

The Role of Ethnicity in Social Studies Education: Identity and Conflict in a Global Age

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Abstract

This article examines the continued salience of ethnic identity and ethnic conflicts in world politics; this is especially important given the central role that ethnicity plays in world politics, especially many developing world countries. The author argues that teachers and teacher educators must understand the pivotal role that ethnicity continues to play in world politics, especially in post-colonial African and Asian societies. Teaching about global issues, such as the current war in Iraq, population patterns in the former Soviet Union, and the genocide in Sudan, requires a deep understanding of ethnicity and its major perspectives. Moreover, by adopting a non-linear perspective, students can understand that traditional societies will reassert their ethnic identities as they confront the powerful and dynamic forces of globalization. Finally, the article will establish the links between ethnicity and multicultural and global education, especially the National Council for the Social Studies major curriculum standards.

In *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, the late civil rights leader explained the profound ethnic and political significance of the X. Malcolm Little, born into a Baptist family in Omaha, Nebraska, converted to Islam and replaced his given name with an X to symbolize his true African identity, heritage, and family history that he could never know because of the Atlantic slave trade that brought his ancestors to the United States in the early 17th century (Haley & Malcolm X, 1964, p. 199). Malcolm asserted, “For me, my X replaced the white slave-master name of Little, which was imposed upon my paternal forbears. The receipt of my X meant that forever after in the nation of Islam, I would be known as Malcolm X. Mr. Muhammad taught

that we would keep this X until God Himself returned and gave us a Holy Name from His own Mouth” (Haley & Malcolm X, 1964, p. 199).

In this regard, Malcolm X symbolizes the powerful need of all human beings to know and cherish their ethnic identity. Ethnic identity, despite, or perhaps because of, the forces of modernization and globalization, continues to play a central role in national politics and international relations. This is especially true in countries where centuries of colonialism have blurred ethnic attachments and exacerbated ethnic conflicts. Moreover, conflicts have increased as a consequence of the “ethnic revival” and an emphasis on multiculturalism in the developed world as well as the challenges posed to traditional ethnic identities in the developing world by major social changes, such as industrialization, urbanization, globalization, and modernity (Miall, 2003; Nye, 2000).

A solid understanding of ethnicity is a prerequisite for examining the formation, conflicts, and dissolution of multicultural states, such as the former Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, as well as continued conflicts and violence in Nigeria, Sri Lanka, Iraq (The Sunni and Shiite split is not just over religious differences; there is a significant ethnic component to this 1400-year-old clash), India, and numerous other countries (Brown & Kysilka, 2003; deBlij & Muller, 2006; Hearn, 2006; Martorella, Beal, & Bolick, 2005). Fortunately, Moynihan’s (1993) complaint that the Academy’s neglect of ethnicity as a subject has subtracted from our collective understanding of national and international conflicts has been addressed in recent years (Taras & Ganguly, 2002). The end of the Cold War unleashed a plethora of ethnic conflicts—Yugoslavia, Rwanda, Sudan, Pakistan, India, and others—that demand a thorough analysis by scholars and policymakers in order to formulate viable policies to ameliorate ethnic tensions, violence, and genocides (Taras & Ganguly, 2002).

The comprehensive study of ethnicity—formulating operational definitions, analyzing the nature and functions of ethnic identity and conflict, distinguishing between Western and non-Western models of analysis, explaining the central role of ethnicity in international and domestic politics—will become more important in multicultural and global education programs. Because of immigration patterns, the forces of globalization and modernity have ignited a resurgence of ethnic identity and the important role that ethnicity plays in international conflicts (Connor, 1994; Martorella et al., 2005; Moynihan, 1993). The study of ethnicity, while of critical importance in history and contemporary politics, is very complicated because it is difficult to define (Huntington, 2004). It encompasses a wide variety of disciplines, including evolutionary biology, anthropology, political science, sociology, psychology, and others, and it can be approached from numerous theoretical perspectives. Moreover, ethnicity can be correlated with racial and religious identities in many ways that exacerbate analysis; the Middle East provides examples (Iran, Iraq, and Israel) where ethnicity and religion blend to create a plethora of intractable conflicts. Yet, because of its complexity, the study of ethnicity as a subject can sharpen critical thinking skills, force students to grapple with contradictions and imperfections in human knowledge, recognize that scholars can have profound disagreements over the nature of ethnic identity and historical events, and appreciate the vast amount of ethnic diversity that is a defining characteristic of life.

