of them, like Franz Fanon (1952), colonials – others, like Bourdieu and Michel Foucault (1966), French-born academics).⁴ Unlike English, French was in colonial times not only a language to be learnt by the French subjects of Africa, Asia and the Antilles; it was a language which ought to be *mastered*. An unspeakable amount of suffering and humiliation was – and is still – being inflicted by *colons* of every phenotypical shade, both within and outside France, against non-fluent speakers of the standard, 'educated' variant of the language.

While these forms of linguistic oppression may be painful and certainly reproduce injustice in the name of formal equality, any opposition against the use of dominant languages is inherently paradoxical. With no knowledge of these languages, one remains parochial and powerless, and will lack opportunities for social mobility along the lines defined by the dominators. I shall return to this contradiction in the final sections of the article.

2.2 The State and Linguistic Variation

Since the turbulent age of the French Revolution, Herder, Fichte and German romanticism, nationalisms have often linked up with languages proposed as the one and only authentic national language, organically connected with the 'will of the people'. Granted the modern nation-state, they have access to systems of monitoring and social control of a scope and efficiency which was inconceivable to the inventors of nationalism. In the case of France, the Republican nation-state existed prior to the linguistic community of Frenchmen. Up to the present, French nationalism has sought to eradicate linguistic variation through legal, educational and informal strategies – with a great measure of success, one might add, although such variation still exists. In the case of Germany, the idea of the Teutophone *Volk* existed prior to the unified German nation-state (which did not, and will not in the foreseeable future, encompass all of the German-speaking peoples, notwith-

standing the reunification of 1990). The German case, where the nation, or linguistic community, developed before the nation-state, is exceptional. In almost every other nation-state, linguistic homogeneity gradually emerges *after* the formation of the state. In most countries of the world, this remains an ongoing process. Some nationalists have actually *invented new languages*, albeit usually based on existing dialects. The purpose of such a radical move could be to promote social and cultural unity in an otherwise diverse population, which was at least partially the case with the 'national compromises' whereby a modified (and 'modernized') Swahili was introduced in Tanzania, a re-codified version of Hebrew in Israel, and Bahasa Indonesia (a language based on Malay) in Indonesia. 'New' or newly codified national languages could also, conversely, contribute to delineating the culture whose existence is postulated by nationalism. When, in the mid-19th century, some Norwegian nationalists created a literary language based on certain dialects, *Nynorsk* (New Norwegian), a main purpose was to create a distinctive Norwegian language with the same pretensions as Danish, which had hitherto been used. Danish, however, was closer to many spoken variants of Norwegian than *Nynorsk*, but it could not help the nationalists in their project of creating a distinctive Norwegian nation. The Irish case is comparable, although in some respects different. At independence, the Irish nation-state decided to promote Irish as a national language although it was understood only by a small minority of Irishmen; its legitimacy, apart from confirming, and mythologizing, the presumed ancientness of the Irish nation, consisted in its being distinctive from the language of the former imperial masters (Hindley, 1990).

The great importance of language in ethnic and nationalist movements all over the world – from Greenland to the Tokelau islands (see Hovdhaugen et al., 1989, for the latter) – testifies to a close link between language, politics and ethnic identity. This connection, often striking in ethnic symbolism and propaganda, should not be over-generalized. First, there are nationalisms (notably

in Africa and in South and Central America) which cannot propose an intrinsic relationship between the official language and the national *mythos* – the Argentine and Ivorian nations can for obvious reasons neither distinguish themselves from the Uruguayan and Senegalese nations, respectively, nor present their nationhood as an ancient community, through an emphasis on their national language. Their nationalisms can be effective as mobilizing ideologies no less. Second, there are many examples of ethnic groups which have retained important aspects of their cultural distinctiveness after losing their original language and adopting that of dominant linguistic groups. A good example could be the Indian diaspora populations in Guyana, Trinidad and Mauritius. These groups, the large majority of whom have switched from Bhojpuri to the local English or French lexicon creole, remain strongly committed to their Indian identities.

However, the converse – shared collective identity without shared language – apparently does not work. It is difficult to imagine a tightly knit community where no shared language forms a basis of mutual understanding. Such a shared language, it should be noted, does not have to be a mother tongue. (This is an important point to make since many nationalists regard bilingualism as ‘unnatural’.) Since nationalists conceive of the nation as such a tightly knit community (and for other reasons, some of them administrative), the tendency in nationalist ideology and practice is to try to eradicate linguistic differences. Sometimes this is done through cruel and authoritarian methods.

I now turn to a discussion of the techniques employed to this end, and the reactions such strategies are met with by members of non-hegemonic linguistic groups.

