contend over the redistribution of resources and the providing of mutual assistance, as John Lonsdale's work on "moral ethnicity" shows. Finally, ethnicity may be deployed as an idiom of political mobilization and making demands on the state. Ethnic ideologies assert that identity is natural and immutable. Its power rests upon the emotional force of kinship and origins that are carried over and applied to larger communities. But only because it conceals that it is in fact open to multiple interpretations and negotiation is ethnicity for so many different people emotionally attractive and strategically efficient. Where such negotiation is forcefully prevented ethnic ideologies also lead to exclusion, hardship, insecurity, and death.

See also **Colonial Traditions and Inventions; Colonialism and Imperialism; Kinship and Affinity; Warfare.**

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CAROLA LENTZ

CENTRAL AFRICA

IDEOLOGY OF ETHNICITY IN CENTRAL AFRICA

In the postcolonial nation-states of Central Africa, black African social actors identify themselves as members of particular "tribes," or "ethnic groups," or the equivalents of these terms in African and European languages in local use. Such ethnic groups tend to be felt as a tangible reality. They are claimed to organize major aspects of the individual's life in the field of language, expressive and ritual culture, kinship, production, and reproduction. Allegiance and opposition in traditional and modern politics are considered to be largely determined along ethnic lines. National territory is often seen as parceled out in contiguous sections, each of which forms an ethnic group's rural home area administered by a traditional ruler (chief, headman). The natural habitat of ethnic identity is therefore thought to be "the village home," a category implying purity, meaningfulness, and order.

This view is largely nostalgic. Significant ethnic processes in Central Africa evolve not only in a

rural context but also in towns, bureaucracies, and national political circles; they involve, among others, born urbanites organizing themselves through dyadic network contacts and formal organizations rather than through historic localized groups. Moreover, massive twentieth-century social change in the rural areas has blurred the distinction between town and countryside.

This local ideology of ethnicity must form our point of departure. It resonates with the views held by European travelers, administrators, Christian missionaries, employers of African labor, and anthropologists active in Central Africa throughout the colonial period. Colonial administration partitioned African territories into strictly demarcated units thought to possess, through "tribes," a unique culture and indigenous sociopolitical organization allegedly underpinned by centuries of inescapable tradition. In their selection and diocesan administration of certain areas, and their codification of local languages for education and Bible translation, Christian missions reinforced the illusion of tribal identity. Central African intellectuals and politicians perpetuated this understanding by articulating their own ethnicities; "inventing" tradition in the form of ethnohistory, ethnic festivals, and folklorization; and supporting reinstatement of traditional leadership as a focus for ethnicity.

Anthropology also adopted the tribal illusion. It was only in the 1960s that the concept of "tribe" was subjected to profound criticism as a Eurocentric arfd reifed designation of an ethnic group, and ethnic differentiation began to be viewed as a sociopolitical process. In the twenty-first century anthropologists understand Central African ethnicity to be constructed and situational. Late-twentieth-century research shows how many ethnic names, or ethno-nyms, in Central Africa originated in colonial practices. Whereas the "tribe" was once thought to sum up a total, bounded, and localized culture, ethnicity has come to be stressed to be only one among several primary structural principles in Central African societies.

ETHNICITY AND ETHNICIZATION

Ethnicity poses great analytical difficulties because it is operative in many social and political contexts where it displays varying and contradictory dimensions. "Ethnicity" in Central Africa today can refer to, among other things, a system of social classification that is ostensibly rigid yet depends on flexibility and manipulation at the level of both ethnic groups and individuals; a structure for the definition and interaction of subnational power groups making up the national polity; a system of social inequality; and a strategic network for redistribution. It constitutes the local folk theory of political causation in addition to being an ideology justifying inequality and violence vis-a-vis other ethnic groups. This multidimensionality makes for the complex ethnic dialectics of Central African societies and renders these dialectics unpredictable.