Furthermore, the study of ethnicity is an important component of the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) curriculum standards, particularly, “Culture”; “People, Places, and Environments”; “Power, Authority, and Governance”; and “Global Connections,” and teachers could develop lesson plans that focus on ethnicity (Banks, 2004; National Council for the Social Studies, 2005; Merryfield & Wilson, 2005). For example, an analysis of most African societies,

for which the primordial perspective on ethnicity is deemed the appropriate mode of analysis (Horowitz, 1985; Moynihan, 1993; Stack, 1986), would reveal that their governments, political parties, militaries, and major social institutions are based on ethnic attachments; these same attachments are central to the violence, social inequities, corruption, coups, and genocides that characterize many African societies (Connor, 1994; Horowitz, 1985; Moynihan, 1993). Additionally, studying ethnicity in Africa would allow students to see the pivotal role played by Western colonial powers in creating ethnic conflicts; the Europeans often bestowed powers and privileges upon a particular ethnic group in order to prevent unified opposition to European hegemony. This knowledge is instrumental in understanding the 1994 genocide in Rwanda—800,000 Tutsis and moderate Hutus were slaughtered by radical Hutus in two months—spawned, in part, by Belgium's preferential treatment of the Tutsi population (Gibbs, 1994; Taras & Ganguly, 2002).

The focus on ethnicity from a “primordial” perspective would help students develop a deep appreciation for the importance of kinship, perceived blood ties, language, an ancestral homeland, the psychological bonds forged via common experiences, and the powerful emotions that are at the root of ethnic identity and conflict in many African and Asian countries today (Moynihan, 1993; Stack, 1986; Taras & Ganguly, 2002). Alternatively, an examination of ethnicity from a “modernist” perspective emphasizes the importance of the development of modern nation-states (beginning in 1648 with the seminal Treaty of Westphalia) characterized by civil societies, mass culture, complex bureaucracies, public education, and industrial capitalism (Hearn, 2006). Both approaches have merits and flaws, yet they will provide students with competing perspectives on the origins, nature, and consequences of ethnic conflicts throughout the world.

Ethnic identity and ethnic conflict remain central to political events in much of Africa, Asia, and the Middle East (Moynihan, 1993; Nye, 2000). Violence and discord are ubiquitous in many countries in these regions as competing ethnic groups attempt to construct their unique identities in artificially created states spawned by European imperialism in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. One of Malcolm X's primary goals was “to produce a psychic conversion in Black people; they would affirm themselves as human beings, no longer viewing their bodies, minds, and souls through white lenses, and believing themselves capable of taking control of their own identity and destiny” (West, 1993, p. 136). Many ethnic groups throughout the developing world seek a similar goal of being independent autonomous ethnic communities asserting their own cultural identities, achievements, and pride as well as by demanding and fighting for full participation in the political, social, and economic institutions in their multiethnic societies or the creation of their own sovereign state.

The Nature of Ethnicity

The nature, causes, and consequences of ethnic conflicts have profound implications for educators concerned with teaching students about history, global education, cultural diversity, and the prospects for political integration, social cohesion, and economic development in many African and Asian societies. Moreover, many issues and problems in global education and international relations cannot be understood without a solid knowledge and understanding of the pivotal role that ethnicity has played in world affairs. Many current global education issues, such as civil wars, human rights abuses, genocides, world hunger, terrorism, North and South economic inequalities (The term *North* refers to the developed states of Europe, North America,

and Japan, and *South* refers to the developing states of Africa, Latin America, and Asia), and economic development are intricately related to ethnicity (Connor, 1994; Horowitz, 1985; Miall, 2003).

