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RE-IMAGINING NATIONAL COMMUNITIES

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by

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What follows attempts to re-imagine national communities. My project in social criticism combines perceptions of the empirical world with hopes for a better one. The former reminds one of human finitude and social constraints; the latter urges one to action based on admittedly local visions of social justice and participatory democracy. How can one imagine national communities whose solidarity emerges more from diversity than from homogeneity?

The modern nation state, at least as it appears from California, rests on a curious paradox. On the one hand, it values a common culture and often rallies around the flag of saving the shared core, whatever that may be. From this perspective of unity based on the cultural homogeneity of the citizenry, diversity appears to be a threat. On the other hand, demographic diversity is an overwhelming reality. In California elementary and high schools, so-called minorities have already become the numerical majority. In this context, the question of how to (and not, whether or not to) enfranchise the emerging majority population has become an urgent issue. Otherwise we condemn ourselves to building a supposedly democratic nation state where some classes of citizens are clearly more equal than others.

What follows has been conditioned by two recent events, one quite general and the other rather particular. The more general event is the Gulf War. For me, this was strangely like dreamtime. When the war ended I had difficulty discerning whether it was late January or late March. Time seemed to have come to a standstill. Yet the war's conclusion involved a rude awakening. The war had

been neither another Viet Nam (as President Bush had warned it would not be—no more Viet Nam syndrome) nor World War II (as the president had tried to convince us it would be—a moral crusade against the new Hitler). Nor was it the War of 1898 (as I had been saying it would be—a bully nation fighting an unworthy opponent for self-aggrandizing neo-colonial aims). Instead it more nearly resembled the late nineteenth-century battle of Wounded Knee against the Sioux nation. It was massacre.

During the dreamtime of war yellow ribbons sprouted everywhere. They were multi-vocal symbols. Some people used the yellow ribbons to say that they supported the troops but not the war; others meant to say that they supported both the war and the troops. In the meantime, public opinion polls supporting President Bush's war shot up as if they were thermometers in the grip of a hot thumb. Many of us who opposed the war began to feel uncomfortable going to the movies because we feared that we would find ourselves surrounded by flag-waving Americans. Yet we wondered whether or not somebody had their thumb of the public opinion poll's bulb. Were we witnessing a manufactured event? Or were we watching the welling up of spontaneous national sentiment? In the end, I'll return to this question.

A second event conditioning this paper was more particular. In January of this year I attended a conference on national culture in Tijuana, Mexico. There, two Mexican social scientists engaged in intense debate on the topic. Mexico City Anthropologist Guillermo Bonfil Batalla argued that national culture was imagined in the

sense of being false. It ignored the deeper, more pervasive presence of indigenous cultures, partially assimilated and partially not, throughout Mexico. There was, he said, no such thing as a national culture outside the minds of a few urban intellectuals. Tijuana sociologist Jorge Bustamante argued that Mexican national culture was real and that, in relation to domination from the United States, it was a culture of resistance. He spoke from the border where international relations of inequality were a paramount reality. He went on to say that the indigenous groups, such as the Mixtecs, did not share this culture, but because they were small in numbers they did not matter in making the general argument. This debate made me realize once again how much the analyst's social position can influence their analysis.

From a Chicano perspective, to add a third vantage point, the debate ignored what happens when Mexicans cross the border and move from being a majority population to becoming a minority group. Structurally speaking, Chicanos in the United States occupy a niche comparable to that of Mixtecs in Mexico. For us, national culture as usually defined is more a source of marginalization and exclusion than of empowerment. When we study American history in school we learn about the Jamestown, immigration, and westward expansion. The fact that our ancestors had settled colonies before Jamestown and that, in many cases, they did not immigrate but rather stood still and the border moved rarely enters the textbooks. Native Americans also can only wonder at the immigration

theme; African Americans ask about who booked their passage; Asian Americans say they came eastward, not westward. At the very least, there seems to be a need to revise national history.

One of my underlying questions is whether or not Chicanos and other minority groups can have a place in imagined national communities? Can we be who we are, as changing rather than static cultural communities, and still belong as full members in a participatory democracy? Although the following speaks primarily about the Philippines, I shall be concerned to view issues from both the viewpoint of the dominant national community and the historically subordinated groups within it, including Mixtecos in Mexico, Chicanos in the United States, and Ilongots in the Philippines. What difference does it make, in imagining national communities, if one of the analysts primary points of attachment is that of a minority group?