3. Linguistic Oppression and Resistance

The relative uniformity of the modern nation-state makes wide-ranging comparisons between nation-states possible. Nation-states have, among other features,

this in common: They have fixed boundaries (unlike the vague frontiers of former times), national, usually uniform educational systems, a national legislative system, a national military force and a domestic police force, national mass media, a state bureaucracy and national budget – and, in most cases, a national language. As regards their relationship with linguistic minorities, there are important differences between states. Conversely, there are relevant differences between linguistic minorities. An important distinction between kinds of linguistic minorities must be that of *differential integration into the nation-state* and other cultural and institutional vehicles of modernity. If we were to compare the Saami of Northern Scandinavia with say, Kurds in Turkey, Hindi speakers in Britain or Quechua speakers in Bolivia, therefore, such differences must form a basic dimension for comparison. I now turn to some such comparisons along these two axes. Differential integration into the nation-state forms one axis; differential legislation and state practice concerning linguistic minority issues forms the other. After these presentations of empirical cases, I shall try to make some general, policy oriented as well as research oriented conclusions about the relationship between linguistic minorities and the nation-state.

3.1 Indigenous Peoples

A minority can be defined as

... a group numerically inferior to the rest of the population of a state, in a non-dominant position, whose members – being nationals of the state – possess ethnic, religious or linguistic characteristics differing from those of the rest of the population and show, if only implicitly, a sense of solidarity directed towards preserving their culture, tradition, religion or language (Minority Rights Group, 1990, p. xiv).

While this definition is not entirely satisfactory – numerical majorities can in fact be minorities as regards access to power (Allardt, 1984; Skutnabb-Kangas, 1990) – it is sufficiently clear for our purpose. It is more difficult to define *indigenous*, or aboriginal, populations. Some have suggested that the term indigenous peoples should be

applied to the 'first-comers' to an area. This is clearly insufficient, since, for example, Germans and Russians, who were first-comers in many areas (provided we exclude the populations whom they replaced in the misty past), cannot be regarded as indigenous peoples. I therefore propose to use a definition adding some further criteria, based on family resemblances, not on 'essences': Indigenous peoples are non-immigrant minorities associated with a non-industrial mode of production, usually hunting-gathering, pastoralism or horticulture, whose languages were not widely used in writing until less than a generation ago – if at all.⁵ The fact that these peoples are associated with a non-industrial mode of production does not necessarily imply that most, or all, of their members take part in this. The main point is that indigenous peoples are *non-state* people. I shall now compare two indigenous peoples, which have very different kinds of relationships with their respective nation-states.

3.1.1 *The Greenlandic Inuit*

The total number of Inuits (Eskimos) is approximately 100,000; they have citizenship mainly in three states; Canada (25,000), the USA (Alaska, 30,000) and Denmark (Greenland, 42,000).⁶ The language of different Inuit groups varies almost to the extent of being mutually unintelligible in extreme cases, but there are no sharp linguistic boundaries. I shall concentrate on the Greenlandic Inuit, the most successful Inuit group in terms of ethnopolitics (Gray, 1989).

Although their language has absorbed many Danish loan-words (the island has been a Danish colony for centuries), the Greenlandic language seems in no respect to be threatened at present. Only a generation ago, however, Greenlandic seemed doomed. The case of the Greenlandic Inuits is in some ways typical of the ethnic revitalization of the second half of the 20th century, and it is also a good, if much less typical, example of an indigenous language which has successfully been revived after a dramatic decline.

Greenlandic was acknowledged and

encouraged by the Danish colonial administration until 1950;⁷ the first printing press for printing books in Greenlandic arrived in 1856 (Berthelsen, 1990). Most Greenlanders were nevertheless functionally illiterate in this period. From 1950 until 1978, Danish gradually became the dominant language, notably as a medium of instruction in schools. This Berthelsen writes (1990, p. 335), was actually a Danish response to a wish among Greenlanders 'to make Greenland Danish-speaking in the long run'. The brokers of the Greenlandic community, that is their formal leaders, saw no future for Greenlandic. Exaggerating somewhat, one may describe them as Danish nationalists negotiating for individual equality with the metropolitan Danes.

As a part of the new trend in international ethnopolitics gaining momentum in the early 1970s, a new group of spokesmen began to make demands on behalf of the Greenlandic language. Since then, and particularly since the institution of Home Rule in 1978, Greenlandic has gradually begun to replace Danish in schools, media and bureaucracy. The case is untypical in some ways, but in others it is typical: One's grandparents (before 1950) unquestioningly adhered to the Greenlandic language; one's parents (1950–70) wanted to become modern and to assimilate; ego (since 1970), already assimilated, wants to revive the half-forgotten traditions of the grandparents.

Causes for the success of Greenlandic are obvious: First, the colonial power was relatively benevolent and permitted the use of the minority language in most sectors. Second, the Inuit had a well-defined, isolated territory. Third, the Inuit have for decades been represented politically in the state, and have since 1978 been politically autonomous. Fourth, the Inuit have successfully drawn upon international law and the support of supra-national organizations such as the WCIP (World Council of Indigenous Peoples), which can sometimes overrule the nation-state. Fifth, the Greenlandic language community was large and occupationally relatively diverse (it contained, among other things, professional brokers, that is to say politicians), and sixth, the language was

preserved and used as script before it began to decline due to the pressures from modernization. It could therefore easily be revitalized.

3.1.2 *The Dyirbal*

Very different, and unfortunately more representative of the language situation of indigenous peoples, is the case of the Dyirbal of northeastern Queensland, Australia. The imminent death of the Dyirbal language has been researched by Annette Schmidt (1985). In presenting the case, I shall highlight the differences vis-a-vis the Greenlandic one.