Definitions are a first step toward managing this complexity. An "ethnic group" is an explicitly named set of people. Within a given social field there are more than one such set, but only a finite, usually limited number are distinguished. The numerically largest set in the social field is of considerable demographic scope; other sets may be quite small. The membership of a set is in principle ascriptive—that is, determined by birth. Within the set, people identify with one another and are identified by others on the basis of a few historically determined and historically changing ethnic "boundary markers," including ethnonym, language, historic forms of leadership, modes of production, selected cultural traits, and sometimes selected somatic characteristics such as skin color, hair texture, facial characteristics, and deliberate human interference with the body's appearance, both reversible (for example, hairstyle) and irreversible (for example, scarification).

"Ethnicity" is the way in which the wider social field is economically, politically, and culturally structured in terms of a multiplicity of such ethnic groups in interaction. "Identity" is the self-image that members of any social category construct as members, on the basis of identification and of stereotyping both among themselves and among outsiders. Identity tends to be situational, multiple (since every social field consists of many intersecting social categories), strategic, and subject to historical change. This applies to ethnic identities no less than to gender, class, and professional, religious, and other identities. Socialization early in life, as well as social control, propaganda, and taking consciousness in adulthood, may cause a

specific identity to become so deeply entrenched in the personality as to produce a fixed, self-evident Vision of reality, no longer consciously negotiated in social contexts. "Ethnicization" marks the process by which ethnic identity becomes a militant political idiom taking precedence over an individual's other identities, as a basis for political action. "Culture" comprises the total combination of attributes a human individual acquires as a member of society.

Ethnonyms tend to be nested. Local groups at are clearly distinguished at the regional level may be merged at the national level in the face of nonmembers of either group. If either local group of higher status, such merging amounts to ethnic 'passing" on the part of members of the group considered inferior. Ethnonyms are segmentary, shifting, situational, and manipulable, and so are ethnic boundary markers. The history of ethnic oups within a social field includes the capricious attern of the emergence, distribution, and redistribution of boundary markers including ethnonyms. For instance, in the region straddling Angola, "aire, and Zambia, male circumcision serves as a oundary marker between groups (the Lunda, dembu, Luvale, Mbunda, Chokwe, and Luchazi, or example) associated with the widespread Lunda complex of language and political and ceremonial culture, as against other yet related groups such as Nkoya and Mbwela, who practiced circumcision until the nineteenth century.

Throughout Central Africa language plays a major role as an ethnic boundary marker. This "prings partly from the codification of African lan-ages since the nineteenth century but also more in general from language's capability of encoding and displaying identity or alienness in social inter-ction. More than any other feature of institutionalized culture, language is encoded in formal rules the infringement of which (by nonnative speakers, or example) immediately causes puzzlement, rid-'cule, rejection, or a breakdown of communication mong listeners and readers. Language for the ative speaker tends to be the last refuge of owning d belonging, of competence and identity, owever, such emotive appeal presupposes ethnicization; without this factor, tjie role of language as ethnic boundary marker is attenuated by Central rica's widespread multilingualism.

The tribal model and ethnicization erroneously equate ethnic identity with a total culture embracing all aspects of human life, instead of with selected cultural items serving as boundary markers. In Central Africa, a specific cultural package encompassing all aspects of human life is seldom limited, in place and time, to a specific ethnic group; usually it has a much wider distribution. For instance, in the savanna belt of south Central Africa, scores of ethnic groups have been distinguished, one next to the other, since the nineteenth century, yet the distribution of patterns of production, reproduction, and signification shows such an underlying unity that one should speak of one large culture region. Within this far-reaching regional continuity, distinct ethnic groups have distinguished themselves by relatively minor cultural items marking ethnic boundaries.