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In northern Luzon, Philippines, members of one of the cultural minority groups, the Ilongots, speak of themselves as bugkalut and lowlanders as "those Filipinos." In other words, Ilongots do not regard themselves as belonging to the nation state; they do not see themselves as citizens. Yet, over the period I have known them, from 1967 to the present, they have started joining the nation, albeit in small ways. Ilongots have had little choice in the matter because the nation has imposed itself on them through landgrabbing, mining, hydroelectric projects, resettlement projects, elementary schools, and missionization.

In response, Ilongots have prepared their children to face a changing world by sending them to secular schools, encouraging them to convert to evangelical Christianity, and urging them to learn wet rather than dry rice agriculture. The changes thus brought have created a chasm between parents and their children. In a short span of years, they have moved from a purely oral to a partially literate world. Their children's conversion to evangelical Christianity involves the end of oratory, magical spells, songs, and a host of other cultural practices. Parents say that by giving up shifting cultivation and taking up the plow their children will no longer be Ilongots. The on-going change in identity has been drastic.

There is no law that says in order to be Filipino one has to go to school, belong to a major world religion, or do wet rice agriculture. Yet to be utterly unschooled is to be incompetent in the lowlands. Ilongots have also found that the phrase pagan Filipino is virtually an oxymoron--one can be either a pagan or a Filipino, but not both. Finally, they have encountered tremendous prejudice against people who practice dry rice cultivation, and they recognize that as settlers move in their midst they must limit themselves to a single plot of land for which they can gain legal title.

The Ilongot case raises more general questions about what I have chosen to call cultural citizenship. In this context, the term citizenship broadly refers to a sense of belonging, as in full citizenship versus second class citizenship, rather than to more

narrow legal definitions, where one either is or is not a citizen. It emphasizes participation in the national and local polity; it includes both legal definitions and local, informal notions of membership, entitlement, and influence. The term cultural underscores local definitions of community, identity, and human dignity, particularly those of the minority groups. In the case at hand, rapid changes brought by incorporation into the nation state and capitalist penetration have made it difficult to fix identities and culture.

Both the Ilongot imagined community and the Filipino national imagined community continue to be under negotiation rather than being settled once and for all. Under such circumstances, affirmations of Ilongot identity often appear problematic and at odds with notions of citizenship in the nation. At the same time notions of national citizenship that do not fit significant numbers of people legally entitled to them are thrown into jeopardy. (Indeed, a number of observers would follow William Henry Scott, a noted historian of the Philippines, in asserting that such groups are primordial Filipinos, the ultimate first class citizens, at least in theory if not in present day fact.)

Questions of national identity thus appear, not only as collective fictions (where the line between something made and a lie can be difficult to draw), but also as arenas of negotiation, dispute, and conflict. How do ethnic minority groups navigate between local identities and participation in the state? Such matters are often negotiated around issues of religion, education,

land rights, modes of subsistence, wage labor, health care delivery, taxes, and the right to vote. For state officials, such matters quickly become practical administrative matters that must be reduced to fiscal and other solutions. For historically subordinated groups, such matters often involve questions of human dignity and distinctive senses of value and community. Social analysts should aspire to tack between the former perspective and the latter viewpoint. Under conditions of rapid change, the interplay between state citizenship and ethnic nationality involves conflict and complex processes of negotiation more than stable conceptions of identity and community. Such situations test—at once reflecting and redefining—the often tacit boundaries of imagined national and local communities.

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One could summarize the preceding by arguing that studies of nationalism could usefully follow three phases. First, one should notice that nationalism is a cultural artifact. Not unlike other social phenomena, ranging from the self to the state, nationhood is made by human beings. Rather than having been given in nature, as ideology often would have it, nationalisms have been invented through time. They have histories—rising, falling, meandering, coming into focus, blurring—and cannot be reduced to such seeming brute facts as human nature or the conduct of men in groups. At the same time this perspective asks analysts to consider the strength and nature of attachments. Why and when and for whom is nationalism

compelling? If nationalisms are mere inventions why are people so often willing to die for them? Social analysis requires a double vision that can apprehend both the force of cultural artifacts and their fictional character.