Unlike the Greenlanders, the distinctiveness of Australian aboriginal culture was never respected by the white colonizers. Groups were slaughtered or forcibly transported to alien areas; their languages were usually recorded only by anthropologists for research purposes, not by missionaries and government agents. A newspaper article from 1874 brings out the typical view of the colonizers: 'When savages are pitted against civilization, they must go to the wall: it is the fate of their race' (Schmidt, 1985, p. 11).

Before 1860, an estimated 3,000 individuals, covering an area of 8,000 square kilometres, spoke a variant of Dyirbal. Today, the language is confined to isolated pockets. The community studies by Schmidt had a population of about 100, 'and is the last area where Dyirbal is spoken in a sizeable community'. Signs of language contraction and imminent death are evident, as the young speak an imperfect Dyirbal heavily mixed with an imperfect English.

Important factors distinguishing the Dyirbal case from that of the Greenlanders are: The absence of a script; compulsory education in the dominant language; no mass media in the vernacular; small numbers; enforced interaction with monoglot English speakers; no political organization able to negotiate with the authorities; lack of the resources required to link up with international law and supra-national organizations such as the WCIP. The language is heavily stigmatized even by its own speakers and will, like many indigenous languages in a similar situation, soon die.

Greenlanders are no less culturally assimilated or 'modernized' than the Dyirbal. They, too, have radically modified important aspects of their traditional culture, and their policy of revitalization is comparable to modern nationalist ideologies and policies in other parts of the world. Languages which can be represented in formal political bodies stand a much better chance of survival than others; if they can also actually be used in local administration, the chances for survival are enhanced further. This is an aspect of the paradox of modern ethnicity described earlier: *Those groups whose members have most successfully adapted to the dominant culture stand the best chance of long-term survival as cultural groups.* Total isolation is no option in the contemporary world.

3.2 *Urban Minorities*

The situation of recent immigrants is different from that of indigenous peoples in several ways: They cannot lay claims to a territory; they are from the outset, through the act of migrating, committed to participation in modern society; and they are frequently non-citizens in their country of residence. I shall contrast two such categories; the French-lexicon creole speakers of the United Kingdom and the Spanish speakers of the United States.

3.2.1 *French-lexicon Creole Speakers in the UK*

French-lexicon creole languages, which are only partly mutually intelligible, are spoken in former French plantation colonies (and present overseas territories), mostly in the Indian Ocean and the Caribbean. The Seychelles is the only nation-state where a French creole is officialized (together with French and English), and the various creoles exist in diglossic or triglossic relationships, with French and/or English, in all of the societies where they are spoken.

The largest communities of French creole speakers in Great Britain come from Dominica and St Lucia in the eastern Caribbean, where the creole vernaculars, latterly known as *Kwéyòl* (Nwenmely, 1991), are diglossic with English.⁸ The Dominican and

St Lucian creole speakers, who speak closely related creoles, are identified by Britons simply as West Indians. In this way, they form a small minority within a small minority, the dominant segment of which is of Jamaican origin and speaks an English creole. There may be some 20,000 Kwéyòl speakers altogether in Britain, many of whom are non-fluent in their mother tongue (which may literally be their *mother's* tongue only to them). Until very recently, Kwéyòl was only relevant in informal conversation: the language of schools, media and public life was always English. In addition, many second-generation immigrants have tended to define themselves 'primarily as part of a larger British Black grouping and British Black English rather than Kwéyòl as the language of wider currency' (Nwenmely, 1991, p. 62). An unprestigious language even in its original context, one would expect Kwéyòl to die out soon – like Dyrbal and other stigmatized minority languages.

It probably would have died out had there not been taken conscious measures to revitalize it during the 1970s and 1980s. Concerned Kwéyòl speakers, particularly in London, have invested a great amount of work into the task of preserving the language, which is now being used in theatre, popular music, newsletters, poetry and, since the mid-1980s, in some educational contexts – indeed, it is even taught as a foreign language to second-generation immigrants who grew up speaking English.

Some general points can be made here. First, the Kwéyòl example illustrates the point made about the Inuit that a high degree of integration into the institutions of the nation-state seems a prerogative for the preservation of a minority language. Only after attaining a high level of education did it become possible for certain Kwéyòl speakers to promote their language systematically. Second, the Kwéyòl speakers resist cultural assimilation more efficiently than the Dyrbal, despite their small numbers and lack of a territory. This is also due to their higher degree of integration in the nation-state; they are literate and formally organized. Third, it is clear that the Kwéyòl

revitalization is in part a resistance strategy directed against stigmatization and discrimination from within British society. Perhaps they would have preferred to assimilate completely if that were possible; however, their looks (they are black) set them apart within the British system of ethnic classification. Fourth, the Kwéyòl movement, expressing the virtues of an unprestigious and marginal language, indicates that linguistic identity, codified as 'cultural roots', is important as a countervailing force against the flux and transience of the modern world. Fifth, the success of an urban minority language such as Kwéyòl relies on proficiency in the majority language among their speakers. Since virtually no conventional career opportunities would be open to a monolingual speaker of Kwéyòl, it is taken for granted by Kwéyòl speakers themselves that everybody should learn English properly. As Nwenmely (1991, p. 67) puts it, citing a Kwéyòl proverb: '*Sé pou'w mantjé néyé pou ou apwann najé*' (In order to learn to swim, you must survive drowning).

