Until a few years ago I was content to live in that special space allotted to “foreigners,” especially educated Anglophones like myself, with faint traces of a British accent. As a black woman at a bus stop in Chicago once said to me with approval, I was an East Indian. That was in 1972. But since that happy conversation two decades ago, it has become steadily less easy to see myself as somehow immune, armed with my Indian passport and my Anglophone ways, from the politics of racial identity in the United States. It is not simply that after two decades of being a “resident alien” in the United States, the spouse of an Anglo-Saxon American woman, and the father of a bicultural teenager, that my Indian passport seems like a rather slight badge of identity. The net of racial politics is now cast wider than ever before on the streets of the urban United States.

My own complexion and its role both in “minority” politics and in street encounters with racial hatred, prompt me to reopen the links between America and the United States, between biculturalism and patriotism, between diasporic identities and the livability provided by passports and green cards. Postcolonial loyalties are not irrelevant to the problem of diversity in the United States. Indeed, a postnational order is in the making, and Americanness changes its meanings, the whole problem of diversity in American life will have to be rethought.

It is not just the force of certain deductions that moves me to this recommendation. As I oscillate between the detachment of a postcolonial, diasporic, academic identity—taking advantage of the mood of exile and the space of displacement—and the ugly realities of being racialized, minoritized, and tribalized in my everyday encounters, theory encounters practice. A 1993 Random House book, Tribes: How Race, Religion, and Identity Determine Success in the New Global Economy, traces the connections between ethnicity and business success. Its author, “an internationally recognized authority on global, economic, political and social trends,” delineates five “tribes” — the Jews, the Chinese, the
The trope of the tribe

In spite of all the evidence to the contrary, these are hard times for patriotism. Maimed bodies and barbed wire in Eastern Europe, xenophobic violence in France, flag waving in the political rituals of the election year here in the United States, all seem to suggest that the willingness to die for one’s country is still a global fashion. But patriotism is an unstable sentiment, which thrives only at the level of the nation-state. Below that level it is easily supplanted by more intimate loyalties; above that level, it gives way to empty slogans rarely backed by the will to sacrifice or to kill. When thinking about the future of patriotism, if it is necessary first to inquire into the health of the nation-state.

And doubts about patriotism (patria-tion?) are tied up with my father’s biography, in which patriotism and nationalism were already diverging terms. My sister, brothers, and I grew up in Bombay wedged between ex-patriotism, Bose-style, and bourgeois nationalism, Nehru-style. Our India, with its Japanese connections and anti-Western ways, carried the nameless aroma of trea- son, in respect to the cozy alliance of the Nehrus and Mountbattens, and the bungluous combat between Gandhian nonviolence and Nehruvian socialism. My father’s distrust of the Nehru dynasty predisposed us to imagine a strange, deterritorialized India, invent-ed in Taiwan and Singapore, Bangkok and Kuala Lumpur, quite independent of New Delhi and the

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Nehru, the Congress party and mainstream nationalism. So there is a special appeal for me in the possibility that the marriage between nations and states was always a marriage of convenience and that patrology needs to find new objects of desire. One major fact that accounts for strains in the union of nation and state is that the nationalist genie, never perfectly contained in the bottle of the territorial state, is now itself diasporic. Carried in the repertoires of increasingly mobile populations of refugees, tourists, guest workers, transnational intellectuals, scientists, and illegal aliens, it is increasingly unrestrained by ideas of spatial boundary and territorial sovereignty. This revolution in the foundations of nationalism has created, in our virtually unsettled, real and social places, once the key to the linkage of territorial nation with state monopoly over the means of violence, key identities and identifications now only partially revolve around the realities and images of place. In the Sikh demand for Khalistan, in French-Canadian feelings about Quebec, in Palestinian demands for self-determination, images of a homeland are part of the rhetoric of popular sovereignty and do not necessarily reflect a territorial bottom line. The violence and terror surrounding the breakdown of many existing nation-states are not signs of reversion to anything biological or innate, dark or primordial. What then are we to make of this renewed bloodlust in the name of the nation? Modern nationalisms involve communities of citizens in territorially defined nation-states who share the collective experience, not of face-to-face contact or common subordination to a royal person, but of reading books, pamphlets, newspapers, maps, and other modern texts together. In and through these collective experiences of what Benedict Anderson calls *print capitalism* and others increasingly see as *electronic capitalism* (television and cinema), citizens imagine themselves to belong to a national society. The modern nation-state, in this view, grows less out of natural facts - such as language, blood, soil, and race - but is a quintessential cultural product, a product of the collective imagination. This view distances itself, but not quite enough, from the dominant theories of nationalism, from those of J. G. Herder to Guiseppe Mazzini and since then to all sorts of right-wing nationalists, which see nations as products of the natural desires of peoples, whether rooted in language, race, soil, or religion. In many of these theories of the nation as imagined, there is always a suggestion that blood, kinship, race, and soil are somehow less imagined, more natural than the imagination of collective interests or solidarity.