For example, ethnic conflicts in many African countries, such as Sierra Leone, Rwanda, Angola, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (formerly Zaire), and Sudan, have killed more than two million people the past decade (Ramsay, 2002, p. 5). It is not a coincidence that in many of these African states political parties, trade unions, government bureaucracies, and the armed forces are organized ethnically (Horowitz, 1985, p. 3). Additionally, Horowitz argues:

Ethnicity is at the center of politics in country after country, a potent source of challenges to the cohesion of states and of international tension. Connections among Biafra, Bangladesh, and Burundi, Beirut, Brussels, and Belfast were at first hesitantly made—isn't one "tribal," one "linguistic," another "religious?" But that is no longer true. Ethnicity has fought and bled and burned its way into public and scholarly consciousness. (p. xi)

Thus, ethnic conflicts have taken a center stage in international relations and domestic political events. While ethnic identity is the basis for the formation of nations and national identity, there are some sharp distinctions between an ethnic group and a nation (Smith, 1991).

Explaining the major differences between an ethnic group and a nation is critically important in any serious attempt to understanding ethnicity in the modern world. Furthermore, this distinction allows for greater clarity regarding the differences between a multiethnic state and a multinational state. Historically, confusion over these terms has resulted in a lack of understanding regarding specific cultural conflicts and ill-advised policies that failed to improve ethnic/national conflicts and violence (Connor, 1994). Indeed, linguistic confusion has exacerbated ethnic and national conflicts in the Middle East, Asia, and Africa, and it has prevented possible solutions because there is widespread confusion over the meaning of terms such as a state, a nation, a tribe, and an ethnic group (Connor, 1994).

Generally, ethnic groups are groups within a larger society that possess common cultural traits, such as religion and language, a strong sense of community, a common history and ancestry, varying degrees of ethnocentrism (the tendency to believe in the innate superiority of one's own ethnic group) and xenophobia (the fear of individuals or groups that are physically and/or culturally different from one's own group). Membership is usually ascribed and not subject to fundamental change, and ethnic groups often occupy a specific territory within the larger state (Marger, 1994; Smith, 1991). Thus, competition among various ethnic groups for political power, wealth, and social status drives domestic politics throughout the world. The vast majority of the world's 194 countries (deBlij & Muller, 2006) are multiethnic states in which many ethnic groups—propelled by the desire for honor, power, wealth, and status—struggle for equality, or more likely, dominance (Kegley & Wittkopf, 2001). This desire for dominance, fueled by ethnocentrism and xenophobia, moved French philosopher Voltaire to remark, "It is sad that being a good patriot often means being the enemy of the rest of mankind" (cited in Rourke, 1995, p. 188). These same feelings of ethnocentrism and xenophobia may stimulate an ethnic group to secede from a multiethnic state and create their own independent state, spawning a high degree of violence in the process.

An ethnic group can be transformed into a nation when it wants an independent state and complete sovereignty (ultimate political power in a country). Considering that there are

thousands of ethnic groups and nationality groups in the world and there are only about 194 states, the desire of each ethnic group or nation for its own sovereign state can produce ethnic/national wars, genocide and other war crimes, and the fragmentation of multinational states. The demise of the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia, and Yugoslavia are examples of multinational states collapsing in the face of powerful separatist inclinations of estranged nationalities (Hearn, 2006; Rourke, 1995). Understanding the difference between a multiethnic state is important, such as the United States, in which many ethnic groups possess unique cultural traits but are loyal to the country and have no desire to form a separate sovereign state, and a multinational state, such as the Soviet Union, in which various nationality groups have strong separatist impulses that often result in conflicts, wars, and the dissolution of the state.

A solid understanding of ethnicity its crucial role in world politics will help students obtain the knowledge and skills necessary to analyze political events in various geographical regions and countries. The forces of globalization have created an interdependent world in which contact with diverse cultures requires knowledge and understanding that is, more than ever before, essential to a state's economic health, national security, and sense of national identity. Ideally, this knowledge will help students to become more tolerant of ethnic diversity and recognize the commonalities in all human societies (Ukpokodu, 1999, p. 300).

