

# Languages at the margins of modernity: Linguistic minorities and the nation- state

*Thomas Hylland Eriksen*

*PRIO: PRIO Reports, No. 5, 1991.*

Reproduced in its entirety here, this study was too long for an article and too short for a book. The article was eventually written (and published in the *Journal of Peace Research*), but not the book. Not by me anyway.

## **Abstract**

## **Contents**

### **1. Introduction**

### **2. Nation-states and minorities**

Nationalism and the nation-state

Ethnicity and nationalism

Ethnic conflicts and the nation-state

Languages and the nation-state

Language death and the nation-state

Cultural homogenisation and differentiation

Minorities in the seamless modern world

### **3. The nationalist quest for linguistic integration**

Nationalist ideology and linguistic unification

The state and linguistic variation

### **4. Linguistic oppression and resistance**

Indigenous peoples

*The Greenlandic Inuits*

*The Dyirbal*

Urban minorities

*French-lexicon creole speakers in the UK*

*Spanish speakers in the USA*

Proto-nations

*The Bretons*

*The Kurds in Turkey*

Language policies in "plural societies"

*Switzerland*

*Kenya*

*Mauritius*

Problems in challenging the hegemony

### **5. Some implications**

**Afterthought: Between the native reserve and cultural genocide**

"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

The present essay should be read as a synoptic study of oppression and resistance, as well as an attempt to delineate some conditions for peace and the realization of human rights in the widest sense. The forms of oppression which are about to be considered, are not necessarily of a physical and overt kind. On the contrary, they are often invisible to the casual observer, and they are sometimes not even articulated as forms of oppression either by the oppressors or by the victims. For this reason, the social and cultural processes with which I shall deal have scarcely at all been investigated as forms of systematic repression; they have rather been described and analysed as processes of modernization or as social change, aspects of minority strategies, forms of cultural homogenization, or cultural conflict. The topic is the relationship between linguistic minorities, social identity, and nationalism as embedded in a nation-state.

The present perspective departs from a conception of *power asymmetry* where the nation-state is regarded as the chief power-holder and its linguistic minorities as relatively powerless at the outset of a conflict. I shall in this context 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 many inhabitants of many areas, who have more or less involuntarily become citizens of some nation-state.<sup>1</sup> By implication, I shall argue, nationalism as such, which combines the immense power of the modern state with ethnic ideology of exclusion and inclusion, deserves critical scrutiny.

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 ("less than five per cent", according to Skutnabb-Kangas, 1990). 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 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 institutionalised 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 essay 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 contemporary conflicts between nation-state and minorities (see, however, Mannheim, 1984, for an interesting "pre-modern" comparison). Then, several examples of linguistic dominance and minority resistance are presented and compared, with the aim of showing variation and similarities in multi-lingual situations in different contemporary settings. Finally, some general principles regarding the prospects for linguistic survival on the part of linguistic minorities are enumerated, and some implications for further research are suggested. An essential underlying concern is a wish to suggest ways in which qualitative research, which takes into account the wider social and cultural context of a given conflict, can be of considerable value in peace and conflict research.

## 2. Concepts and processes

### Nationalism and the nation-state

As Richard Handler (1988) has observed, a difficult problem intrinsic to the study of nationalism consists in the fact that the social disciplines and nationalism to a great extent have a common intellectual heritage. In other words, the respective concepts and models of the social world invoked by nationalism and by the social disciplines are intrinsically related. An additional reason why it can be difficult to treat nationalism with the analytical detachedness required, consists in its urgent appeal to our political views and emotions. There are probably few fields -- at least within anthropology (which is this writer's discipline) -- which run a greater risk of being contaminated by the inaccurate and sometimes passionate language of politicians, the press and lay people, than the field of nationalism. A few conceptual demarcations therefore seem immediately pertinent.

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 therefore nation-states proper, since most of the world's 162 *internationally (sic)* recognized states (as of October, 1991) contain minorities, who do not define themselves as members of the group represented through state nationalism. There may be 10,000 or more culturally distinctive groups in the world, depending on one's criteria. As Gellner (1983) remarks, the number of potential nationalisms is probably much, *much* higher than the number of extant or successful nationalisms. Most nationalisms can further be defined as *ethnic nationalisms*, and do therefore not include, in their delineation of the nation, the minorities who happen to live in the territory which they define as the national one. Both cultural minorities and foreigners are thus *outsiders* to the "imagined community" postulated by nationalism. Minorities, in particular, are "matter out of place" in relation to nationalism; their distinctiveness is in itself a sign of the lack of congruence between nationalist

ideology and social reality. For this reason, many nation-states try to assimilate minorities and in order to create the cultural homogeneity insisted upon by nationalist ideology; some do so through extremely violent means, through the extermination or expulsion of minorities. -- It is perhaps characteristic that our paradigmatic vision of a democratic society is the ancient Greek city-state. Just as we tend to forget the dark side of that society, including slavery and lack of women's rights, we also tend to forget that the "democratic" unity of a modern nation-state is nearly always parasitic on those whom it excludes from its unity - - whether they are outsiders or insiders -- or those who are compelled to join against their will.

In the Europe of the late nineteenth century, Peter Worsley writes (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, which was represented by the Hungarian revolutionary Kossuth (and by many others, among them Guiseppe Mazzini), was that each nation, or "people", ought to have its own state. "It was the latter conception which was to win out," Worsley (*ibid.*) comments dryly.

The idea of a multicultural, multilingual state seems unnatural and impractical to contemporary nationalists. Europeans laugh sadly at the "artificial" African states, which can be composed of as many as forty or more linguistic communities. What should be kept in mind here is the fact that most European states *were* multilingual only a century ago, as well as the fact that they still *are* multilingual, notwithstanding current nationalist ideologies and various forms of legislation which suggest that they are not (the only nearly monolingual European states are Iceland and Portugal). Most countries in the world contain linguistic minorities, whether they are "indigenes" or immigrant communities.