Second, social analysts should consider how cultural artifacts look and feel from different positions. Such positions can be purely structural, based on class, age, gender, ethnicity, race, and so on, taken singly or together in various combinations. They can also be more experiential--such as the status of recent immigrant, political prisoner, or parent of child killed in war. The structural positions can be described along such axes as top versus bottom (as in history from below) or center versus margins (as, perhaps, in middle class women's history). Perspectives based on experience can range from patriotic zeal and national fervor to exclusion and degradation. Rather than being positioned as a singular unified manner, individuals are made up of multiple intersecting subject positions (white, upper middle class, male, political prisoner, for example). These positions can be relatively consistent, contradictory, or both.

Third, cultural artifacts are contested or negotiated rather than being fixed; they often encompass both sites of struggle and zones of consensus. When a consensus arises, one can ask, "Who was not in the room when the consensus was formed?" This approach suggests that social analysts should study the intersections of relations of inequality, such as gender, age, caste, class, race, and ethnicity. Although certain dimensions of inequality may be

considered universal (age and gender), their content is always local-historically formed, politically and economically conditioned, and culturally specific. In this approach, one attempts to discern historical processes of conflict and change rather than to discover timeless essences of universal human nature.

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Let me now illustrate the first of the three schematic analytical phases just sketched through a discussion of Benedict Andersen's influential book, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983). It's probably best to begin with what the book says before going on to explore the further questions it provokes.

Anderson begins with the observation that nationalism has proven a more recalcitrant and enduring fact of life than theorists of either the left or the right predicted. Nationalism, he says, must be understood as a cultural artifact (requiring historical and cultural analysis) rather than as a natural object (transparent to common sense understandings). It is a fiction in the sense of something made or constructed, but not a falsehood. Not unlike other human inventions, nationalism acts back on its inventors; it shapes, even as it is shaped by, human lives. Indeed one's nationality has come to be treated, not as an invention, but as (if it were) a human fatality given at birth and subject to change only by undergoing the ordeal of so-called naturalization.

From the outset Anderson combines invention (imagined national

communities) with attachment (nationality as human fatality). Thus one's nationality belongs with a family of fatalities, such as one's skin-color, genetic endowment, gender, parentage, life-era, and so on. In accord with the ideology of nationhood, human beings cannot do much about the nationalities they are born into, except live with them as best they can.

Too numerous to know each other, members of the nation nonetheless imagine that they belong to a small-scale face-to-face community. Their community is regarded as sovereign and finite. Its limited boundaries never extend to the whole of humankind. Yet, as Anderson notes with biting irony, people willingly give their lives for their limited national imaginings. "What," he asks, "makes the imaginings of recent history (scarcely more than two centuries) generate such colossal sacrifices (p. 16)?"

Perhaps using the term with more precision than he intends, Anderson describes the horizontal egalitarian ties that bind the members of a nation as those of a fraternity. Readers can probably anticipate that I shall in due time reconsider the question of fraternal relations from the perspective of gender studies.

Anderson goes on to develop an ideal typic contrast between the imagined community of nationalism and that of its predecessor, the dynastic realm. He suggests that the key historical shift involves the change from the dynastic realm's notion of a human population defined as subjects to the national community's one defined as citizens. He then argues that the transition between social orders fundamentally redefined cultural notions of space and

time.

In spatial terms, the dynastic realm defines human relations vertically by their connection with divinity which is, in turn, linked in a hierarchical series to such earthly representatives as the monarch, the lords, and the vassals. In this vertical social order altitude is the key dimension; it emphasizes centers, not borders. In contrast, the nation has sovereign control over a flat, homogeneous territory defined by its boundaries rather than by its middles.