The size of a minority can be a crucial factor as regards the degree of generality of the latter contention. This dimension will be pursued further in the next example.

3.2.2 Spanish Speakers in the USA

At the time of the 1980 census, 11.1 million US citizens, or nearly 5% of that country's population (excluding Puerto Rico), stated that they spoke Spanish at home. The majority stated that they were bilingual in English, but this figure is probably too high. Besides, the number of Spanish-speakers has grown considerably throughout the 1980s. Spanish-speakers are clustered in certain areas, notably in New York, Florida, Texas and California.

Resentment against linguistic diversity has always been strong in the USA, and virtually all earlier immigrant groups lost their language within two generations (Garcia et al., 1985, p. 343). This shift seems not to come about in the case of the Spanish-speakers, despite strong pressure from the government. I shall make a few points concerning the prospects for linguistic survival

in the Spanish-speaking community in the United States: First, there are now cities (such as Miami) and parts of cities (such as Spanish Harlem in New York) where the majority of the population are native speakers of Spanish. The 'Hispanics' are in this regard in a situation more comparable to the Greenlandic Inuits than to the speakers of Kwéyòl in Britain; although they are a minority in the nation-state, there are areas where they are a majority. Second, linguistic plurality is widely regarded as a serious problem – as something which should be tracked down, cornered and exterminated – in the United States (see Fishman, 1989; Wardhaugh, 1987, pp. 249–51). However, several states in the USA have found it necessary to introduce some public services codified in a different language from English, usually Spanish. This has met with resistance from monoglot English-speakers. During the 1980s, funds for education in languages other than English were reduced, despite the fact that these programmes were probably intended to remove foreign languages in the long run through their emphasis on teaching English (Wardhaugh, 1987, p. 251). Unlike the Greenlanders, whose language was encouraged by the hegemon, and unlike the Kwéyòl-speakers, who were treated with benevolent indifference – but like the Dyirbal, whose language and culture were treated in an authoritarian way aiming at the total eradication of the minority as a distinctive group, the Spanish-speakers in the United States are confronted with a by-and-large hostile environment where the incentives for linguistic assimilation are strong. If education and mass media are to be in English, the long-term prospects for Spanish seem bleak.

In this context, it would seem that a condition for the preservation of Spanish in the United States could be linguistic segregation; in other words, that the Spanish-speaking community should create autonomous bodies aimed at their linguistic survival. This is in many respects possible with this large minority, which is in many ways less vulnerable than smaller ones, and which has the additional advantage, if we compare

with former immigrant groups to the USA, of modern means of communication. At present, the Spanish-speakers of the USA have a large number of newspapers and journals, TV and radio stations, community centres, control of local government in core areas, and some access (although decreasing) to publicly funded primary education in Spanish. If the community becomes sufficiently wealthy and diversified, then a speaker of Spanish in the USA may have the same career opportunities as an Anglophone, without knowing a word of English! In this sense, increased integration into the institutions of the nation-state (in this case, the economy) would serve the community well (see Garcia et al., 1985, p. 356), but these institutions would not necessarily be connected with the state as such: they would be parallel, autonomous institutions. If such a cultural segregation was to come about, then the USA would actually be a multi-national state (see 4 below) and not a nation-state. At the moment, however, the pressure from the majority demanding the swift integration of the minority is very strong. One of my general assumptions as regards the linguistic survival of minorities thus holds true in this case as well: The minority must master the cultural code of the majority *as well as its own* in order to retain its identity. In this case, however, the cultural difference between majority and minority is clearly less than in the case of many indigenous peoples, and the switching of codes required in a bicultural environment need not be as difficult. The example of the Spanish-speaking minority in the USA has further suggested that a sufficiently large minority can, at least in theory, learn this code through its own educational and professional system, without relying on an unreliable state. If this option is available, which it is to the Inuit and the Hispanics but not to the Dyirbal and the Kwéyòlophones, then linguistic survival can be complete. If successful, Hispanics need not suffer the discrimination implied by a diglossic situation, since most of them will be able to remain in a monolingual environment most of the time. Such a situation, where a minority language becomes

codified and used for all sorts of writings (I am aware that Spanish has been a literary language for some time; West Greenlandic, however, has not), will also lead to an increase in the overall prestige of the language.

3.3 *Proto-nations*

I now turn to a discussion of a different kind of majority/minority relationship. This section deals with 'proto-nations', that is, minorities which may wish to form their own nation-state or at least a politically autonomous region. Notwithstanding the power asymmetries, these contexts are marked by competition over linguistic (and political) hegemony. Nowhere is the hegemonic position of the nation-state more apparent, and perhaps nowhere is it more evident that nation-states abhor cultural variation, than in their endeavour to mute the linguistic distinctiveness of proto-nations residing within their territory.