Ethnicization entails the construction of ethnonyms to mark ethnic boundaries and the redefinition of local culture so as to offer distinctive boundary markers. The cultivated sense of a shared history lends meaning to experiences of powerlessness, deprivation, and estrangement, and kindles hope of improvement through ethnic self-presentation. The ethnonym and the principle of ascription then produce for the members of society an image of a bounded, particularist set of solidary people. The vulnerable individual's access to national resources and to the formal organization (state, industry) controlling them becomes the object of group action. In postcolonial Central Africa, ethnicization increasingly has included cultural politics. Sets of people are restructured as ethnic groups by the designing of a cultural package, which in its own right constitutes a major stake in the negotiations with the outside world. One dissociates from rival ethnic groups at the local and regional scene through a strategic emphasis on cultural and linguistic elements; at the national level one competes for the state's political and economic prizes via the state's recognition of the ethnically constructed cultural package. New inequalities emerge within the ethnic group. The mediation takes place via ethnic brokers who are best positioned to exploit the opportunities at the interface between the ethnic group and the outside world. Asserting the "traditional," "authen-tic" (but in fact newly reconstructed) culture is seen as an important task and becomes a source of power and income for the brokers. Ethnic associations,

publications, and festivals constitute general strategic instruments in this process.

Ethnicization restructures individuals' perceptions of time and space. It creates social meaning by offering to the members of Central African societies a folk theory that enables them to impose a sense of spatial localization and temporal continuity on the otherwise bewildering fragmentation and heterogeneity of their postcolonial experience. Individuals not only frame selected items of their regional culture within the boundaries of their ethnic group and within their image of "home," but also project these items onto a glorified past. Political, judicial, and moral relations are underpinned by reference to the virtual, dreamed village, the evocation of which (in urban ritual, ethnic festivals, and political demonstrations embellished by traditional costumes, ceremonial weapons, and traditional leaders) enables people to derive symbolic comfort from their communion with mythical images and provides a basis for ethnic leaders' mobilizing appeal.

Ethnicity displays a remarkable contradiction between inescapability and constmctedness, which largely explains its great societal potential. As a classification system, ethnicity offers a logical structure, which is further ossified through ascription and which presents itself as unconditional, bounded, inescapable, and timeless. This is what made early researchers of Central African ethnicity stress primordial attachments. However, the social praxis of ethnicity, as ethnicization, implies flexibility, choice, constmctedness, and change. Together, these entirely contradictory aspects,constitute ethnicity, which is able to disguise strategy as inevitability. This dialectics renders ethnicity particularly suitable for mediating, in processes of social change, between social contexts that are of a fundamentally different structure. Because of this internal contradiction, ethnicity offers the option of strategically effective particularism in a context of uni-versalism and hence enables individuals, as members of an ethnic group, to cross otherwise nonnegotiable boundaries and to create a foothold or niche in structural contexts (such as cities and bureaucracies) that would otherwise remain inaccessible.

ETHNICITY AND SOCIAL CONFLICT IN CENTRAL AFRICA

Ethnicity is rarely a mere classification system of parallel groups operating at the same level of power, esteem, and privilege. It usually implies an element of vertical subordination: ethnic group membership is a status position in a hierarchy of politico-economic power and prestige, and ethnicization aims at improving the position of the entire ethnic group; failing empowerment of the group, an individual may try to pass singly to a more highly placed group by the adoption of new boundary markers (a different ethnonym, language, dress style, world religion, and so on). Ethnic formulations govern conflicts over social inequality in the society.

Though ethnicity is not as dominant and independent a factor in Central African society as ethnic actors (and many outside analysts) claim it to be, it has established itself as the Central African political folk theory, and all major social conflicts assume ethnic manifestations. This is possible because of ethnicity's unique capability of being manipulated by ethnic and political brokers; its suggestion of inescapability; its focus on ethnonyms, which makes actors reduce complex structural issues to identified social groups; and its spatial and temporal imagery (evoking, for example, the idealized village home), which renders ethnic constructs highly persuasive. The appeal by ethnic brokers to historic ethnic symbols emulating precolonial contradictions of competition (pastoralists versus agriculturalists, lords versus clients) suggests that the conflict is rooted not in contemporary power relations but in precolonial, perennial, intergroup conflicts, and hence is unsolvable.