Origins and Functions of Ethnic Identity

Simone Weil, writing in wartime England in 1942, asserted that “To be rooted is perhaps the most important and least recognized need of the human soul” (cited in Eley & Suny, 1996, p. 434). Weil understood the psychological importance of roots—people have a basic biological need to belong to a distinct cultural group—in creating and perpetuating a strong ethnic or national identity. Indeed, the idea that human populations are biologically and culturally different is a dominant theme in world history. The Western model created to analyze ethnicity, which emphasizes the primacy of territory (an historic homeland, possibly a state), a legal-political community, and a common civic culture, may be the appropriate model for Western societies, but non-Western societies, particularly African and Asian societies, require a different mode of analysis in order to fully understand ethnicity (Smith, 1991). The non-Western model stresses the primordial nature of ethnicity and emphasizes perceived blood ties, myths, land, customs, and passions in the formation of an ethnic group (Connor, 1994; Smith, 1991; van den Berghe, 1978).

Both models provide solid theoretical frameworks for analyzing ethnic identity, the formation and persistence of ethnic conflicts, and designing possible solutions to reducing ethnic animosities and violence. According to some scholars, ethnic identity is socially constructed and can be changed; individuals have the freedom of will to identify themselves as part of an imagined communities@ that link past, present, and future generations, thus ensuring a type of immortality and fulfilling the psychological need for security, belonging, and continuity (Anderson, 1983). Perceptions of group membership, which can be imagined or grounded in historical experiences, and powerful emotional attachments are important factors in all models designed to analyze ethnicity (Anderson, 1983; Connor, 1994; Hearn, 2006; Horowitz, 1984; Smith, 1991).

Ethnic identity commands the ultimate loyalty from people—witness the untold number of individuals who have forfeited their lives for their ethnic group or tribe—because it provides a deep psychological bond that unites a group of people and distinguishes them from other groups

in fundamental ways. A subconscious belief in the group's mythical origins, common core values and interests, attachment to a particular territory, a common history, and a deeply held sense of peoplehood combine to form the "heart and soul" of ethnic identity. Ethnic identity provides a sense of belonging and self-esteem, which are two fundamental psychological human needs rooted in evolutionary biology (Connor, 1994; Hearn, 2006; Moynihan, 1993; van den Berghe, 1978; Wilson, 1978). Thus, ethnic identities are not merely socially constructed identities invented to obtain specific political and economic advantages; they are the result of evolution interacting with powerful socialization forces throughout all human societies and serve "to provide a strong community of history and destiny, to save people from personal oblivion, and to restore collective faith" (Smith, 1991, p. 161).

Pierre van den Berghe, while acknowledging the importance of environmental factors and the unique qualities of *Homo Sapiens*, asserts that "Human behavior is the product of a long process of adaptive evolution that involved the complex interplay of genotypical, ecological, and cultural factors" (Hutchinson & Smith, 1994, p. 97). Ethnic identities provide crucial links between the past, present, and future that make life meaningful and understandable. This view of ethnic identity places great emphasis on kinship ties, common blood ties and shared ancestry, common language, and an ethnic/national homeland. This primordial perspective, while not shared by all scholars, is the dominant paradigm in studying African and Asian societies and must be understood if Western societies are to formulate viable foreign policies in these regions. Too often, American and European scholars and policy-makers have applied a Western model of ethnic identity to non-Western societies, which, not surprisingly, produced increased ethnic/national conflicts and failed policies regarding nation-building in Asia and Africa (Horowitz, 1985; Moynihan, 1993; Smith, 1991).

This primordial approach to the study of ethnic identity emphasizes the powerful emotional bond created by the perception, still valid even if partially fictive, that the group has a common ancestral origin and provides the ultimate answer to the question, "Who am I?" It is the emotional power of ethnic identity rooted in the human need for self-esteem, pride, a sense of belonging to an extended family, and achievement that generates ethnic conflicts, the formation of political parties based on group identity, discrimination, and the creation of preferential policies based on ethnicity/nationality, competition among ethnic/national groups for power, wealth, and status in multiethnic/multinational states, genocide, and war (Connor, 1994; Horowitz, 1985; Moynihan, 1993; Smith, 1991; Stack, 1986).

