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The Limits of Integration: Ethnicity and Nationalism in Modern Europe (Introduction)

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THE LIMITS OF INTEGRATION: ETHNICITY
AND NATIONALISM IN MODERN EUROPE

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INTRODUCTION

This issue of Research Reports addresses itself to a somewhat neglected subfield of the study of complex societies--interethnic relations in modern pluralistic societies. Anthropological literature on complex societies is by now fairly extensive, although Wolf's observation of several years ago that anthropologists have tended to leave the description and analysis of such societies to specialists in other fields has still some validity.

With respect to anthropological efforts, part of the problem lies in the lack of fit between conceptual models and the cultural and social data encountered in the study of complex societies. Anthropological investigations remain in large part geared to either community studies or studies of whole societies, and neither category is able to provide a fully adequate model for the student of complex societies.

The community approach has indeed proved fruitful, but it is evident that the community in a complex society is but a part of the larger whole. However much we may insist that the community be viewed as a segment of the total society, this totality is nonetheless approached from the perspective of the community; in short, the emphasis tends to be on the part rather than on the whole, and on the degree to which the wider society impinges on the local one.

Some problems also arise when the society rather than the community is taken as the abstraction. As used by anthropologists, society is a

concept encompassing the total social system within which smaller subordinate units are positioned. When the frame of reference is states and/or national cultures, it is easy to fall into the conceptual error of assuming that all entities within a given society share a substantial commonality of culture, even if allowances are made for subcultural differences.

Yet, what we observe in many societies are not continuities but discontinuities in culture, a multiplicity of cultural designs woven within one social frame. In a situation of this sort there is a danger that the equation of society with culture may lend itself to gross distortions. For example, ethnicity in the United States still tends to be categorized as a subcultural phenomenon, the assumption being that there is a mainstream or standard culture and that deviations from it constitute part-culture manifestations--variations from the norm or even aberrations of the standardized culture. That these assumptions are currently being questioned by students of black culture and others suggests that even in the special case of a society that has witnessed massive immigration, dispersal, and assimilation, the traditional model may be too simplistic.

The ethnic groups discussed in this publication share a number of attributes. Most obviously, they are European, which is important less for geographic reasons than as an expression of historical experience. In Europe, as elsewhere--Lapps and Gypsies readily come to mind--there are ethnic components that perforce operate at the sub-national level. The groups under examination, on the other hand, are essentially nations in being which, because of historical circumstances,

do not exercise sovereignty over their own political affairs. It is understandable, therefore, that ethnic demands tend to center on political questions, in particular the constraints imposed on the ethnic group by the dominant state system. It follows that such ethnic groups evidence many of the characteristics which anthropologists generally attribute only to sovereign political entities, including distinct national cultures. This is not too surprising since most European ethnic minorities have at one time enjoyed an independent, or quasi-independent, national existence, and the memory of this independence dies hard.

Perceived political deprivation is at times linked to relative economic underdevelopment. But the nationalism of many European ethnic groups cannot be understood as the response of "have-not" peoples to simple economic exploitation. This is not to deny that many European minorities see themselves as the victims of a form of internal colonialism. Apparently, though, both developed and underdeveloped ethnic regions respond in much the same way to the pressures of centralism: the underdeveloped regions attribute their condition to neglect by the central government, while the developed ones feel that they are called upon to unfairly subsidize the state by tax outflows and other demands not compensated for by governmental grants and services. Whether in fact these complaints are valid in all instances, they are popular beliefs that give added impetus to calls for greater self-determination.

European ethnic groups are generally concentrated in particular localities. These regions are for the most part ethnic homelands that long antedate the establishment of modern nation-states. A consciousness of this antiquity, and the association of geography with culture, helps

to reinforce cultural identity. It also makes for greater cultural visibility since the boundaries of culture are conterminous with recognized spatial limits, a situation which in America north of the Rio Grande applies only to some French Canadians and reservation Indians.

It is not inconceivable that if the North American ethnic mosaic had been arranged on a more firmly regional basis, many of the ethnographic problems touching on the delimitation of natural cultural systems within complex societies would have been approached from a different perspective. As it is, anthropological literature is still largely concerned with blocking out relationships between subnational units, such as tribes, peasant communities, and ethnic urban aggregates on the one hand, and larger wholes such as traditional civilizations and state systems on the other. The degree to which this approach has applicability to the kind of cultural phenomena examined in this report may be judged by a consideration of Puerto Rico, a sociocultural system standing in relation to the United States in a manner fairly analogous to European minority cultures and their respective state systems.

The traditional categories do not easily lend themselves to the study of Puerto Rico as an integral whole, a situation that has not eluded Puerto Rican observers. These shortcomings may help explain why we have an extensive body of anthropological writings covering several peasant communities, life histories of impoverished Puerto Ricans in both San Juan and New York City, but only one study of elite families in Puerto Rico. There is no question that the poor, the peasants, and the immigrants are worthy subjects of anthropological research, but alone they will not give us a fair picture of the total minority

culture or of all the modalities of intercultural relations that exist between the minority culture and the dominant system.

This collection of essays grew out of a symposium held in San Diego during the 69th Annual Meeting of the American Anthropological Association. Given the restrictions imposed by conference guidelines--half an hour for each presentation--the original contributions were more in the nature of overviews than papers ready for publication. In the interval, the authors have added substantially to their original contributions. This extra work has entailed some delay in publication, but we believe that what has been lost in time has been more than compensated for in depth and quality.

It remains for me to thank my colleagues for all their patience and cooperation.

Oriol Pi-Sunyer
Editor