Redefining circumstances in essentiaiistic, primordialist ethnic terms transforms social conflicts into nonnegotiable standoffs that inevitably result in violence, especially given the poverty and erosion of many postcolonial states in Central Africa, which render states prizes instead of arbiters in social conflict. Ethnicization turns class conflict into ethnic conflict over control of the state, and having captured the state, an ethnic group seizes its political and military resources to further its own aims. With the global availability of sophisticated weaponry, ethnic conflicts easily precipitate into large-scale violence, of which the 1994 tragedy in Rwanda is only one example from Central Africa. While the cultural and mass psychological factors in such events should not be ignored and the unique historicity of events makes a systematic explanation

difficult, ethnicity is largely a template for class conflict.

PRECOLONIAL AND COLONIAL ETHNICITY IN CENTRAL AFRICA

Ethnicity in Central Africa has been greatly influenced by intergroup processes within political arenas defined by the colonial and postcolonial state. However, many ethnonyms and other boundary markers undoubtedly have a precolonial origin.

Ethnic groups as defined above are too prominently and consistently represented in oral traditions to be explained away as mere projections of colonial or postcolonial realities into a precolonial past (although such projections do occur). Moreover, the same ethnonyms appear in documents generated in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, before colonial administration could have made an impact. However, the various genetic and proper names for groups thus distinguished by precolonial Central Africans must have lacked the standardization and territoriality imposed with colonialism. Their dimensions diverged: named political units constituting precolonial state systems did not coincide with linguistic clusters, but probably did reflect ecological specializations of agriculturalists, pastoralists, hunters, fishermen, and petty commodity producers. Precolonial states, as systems integrating ecological diversities, were usually multiethnic: one dominant ethnic group among several other ethnic groups, several languages, and an underlying regional culture.

Ethnonyms in precolonial times may reflect rejection of a central state or regional cult (as did those of the Tonga and Kwangwa, for example), designating groups "tired of subservience," as found repeatedly in Zambia, Malawi, and Zimbabwe. Of course, such structural designation precludes any genetic link between groups thus named. In addition, outside of the context of the state, ethnonymic practices reflected ecological specializations, for example, by distinguishing between hunter-gatherer Pygmies and agriculturalist Bantu-speakers in Zaire, and between Khoesan-speaking hunter-gatherers and Bantu-speaking agriculturalists and pastoralists in Zambia, Botswana, and Namibia. Here both ecological specialization and language served as ethnic boundary markers. The historic ecological opposition between pastoralism and agriculturalism has provided the imagery (if nothing more) for the most violent ethnic conflicts Central Africa has seen in postcolonial times, in Rwanda and Burundi.

If ethnicity in Central Africa has definite precolonial antecedents, the most obvious form in which colonial ethnicity has presented itself—as a hierarchical structure of geographically bounded, mutually exclusive ethnic, linguistic, religious, political, and administrative units administered by traditional rulers who became colonial officials—does not. The impact of European colonization on ethnicity and identity in Central Africa has been felt in a number of structural contexts.

ETHNICITY IN FORMAL ORGANIZATIONS

In modern formal organizations (state bureaucracies, industrial and commercial enterprises, and voluntary associations including churches, political parties, and ethnic associations), ethnicity emerges as the specific social format in which individuals negotiate between the universalist legal rules and statuses as defined within the formal organization, and their individual and group goals of economic survival, material appropriation, prestige, interpersonal power, and the acquisition of a political following. When of two interacting partners one is an official in the organization, ethnic identification often persuades the official to divert resources for unofficial means. Ethnicity then amounts to a structure of redistribution and patronage, which undermines the universalist principles of the formal organization but at the same time informally ties a significant section of the population both to the redistributing official and to the organization—and ultimately to the state.