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" or simply "subversive" ideologies. The nation-state is a state representing itself through nationalist ideology; this is an ideology proclaiming, in a normative rather than a descriptive way, the essential cultural unity of all citizens. It is not difficult to understand, therefore, that serious conflicts may easily arise if many of the citizens do not regard themselves as being culturally represented in the state -- in a word, that the dominant nationalism is not an ideology with which they identify. The inherent dangers of making nation-building in a poly-ethnic society into an ethnic project are thus obvious.

### **Ethnicity and nationalism**

Ethnicity has been defined in many ways. In the present discussion, the term means the systematic and sustained reproduction of basic classificatory differences between groups whose members define themselves as being culturally distinctive from members of other groups which are defined in a similar way (see Barth, 1969, for an influential discussion of ethnicity along these lines). Ethnicity is thus created and maintained through the ongoing creation of socially relevant *contrasts*-- not, as many laymen and ethnic chauvinists would have it, by virtue of "objective" cultural differences. The minimal unit in ethnic relations is therefore not one ethnic group, but *a relationship between members of different ethnic groups*. An ethnic group seen in isolation is an analytical absurdity; it amounts to what Gregory Bateson, in a different context, has spoken of as "the sound from one hand clapping" (Bateson, 1978).

Ethnic groups nearly always have a common myth of origin and rules of marital endogamy, which are -- needless to say -- practised with highly varying degrees of rigour. One could add further criteria, but that does not seem necessary here. A main point is that ethnicity does not have an imperative relationship to "objective" criteria; it is constituted through its social and cultural relevance (cf. Ardener, 1989). It is, in other words, ideologically constituted, and many ethnic groups contain members who do not perceive ethnicity as important, but who

would rather attach themselves to a political organisation based on a different ideology, for example one based on class membership. In the present context, a main point concerning ethnicity is the empirical fact that collectivities of people who define themselves as culturally distinctive may see their distinctiveness as being threatened from the outside -- largely from the homogenizing and discriminatory practices of the nation-state -- and that they may react in different ways against such a perceived threat.

In the scholarly literature, ethnicity has been accounted for through two main kinds of perspectives. "Instrumentalist" approaches regard it chiefly as a kind of political organisation based on metaphorical and real kinship (e.g. Cohen, 1974); while the "primordialist" view stresses the historical continuity of the ethnic community as a determining factor for personal identity (e.g. Epstein, 1978). While neither of these kinds of explanations are fully satisfactory, both of them depart from the assumption, which has been empirically supported on a number of occasions, that ethnicity simultaneously has a strong *emotional* appeal and an equally strong *politically mobilising* potential. In a situation of conflict, the combination can be extremely powerful and volatile.

Nationalism and ethnicity can frequently be interchangeable terms. Many organizations and collectivities which are officially defined as ethnic ones within the discourse of some nation-state, may regard themselves as nationalist movements. The distinction between nation and ethnic group 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 by definition a nationalist movement. For example, in defining Biafran (Igbo) rebels as an ethnic movement in the late 1960s, 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. In addition to "proto-nations" such as Biafra, there are, of course, many ethnic movements which cannot be described as nationalist ones. Urban minorities and indigeneous populations tend not to be nationalists, in so far as they have no ambition of founding an independent nation-state (see Eriksen, 1991; in press, for more extensive discussions).



## **Ethnic conflicts and the nation-state**

The nation-state inspires ethnic conflict in so far as the political unit contains people who do not identify with the cultural group represented through the state (Eriksen, 1991). Under such circumstances, when there is a lack of fit between ideology and social reality, the state has three main options. First, it may insist on the assimilation of "entropy-resistant" elements; it may insist that say, minorities such as Bretons, Provençals, Basques and Catalans become Frenchmen; that they shed their exclusive group identity and parochial language and replace it with a wider French identity. Although such policies of assimilation are widely believed to help their target groups to achieve equal rights and to improve their standing, they often inflict great suffering and loss of dignity on the part of the minorities, who thus learn that their tradition is of no value.

The second option for the nation-state can be described as domination. This has been the characteristic situation in South Africa and Israel, where there has been no attempt to assimilate the powerless groups (Africans and Palestinians, respectively), but where they have simultaneously been deprived of equal political rights.

The third option consists in the transcendence of nationalist ideology, that is to say, that the state adopts an ideology of multiculturalism, where citizenship does not have to imply a particular cultural identity. It could be argued that India has in some respects followed this course, not least in its decentralised language policy (India has 14 "national languages"). On the other hand, Indian politics is definitely dominated by Hindus, who comprise 80% of the population, and can in this regard be seen as a nation-state proper rather than a federation.

Ethnic minorities in nation-states where the pressure to assimilate or the domination from the hegemonic cultural group, is strong, have three main options -- the options described as "exit, voice or loyalty" by Alfred Hirschman. The first option is to assimilate. Historically, this kind of reaction has been very

common -- whether it has actually been chosen or not -- and in this way many ethnic groups have disappeared from the face of the earth. Immigrants to the United States, for example, tended to lose their language within two generations (although remnants of ethnic identity, with limited social and cultural relevance, frequently survived).

Minority members may also acquiesce in their subordination or try to co-exist peacefully with the nation-state, which most urban immigrant minorities do. Alternatively, they may negotiate for limited autonomy in say, linguistic, religious or local political matters. This has been the option chosen by the Saami, the indigenous people of northern Scandinavia.