In temporal terms, the dynastic realm finds meaning through linkages with divine providence rather than through human causality. Thus an earlier human event can be said to announce or promise a later event which, in turn, fulfills it. In contrast, the nation exists in homogeneous empty time where significant linkages occur through their coincidence in secular rather than divinely ordained time. Anderson suggests, for example, that the sense of national community grows in part from the shared experience of reading about the disparate events that comprise the front page news. The disparity of headline news came home to me some years ago when my son Sam interrupted a group of adults who were talking about the eruption of Mount St. Helens. He asked if we weren't talking about the volcano that was next to Shah-fight? Things fell into place for the stunned adults only after they discovered that Sam had seen the volcano's eruption and the Shah of Iran's demise juxtaposed on the six o'clock television news.

In a similar vein, Anderson speaks of the nineteenth-century

novel and its ability to link characters in ways that create an imagined sense of broad community that transcends the anonymity of ordinary everyday life. A knows B and B knows C, thus A and C (who do not know one another) become linked in what the reader perceives as a single network. In particular, Anderson uses the opening of Philippine national hero Jose Rizal's novel, *Noli Me Tangere*. In this scene, Don Santiago de los Santos is giving a dinner party. Throughout Manila, numerous unnamed people, who do not know each other, are simultaneously discussing the up-coming dinner party in a manner that conjures up a sense of the imagined national community where everybody will be together in the same room at the same time. I will return later to this example.

Anderson argues that print capitalism transforms human linguistic diversity (and the fact that any given individual can learn only a tiny portion of all spoken languages—one imagines the scholar muttering, so little time, so many languages) by making a specific language the official medium of communication (for commerce, politics, and education) over a bounded territorial expanse.

After thus defining the key parameters of the nation as a cultural artifact (the imagined community), Anderson proceeds with a historical sketch which falls into three periods. First, he demarcates the period between 1776 and 1838 when the initial generation of nation states emerged in a relatively rapid succession ranging from the thirteen colonies through the French Revolution to the series of nations founded in the Americas.

Second, the years between 1820 and 1920 were marked by the consolidation of nationalism as ideology in Europe. If the first phase of nationalism was relatively improvised, the later two phases were distinguished by a tension between spontaneous national movements and an official version of nationalism. Based more on the exigencies of the state than on the aspirations of the populace, the latter developed in large measure to contain the former.

Third, the period following World War II was marked by a series of new nations formed out of prior colonial territories. In the new nations the tension between ardent populism and official nationalism became especially acute. The latter was inculcated through the mass media, popular education, and administrative regulations. The former grew out of anti-colonial popular movements of national liberation.

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Anderson's notion of the nation as an imagined community attends more carefully to the question of who is included than to who is marginalized or outright excluded. In terms of the schematic three phases of analysis, it fails to consider the question of subject position.

For my present purposes, I find it useful to use the distinction between nations and states. States often contain more than one nation (in this context, nation and ethnic group are nearly synonymous) and a single nation often inhabits more than one state (in extreme cases, one speaks of diasporas).

Indeed, I would argue that the study of nations under

imperialism now works from a present in which the useful fiction of the nation state as a territorially bounded homogeneous territory is at once strongly present and breaking down due to such global transformations as the new international division of labor, immigration of unprecedented magnitude, and the implosion of the third world into the first. The idea of the melting pot no longer can be sustained. Even newer images, such as the salad bowl and the stewing pot, meant to highlight diversity within an encompassing entity, fail to recognize that the container itself is leaking. Think of New York in the mid-1980s when over one-third of its seven million inhabitants were from the Caribbean. Consider the demographic changes in California where, in 1945, 91% of the population was Anglo and 5% Latino; now the population is 25% Latino and by 2030 it is projected to be 50% Latino. The container does not contain.

Nationalisms and processes of incorporation and resistance to the nation state require historical and comparative study from a present that renders the entities under study increasingly problematic. Current processes of globalization should enable social analysts to reconsider cases that once seemed closed. The central question raised by the concept of cultural citizenship is whether one can be different and be a full citizen too. Need more different mean less equal? Is assimilation a linear law-like process? By what mechanisms have states tried to enforce national (ethno-linguistic) homogeneity within their bounded territories?