The situationality of ethnicity means that only in certain contexts is a display of ethnic exclusive -ness acceptable, and even then under specific conditions (in secret, in private, or during leisure time). Outside these contexts universalism is the norm, and there the migrant, job seeker, or client merges inconspicuously into the background of urban and formal-organizational mass society, submitting to generalized styles of dress and conduct, and using a lingua franca instead of a minority home language, the ticket to ethnic solidarity.

Before independence, industrial officials in Central Africa were mainly European and Asian

expatriates; this introduced an ethnic factor, both between the expatriates and the local Africans and among expatriates from different parts of the world. African labor has been one of the largest problems of local economies; initially the solution was found in recruitment across considerable distances, which (even against the background of extended regional cultures) made for considerable linguistic, social, and cultural diversity at the towns, mines, and plantations where migrants converged. Urban ethnicity emerged under such conditions. The labor market features niches reserved for specific ethnic groups, exemplifying chains of redistribution between town and countryside. Some of today's ethnonyms (Nyamwezi, for example) are derived from the colonial labor market. Initially, industrial social control was exercised on a rural ethnic basis, by "tribal elders," in line with managerial fictions of the "target worker," "the bachelor labor migrant," and the "temporarily displaced villager," but this situation soon became unacceptable to urban and industrial workers developing a worker's class consciousness. In Central Africa, therefore, industrial conflicts tended to be expressed as ethnic conflicts.

The struggle for independence in Central African countries comprised not only the emergence of political parties (often with an ethnic or regionalist element) striving for constitutional reform, but also a distinct ethnic conflict: between a dominant white group of European ancestry controlling the colonial state, its bureaucracies, industry, and large-scale agriculture on the one hand, and on the other the African population, regardless of ethnic composition. Independence marked a replacement of white personnel by black, and in the latter's rallying for access and control, ethnicization played a major role.

Voluntary organizations in Central Africa may be implicitly or explicitly organized on an ethnic basis; of this tendency the standard example is ethnic organizations aiming at the presentation of ethnic identity through music, dance, and annual festivals, and through furthering of traditional leadership. In a multiethnic environment they offer people the opportunity of creating refuges of ethnic particularism, as a basis for effective dyadic network relationships between individuals. The colonial and postcolonial state's intense fear of monoethnic group activity has led to a paucity of such associations in Central Africa. Frequently, voluntary formal organizations can be seen to function in a multiethnic manner, in reflection of the fact that everyday life, especially in towns but increasingly also in rural areas, is multiethnic. Voluntary associations of a recreational, sportive, and religious nature provide a usable model of the wider society and teach people to operate within the latter.

Christian churches furthered ethnic and regionalist particularism; however, this was often balanced by such nationalist and antiracialist orientation as Central African adherents derived from their churches' cosmopolitanism. The same point applies to Islam, a major presence in the northeastern and eastern parts of Central Africa. As a result, world religions and their formal organizations constitute the least ethnically divided domain in post-colonial Central Africa. Many congregations are multilingual in their rituals, and whereas ethnic conflicts (and those between Africans and non-Africans) may contribute to congregational fission, in general the adherents' ethnic particularism yields to religious universalism.

ETHNICITY IN URBAN CONTEXTS

The towns of Central Africa, products of the imposition of colonial administration and of the capitalist mode of production, have served as laboratories of multiethnic social life. African townspeople have shaped converging forms of urban life, molding the multiethnic and multilingual influx of migrants into viable urban societies where, with the aid of a lingua franca, formal and informal norms of conduct, patterns of experience, and sources of identification and mobilization are widely shared across ethnic and regional divisions. On this basis towns have asserted themselves in the face of the modern state and the declining postcolonial economy.