3.3.1 *The Bretons*

Brittany, in union with France since 1532, has gone through a radical Gallification, particularly after the French Revolution and its identification of the French language with its ideological cause. The Breton language, unrelated to French, is a Celtic language. It is related to Welsh and Gaelic, which are also threatened minority languages on the outskirts of Europe (see, for example, Dorian, 1981; Hindley, 1990). The Breton identity remains strong in Brittany, despite – or perhaps in reaction to – centuries of political domination from Paris.

The post-revolutionary Republican state legislated harshly against the public use of Breton. 'The Breton language was to be destroyed and teachers were instructed "to kill the Breton language"' (Wardhaugh, 1987, p. 108). Nevertheless, Brittany's geographic isolation, its relative economic independence and the presence of a Breton-speaking educated class contributed to preserving Breton intact and undiluted until the end of the 19th century. This is an important point. While the mastery of dominant cultural codes was regarded as a prerequisite for linguistic survival among the other minori-

ties I have discussed, the opposite seems to be the case here. Unlike the Inuit or Hispanic Americans, the Bretons have for centuries been an integral – if peripheral – part of greater 'national' society. The intensification of French linguistic imperialism during the 20th century could therefore be much more efficient than in other places; the French had already set up their governmental institutions in the area, and the infrastructural facilities precluded isolation. The Bretons were easy prey, particularly since the linguistic Gallification took place largely before the global trend of ethnic revitalization among minorities. The fact that leading Breton nationalists collaborated with the Germans during World War II (McDonald, 1989, pp. 123 ff.) weakened their case further.

The increasing integration into greater French society has been the most important factor when we try to account for the dramatic decline of Breton during the 20th century. The massive onslaught of French-language mass media, the increasing social and geographic mobility requiring fluency in French, the continued use of French in government matters, and a rigid educational system of growing compass have been main factors. In contemporary France, the individual has far more contact with the macro level of society than she would have formerly, and the Breton case is in this respect a clear exemplification of the fact of cultural homogenization in the age of the nation-state. Whereas some 1.3 million, or 90% of the population of Lower Brittany, spoke Breton at the turn of the century, only 25% reported that they did in 1972. Today, states Wardhaugh (1987, p. 110), the language is little used. French is depicted (by the French) as the national, urban language of progress, sharply contrasted with Breton as the regional, rural language of the past (Kuter, 1989, p. 76). So, it might seem, the case would be closed for Breton.

However, as already mentioned, doomed languages are often revived in the nick of time. Kuter (1989) refers to studies indicating that young Bretons have a positive view on learning Breton, linking it with their cul-

tural identity as something distinctive from French. Many young people, raised as French-speakers, now learn Breton as a foreign language at evening classes. Some radio and TV programmes are also produced in Breton. The weakness of the language, competing as it is with a prestigious international language, nevertheless renders it extremely vulnerable. The intolerant and sometimes brutal policies of the dominant group, which has consistently rejected attempts at introducing administrative languages other than French, has hitherto functioned efficiently in muting linguistic minorities such as the Bretons. Terrorist bombings by Breton nationalists in the 1970s were met with little enthusiasm from the population, although most of them would probably prefer a greater degree of political and cultural autonomy. Since the survival of their language cannot be achieved through the nation-state, and since full independence is unrealistic, many Bretons now look towards Brussels for support. The federalist model of the European Community could be a main factor in the future survival of Breton. In reducing the importance of the nation-state, and increasing regional autonomy, federalism – which is an interesting alternative to nationalism in general – could save Breton from rapid extermination.

3.3.2 *The Kurds in Turkey*

The Kurdish people, totalling some 20 million individuals, are frequently mentioned as a typical 'proto-nation'; an ethnic group possessing all of the characteristics of a nation except their own state. The majority of the Kurds live in Turkey, Iraq, Iran and Syria, with the Turkish group forming half of the total community. This concerns Kurds in Turkey.

Kurdish–Turkish relations are in some regards similar to Breton–French relations. Like the Bretons, the Kurds have inhabited the same territory for very long. They enjoyed periods of de facto autonomy under the Ottoman Empire, but attempts at forming a Kurdish state failed. When, after the dissolution of the empire, the radical nationalist Kemal Atatürk seized power in Turkey, the Kurds (like the Bretons after

the French revolution) expected their condition to improve under the new 'progressive' regime. Like the Bretons, their experience with the nationalism of others was disastrous. Atatürk initiated, from the 1920s, a vigorous campaign – lasting up to the present – of systematic repression. 'Kurdish associations, schools, publications, religious fraternities and teaching foundations were all banned, thus removing all public vestiges of a separate Kurdish identity' (Minority Rights Group, 1990). In Atatürk's view, the Kurdish language (which is linguistically unrelated to Turkish) was a *Turkish dialect*! Despite occasional uprisings, many of them violent and explicitly nationalist, the Kurdish case in Turkey remains an unresolved problem – for the Kurds as well as for the Turkish nation-state. Only one political party has recognized the Kurds, and it was banned in 1969 for doing so. The Kurds officially did not exist until 1991; they were officially labelled 'mountain Turks'. The use of Kurdish language was illegal; in this respect, the Turkish state has gone even further than the French one in terms of repression. It is too early to state whether recent changes in Turkish policy (1991), which to some extent recognize the existence of the Kurds, will have profound practical consequences.

