

THE 350-YEAR WHEEL TURNS

The Global Rise of Ethnic Nationalism

Ireland has outlived the failure of all its hopes.

-- **Sir Roger Casemate**, Irish rebel
1865- hanged 1916

I originally wrote this article in April 1995 to describe the change in social trend from centralizing power to decentralizing. Power has been flowing to centers, i.e., governments, for over 350 years, and now that trend is changing. For the next 350 years power will flow away from centers and back to regions, communities, families, individuals, and non-state entities. This social trend change will profoundly affect the entire globe. – F. Sanders

Japan: No modern nation so perfectly embodies homogenized modernist culture. But is the monolith cracking? In an October 1994 interview, Nobel Laureate Kenzaburo Oe, one of Japan's leading writers, painted an astonishingly different picture. "The Japanese, from the prime minister on down, claim that being a single race & culture strengthens the nation. That is not at all my feeling. There are various cultures in different regions, & each region has its own culture."

Toting up secessionist movements today, you quickly lose count: Basques, Bretons, Catalans, Flemings, northern Italians, Scots, Québécois, Welshmen all clamor for independence or home rule. Even Schwabs & Bayers aren't too enthusiastic about Greater Germany. Ethnic realities have already dismembered World War I gerrymanders like Czechoslovakia & Yugoslavia, & the Great Eater of Nationalities, the USSR, has vomited up its captive nations. Northern Californians suspect they'd be better off rid of Los Angeles, while Idaho & Montana know they'd rather be free.

What in the world is going on?

A 200-YEAR WHEEL TURNS

We are witnessing a historic change of secular trend from centralization to decentralization, from "inclusion" to "exclusion". Since about 1650, nearly four centuries, the social trend has been concentrating power, but now that trend is reversing. Power is flowing away from centers (like federated states) to regions & localities, from governments to individuals. While inclusionist events like NAFTA steal headlines, they are only paroxysms of the dying trend which point to the cycle's top, not its continuation.

Who has noticed the trend change? Analysts from all disciplines. Social observers & market technicians Robert Prechter & Dave Allman of Elliott Wave International, for example. Military strategist Martin van Creveld in his *Transformation of War* (New York: The Free Press, A Division of Macmillan, Inc., 1991 and *Rise and Decline of the State*, 1999). Journalist Robert D. Kaplan in "The Coming Anarchy" (Atlantic Monthly, 2/94). Philosopher & social critic Ed Veith in *Postmodern Times* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 1994). And of course, the American Establishment whose seat of power has already been rattled by the changing trend.

MODERNISM GIVES WAY TO POSTMODERNISM

In *Postmodern Times* Dr. Ed Veith sets the backdrop for these changes. In nearly every sphere, from academic fields to new social phenomena, the assumptions that shaped 20th century thought & culture are being exploded. As we enter the 21st century, it seems clear that Western culture is entering a new phase, which scholars are calling "postmodern." (p. xi)

Postmodernism both level[s] cultures & exaggerat[es] the differences between them. Postmodernism fragments society into contending & mutually unintelligible cultures & subcultures. Even within a single society, people are segmenting into self-contained communities & contending interest groups. Christianity itself is ghettoized. From Bosnia to American universities, we see the emergence of a new tribalism. (p. 144).

What is producing this fragmentation? In part centralization's excess of success, in part technology, & in part the failure of old ideologies. IBM became just too big to manage, like the U.S. government. The computer revolution has decentralized decision making & work stations & exploded data access.

The demise of communism has robbed its artificial dialectical opponent, the anti-communist West (a.k.a. "capitalism" or "democracy"), of all reason to live. For over 40 years the old formula of "closing the ranks before the Red threat" silenced the voices of diversity & dissent, but no longer. Today ideological identity has wilted while ethnic identity (always as deeply rooted as life itself) has blossomed. In a world where all the religion-substitutes (from "anti-communism" to Shirley MacLain-ism) have demonstrated irredeemable failure, ethnic identities return to religion to draw their strength.