The third main option available for minorities consists in a rejection of the dominant nationalism and the existing nation-state, and a consequent attempt to set up their own state. This is the kind of situation that we face in north-eastern Sri Lanka, in Croatia, in the Baltic republics and in Punjab -- and it is under such circumstances that armed conflict between ethnic groups is most likely. In these situations, the minorities see their identity as being threatened by the state in such grave ways that *exit* seems to be the only alternative. It is a sad irony of these movements that the creation of new nation-states as a response to the domination of someone else's nationalism, entails the same contradictions as those which the secessionist group tried to escape from. The difference lies in the fact that the previously dominated group now becomes the dominant group. Examples of such processes are numerous; a brief glance at the dissolving Soviet empire would serve to substantiate it. Peoples who were minorities in the Soviet Union become majorities in their own republics, which in turn contain sometimes as many as two dozen minorities -- and which transform the resident Russians into minority members. Since hardly a single nation or ethnic group has its territory entirely to itself, it seems that a doubling of the number of independent nation-states would also imply a doubling of the number of minority problems associated with nationalism. Burgeoning Slovak nationalism in the Federal Czech and Slovak Republic has inspired a Moravian nationalism fuelled on resentment of presumed Bohemian dominance in the Czech part of the

republic. As if this were not enough, some members of the Silesian minority in Moravia now feel that they should also have their own political unit (Neumann, 1991). The fact that the only credible reaction to domination by nationalism often seems to challenge it with one's own, alternative nationalism, indicates the pervasiveness of this kind of ideology.

### **Languages and the nation-state**

Linguistic processes taking place in a society can be regarded as indicators of, and as being intrinsically related to, many other aspects of that society. When languages die and give way to majority or dominant languages, this indicates that the different groups inhabiting the area in question become culturally more similar and, presumably, more tightly integrated at the abstract level of the state. Linguistic unification, or homogenization, is thus an integral aspect of most nation-building projects, stressing as they do the cultural uniformity and essential equality of all citizens. 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, or effectively resist, the exigencies of the modern state. 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 group identity. When minority languages or unofficial languages, further, 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.

The loss of cultural universes or world-structures which is manifested in the rapid disappearance of languages in the modern world, can be regarded as a major tragedy for mankind as a species; to those humans whose language is lost, considerable suffering and discrimination are frequently inflicted. Studies of *ethnocide*, either in its literal or in its metaphoric sense, have shown how nation-states or capitalist enterprises radically alter the conditions under which ethnic minorities live, and in which ways this contributes to the transformation

of their culture and social organization. Such studies of indigenous peoples, which have often been commissioned by organizations like the IWGIA (International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs) and the MRG (Minority Rights Group), have doubtless contributed important insights in this regard.

Recent studies of nationalism have, on the other hand, indicated the integrating and potentially conflict-solving aspects of the modern nation-state; they have shown that nationalism can be a vehicle for the expression of strong and profound collective identities (Anderson, 1983; Smith, 1991) and that it has been, notwithstanding its ambiguous moral character, an apparently inevitable agent in processes of modernization worldwide (Gellner, 1985; Hobsbawm, 1990). The nation-state, unlike earlier state formations, stresses the formal equality of its citizens. It is therefore untenable (or at least analytically uninteresting) to regard the nation-state *a priori* as a malevolent force in contemporary processes of group integration or conflict. Enlightenment must be sought in analyses of the actual conflict situations involving the nation-state and parts of its population as antagonists. In doing so, we will see that the part played by the nation-state in these conflicts is highly variable, but it will be equally evident that all of the different situations have something in common in that the nation-state is always a much more powerful agent than the minorities which may oppose it. This fact should lead us to consider the role of the nation-state, as "the pre-eminent power container in the modern era" (Giddens, 1985), with a critical attitude. In this day and age, where many if not most of the cruelties of war and armed conflict are justified ideologically through nationalist ideologies -- whether they represent nation-states or minorities in quest of a state ("stateless nations" or ethnic groups) -- it is indeed timely to look for alternatives to the nation-state as the most relevant political unit for humanity.

I shall now indicate ways in which linguistic differences within a nation-state or a potential nation-state can have harmful consequences for certain categories of inhabitants (i.e., minorities), and I shall also discuss and compare strategies of resistance and "cultural revitalization". A main purpose is to argue that a state need not have *a* national language, and that linguistic diversity should therefore

be tolerated, if not positively 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 wished to call attention to some of the less visible aspects of group domination in the nation-state and, notably, to the complex interplay of the organizational (political) and symbolic (meaningful) aspects of social identities such as ethnic and national ones.

### **Cultural homogenisation and differentiation**

The salience of ethnicity and ethnic conflict in the contemporary world is sometimes described as a paradoxical phenomenon. Rather than vanishing or losing its significance in modern societies, ethnicity has become an ever more important principle for political organisation and focus for individual identity. Formerly seen by many scholars as an atavistic retention or as a kind of "cultural lag", ethnicity is now increasingly acknowledged as an inherent aspect of modernity. It was formerly widely believed that cultural differences would cease to be relevant in modern nation-states, and that ethnic allegiances would eventually be replaced by class loyalties and other overarching ideologies. However, it has now become abundantly clear that ethnicity indeed often assumes political importance only from the moment discrete groups are integrated into a nation-state. The transition from the Garden of Eden to the Tower of Babel is, apparently paradoxically, chiefly a result of *contacts* between groups, not by isolation. Only from the moment a group is thrown into a situation of regular and enduring contact with other groups, its members become able to develop a reflexive awareness of their distinctiveness and a notion that they are the carriers of a unique tradition. People become *a people* through awareness of differences vis-à-vis others.

In the modern world, there is a marked tendency for many cultural differences to be smoothed out and to disappear. This holds true for many languages too, particularly those lacking a script, which tend to die quickly in these times (see the contributions to Dorian, 1989). On the other hand, recent ethnic and

nationalist revivals have contributed to the standardization and preservation of many languages which few years earlier seemed condemned to vanish. Whereas modern education, modern mass media and modern avenues for professional careers encourage, and tend to effect, the smoothing out of linguistic differences, these processes are met with considerable resistance. Some nearly extinct languages have actually been revived and strengthened since the 1960s.