Let us return, in considering such issues, to the opening

scene of Rizal's *Noli Me Tangere*. In his book Benedict Anderson underscores the universality of the verbal net Rizal casts. Indeed, Rizal's so-called black humor and his Gothic sense of the grotesque lend credence to this view in passages such as the following: "So the news of his dinner party ran like an electric shock through the community of spongers, hangers-on, and gate-crashers whom God, in His infinite wisdom, had created and so fondly multiplied in Manila (p. 1)." The image of riff-raff spreading the news suggests that everybody in Manila was planning to attend the dinner party being given by Don Santiago de los Santos. Yet lines of exclusion were evident by the time the great event began. For example, the narrator says that the few women present were segregated in a separate room from the men. Only one person, a "kindly-faced" cousin of the host, bothered to welcome the women. "Her hospitality and good manners," the mean-spirited narrator says, "did not extend beyond offering the Spanish ladies cigars and betel-nut chew on a tray, and giving her hand to be kissed by her compatriots, exactly like a friar (p. 4)." In a double ethnic cross-over, she demeaned the Spanish by offering them lowly Filipino fare—cigars and betel-nut chew—and she insulted her compatriots by offering her hand to be kissed and by assuming friar-like haughty Spanish airs toward them.

The party centers on men (often pretending to be) of eminence and their occasional wives rather than on distinguished women and their husbands. Indeed the male guests described at the party are clergy, officials, military officers, businessmen, and men of

affairs generally rather than vagabonds, rogues, or members of the working class.

Aside from the segregation of men from women in the novel's opening scene, women find multiple ways to absent themselves, as anthropologist Anna Tsing has pointed out to me, so that the men can become the kinds of patriots that measure up to international standards. The perceived need to protect indigenous women, especially mothers and virgin daughters, from predatory Spaniards brings a number of Filipino male characters into consciousness as nationalists. Women are thus the enabling condition and the source of inspiration for the mobilization of a patriotic male defence of the nation.

Women also find more literal ways to remove themselves so that men can create the revolutionary fraternal ties that bind. In the *Noli*, Maria Clara, the only daughter of Don Santiago de los Santos who hosted the opening scene's dinner party, was betrothed from an early age to the novel's hero, Crisostomo Ibarra. After a number of Spaniards repeatedly use foul play to foil the young couple's amorous intentions, the male hero flees because he has been charged with rebellion and Maria Clara literally takes herself out of the (incipiently bonding) men's way by entering a convent and going mad. In the novel's concluding scene, she becomes little more than a frightful apparition, "a white figure standing almost on the ridge of the roof, its arms stretched out to the sky and its face turned pleadingly upward while the heavens replied with thunder and lightening (p. 406)." Rizal's novel establishes a hydraulic

relation between horizontal egalitarian relations among men and the exclusion of women. In other words, the disenfranchisement of women and otherwise keeping them out of the picture enables men to forge the fraternal bonds that unite the imagined national community in egalitarian solidarity.

Gender relations in Rizal's novel have a notable precedent in the French Revolution which, for a series of successors, has become a model of both revolution and the nation. Indeed Andersen's phrase concerning the imagined community's fraternal bonds appears tacitly to draw on the French Revolutionary slogan of liberty, equality, and fraternity. Yet it is only recently that scholars, such as Joan Landes in *Women and the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution* (Ithaca: Cornell, 1988), have called attention to the relations of gender and the nation. Landes argues that under dynastic realms the absolutist public sphere did not exclude women. Instead it put them at something of a disadvantage because of their supposed weaker character and baser nature. Under the republic, however, women's gender became the basis of twin differences. On the one hand, they enjoyed a certain moral superiority, especially as manifest in motherhood and domesticity. On the other hand, they were virtually excluded from the public realm of politics and civil society. "The subordination of women to men and a rigid sexual differentiation," Landes says, "were encapsulated in the uniform body of laws codified by Napoleon during the first decade of the [nineteenth] century. The Civil Code excluded women from the definition of citizenship even as it recognized the equal rights of

all citizens (p. 170)." Feminism as we know it today has emerged in part from the contradiction between equal rights for all citizens and the explicit exclusion of women from citizenship.

In addition to the marginalization of women and the working class, the Noli fails even to acknowledge the existence of cultural minorities. My companions of some three years, the Ilongots in the hills to the north, neither were invited to nor heard about the party given by Don Santiago de los Santos. In the present, the imagined national Philippine community usually fails to include cultural minorities. As one can probably anticipate, the feeling is by and large mutual.