There are also some relevant differences between the Kurds and the Bretons. First, the Kurdish language community is much larger than the Breton one, and by virtue of size alone it will survive for the foreseeable future. The division of labour among the Kurds is less complex, and the community as a whole is less integrated into national society than the Breton community. As regards language, this situation, along with government repression, implies the continued existence of a plethora of dialects, paucity of Kurdish writings (although many are now published by exiles), the lack of a common script,⁹ and continued monolingualism among many Kurds. Although there are by now many highly educated Kurds and thousands of refugees or 'foreign workers' in western Europe, the organizational infrastructure required for the Kurdish cause to be politically effective

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within the Turkish nation-state is absent. Factionalism and lack of internal formal political organization are typical problems (Bruinessen, 1989).

There seem to be three options available for the Kurds in Turkey. They may opt to assimilate and become Turks; they may continue to fight for a nation-state of their own; or they may try to persuade the Turkish state to grant them political and cultural self-determination in their region. If this last option is chosen, radical social change in Turkish Kurdistan will probably be necessary; in other words, the Kurds must become more strongly integrated into the institutions of modernity – in matters of education, division of labour and political organization. Thus, the paradox mentioned several times is repeated: In order to achieve the right to be different from their antagonists, the Kurds must first become more similar to them.

4. Language Policies in 'Plural Societies'

An underlying premise for the preceding discussion has been that nation-states are, as a rule, culturally plural, and that this plurality is neglected or actively suppressed and undermined by the state. I have indicated some common forms of linguistic oppression – from denying the officialization of minority languages to the downright banning of their use. I have also discussed strategies of linguistic resistance, ranging from the formation of informal clubs and 'cultural groups' to political secessionism. The causes of the oppression lie with the nation-state and its ideology, insofar as it denies culturally deviant citizens the right to be different and claims a functional need on the part of the state for cultural homogeneity. While most linguistic minorities do not advocate secession – it is usually unrealistic, and it tends to create new minority problems – it should be stressed that states need not be nation-states, and that the implementation of this insight into the official practices of states may alleviate tensions. I have also argued against the assumption, widespread among speakers of dominant languages, that bilingualism is 'unnatural' and entails

inadequate knowledge of both languages involved. I shall now briefly describe the linguistic policies of two states whose governments are aware that their countries are de facto multicultural.

4.1 Kenya

Kenya, independent from Britain since 1963, contains some 40 distinctive linguistic groups, some of which are closely related. No group forms an absolute majority, and no ethnic language has ever been proposed as a national language. Independent Kenya has witnessed a process of growing trilingualism in its population: First, one speaks one's mother tongue; then, one learns English and Swahili, which are both officialized as national languages (Swahili since 1974). Primary instruction in schools is carried out in English and Swahili, and both languages are in use up to the university level. The government has found, it would seem, a compromise unifying an otherwise diverse population. However, there is a constant tension between the two languages (Haries, 1976). Swahili is recognized as an African alternative to the imperialist language; English is recognized as the international, and also the pan-African language (speakers of French, Arabic and Portuguese are conveniently left out in this rhetoric). Up to the present, it should be stressed, the two national languages have co-existed in uneasy compromise, *without extinguishing a single minority language*. In Africa, as in many other parts of the world, it is not at all seen as unnatural that one should be able to communicate in two or three different languages.

4.2 Mauritius

The linguistic case of Mauritius is in some ways similar to the Kenyan one (see Eriksen, 1990b). Upon Independence in 1968, the new leaders of this Indian Ocean state decided that English should be the official language. Although most Mauritians were – and are – unable to express themselves well in English, there has been little controversy over this choice. Since none of the several ethnic groups inhabiting Mauritius claim English as their mother tongue, the lan-

guage seemed a good (and useful) compromise. The newspapers and radio broadcasts continue to be predominantly in French, which is the second language of most Mauritians.

Unlike Kenya, Mauritius had no pre-colonial history. The inhabitants of the island initially spoke the languages of their places of origin; today, after 280 years of continuous human settlement, a growing majority speak *Kreol*, a French-lexicon creole (which is very different from *Kwéyòl*), as their mother-tongue. *Kreol* remains a despised language, and is regarded as unsuitable for sophisticated communication. When the radical nationalist MMM (*Mouvement Militant Mauricien*) government tried to introduce *Kreol* as a national language after winning general elections in 1982, it was met with massive protest, and the proposal had to be withdrawn (Bowman, 1991). Like Kenyans, the majority of Mauritians are more or less trilingual: virtually all speak *Kreol*; most understand and speak French; many understand English. A significant number of Mauritians of Indian descent also speak Bhojpuri (which is closely related to Hindi) fluently; many Sino-Mauritians speak Hakka. In addition, several ancestral languages are carefully guarded by their proponents; as in the case of Breton, many young Mauritians of Indian origin learn Hindi, Tamil or Arabic as foreign languages. The main difference if we compare with the Breton situation, is that instruction in minority languages is supported by the government. In Mauritius, it is *legitimate* to belong to a minority, although it is also taken for granted that all citizens must master the common denominators required for society to function efficiently (Eriksen, 1990a), including a shared linguistic code (which is in fact usually the despised *Kreol* language).