A paradox of the contemporary world could therefore be phrased thus: On the one hand it is an indubitable fact that citizens of most of the nation-states in the world are gradually becoming more similar in certain cultural respects. This is brought about through their increasing integration into the institutions of the state, notably the educational and political systems; the integrative effects of capitalism, which creates a uniform labour market and a more or less shared "economic culture" within the state; and finally, processes of cultural globalization (Appadurai, 1990; Hannerz, 1989; Robertson, 1990), which are mediated by various forms of mass communication (mass media as well as air travel and patterns of consumption), and which create cultural similarities across borders. On the other hand, a strong ideological and political current in recent decades has been that which can best be described as forms of *ethnic revitalization*. This tendency, which may be seen as a countervailing, "negentropic" force directed against the processes creating cultural similarity, has led to the widespread revival of half-forgotten rites and religions, the codification and articulation, and in some cases the "re-invention", of presumed ancient custom, and frequently, the glorification of vernacular languages. Despite its often traditional appearance, ethnic politics is in an important sense thoroughly modern.

### **Minorities in the seamless modern world**

The "re-invented" culture championed by ethnic movements is qualitatively different from that which it seeks to emulate. It is 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 implied by modernization is irreversible. Although their organizations often call for a return to pre-modern society, it is perhaps impossible for the members of minorities to undertake such a return. They are now increasingly literate wageworkers, and it is wholly unrealistic (and, perhaps, impossible in principle) for them to "forget" their conversion to modernity entirely. This loss of tradition, I will show, paradoxically presents a comparative advantage when it comes to linguistic survival. A related paradox is the fact that cultural *brokers*,<sup>2</sup> 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 seriously 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 imminent extinction. Such a development could provide a partial explanation for the linguistic revival witnessed in many parts of the world since the 1960s: Whereas minority languages such as Inuit, Saami and Breton were predicted to vanish within a generation in the early 1960s, subsequent developments have demonstrated a strong will to retain the languages, to revive them and to propagate their use in the modern bureaucratic sector of society.

The representatives of minority languages or ethnic minorities are now aware of the fact that they represent a distinctive "culture" and are concerned to retain their distinctiveness. This self-conscious minority 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, as noted above, always defined through the cultural creation of contrasts vis-à-vis other identities. The "original cultural forms" which ethnic movements seek to revive were not, therefore, necessarily *ethnic* identities in their time. 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 only insofar as it can be contrasted with other identities, which become relevant only within the framework of a modern 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 in some way parasitical on modernity, is an intrinsic aspect 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 in all of its forms reduce the scope of cultural differences worldwide. On the other hand, the emerging cultural self-consciousness (or reflexivity) brought about through modernization and the incorporation into nation-states has led to the formation of self-consciously distinctive ethnicities which strongly stress their cultural uniqueness. One may put it like this. While (say) one's grandparents lived as traditional Saami (Welshmen, Kurds...) without giving it any thought, and one's parents took great pains to escape from their stigmatized ethnic minority position and become assimilated and modern, ego does everything in his power to revive the customs and traditions that 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 cultural 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 total lack of respect for the Inuits themselves. Our "noble savages" may actually want some of the benefits offered by modernity, and we should be extremely careful 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).

### **3. The nationalist quest for linguistic integration**

#### **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).

From the Revolution on, language planning *from above* took the place of gradual linguistic change. From now on, 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 now 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" (*Ibid.*, p. 31).

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 nation-state.

I have cited Bourdieu at some length because his description of French language change illustrates some very general aspects of linguistic hegemony and power. In defining minority languages as deficient in some way or other, the hegemonic (national) language effectively justifies its exclusive use in education and other official contexts and thus efficiently prevent nonfluent 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 acquaintance, 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 oppression.<sup>3</sup> 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).<sup>4</sup> 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 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 of France, against nonfluent speakers of the standard, "educated" variety of the language.

While these forms of linguistic oppression may be painful and certainly reproduce injustice in the name of equality, any opposition against the use of dominant languages can be 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 essay.

### **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 languages, organically connected with the "will of the people". Granted the fact of the modern nation-state, they have access to systems of monitoring and social control of a scope and efficiency which could never have been imagined by 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).

The German case, where the nation, or linguistic community, existed 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-nineteenth century, some Norwegian nationalists created a literary language based on certain rural dialects, *Nynorsk* (New Norwegian), a main purpose was to create a distinctively Norwegian language with the same compass and pretensions as Danish, which had hitherto been used. Danish, however, was closer to many spoken varieties 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 very 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., 1990, 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, 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. Secondly, 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 seem to regard bilingualism as "unnatural".) Since nationalists conceive of the nation as such a tightly knit community (and for other reasons, mentioned above), the tendency in nationalist ideology and practice is to try to eradicate linguistic differences. Sometimes, this is done through cruel and authoritarian methods. One obvious example of this is Turkey, where the use of Kurdish has not only been discouraged, but *banned*, for decades. I now turn to a discussion of the techniques employed to this end and the reactions such strategies are met with by members of nonhegemonic linguistic groups.

#### **4. 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, 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 (see, for example, Giddens, 1990, for a good discussion of the institutional dimensions 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.

### **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 their 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, which we ought to since there have been earlier, now extinct societies almost everywhere), cannot be regarded as indigenous peoples. I therefore propose to use a definition adding some further criteria, based on family resemblances, not on "essences", to the definition of minorities cited above: Indigenous peoples are nonimmigrant minorities associated with a non-industrial mode of production, usually hunting gathering, pastoralism or horticulture, whose languages have been widely used in writing less than a generation ago if at all.<sup>5</sup> 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. Many of them can also be literate, but their own language has usually not been a common language in literacy for very long. The main point is that indigenous peoples are essentially *non-state* people. I shall now compare two indigenous peoples, which have very different kinds of relationships with their nation-states as regards their linguistic situation.

#### *The Greenlandic Inuits*

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).<sup>6</sup> 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 Inuits, who have been the most successful Inuit group in terms of ethnopolitics (Gray, 1989).

There has been virtually no permanent loss of language among Greenlandic Inuits. Although their language has absorbed many Danish loan-words (the island has been a Danish colony for centuries), the language seems in no way 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 wave of the second half of the twentieth century, and it is also a good, if less typical, example of a situation where an indigenous language has successfully been revived after initially declining dramatically.