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The third schematic phase of analysis involves conflict and negotiation. Issues raised thus become fundamentally historical because contestation always is in process and its outcomes are uncertain. Although structural factors may constrain events they do not determine them. In this respect, Andersen's work has set in motion a series of new studies that take his work as their point of departure.

Recent works suggest a need to supplement Andersen's historical schema. Begin with the conception of the nation as a bounded homogeneous territory. Within this delimited territory, as Max Weber said, the state exercises a monopoly on the legitimate use of violence. The term legitimate refers, of course, to the state's vantage point and not to the people against whom the violence is directed. Ilongots, Kurds, Basques, and Mohawks

probably do not find state violence legitimate.

Increasingly over Anderson's second phase (1820-1920) the idea of nationality took on the appearance of a fact of nature. Indeed the term naturalization became current in this period and one's nationality, as Anderson says, increasingly had the character of a fatality given at birth. From the viewpoint of the state, its individual citizens were equal and the same; they were uniform in language and culture. From this perspective, however, national (linguistic and ethnic) diversity within the state became a threat because it challenged the normative order that posited uniformity among the citizenry in the name of a congruence between state and nation.

During this period, certain citizens came to fulfill the norm and thus became culturally invisible to themselves. Upwardly mobile citizens who succeeded in entering the bourgeois bureaucratic chambers (corporate, military, legal, medical, educational) were called upon to abandon local attachments and parochial (i.e., sub-national) cultural attributes. No matter how parochial they may have been, ancient Athenian and western European educational classics were regarded by many in positions of privilege as if they embodied universal thought, reason, and cultivation. From another angle of vision, so-called universal thought could be described, despite the protestations of its adherents, as the distinctive cultural systems of the bourgeoisie in each nation founded in Europe and the Americas between 1776 and 1838.

If the state fully enfranchised certain individuals (e.g.,

white male property holders), it simultaneously disenfranchised others (e.g., women, people of color, white men without property). In this context, the full citizens of nations founded between 1776 and 1838 saw themselves as universal, rational, and cultivated, whereas it regarded its second class citizens as local, ethnic, and cultural. From a top-down perspective, the more empowered a group the less cultural it was and the more cultural the group the less powerful it was, at least in terms of the entitlements of full citizenship. One can then ask whether this ratio of culture and power applies as aptly to the nations formed after World War II as it does to those created between 1776 and 1838. This question requires comparative exploration.

Benedict Anderson's path-breaking work has made questions of citizenship in the imagined national community a productive area for further inquiry. Membership in imagined national communities appears to be a contract that requires constant renegotiation. Thus one can fruitfully ask about who was and who was not invited to the party. How do such inequalities as age, gender, class, race, caste, and ethnicity intersect in conflicts and negotiations? Which groups have been excluded or marginalized by national imaginings? How do marginalized groups imagine themselves and the nations they inhabit?

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Let me conclude by returning to my opening reflections. First, the question of the Gulf War and whether we witnessed a spontaneous outpouring of national sentiment, a manufactured mobilization of

consensus, or both. One should note well that the national consensus took the form of like-mindedness. It evoked images of men in groups and men on teams playing hardball, as one so often hears these days. Much as Benedict Anderson's work would anticipate, the emerging New World Order appears quite literally fraternal. Yet the war moved me beyond the spontaneous versus manufactured issues to the rather chilling realization that national mobilization for war appears to be the best example of nationalism in Anderson's sense. Hopefully, such realizations can open those with democratic aspirations to re-imagining national communities.

Secondly, re-imagining national communities requires a blend of the world as we know it and the world as we hope it can become. For me, such efforts require comparative research and I plan to explore Southeast Asian polities as well as those of Mexico and the United States. This project will tack between dominant and subordinate perspectives and it asks what makes internally diverse national communities thrive and feel violated. How do marginal or excluded groups imagine themselves and their nations? Can one move from notions of homogeneity as the basis of consensus to something more like a weave whose strength and solidarity resides in a combination of overlap and difference. Can we have polyglot citizens who exist, not as autonomous monads, but as interconnected subjects? For historically subordinated groups, these questions are not abstract, but concern the possibility of surviving and perhaps thriving in nation states.