4.3 Problems in Challenging the Hegemony

The feeling of self-contempt inflicted on the non-hegemonic by those who represent linguistic hegemony is evident in Kenya as well as in Mauritius – as, indeed, in most countries. Mauritians speak *Kreol malgré eux*, and most of them speak French imper-

fectly. Further, there have so far been few attempts at creating a literature in Kenyan languages (Swahili is not a pan-Kenyan language proper). In both countries, only the colonial languages are used in bureaucracy and formal communication. Let us therefore consider the following problem.

Since changing his name from John Ngugi to Ngugi wa Thiong'o ('the son of Thiong'o' in Gikuyu) in the mid-1970s, this Kenyan author has written most of his work in Gikuyu (the language of the Kikuyus, spoken by roughly 12% of all Kenyans). For this reason, Ngugi, who had been instrumental in setting up a Department of Linguistics and African Languages as a partial replacement for the former Department of English in Nairobi (see Ngugi, 1972), was accused by his academic colleagues of Kikuyu chauvinism (Ngugi, 1981, pp. xxii–xxiii). Throughout the 1970s and early 1980s, Ngugi engaged in a lively, pan-African debate (which was, incidentally, held in English, thus excluding Francophone and Lusophone Africans, among others) about the advantages and disadvantages of African languages in literary and social criticism. Rejecting English as the language of the imperialists, Ngugi argued that African authors had a responsibility to write in their vernacular. In their replies, several South African writers retorted that an important aspect of *apartheid* policies consisted in the encouragement of vernacular African languages in education and mass media. This was in fact an efficient method of debarring blacks from social mobility and communication with the outside world. Therefore, the South Africans argued, one should write in English despite its being, historically, an imperialist language. Besides being the language of the imperialists, it was also the language of power. With no knowledge of English, therefore, one would be powerless.

This predicament can be phrased in a more general way. If social desiderata are denied speakers of particular languages, they may develop contempt for their own vernacular and eventually discard it. In a study of the coastal Saami of northern Norway, Eidheim (1971) noted that the stigmatized, bilingual Saami tended to use the ver-

vernacular only in private contexts. The language deemed appropriate for 'frontstage' contexts was always Norwegian, which was the language of the state bureaucracy, the educational system and the mass media. Unless one was willing to use Norwegian extensively, it would be impossible to get a job, a spouse or a new acquaintance outside of the few Saami speaking communities in Finnmark county. Few 'prizes' were associated with the Saami language. A similar point is made by Watson (1989), who takes as an indication of the inherent weakness of the Scottish and Irish Gaelic-speaking communities the fact that 'some individuals within the community itself frequently dissociate themselves from the language, behaving as if they were virtually monoglot English speakers' (Watson, 1989, p. 42). So while some minorities are discouraged from using their vernacular, others (notably in South Africa) are *forced* to use their vernacular. Neither option seems attractive. In this sense, the world's linguistic minorities are trapped between the reservation and cultural genocide, provided their governments and civil societies do not encourage bi- or multilingualism.

The oppressive aspects of nation-building, described with reference to French linguistic unification in 2.2, can be recognized here. There can be no easy solution to the dilemma. It would be too facile to try to persuade the 'natives' concerned to use their vernaculars 'for their own good'.¹⁰ South African children were unable to choose – they *had to* remain speakers of African languages only, with no access to the dominant code. Insofar as opportunity is linked with the dominant language, revival of minority languages or the replacement of a hegemonic language with a 'national' one presupposes fluency in the dominant language. The mechanism is familiar: while the powerful need not worry about their linguistic ineptness, the powerless must always learn the codes of the powerful *in addition to* their own code, which they cannot afford to lose lest they be totally assimilated and lose their distinctive identity. Most of the examples described in this article indicate three phases in the development of minority lan-

guages: Autonomy and widespread use; threat with extinction due to pressure from a national or imperial language; attempts at revitalization following modernization and the rise of cultural self-consciousness. The solution to the dilemmas which have been outlined here must entail the encouragement of bi- or plurilingualism *and* official equity between different languages.

5. Some Implications

I shall not bore the reader with a systematic comparison between the foregoing examples. Some general comparative points have already been made and they shall merely be summed up here.

- First, aspects of personal identity expressed through language can be extremely important for the well-being of individuals. Linguistic rights should be seen as elementary human rights.
- Second, the nationalist doctrine of unity between culture and state is always harmful to linguistic minorities.
- Third, the idea that a multilingual society is an unhealthy or impractical society is mistaken. A *lingua franca* may be necessary, but it need not replace other languages.
- Fourth, the psychological pain, inferiority complexes and difficulties of social mobility inflicted on individuals by linguistic hegemony can be alleviated only if minority groups assert their own language as fully-fledged alternatives to the hegemonic language.
- Fifth, linguistic minorities stand a better chance of survival if they codify their language in an alphabet,¹¹ as well as develop the organizational and cultural skills associated with modernity *within* that language. Only then can their language be an alternative as a language of 'progress' and education, and not simply a 'colourful jargon' useless for serious purposes; and only then can they, as a group, present their case convincingly in national and international politics.
- Sixth, *modernization* – including, among other aspects, formal education, occupational diversification, social mobility

and international communication – is a necessary prerequisite for linguistic minorities to survive.