Greenlandic<sup>7</sup> was acknowledged and encouraged by the Danish colonial administration until 1950 -- 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 a more dominant language, notably as a medium of instruction in schools. This, Christian Berthelsen writes (1990, p. 335), was actually a Danish response to the wish of 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. In a sense, they were Danish nationalists negotiating for equality with the 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 again 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 grandfather (before 1950) unquestioningly adhered to the Greenlandic language; one's father (1950-1970) 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. Secondly, the Inuits had a well-defined, isolated territory. Thirdly, the Inuits have for decades been represented politically in the State, and have since 1978 been politically autonomous. Fourthly, the Inuits 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. Fifthly, the Greenlandic language community was large and occupationally relatively diverse (it contained, among other things, professional brokers, that is politicians), and sixthly, 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.

### *The Dyirbal*

Very different, and more representative of the language situation of indigenous peoples, is the case of the Dyirbal of north-eastern 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-à-vis the Greenlandic one.

Unlike the Greenlanders, the distinctiveness of Australian aboriginal culture was never respected by the white colonialists. Groups were slaughtered or forcefully 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 colonialists: "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 studied 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.

An important point is the fact that 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 which 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.

### **Urban minorities**

The minority situation of recent immigrants in industrial environments 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.

#### *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, usually with French and/or English, in all of the societies where they are spoken.

The largest communities of French creole speakers in Britain come from Dominica and St Lucia in the eastern Caribbean, where the creole vernaculars, latterly known collectively as *Kwéyòl* (Nwenmely, 1990), are diglossic with English.<sup>8</sup> 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 nonfluent 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" (Nwemely, 1990, p. 62). An unprestigious language even in its original context, one would expect Kwéyòl to die out soon -- like Dyirbal 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 and creativity 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 now 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 provisional point made about the Inuits to the effect 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, it became possible for certain Kwéyòl speakers to promote their language systematically. Secondly, the Kwéyòl speakers resist cultural assimilation more efficiently than the Dyirbal, 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. Thirdly, it is clear that the Kwéyòl revitalization is in part a resistance strategy directed against stigmatization and discrimination from 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. Fourthly, the Kwéyòl movement, expressing the virtues of an unprestigious and marginal language, indicates that linguistic identity, codified as "cultural roots", can be important as a countervailing force against the flux and transience of the modern world. Fifthly, 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 the Kwéyòl speakers themselves that everybody should learn English properly. As Nwemely (1990, p. 67) succinctly 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 could be a crucial factor as regards the degree of generality of the latter contention. This dimension will be pursued further in the next example.

#### *Spanish speakers in the USA*

At the time of the 1980 census, 11.1 million US citizens, or nearly five per cent 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 extremely 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 thus 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 constitute a majority. Secondly, bilingualism is widely regarded as a serious problem -- as something which should be tracked down, cornered and exterminated -- in the United States (see Wardhaugh, 1987, pp. 249-51; Fishman, 1989). On the other hand, 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 great resistance from monoglot English-speakers. During the 1980s, funds for education in other languages than English were cut back, 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 arrogant and 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 demanding their rapid linguistic assimilation.

In this context, it would seem that a precondition for the preservation of Spanish in the United States would 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 US have a large number of newspapers and periodicals, 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 (which it is not at present), then a speaker of Spanish in the US 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 could be parallel, autonomous institutions. If such a cultural segregation was to come about, then the US would actually be a multi-national state (see 4 below) and not a nation-state. At the moment, however, the authoritarian 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 Inuits 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 for 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 for some time; West Greenlandic, however, has not), will also lead to an increase in the overall prestige of the language.

### **Proto-nations**

Let us 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 differences, than in their endeavour to mute the linguistic distinctiveness of proto-nations residing in their territory.

### *The Bretons*

Brittany, in union with France since 1532, has gone through a gradual Gallification, which has grown considerably in strength and intensity since 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 can also be described as threatened minority languages on the outskirts of Europe (see, for example, Hindley, 1990; Dorian, 1981). The distinctive Breton identity remains strong in Brittany, despite -- or perhaps in reaction to -- centuries of political domination from Paris. The decline - and possible revival -- of the Breton language follows a familiar course, which will now be summarized.

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, the relative economic independence and the presence of a Breton-speaking educated class contributed to preserving Breton intact and undiluted until the end of the nineteenth century. This is an important point. While the mastery of dominant cultural codes was regarded as a prerequisite for linguistic survival among the other minorities I have discussed, the opposite seems to be the case here. Unlike the Inuits 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 this 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, p. 123 ff.) weakened their case further.

The increasing integration into greater French society has been the most important factor in the dramatic decline of Breton during the twentieth 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 average individual has wider contact with the macro level of society than he 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 Ronald 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.

This need not be the case, and as already demonstrated, doomed languages are often revived in the nick of time. Lois Kuter (1989) refers to studies indicating that young Bretons have a positive view on learning Breton, linking it with their unique cultural identity as distinctive from Frenchmen. Many young people, raised as French-speakers, now learn Breton as a foreign language at evening classes and summer schools. Some radio and TV programmes are also made in Breton. The inherent 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 linguistic group, which has consistently rejected attempts at introducing other administrative languages than French, has hitherto functioned efficiently in muting linguistic minorities such as the Bretons. Occasional 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 actually be a main factor in the future survival of Breton. In reducing the importance of the nation-state, and increasing regional



autonomy, federalism -- which could be an interesting alternative to nationalism in general -- could save Breton from a quick death.

### *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.

KurdishTurkish relations are in some regards similar to BretonFrench relations. Like the Bretons, the Kurds have inhabited a well-defined 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 has been disastrous. The great Turkish nationalist Atatürk initiated, from the 1920s, a long period -- 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 actually 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 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 (as from spring, 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,<sup>9</sup> 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 within the Turkish nation-state is largely absent. Factionalism and lack of internal organization are typical problems (Bruinessen, 1989).