Smith (1991) asserts that a non-Western perspective on ethnicity emphasizes that an ethnic group is a community of common descent and individuals remained a member of that community, despite migration or attempts at assimilation, for life. In this conception, the ethnic group can trace its roots to a real or imagined common ancestry that provides the essence of ethnic identity which is a strong psychological bond, with roots in evolutionary biology, that unites a people in an extended family that is fundamentally different from other ethnic groups (Connor, 1994; Hinsley, 1973; Isaacs, 1975; Smith, 1991; Stack, 1986). It is the intangible characteristics of ethnicity (a) a sense of kinship, (b) the formation of myths, and (c) psychological bonds formed via common experiences combined with more tangible elements, such as (a) religion, (b) language, and (c) land, that give ethnic identity its power.

The non-Western model, with its emphasis on presumed blood ties, myths and traditions, and emotions, which presents unique problems for social scientists because it is difficult to quantify some variables that are crucial for understanding ethnicity. Emotions, perceptions, feelings, and psychological bonds are difficult to define and measure; however, they are of

critical importance in the formation of ethnic attachments and worthy of serious inquiry (Hearn, 2006; Stack, 1986). It is important for social studies educators and their students to recognize that the natural sciences play a significant role in explaining political and social behavior; in fact, Van de Berghe (1995) asserts that our socially-constructed notions of race and racism have a basis in evolutionary biology. If true, this could help explain why the ideas of ethnicity, race, and racism remain salient throughout the world despite predictions that modernity would render the notions of race, ethnicity, and nationalism obsolete (Moynihan, 1993). Of course, this is a hotly debated topic and other scholars argue that race and racism are primarily social constructs; albeit ones that have had a devastating impact on human civilizations in terms of slavery, discrimination, segregation, and genocidal wars (Graves, 2004).

The critical factors in this non-Western analysis of ethnicity are genealogy, popular myths and symbols, cultural perceptions, vernacular languages, traditions, and powerful emotions associated with membership in an immutable ethnic community (Smith, 1991). This primordial view, which has received some support from sociobiology, in which ethnic attachments are viewed as an extension of genetic selection and inclusive fitness, helps explain the persistence of ethnocentrism and xenophobia throughout multiethnic societies (Connor, 1994; Graves, 2004; Smith, 1991; van den Berghe, 1978). Wilson (1978) argues that not all human behaviors are attributable to culture and socialization and that social behavior is shaped by a symbiotic relationship between the environment and the powerful forces of evolutionary biology.

Indeed, it is the emotional power of ethnic identity, often ignored or slighted by social scientists because it suggests variables, such as emotions and perceptions, which are not amenable to scientific analysis (Hearn, 2006; Moynihan, 1993), but vital in understanding ethnic politics throughout the world, that helps explain why so many people are willing to fight, kill, or die for their ethnic group. Francois Chateaubriand expressed the emotional power of ethnic identity when he stated, “Men don’t allow themselves to be killed for their interests; they allow themselves to be killed for their passions” (cited in Connor, 1994, p. 206). When viewed from this perspective, ethnic/national conflicts, wars, and genocide in Sudan, Rwanda, Yugoslavia, Iraq, and countless other countries are easier to understand and, perhaps, more amenable to solutions based on a solid understanding of the nature, causes, and consequences of ethnic identity.

Harold Issacs, writing in *The Idols of the Tribe* in 1975, said, “Science advanced, knowledge grew, nature was mastered, but Reason did not conquer, and tribalism did not go away” (cited in Kotkin, 1992, p. 3). This is true because human behavior, including ethnic identity, is grounded in evolutionary biology, as well as cultural factors. The “House of Muumbi—the home of the progenital mother of the Kikuyu tribe in Kenya, used here as a surrogate name for all the rooms—all the wombs—in all the tribal mansions—is where human beings still mostly live” (Glazer & Moynihan, 1975, p. 30). Ethnic identity remains the most powerful form of individual and collective identification because it fulfills the basic biological, psychological, and social needs of honor, security, and a sense of purpose which are better than any other form of identity. This is why ethnic identities remain critically important issues in world politics and are central to the vast majority of conflicts, violence, political events, and wars in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East. Moynihan (1993) asserts that the scholarly focus on states has hindered our understanding of many international events that are rooted in ethnic conflicts. Therefore, it is imperative that educators transmit to their students the pivotal role of ethnicity in history and contemporary world politics.