- Seventh, a suppressed linguistic minority, victim to the whims of the nation-state, can opt for political independence only if it has a well-defined territory and relatively large numbers. Only a few minorities do.
- Eighth, recent immigrants are more vulnerable to linguistic assimilation than indigenous minorities, all other things being equal. They are also less likely than other groups to gain the goodwill of either the national government or bodies of international opinion.

Although these conclusions may not be highly original, a pertinent point may be that a focus on the less obvious forms of oppression, such as linguistic oppression, may make important contributions to conflict studies and peace research. This is both because subtle and invisible oppression is and remains a kind of oppression, even if it is 'muted', and because insight into such forms of dominance may help us to understand some of the apparent fanaticism and wanton destructiveness of ethnic movements representing minorities who, after decades or centuries of humiliation and discrimination, at some point decide that they *will take no more*.

The world is bound to remain a system of states yet awhile. Many of these states are continuously being torn apart by 'ethnic' conflicts, while others contain large, muted but severely oppressed cultural minorities. This article is chiefly intended as a reminder that the nation-state is not natural, and that many conflicts are 'invisible' but no less serious for that. There are several states today which pride themselves on their multi-cultural and multilingual character; there ought to be many more.

5.1 Afterthought: *Between the Native Reserve and Cultural Genocide*

One of the strengths of social anthropology as an academic discipline, and one of its most important critical functions, has been its ability to remind literate (actually,

largely Anglophone or at least 'Western') humanity that their form of life represents only one of an almost infinite range of possible ways of coping with the perennial questions of humankind. Many anthropologists, among the finest Claude Lévi-Strauss (for example, 1962) and Hans-Peter Duerr (for example, 1984), have undertaken an extremely important task in trying to convey and translate experiences and life-worlds which are in many ways radically and qualitatively different from those of modern societies. The kinds of cultural variation promoted in this article are in many ways of a less radical nature. Since the homogenizing institutions of modernity now impinge, to a greater or lesser extent, on virtually all of the traditional 'peoples' studied by social anthropologists, aspects of modernity are now present – and are being propagated – on a global level. However, studies highlighting radical cultural discontinuities between human societies have shown us that men and women may differ in an enormous number of ways, and so there is every reason to assume that variation will prevail and that new forms will develop, even if future societies will eventually all share important common organizational denominators of modernity: literacy, monetary economy, abstract ideology, citizenship. Since I regard cultural variation as an absolute asset for humanity, an important concern of this article has been to argue that such variations remain possible in an apparently seamless, thoroughly 'modern' world. In a world of nation-states, linguistic minorities are trapped *between the native reserve and cultural genocide* – between isolation, neglect or expulsion from the benefits of modernity, and total absorption by hegemonic groups. They should neither be forced to remain 'picturesque' exponents of human diversity, nor to lose their identity as distinctive cultural groups. If non-hegemonic groups in modern societies are to decide their own destiny, they must be released from the straitjacket of aggressive nation-building. Rather than applauding nationalism as the authentic expression of the people's will, we should look for alternatives. The system of states will prevail for

the foreseeable future, but it need not be a system of *nation-states*.

NOTES

1. The present article is in many ways complementary to Eriksen (1991), where I discuss the general relationship between ethnicity and nationalism in poly-ethnic societies and kinds of conflict between states and ethnic groups.
2. See Barth (1966), Paine (1971) and Kapferer (1976) for anthropological perspectives on the phenomenon of cultural brokerage, that is, mediation between discrete cultural universes.
3. This form of dominance is often expressed through some form of *diglossia*, i.e. the co-existence of 'low' and 'high' ranked forms of a language or two languages in a society. This phenomenon will not be discussed here (but see Ferguson, 1959; Fishman, 1989; and – for those who read Scandinavian – Danielsen, 1987).
4. A typical aspect of French academic language is advanced word-play, the aim of which is at least partly to humiliate, dazzle and confuse one's audience! (It can, of course, also be great fun.)
5. West Greenlandic, to mention one apparent exception, has been codified as script since the 18th century. However, literacy among the Greenlanders was negligible until this century.
6. There is also a small group of 1,500 Inuit in eastern Siberia.
7. When using the term 'Greenlandic' in referring to the language, I refer to West Greenlandic, which is spoken by nearly 90% of Greenlandic Inuit.
8. Migrants from other creole-speaking islands would tend to migrate to France or Québec, since their second language tends to be French. This holds true even for Mauritians, although their island is a member of the New Commonwealth.
9. There are three scripts currently in use: Arabic, Latin and Cyrillic.
10. The reader should be aware of the fact that this author is writing in a foreign language at this very moment. Why should he?
11. Most research efforts tend to confirm this. See, however, Mühlhäusler (1990) for a challenge against this assumption. He suggests that the alphabetization of Melanesian languages, in creating literacy, actually undermined these languages since Melanesians, as soon as they became literate, were drawn strongly towards English as a medium of expression. His argument questions the value of literacy as such and that is a topic which is too vast for me to go into here.

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