There are three options available for the Kurds. 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 influence the Turkish state to grant them political and cultural self-determination in their region. If the latter option, which seems the most credible, 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 in the course of this article, is repeated: In order to achieve the right to be different from their antagonists, the Kurds must first become more similar to them. However, the Kurds, like the Bretons (and to some extent, but in different ways, like the Greenlanders and the Hispanics), are in this respect different from urban or numerically weak minorities. Due to their numbers and territorial concentration, they may in theory, and perhaps in practice, acquire the skills and institutions needed without relying on the (very dubitable) benevolence of the nation-state. This, of course, requires that they have access to alternative resources -- that

they can modernize politically and educationally without becoming entirely dependent on the institutions of the Turkish state.

### **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 generally neglected or actively 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 also 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 widely held assumption, particularly widespread among speakers of dominant languages, that bilingualism is "unnatural". I shall now describe the linguistic policies of three countries whose governments are aware that their countries are *de facto* multicultural.

#### *Switzerland*

The Swiss language communities are territorially located; in addition, no supra-ethnic national language exists. In this, Switzerland differs from Mauritius and Kenya, which are presented below. Switzerland has four national languages; German, French, Italian and Rhaeto-Romansch. Apart from the latter, all can relate themselves to much larger language communities outside of Switzerland. However, the German community is by far the largest, and had Switzerland been a typical nation-state, German would clearly have been the official language. The political structure of the country explains why this has not come about. It is extremely decentralized at the level of the canton (county), and federal control is in many respects much less than, for example, in the United States. The rights of

the old linguistic groups which make up the Swiss people are thereby preserved. On the other hand, the lack of a shared language sometimes poses a problem within the country since many Swiss are monolingual, and many of the bilingual ones have chosen English as a second language. A second point to be kept in mind is the fact that Switzerland is infamous for not granting ordinary citizen rights to labour migrants from abroad. Nobody bothers about *their* linguistic rights, although there are many thousand *Gastarbeitern*, largely from south-eastern Europe, in the country.

### *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 (Harries, 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 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.

### *Mauritius*

The linguistic case of Mauritius is in some ways similar to the Kenyan one (see Eriksen, 1990b, for a full discussion). 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 language seemed a good (and useful) compromise. The newspapers and radio broadcasts continue to be predominantly in French, which is the second language of nearly all Mauritians.

Unlike Kenya, Mauritius had no pre-colonial history as a society. The inhabitants of the island initially spoke the languages of their places of origin; during this century, a growing majority speak *Kreol*, a French-lexicon creole (which is, incidentally, quite different from *Kwéyòl*), as their mother-tongue. Kreol remains a despised language, however, regarded as unfit for sophisticated forms of communication. When the radical nationalist MMM government tried to introduce Kreol as a national language in 1982, it was met with massive protest and was forced to withdraw the proposal (Bowman, 1991). Like Kenyans, therefore, 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 fluently; many Sino-Mauritians speak Hakka. In addition, several ancestral languages are carefully guarded by their speakers; 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 Mauritian 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 usually Kreol). In a federal state such as Switzerland, this does not seem necessary, although the Canadian case suggests that the lack of a supra-ethnic language is highly problematic. In Canada, the tendency has been that French speakers have been more strongly urged to learn English than vice versa, English being the larger language. Indeed, contemporary nationalism in Québec is strongly focused on language and the need for secession in order to save the French language in Canada (Handler, 1988).

### **Problems in challenging the hegemony**

The feeling of self-contempt inflicted on the nonhegemonic by those who represent linguistic hegemony is evident in Kenya as well as in Mauritius -- as, indeed, in most countries in the world. Mauritians speak Kreol *malgré eux*, and there have so far been few attempts at creating a literature in Kenyan languages (Swahili, a Bantu language, is not a pan-Kenyan language proper). In both countries, the colonial languages dominate 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-seventies, this Kenyan author has written most of his work in Gikuyu (the Kenyan Kikuyu language, spoken by roughly twelve per cent of all Kenyans). 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 for debarring blacks from social mobility and communication with the outside world. Therefore, the South Africans argued, one should write in English despite its being 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 switch entirely to the dominant language, or they may at

least confine its use to a limited range of social contexts. In a study of the coastal Saami of northern Norway, Eidheim (1969) thus noted that the stigmatized, bilingual Saami tended to use the 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. With no knowledge of Norwegian, it was impossible to get a job, a spouse or a new acquaintance outside of the few Saami speaking communities in Finnmark county. 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 on the one hand, some minorities are discouraged from using their vernacular, others (notably in South Africa) are *forced* to use their vernacular. Neither option is attractive. In this sense, the world's linguistic minorities seem to be trapped between the reservation and cultural genocide.

The oppressive aspects of nation-building, described with reference to French linguistic unification above, can easily be recognized here. There can be no easy solution to the dilemma for the minorities. It would be too facile to try to persuade the "natives" concerned to use their vernaculars "for their own good".<sup>10</sup> 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 certainly presupposes fluency in the dominant language. The mechanism is familiar and has been mentioned earlier: 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 languages: 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 languages.

## 5. Some implications

I shall not bore the reader inordinately with a systematic comparison between the nine examples which I have described. Some general comparative points have already been made about the relationship between linguistic minorities and the nation-state, and they shall merely be summed up here.

\* First, those aspects of personal identity which are expressed through one's language, can be extremely important to the well-being of individuals. Linguistic rights should be seen as elementary human rights.<sup>11</sup>

\* 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 society, intimately connected with the idea of nationalism, is mistaken. A *lingua franca* may be necessary, but it needs not replace other languages.

\* Fourth, the psychological pain, inferiority complexes and difficulties in social mobility inflicted on individuals by linguistic hegemons, can be alleviated only if the minority group asserts its own language as a full-fledged alternative to the hegemonic language.