Implications for Social Studies and Global Education in the Twenty-First Century

A solid understanding of ethnicity, including the ability to analyze ethnicity from different perspectives, is an important component of multicultural and global education (Gollnick & Chinn, 2006; Howard, 1999). Ethnicity is a central theme in American and world history, geography, sociology, economics (The intersection between ethnicity and social class is a major concern in most societies), and political science; in fact, ethnicity can easily be incorporated into the ten major social studies themes articulated by the National Council for the Social Studies. Demographic trends in the United States show that ethnic diversity, as well as other forms of diversity, are increasing and will continue to exert a profound influence on politics, economics, and education well into the 21st century. There are sound educational, demographic, and cultural reasons why ethnicity should be a central focus in education, particularly in social studies education which is the discipline charged with promoting a strong national identity, increasing civic participation, producing students knowledgeable about global affairs, and strengthening democracy in a pluralistic society.

Teacher education programs, in conjunction with the social and natural sciences, should expand and improve efforts to understand the role of ethnicity in history and contemporary society; this is especially important in Asia, Africa, and the Middle East which are three regions ripe with ethnic conflicts, violence, and in some cases, genocide. In accordance with NCSS standards, the study of ethnicity would be interdisciplinary and involve the biological sciences, social sciences, and humanities. Moreover, the study of ethnicity must incorporate Western and non-Western models of analysis if educators and students are to fully understand ethnicity and conflict in the developing world; all theories should be examined for their ability to explain and predict ethnic patterns and conflicts and be revised or discarded based on objective criteria. A model which explains ethnic conflict in Europe, Russia, or the United States may not be appropriate in developing world societies characterized by significantly different cultures and historical experiences.

The bitter Israeli-Palestinian conflict in the Middle East, the Indian-Pakistan confrontation over Kashmir (which has brought the two countries to the brink of nuclear war), the demise of the Soviet Union, the genocides in Yugoslavia and Rwanda, and countless other international hostilities are centered on ethnicity. Furthermore, the dominant issues in world politics in the 21st century—international terrorism, globalization, population growth rates, the fragmentation of multiethnic states, North and South inequalities, immigration, economic growth in developing countries, human rights, and a host of others—are all strongly correlated with ethnicity (Miall, 2003; Moynihan, 1993).

However, it appears that ethnicity has been slighted in the teaching of world history, international relations, and contemporary global issues and problems. Too often, these courses emphasized the behavior of states as all-powerful monolithic entities capable of controlling and assimilating ethnic minority groups (Connor, 1994; Moynihan, 1993; Stack, 1986). The dissolution of Yugoslavia, the constant ethnic discord in India, the genocidal wars in Rwanda, the amiable partition of Czechoslovakia, the Anglo-Franco friction in Canada, and the disintegration of the Soviet Union serve as powerful refutations to the notion that state power is supreme in creating and maintaining a multiethnic/multinational state. The political ideology of realism, which stressed the all-encompassing power of states in world politics, was theoretically ill-equipped to explain the power of ethnic conflict to destroy a state (Moynihan, 1993).

Thus, the paradigms—dominant theories based on fundamental assumptions that frame a discipline—constructed by social scientists for understanding the world may have serious flaws incapable of explaining new and unexpected behaviors and events and will be replaced by revised or new paradigms (Huntington, 1996; Kegley & Wittkopf, 2001; Kuhn, 1996). It is critically important that students understand that throughout history many paradigms including religious, philosophical, political, scientific, economic, and social have been created and abandoned in humanity's march toward intellectual progress (Kuhn, 1996). Educators can be held captive to a flawed paradigm that hinders student knowledge and understanding. Therefore, the willingness to objectively examine multiple perspectives, even ones we may disagree with based on philosophical or methodological grounds, appears to be a rational approach in our search for truth and understanding.