The trope of the tribe reactivates this hidden biology, largely because forceful alternatives to it have yet to be articulated. The historical conjunctures concerning reading and publicity, texts and their linguistic mediations, nations and their narratives are only now being juxtaposed to formulate the special and specific diversities of the national imaginary and its public spheres. The leaders of the new nations that were formed in Asia and Africa after World War II - Nasser, Nehru, and Sukarno - would have been disoriented to see the frequency with which the ideas of tribalism and nationalism are conflated in recent public discourse in the West. These leaders spent a great deal of their rhetorical energies in urging their subjects to give up what they saw as primordial loyalties - to family, tribe, caste and region - in the interests of the fragile abstractions they called "India," "Egypt," and "Indonesia." They understood that the new nations needed to subvert and annex the primary loyalties attached to more intimate collectivities. They rested their ideas of their new nations on the very edges of the paradox that modern nations were intended to be "something open, universal, and emancipatory by virtue of their special commitment to citizen virtue but that their nations were nonetheless, in some essential way, different from, and even better than, other nations. In many ways these leaders knew what we have tended to forget, namely, that nations, especially in multi-ethnic settings, are tenuous collective projects, not eternal natural
facts. Yet they too helped to create a false divide between the artificially constructed nation and these facts they failed to project as primordial – tribe, family, region.

The nation-state, in its preoccupation with the control, classification, and surveillance of its subjects, has often created, revitalized, or fractured ethnic identities that were previously fluid, negotiable, or nascent. Of course the terms used to mobilize ethnic violence today may have long histories. But the realities to which they refer – Serbo-Croatian language, Basque customs, Lithuanian cuisine – were most often crystallized in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Nationalism and ethnicity thus feed each other, as nationalist construct ethnic categories, which in turn drive others to construct counterhegemonies, which, in times of political crisis, demand counterhegemonies based on redefined counterhegemonies. For every nationalism that appears to be naturally destined, there is another that is reactive by-product.

Minorities in many parts of the world are as artificial as the majorities they are seen to threaten: “whites” in the United States, “Hindus” in India today. In its extreme form, this kind of ethnic politics is at the root of mass murder. In its less extreme form, all examples of the political and administrative designation of some groups as “minorities” (blacks and Hispanics in the United States, Celts and Pakistanis in the United Kingdom, Muslims and Christians in India) help to put majorities close to borders. They are the kind of borders that divide large states but not long histories. The new ethnicities are often no older than the nation-states they have come to resist. The Muslims of Bosnia are being reluctantly gesticulated though there is fear among both Serbs and Croats about the possibility of a “separate” Islamic state in Europe. Minorities are as often made as they are born.

Recent ethnic movements often involve thousands, sometimes millions, of people who are spread across vast territories and often separated by vast distances. Whether we consider the linkage of Serbs separated by large chunks of Bosnia-Herzegovina, or Kurds spread across Iran, Iraq, and Turkey, or Sikhs spread through London, Vancouver, and California, as well as the Indian Punjab, the new ethnonationalisms are complex, large scale, highly coordinated acts of mobilization, reliant on news, logistical flows, and propaganda across state borders. They can hardly be considered tribal, if by this we mean that they are spontaneous uprisings of closely bonded, spatially segregated, naturally allied groupings. In the case we find most frightening today, what could be called Serbian “tribalism” is hardly a simple thing since there are at least 2.8 million Yugoslav families who have produced about 1.4 million mixed marriages between Serbs and Croats, to which these could these families be said to belong? In our horrified preoccupation with the shock tactics of ethnonationalism, we have lost sight of the confused sentiments of civilians: the torn loyalties of families that have members of warring groups within the same household and the anguish of those who hold to the view that Serbs, Muslims, and Croats in Bosnia-Herzegovina have no fundamental enmity. It is hard to explain how principles of ethnic affiliation, however dubious their provenance and fragility their pedigrees, can very rapidly mobilize large groups into violent action.