\* Fifth, linguistic minorities stand a better chance of survival if they codify their language in an alphabet,<sup>12</sup> as well as developing 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 dimensions formal education,



occupational diversification, social mobility and international communication -- is a necessary prerequisite for linguistic minorities to survive in the long term.

\* 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 less likely than other groups to gain the goodwill of either the national government or bodies of international opinion.

Although perhaps none of these conclusions are 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 has chiefly been 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 multicultural and multilingual character; there ought to have been many more.

## **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 immensely important task in trying to convey and translate experiences and life-worlds which are radically and qualitatively different from those typical of the inhabitants 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 present -- and are being propagated -- on a global level at this very moment. 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 essay 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 nonhegemonic 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 expressions of the people's will, we should look for alternatives. Ethnicity in some form or another will doubtless remain an important focus for many people's personal identities, and the system of states will prevail for the foreseeable future. However, it might be noted that the unfortunate merger of ethnicity with the state which constitutes the nation-state is not an inevitable outcome of this. The system of states need not, in other words, always remain a system of *nation*-states dictated by narrow-minded, excluding ethnic, that is nationalist, ideologies.

### **Acknowledgements**

The author is indebted to Harald Eidheim, Kjetil Folkestad, Leif John Fosse, Even Hovdhaugen, Randi Kaarhus, Stein Tønnesson and an anonymous referee of the JPR, for many useful comments on an earlier version of this essay. A shorter version of the essay is due to appear in *Journal of Peace Research* in the course of 1992.

### **Notes**

1This essay 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 conflicts between states and ethnic groups.

2See Barth (1966); Paine (1971); Kapferer (1976), for anthropological perspectives on the phenomenon of cultural brokerage, that is mediation between discrete cultural universes.

3This 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).

4A 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 readers! (It can, of course, also be great fun.)

5West Greenlandic, to mention one apparent exception, has been codified as script since the eighteenth century. However, literacy among the Greenlanders was negligible until this century.

6There is also a small group of 1,500 Inuits in eastern Siberia.

7When using the term "Greenlandic" in referring to the language, I refer to West Greenlandic, which is spoken by nearly 90% of Greenlandic Inuits.

8Migrants 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.

9There are three scripts currently in use: Arabic, Latin and Cyrillic.

10The reader should be aware of the fact that this author is writing in a foreign language at this very moment. Why should he?

11The UN charter on human rights does not mention the right to a language. However, the UN Draft Declaration of Principles for Indigenous Rights states: "Indigenous nations and peoples have the right to be educated and conduct business with States in their own languages, and to establish their own educational institutions" (§ 12).

12Most 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.

## References

- Allardt, Erik, 1984. 'What Constitutes a Linguistic Minority?' *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, vol. 5, no. 3-4, pp. 195-205
- Anderson, Benedict, 1983. *Imagined Communities*. London: Verso
- Appadurai, Arjun, 1990. 'Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural

- Economy', pp. 295-310 in Mike Featherstone, ed., *Global Culture. Nationalism, Globalization and Modernity*. London: Sage
- Ardener, Edwin, 1989. *The Voice of Prophecy and other Essays*. Oxford: Blackwell
- Barth, Fredrik, 1966. *Models of Social Organization*. London: Royal Anthropological Institute, Occasional Paper No. 23
- Barth, Fredrik, 1969. 'Introduction', pp. 9-38 in Fredrik Barth, ed., *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries. The Social Organization of Culture Difference*. Oslo: Norwegian University Press
- Bateson, Gregory, 1978. *Mind and Nature: A Necessary Unity*. Glasgow: Fontana
- Bernstein, Basil, 1964. 'Elaborated and Restricted Codes', pp. 55-69 in John Gumperz and Dell Hymes, eds., *The Ethnography of Communication*, *American Anthropologist*, vol. 66, no. 2
- Berthelsen, Christian, 1990. 'Greenlandic in schools', pp. 333-340 in Dirmid R.F. Collis, ed., *Arctic Languages: An Awakening*. Paris: Unesco
- Bourdieu, Pierre, 1982. *Ce que parler veut dire. L'économie des échanges linguistiques*. Paris: Fayard
- Bowman, Larry W., 1991. *Mauritius: Democracy and Development in the Indian Ocean*. Boulder: Westview
- Bruinessen, M.M. van, 1989. *Agha, Scheich und Staat. Politik und Gesellschaft Kurdistans*. Berlin: Parabolis
- Cohen, Abner (1974) *Two-Dimensional Man*. Berkeley: University of California Press
- Danielsen, Egil, 1987. 'Språk, nasjonalisme og diglossi-modellen', *Norskraft*, vol. 52, pp. 59-72
- Dorian, Nancy, 1981. *Language Death. The Life Cycle of a Scottish Gaelic Dialect*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press
- Dorian, Nancy, ed., 1989. *Investigating obsolescence. Studies in language contraction and death*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Duerr, Hans-Peter, 1984. *Sedna oder die Liebe zum Leben*. Frankfurt-am-Main: Suhrkamp
- Eidheim, Harald, 1971. *Aspects of the Lappish Minority Situation*. Oslo: Norwegian University Press
- Epstein, A.L. (1978) *Ethos and Identity*. London: Tavistock