Daniel Patrick Moynihan (1993) argues that an ethnic perspective, which scholars, policymakers, and professors generally ignored, would have made it possible to predict the collapse of the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union, formed via a process of territorial imperialism that forcibly incorporated more than 100 nationalities into the state, was never able to create loyal Soviet citizens despite, or because of, 70 years of totalitarian rule (Moynihan, 1993). Historically, in conflicts between patriotism (loyalty to the state or government) and ethno-nationalism (loyalty to one's national/ethnic group), ethno-nationalism is the clear winner (Connor, 1994). This is the major barrier to "nation-building" in Africa because the vast majority of Africans are loyal to their ethnic group instead of an artificially created state that ignores the tremendous cultural diversity of the African people. Unfortunately, many experts in African and Soviet studies who are generally committed to realism (the dominant theory in international relations that stresses the all-powerful role of the state) ignored the power of ethnic identity and the crucial distinction between patriotism and nationalism (Connor, 1994; Hearn, 2006; Moynihan, 1993). This is a major reason why scholars, policymakers, and educators must be exposed to many competing and possibly controversial perspectives; diversity of thought is an excellent strategy to counter the conventional wisdom, which may be wrong.

Students must be taught that scholars, experts, and professors can be wrong on important issues and adopting many diverse perspectives ever open to serious discussion, debate, and verification can lead to a greater understanding of highly complex phenomena, such as ethnic identity. There are multiple ways of thinking and behaving which can be wielded to challenge the dominant view; multiple perspectives can result in a more accurate analysis of ethnic conflicts, improved relations among competing ethnic groups, and the creation of viable domestic and foreign policies and may help reduce the number and intensity of ethnic conflicts and wars that produce untold human suffering. It is important that educators adopt a variety of perspectives when explaining the continued salience of ethnicity; this would allow deeper understanding of ethnic conflicts and the unique characteristics of regional conflicts.

Alvarez (1993) asserts that a non-linear perspective, which rejects a one-dimensional view of reality that assumes "either the world is moving inexorably toward cultural unity OR toward ethnic diversity" (p. 17), recognizes "the adoption of new cultural values, attitudes, and behaviors does not necessarily eliminate the possibility of their coexistence with old patterns" (p. 17). Thus, the dynamic forces of globalization—the expansion of global economic interdependence, major advances in mass communications and transportation, a "shared global culture as mass consumer products, media, and fast food chains spread" (Sleeter, 2003, p. 4), and the expansion of democracy—can coexist with a powerful and resurgent ethnicity. Indeed, it appears that globalization and ethnic diversity represent "two interdependent poles of the same

cultural reality” (Alvarez, 1993, p. 17), and competing forces pressing for cultural unity and diversity will produce a new global reality that requires students to understand that the struggle between cultural unity and diversity is a healthy exercise in pluralistic societies.

Moreover, if teacher educators and secondary social studies teachers adopted a non-linear perspective in their classes, it would facilitate student understanding of an overriding conflict that permeates domestic and international affairs: the monumental challenges that modernization poses to traditional ethnic identities, social and political values, religious beliefs, and institutions. For example, significant advances in science and technology, the expansion of political and economic liberalism, and the primacy of individualism have resulted in Western civilization becoming highly secular (Inglehart & Baker, 2005; Nord, 1995). Thus, many religious individuals and groups view secularization as a threat to their core religious beliefs and take steps to protect their religious beliefs, practices, and institutions from an encroaching secularism. Some scholars argue that the rapid global expansion of Islam is a direct response to the horrors wrought by secularism and the unrestrained forces of modernity, including rampant materialism, consumerism, hedonism, dysfunctional families, sexual promiscuity, drug abuse, and other pathological behaviors, because it offers security, identity, and a spiritual life in a God-centered world (Haddad, 1999; Harris, 2007; Huntington, 1996).

Students who become adept at using non-linear analysis can understand that people have radically different world views based on numerous factors, such as geographic, religious, cultural, political, and personal experiences, and changes can viewed as “progress” by some will be seen as “deterioration” by others. American students, socialized and educated in a culture committed to certain core ideals, must understand that some people reject Western perspectives of democracy, equality, scientific explanations, and other facets of a modern liberal society.