OTHER OBSERVERS

Robert D. Kaplan took a trip to West Africa to watch fragmentation in action. The picture he paints in the February 1994 *Atlantic Monthly* isn't rosy.

West Africa is becoming the symbol of worldwide demographic, environmental, & societal stress, in which criminal anarchy emerges as the real "strategic" danger. Disease, overpopulation, unprovoked crime, scarcity of resources, refugee migrations, the increasing erosion of nation-states & international borders, & the empowerment of private armies, security firms, & international drug cartels are now most tellingly demonstrated through a West African prism. . . . A pre-modern formlessness governs the battlefield, evoking the wars in medieval Europe prior to the 1648 Peace of Westphalia, which ushered in the era of organized nation states. (p. 46).

Kaplan foresees that refugees & peasants crowding into cities will rob national borders of their meaning & shift power into "less educated, less sophisticated groups" who know only one border: "culture & tribe." Refugees will bring cultural disputes to weaken the U.S. & Europe. Altogether disregarding present national borders, these population shifts will remake the identities of civilizations after the image of religion & ethnicity (P. 62). Bristling with gloomy adjectives, Kaplan denounces the future:

[T]he political & cartographic implications of postmodernism [will be] an epoch of themeless juxtapositions in which the classificatory grid of nation-states is going to be replaced by a jagged-glass pattern of city-states, shanty-states, nebulous & anarchic regionalisms . . . (p. 72).

Ethnic identification, Kaplan predicts, will form the most cohesive social force in the immediate future. How will these trends affect the U.S.?

[Many] factors will make the U.S. less a nation than it is today, even as it gains territory following the peaceful dissolution of Canada. Quebec, based on the bedrock of Roman Catholicism & Francophone ethnicity, could yet turn out

to be North America's most cohesive & crime-free nation-state. (It may be a smaller Quebec, though, since aboriginal peoples may lop off northern parts of the province.) "Patriotism" will become increasingly regional [*sic*] as people in Alberta & Montana discover that they have far more in common with each other than they do with Ottawa or Washington, & Spanish-speakers in the Southwest discover a greater commonality with Mexico City. . . . As Washington's influence wanes, & with it the traditional symbols of American patriotism, North Americans will take psychological refuge in their insulated communities & cultures. (p. 76, emphasis added.)

THE TRANSFORMATION OF WAR

Military historian Martin van Creveld teaches history at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. In the *Transformation of War* he predicts the end of war as we have known it. His thesis is simple. *Technology has made war waged by nation states so costly that conventional warfare is now obsolete.* The massive techno-spasm that pulverized Iraq may be the dinosaur's last lunge. Conventional military organization offers no protection against the terrorist army that strikes & then melts into the populace, leaving no target for technology. The U.S. looked great in Kuwait, but a bit ragged in Mogadishu. The same military machine that incinerated Iraqis by the thousands lurched helplessly from side to side when facing hit-&-run Somalis in "technicals," pick-up trucks with machine guns welded to their beds.

The wars of the future will be "low-intensity conflicts" (LICs). In developed countries LICs may be called "terrorism" or "police work." They rarely involve regular armies on both sides, but usually regulars on one side & guerrillas -- including civilians, women, & children -- on the other. Most of all, LICs do not rely on high-technology collective weaponry, "the pride & joy of any modern armed force." (p. 20)

THE ESTABLISHMENT'S VIEW

The trend toward decentralization has not escaped notice of the American Establishment. In the Council on Foreign Relations' influential policy journal, *Foreign Affairs*, various articles in recent years have addressed international fragmentation. As the old ideologies crumble, ethnicity & irredentism threaten Establishment control. Meanwhile the Insiders have been considering the best ways to hijack the trend & preserve their power. In Establishmentese, it sounds like this:

While wider economic imperatives & the power of the market dictate wider associations of states, the emotional & psychological drives to cultural & national affirmation support the currents of separation. The resulting forces that are pulling in three directions -- wider association of markets, narrower ethnic affirmation, & restrictive national sovereignty -- continue to sap the stability of the post-Cold War world. . . . The exclusive position of the state, as the dominant actor in international relations in time of peace, is under challenge. . . . The old order is fading fast; the very idea of "order," in the world that is taking shape before our eyes, is now in question." (Gideon Gottlieb, *Nation against State*, p. 126 ff. New York: Council on Foreign Relations Press, 1993)

In the March/April 1995 *Foreign Affairs*, the book review section devotes four pages to book reviews by Francis Fukuyama of "The End of History" fame. Seven of the books he reviews concern the rise of ethnicity, race, and/or culture.

The Clash of Civilizations

By far the most important of these recent articles & books appeared in the Summer 1993 Foreign Affairs. "The Clash of Civilizations?" claims, "The clash of civilizations [i.e., culture] will dominate global politics. The fault lines between civilizations will be the battle lines of the future." The author of this piece, Samuel P. Huntington, is Eaton Professor of the Science of Government & Director of the John M. Olin Institute for Strategic Studies at Harvard. Huntington writes,

"World politics is entering a new phase, & intellectuals have not hesitated to proliferate visions of what it will be -- the end of history, the return of traditional rivalries between nation states, & the decline of the nation state from the conflicting pulls of tribalism & globalism, among others. Each of these visions catches aspects of the emerging reality. Yet they all miss a crucial, indeed a central, aspect of what global politics is likely to be in the coming years.

"[T]he fundamental source of conflict in this new world will not be primarily ideological or primarily economic. *The great divisions among humankind & the dominating source of conflict will be cultural.*" (p. 22, emphasis added)

According to Huntington the clash of civilizations is the latest phase in conflict's evolution. From the Peace of Westphalia until the French Revolution, Western conflicts arose largely among princes trying to expand power & territory. From the French Revolution until the end of World War I, nations fought rather than princes. From the World War-I until the Cold War's end came the wars of ideology with their transnational superpowers. As international conflict moves out of its Western phase, civilizations will face off, the West against the non-West & non-Western civilizations against each other.

CONFLICT BECOMES CULTURAL

What interests us here is not Huntington's shifting the focus from West to non-West, but from ideological & political goals to cultural clashes. He defines a civilization as "the highest cultural grouping of people & [their] broadest level of cultural identity . . . short of that which distinguishes humans from other species." Both objective elements (language, history, religion, customs) & the people's subjective self-identification define civilizations. (p. 24).

These differences [among civilizations] are the product of centuries. They will not soon disappear. They are far more fundamental than differences among political ideologies & political regimes. (p. 25) Religion reinforces the revival of ethnic identities . . . (p. 33)

What will this mean for multicultural empires?

In the future, as people differentiate themselves by civilization, countries with large numbers of peoples of different civilizations, such as the Soviet Union & Yugoslavia, are candidates for dismemberment. Some other countries have a fair degree of cultural homogeneity but are divided over whether their society belongs to one civilization or another. (p. 42)

While admittedly Huntington focusses his eyes on non-Western countries, he misses what's right under his nose in the West. The same centrifugal cultural forces that drive Kenzaburo Oe away from Tokyo & Armenians away from Moscow drive Southerners & Westerners away from New York, Washington, & Hollywood. As the United States government & Yankee culture has become more & more self-consciously pagan, their assault on the South's Christianity & identity has sharpened. This only reinforces our other cultural differences: "history, language, culture, tradition, different views on the relations between God & man, the individual & the group, the citizen & the

state, parents & children, husband & wife, as well as differing views of the relative importance of rights & responsibilities, liberty & authority, equality & hierarchy, . . . the product of centuries" in Huntington's words.

THE TREND IS OUR FRIEND

Day by day kindred national feelings grow around the globe, reflecting a secular trend to decentralization & fragmentation that will continue for centuries. No nation will be exempt, not even the United States. -- F. Sanders