A widespread academic opinion stresses the increasing irrelevance, in the urban situation, of historic, rural-derived forms of social organization (kinship, marriage, and "traditional" politics and ritual). Here the Kalela dance, studied by J. Clyde Mitchell *(The Kalela Dance,* 1956) offers the classic paradigm, emphasizing how at the city boundaries, elements of rural society and culture may be selectively admitted onto the urban scene, yet undergo such a dramatic transformation of form,

organization, and function that their urban manifestations must be understood by reference to the urban situation alone. Or, in H. Max Gluckman's famous words, "the African townsman is a townsman." He is "not a displaced villager or tribesman [but is J'detribalised' as soon as he leaves his village." The pioneering research by Mitchell and A. L. Epstein on the Zambian Copperbelt in the 1950s viewed urban ethnicity principally as a classification system for the management of dyadic network contacts and marital choices in town—an exclusively structural feature, not a vehicle for cultural continuity between rural and urban areas. Whereas Mitchell's later work developed the theory of urban ethnic categorization, Epstein abandoned the earlier position. He elaborated on the emotive aspects of identity as deriving from a sense of collective history, and from identification between (alternate) generations. He asserted that the private urban domain of the household, kinship, and sexuality was informed by cultural orientations from the migrants' distant rural homes.

This issue is elucidated by subsequent research on kinship rites, life-crisis rites, and historic African rituals in town. What is reproduced in such urban rituals is not an ethnically specific distinctive set of practices (although ethnicization pretends otherwise), but the overall cultural orientation of the wider region. The rural-derived practices bring to bear historic-cultural meaning and the attending cos-mological orientation upon the culturally fragmented urban existence, in order to complement such symbolic orientation as derives from the modern state, the capitalist economy, world religions, and global consumer culture. Underneath the multiplicity of ethnic labels circulating in town, institutionalized modes of interethnic discourse (jolting relations, funerary friendship) and marriage also mediate this joint substratum. Historic African cults, syncretistic cults, and independent Christian churches in town, which tend to be transethnic, derive much of their appeal from the way in which they articulate and transform this historic substratum and thus recapture meanings for urbanites who have loosened their direct contact with rural culture.

ETHNICITY IN RURAL CONTEXTS In late-twentieth-century Central Africa, the urban-rural distinction has become less dear. Formal organizations exist in rural areas, and many of the patterns of ethnicity discussed above are therefore also found there. Through rural-urban links (migration, marriage, part-time farming, ritual, and healing), many Central Africans participate both in urban and in rural life, and ethnicity provides strategic connections between these structurally different settings.

The colonial project sought to turn rural Central Africa into a patchwork quilt of "tribes," but never succeeded. Although in many countries the administration of rural areas is partly in the hands of traditional rulers whose authority is defined territorially, chiefs' areas today are not homogeneous in terms of the inhabitants' ethnic and economic characteristics; they include national and international ethnic strangers, primary rural producers, as well as representatives of all sorts of national-level formal organizations. The rural areas are involved in processes of class formation, in which the increasing scarcity of land as an agricultural resource leads to ethnic conflict because of the link between ethnic groups, traditional rulers, and land allocation. For such ethnic confrontations, as well as for the contest over scarce resources trickling down from the central state and from international development agencies, local and regional politics constitute an arena; the players include traditional rulers, ethno-political brokers conversant with urban and national-level conditions, and nonlocals pursuing supralocal political and economic concerns.

As small agricultural producers, equipped with the power to vote and usually with personal knowledge of urban conditions at the political center, peasants also play a role. Their view of politics tends to be dominated by ethnicity as a folk political theory. Here they are inspired by a collective sense of rural deprivation in the course of a shared colonial and postcolonial history. Expecting to extract, from state, party, and individual politicians, goods and seivices that until the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries have been denied them, peasants give voting support to politicians who involve them in and through ethnicization. Politicians, often with a local background but through their education and careers involved beyond the local level, are often in collusion with local intellectuals, ethnic associations, and traditional rulers.