- Eriksen, Thomas Hylland, 1990a [1988]. *Communicating Cultural Difference and Identity. Ethnicity and Nationalism in Mauritius*. Occasional Paper no. 16. Oslo: Department of Social Anthropology
- Eriksen, Thomas Hylland, 1990b. 'Linguistic Diversity and the Quest for National Identity: The Case of Mauritius', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol. 13, no. 1, pp. 1-24
- Eriksen, Thomas Hylland, 1991. 'Ethnicity versus Nationalism', *Journal of Peace Research*, vol. 28, no. 3, pp. 263-278
- Eriksen, Thomas Hylland, in press, 1992. *Us and Them in Modern Societies. Ethnicity and Nationalism in Trinidad, Mauritius and Beyond*. Oslo: Norwegian University Press
- Fanon, Frantz, 1952. *Peaux noires, masques blancs*. Paris: Seuil
- Ferguson, Charles A., 1959. 'Diglossia', *Word*, vol. 15, pp. 325-340
- Fishman, Joshua A., 1982. 'Whorfianism of the Third Kind: Ethnolinguistic Diversity as a Worldwide Societal Asset', *Language in Society*, vol. 11, pp. 1-14
- Fishman, Joshua A., 1989. *Language and Ethnicity in Minority Sociolinguistic Perspective*. Philadelphia: Multilingual Matters
- Foucault, Michel, 1966. *Les mots et les choses*. Paris: Gallimard
- Garcia, Ofelia, Joshua A. Fishman, Silvia Burunat and Michael H. Gertner ,1985. 'The Hispanic Press in the United States: Content and Prospects', pp. 343-362 in Joshua A. Fishman et al., *The Rise and Fall of the Ethnic Revival: Perspectives on Language and Ethnicity*. Berlin: Mouton
- Gellner, Ernest, 1983. *Nations and Nationalism*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell
- Giddens, Anthony, 1985. *The Nation-State and Violence*. Cambridge: Polity
- Giddens, Anthony, 1990. *The Consequences of Modernity*. Cambridge: Polity
- Gray, Corinne, 1989. 'Arctic Policy and Self-Determination: a Canadian Inuit Perspective', pp. 21-28 in *Indigenous Self-development in the Americas*. Copenhagen: IWGIA Document No. 163
- Handler, Richard, 1988. *The Politics of Culture in Quebec*. Madison: Wisconsin University Press
- Hannerz, Ulf, 1989. 'Notes on the Global Ecumene', *Public Culture*, vol. 1, no. 2, pp. 66-75
- Harries, Lyndon, 1976. 'The Nationalization of Swahili in Kenya', *Language in Society*, vol. 5, pp. 153-164

- Hindley, Reg, 1990. *The Death of the Irish Language*. London: Routledge
- Hobsbawm, Eric, 1990. *Nations and Nationalism since the 1780s*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Hovdhaugen, Even, Ingjerd Hoëm, Consulata Mahina Iosefo and Arnfinn Muruvik Vonen, 1989. *A Handbook of the Tokelau Language*. Oslo: Norwegian University Press
- Kapferer, Bruce, 1988. *Legends of People; Myths of State*. Baltimore: Smithsonian Institution Press
- Kapferer, Bruce, ed., 1976. *Transaction and Meaning: Directions in the Anthropology of Exchange and Symbolic Behaviour*. Philadelphia: ISHI
- Kuter, Lois, 1989. 'Breton vs. French: Language and the Opposition of Political, Economic, Social and Cultural Values', pp. 75-90 in Nancy Dorian, ed., *Investigating obsolescence. Studies in language contraction and death*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Lévi-Strauss, Claude, 1962. *La pensée sauvage*. Paris: Plon
- Mannheim, Bruce, 1984. 'Una nación acorralada: Southern Peruvian Quechua language planning and politics in historical perspective', *Language in Society*, vol. 13, pp. 291-309
- McDonald, Maryon, 1989. *'We are not French!' Language, Culture and Identity in Brittany*. London: Routledge
- Minority Rights Group, 1990. *World Dictionary of Minorities*. London: Longman
- Mühlhäusler, Peter, 1990. "'Reducing" Pacific Languages to Writings', pp. 189-205 in John E. Joseph and Talbot J. Taylor, eds., *Ideologies of Language*. London: Routledge
- Neumann, Iver B., 1991. *Splittelse og samling. Sovjetunionen og den nye europeiske orden* (Fragmentation and unification. The Soviet Union and the new European order). Oslo: Norwegian University Press
- Ngugi wa Thiong'o, 1972. *Homecoming*. London: Heinemann
- Ngugi wa Thiong'o, 1981. *Detained. A Writer's Prison Diary*. London: Heinemann
- Nwenmely, Hubisi, 1991. 'The Kwéyòl Speech Community', pp. 57-74 in Viv Edwards and Safder Alladina, eds., *Multilingualism in The British Isles*, vol. 2. London: Longman
- Paine, Robert, ed., 1971. *Patrons and Brokers in the East Arctic*. St. John's:

Institute of Social and Economic Research, Memorial University of Newfoundland

Petersen, Robert, 1990. The Greenlandic Language: Its Nature and Situation, pp. 293-308 in Dirmid R.F. Collis, ed., *Arctic Languages: An Awakening*. Paris: Unesco

Robertson, Roland, 1990. 'Mapping the Global Condition: Globalization as the Central Concept', pp. 15-30 in Mike Featherstone, ed., *Global Culture. Nationalism, Globalization and Modernity*. London: Sage

Schmidt, Annette, 1985. *Young People's Dyirbal. An example of language death from Australia*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Skutnabb-Kangas, Tove, 1990. *Language, Literacy and Minorities*. London: Minority Rights Group

Smith, Anthony D., 1991. *National Identity*. Harmondsworth: Penguin

Trudgill, Peter, 1991. 'Language Death'. Public lecture delivered at the conference "Islands: Their Biology and Culture", organized by the North Norwegian Academy, Melbu, Norway, 16-20 July, 1991

Wardhaugh, Ronald, 1987. *Languages in Competition*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell

Watson, Seosamh, 1989. Scottish and Irish Gaelic: The Giant's Bedfellows, pp. 61-74 in Nancy Dorian, ed., *Investigating obsolescence. Studies in language contraction and death*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Worsley, Peter, 1984. *The Three Worlds. Culture and World Development*. London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson

## **Abstract**

*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, the last decades has seen the widespread resurgence of ethnic sentiments and revitalization of local cultural identities. This apparent paradox is 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, defending the rights of minority languages and criticizing their nationalist antagonists, compares several linguistic minorities. The comparison focusses 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 demand the attention of peace and conflict researchers.*