Moreover, they will be able to analyze history and contemporary affairs as a clash of contending ideas by various individuals, groups, and civilizations competing for ideological supremacy, wealth, land, and power. This approach will allow students grappling with history and politics to recognize bias, question the conventional wisdom, examine evidence, evaluate arguments, and develop techniques for balancing opposing ideas. This is a major goal of the National Council for the Social Studies and teacher educators, and secondary social studies teachers could apply non-linear analysis to all ten of the themes that compose the national curriculum standards.

For example, a government or comparative politics class (NCSS Theme Six: “Power, Authority, and Governance”) could examine the role that ethnicity plays in a particular society: (a) What ethnic group has the political power? (b) How did they gain this power? (c) How are the ethnic minority groups treated? (d) What is the potential for ethnic violence or the dissolution of the state? By focusing on ethnicity, students would learn that ethnic conflict is a world-wide phenomenon, the vast majority of countries have an ethnic hierarchy, and domestic political, economic, and social issues revolve around ethnicity (Horowitz, 1985; Miall, 2003). Furthermore, students would see that democracy seldom survives in ethnically divided societies; indeed, ethnically divided societies are prone to dissolution, conflicts, violence, and even genocides. Hopefully, this knowledge concerning the fate of many other multiethnic societies, both past and present, will help students think about ethnic conflicts in the United States and the most appropriate measures to solve them in a manner that preserves and strengthens American society.

The study of ethnicity, reflecting a wide range of perspectives, is critical in multicultural and global education and lends itself to an interdisciplinary approach; a holistic examination of

ethnicity should incorporate history, geography, economics, sociology, psychology, and political science, as well as literature, art, and science. Many of the key questions in multicultural and global education, such as (a) Who am I? (b) What groups possess power in a society? (c) How am I connected to those in the past? (d) What causes conflicts and wars? (e) How and why did nation-states evolve? call for an adoption of an ethnic perspective, in conjunction with other perspectives, in order to provide answers that are historically accurate and compatible with empirical evidence. Students must be taught to be suspicious of one “all-powerful” explanation for human behavior and complex structures and institutions.

Educational policymakers and teachers must develop an over-arching educational program that allows students to appreciate the multiplicity of variables that affect cultural, social, and political changes throughout the world. Viewed from this non-linear perspective, it is not surprising that the faster the world changes owing to globalization, the more likely people will cling to an ethnic identity that provides security, purpose, honor, and a sense of belonging in a turbulent world and fulfills the need for collective immortality.

Conversely, the resurgence of ethnic identity has resulted in virulent ethnic conflicts, wars, and genocides, particularly in African and Asian societies (Connor, 1994; Horowitz, 1985; Miall, 2003; Moynihan, 1993; Sadowski, 2002). It appears that globalization (the trend toward cultural unity) and ethnicity (the trend toward cultural diversity) are here to stay, at least for the foreseeable future. Thus, the main challenge facing scholars, educators, and policymakers is “to make the world safe for and from ethnicity, safe for just those differences which large assemblies, democratic or otherwise, will typically attempt to suppress” (Moynihan, 1993, p. 173). By adopting a non-linear perspective to the analysis of the many factors that impact cultural, political, and social transformations throughout the world, educators can prepare students for a global reality characterized by the complex interactions among often competing forces of continuity and change, tradition and modernity, unity and diversity and equip them with the intellectual skills to understand history and world politics.

This deep understanding will enable them to make informed choices based on reason, historical knowledge, and the ability to think in multiple ways as American citizens living in a dynamic global age. Social studies education can play a critical role in helping students understand that ethnicity, like religion, continues to exert enormous influence on human societies because it provides individuals with a sense of identity, purpose, and security in a world wrought with profound changes that spawn uncertainty and fear.

Finally, it is critically important that students be taught to question the accepted wisdom, knowledge, and policies of society. For example, slavery, racism, and other horrors throughout history were able to persist for centuries because people “knew” that certain ethnic or racial groups were inferior. Instilling in young students a critical spirit that recognizes human knowledge is never complete or infallible but constantly evolving based on new evidence born out of scientific progress will prepare them to live in a world characterized by complexity, contradictions, and competing paradigms that enrich our lives.

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