Provided ethnicization leads to recognition from the center (in the fields of expressive culture and traditional leadership) and an allocation of material benefits, it often results in increased regional and national integration. The view of ethnicity as invariably politically divisive and centrifugal cannot be supported. However, if local ethnicization is systematically frustrated or if the rural area is near a national border across which ethnic identification is cultivated with other groups sharing the same regional culture, then the conditions may be building up for secessionism, one of the most obvious spatial expressions of ethnicized intrastatal conflict, and one feared by Central African governments.

ETHNICITY IN THE POSTCOLONIAL STATE The postcolonial state is far from a fixed and static bedding through which ethnic processes flow. On the contrary, the resilience of ethnic phenomena in Africa and worldwide reflects the erosion of the nation-state, internally by regional and local pressures and externally by the global economy and the changing international political order. If wealth flows from the state, ethnicity provides a network to redistribute it; if the state can no longer deliver, ethnicity provides counterstructures for such things as security, distribution, and assertion of group rights.

In Central Africa, national politics has a regionalist rather than an ethnic bias. Many small ethnic groups coalesce into a few regional power blocs; the latter operate at the national level, in shifting factional arrangements striving for control over the state. In Zambia, for instance, this process has now given rise to "mega-ethnic groups" such as the "Nyanja" (marked by a simplified version of the Chewa language as lingua franca) and the "Bemba." The latter name no longer primarily designates one among many other ethnic groups in the country's northeast, but has come to be mainly used for an ethnic composite encompassing the entire northern part of the country, which since 1930 has provided the bulk of labor migrants to the Zambian Copperbelt towns whose urban lingua franca, Bemba (more than the rural ethnic group of the same name), gave the block its name. Ethnic boundary markers between the constituent ethnic groups are shed and even their ethnonyms become obsolete. The emergent mega-ethnic group, though largely a national-level political construct, begins to coincide with the underlying regional culture. This process will continue to define ethnicization in Central Africa into the twenty-first century.

The increase of scale in ethnicization is partly brought about by national elites who in the absence of the political expression of existing class and religious cleavages in national politics appeal for voter support to the ethnic folk theory of politics. In the 1970s and 1980s, one-party and military rule in Central Africa had as one of its major rationalizations the avoidance of ethnicization in the national political field. The elite sought to borrow from the underlying regional culture symbols of authority with nationwide appeal. A case in point is President Mobutu Sese Seko's drive for ***authenticity in*** Zaire. In other Central African postcolonial states, however, historic African symbols were combined with or supplanted by North Atlantic, Christian, and Islamic ones in the bricolage of national symbolism. With the general reinstitution of multipartyism in the 1990s, however, the explicitly ethnic element in Central African politics has greatly increased and occasionally (as in Rwanda in 1994) assumed genocidal proportions.

CULTURAL RECONSTRUCTION AND THE LIMITS OF ETHNIC MANIPULATION

Is there a limit to the manipulative capacity of ethnicity in Central Africa? Here it is useful to distinguish between a person's identification with a particular ethnic group and its regional and national trajectory in terms of political and economic power, prestige, and intergroup conflicts, and a person's cultural orientation, which is usually shared by many people belonging to a vast region comprising various ethnic groups.

Culture organizes the worldview, including fundamental conceptions of the body, time, space, causation, hierarchy, morality, legality, and relations between genders and between generations, and between the human, natural, and supernatural worlds. Invested in symbolic contents rather than in boundaries and their markers, the identity produced by such an overall cultural orientation does not have a name and may be termed existential, as against contrastive identity, which distinguishes the members of named ethnic groups through contrasting boundary markers.

Ethnicization, therefore, amounts to a conceptual and organizational focusing or framing, so as to make a social contradiction or conflict capable of being processed within the available technologies of communication, bureaucratic organization, and political representation.

The emergence of ethnic associations is one example of such framing at the organizational level. Individuals and groups can and do readily drop certain ethnic boundary markers and adopt others (a different language, ethnonym, or puberty rite, for example) without fundamentally affecting their overall cultural orientation; however, the process of ethnicization, and the intercontinental response it generates, condemns (unjustifiably) any such strategic shift (discouraging the use of a minority language for educational and judicial reasons, for example, or of puberty rites for medical reasons) as a denial of existential identity and an infringement of human rights.

By contrast, such assaults on existential cultural identity as the imposition of colonial rule, world religions, and the capitalist mode of production have affected the people of Central Africa profoundly, but not initially at the level of their specific ethnic group affiliations. However, after religious, therapeutic, and military responses, ethnicization has tended to emerge as a powerful secondary response to threatened destruction of existential identity. This has often produced new ethnic groups as the obvious focus for talcing consciousness and for political action. It is a standard strategy of ethnicization to present the wider regional culture as eminently peculiar to one's own ethnic group; the emergence of megaethnic groups must also be seen in this light. Ethnicization thus becomes a strategy in the struggle not only for political and economic power, but particularly for the rebuilding of an eroded worldview within new boundaries, the reconstruction of existential identity through contrastive identity. The actors engage in a social process that allows them, by the management of boundaries and the positioning of people, ideas, and objects with in and outside these boundaries, to create a new community of mean-ingfulness. For such symbolic reconstruction, ethnicity is a ready context, but not the only one in twenty-first-century Central Africa. Religious congregations in world religions prominently play a similar part.

Ethnicization has yet another role to play. Ethnic identity can become hardened and militant to the point that people are prepared to undergo and inflict violence for its sake. This is when the ethnic identity becomes the focus of modern political history specifically involving the ethnic group, which consolidates itself in the process as a distinct political actor. Individual members of the ethnic group take the injury the group as a whole has suffered as a central personal concern. The awareness of shared historical experience is a powerful mobilizing force, and when it focuses on ethnicity it may lead to such stigmatization of other ethnic groups and to such dramatization of one's own ethnic group's predicament that ethnic identity becomes a folk theory of history, power, and deprivation. The images it conjures up instigate such intransigence that violence becomes an obvious answer, as Central Africa repeatedly showed in the late twentieth century.

See also **Anthropology, Social, and the Study of Africa; Colonial Policies and Practices; Kinship and Affinity; Languages; Military Organizations; Mobutu Sese Seko; Political Systems; Postcolonialism; Urbanism and Urbanization.**

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EASTERN AFRICA

Ethnicity with reference to eastern Africa has taken on a range of pejorative connotations arising from the horrendous cases of ethnic conflict and genocide, such as have occurred in Rwanda, Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Uganda, and Sudan. But the term *ethnicity* had, over the last few decades, already taken on a number of different usages and meanings, not all of them associated with violence and genocide, and not always noncontentious. First, it largely replaced the discredited term *tribalism,* which carried inappropriate connotations of evolutionary backwardness. Second, it came to refer to a supposedly objective process visible to outsiders by which groups become more and more culturally distinctive. Third, it has been used to denote a subjective process, stressing characteristics that differentiate people from other peoples.

These three meanings of the term are often mutually involved: outsiders may recognize a group by their distinctive habits and dress, whereas the members of the group insist on these same characteristics as evidence of their particular groups membership. Sometimes, however, outsiders may attribute an exaggerated uniqueness to a group whose members do not see such a significance. This is, according to some, what earlier European colonialists did when they divided the peoples under their domination into discrete tribal groups, usually ignoring the complex and crosscutting marriage and trading relations between regions that prevented the development of hard-and-fast differences between peoples. The historical falsity of this rigid demarcation of peoples is another reason why the term *tribalism* has been rejected in favor of *ethnicity.*

Such colonial usages leave their traces, however, and tribalism is still used by people in Kenya,