What does seem clear is that the tribal model, insofar as it suggests prepackaged passions waiting to explode, flies in the face of the contingencies that spark ethnic passion. The Sikhs, until recently the bulwark of the Indian army and historically the fighting arm of Hindu India against Muslim rule, today regard themselves as threatened by Hinduism and seem willing to accept aid and succe from Pakistan. The Muslims of Bosnia-Herzegovina have been forced, reluctantly, to revitalize their Islamic affiliations. Far from activating long-standing “tribal” sentiments, Bosnian Muslims are torn between their own conception of themselves as “European Muslims” (a term recently used by Ejub Ganic, vice president of Bosnia), and transnational islam, which is already actively involved in Bosnian matters. We cannot agree that Muslim minorities abroad, in countries such as Turkey, are already playing for the defense of Muslims in Bosnia. To free us from the trope of the tribe, as the primordial source of those nationalisms we find less civil than our own in the United States, we need to construct a theory of large scale ethnic mobilization that explicitly recognizes and interprets its postnationalist properties.

POSTNATIONAL FORMATIONS

Many recent and violent ethnonationalisms are not so much explosive as imploding. That is, rather than being rooted in some primordial strata of affect deep within each of us, which is brought up and out into wider sorts of social engagement and group action, the reverse is often the case. The effects of large-scale interactions between and within nation-states, often stimulated by news of events in even more distant locations, serve to cascade through the complexities of regional, local, and neighborhood politics until it energizes local issues and implores into various forms of violence, including the most brutal ones. What were previously cool ethnic identities (Sikh and Hindu, Armenian and Azeri, Serb and Croat) thus turn hot, as localities implicate under the pressure of events and processes distant in space and time from the site of the implosion. Among Bosnia’s Muslims, it is possible to watch the temperature of these identities changing before our very eyes as they find themselves pushed away from a secular, Europeanist idea of themselves into a more fundamentalist posture. They are being pushed not only by the threats to their survival from Serbs but also by pressure from their fellow Muslims in Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Sudan, who suggest that Bosnian Muslims are now paying the price for playing down their Islamic identity under the weight of Islamic terror and extremism.

One important way to account for those cases in which ethno identities turn hot, and implode, from one place generate explosions in others, is to remind ourselves that the nation-state is by no means the only game in town as far as translocal loyalties are concerned. The violence that surrounds identities politics around the world today reflects the anxieties attendant on the search for transnational principles of solidarity. The mainstreams we see now in Serbia and Sri Lanka, Mountain Karabak and Namibia, Punjab and Quebec are what most might be called “trajan nationalisms.” Such nationalisms actually combine transnational (subnational), and more generally, nonnational identities and aspirations. Because they are so often the product of forced as well as voluntary diasporas, of mobile intellectuals as well as manual workers, of dialogues with hostile nonstate elites. Bosnian Muslims can be seen as being caught in the anguish of displacement, the nostalgia of exile, the repatriation of funds, or the brutalities of asylum-seeking. Haitians in Miami, Tamils in Sri Lanka, Moroccans in France, Mozambicans in Holland are the carriers of the difference.

While there are many separatist movements in the world today – the Basques, the Tamils, the Quebecois, the Serbs – that seem determined to lock nationhood and statehood together under a single ethnic rubric, more impressive still are the many oppressed minorities who have entered into displacement and forced diaspora without articulating a strong wish for a nation-state of their own: Armenians in Turkey, Hutu refugees from Burundi who live in urban Tanzania, Kashmiri Hindus in exile in Delhi are a few examples of how displacement does not always generate the fantasy of state-building. Although many antistate movements revolve around images of homeland, of soil, of place, and of return from exile, these images reflect the poverty of their (and our) political language and also the hegemony of territorial nationalism. Put another way, no idiom has yet emerged to capture the collective interest of many groups in translocal solidarity, crossborder mobilization, and postnational identities. Such interests are many and vocal, but they are still estranged from the lingual imaginaries of the territorial state. This incapacity of many deterritorialized groups to think their way out of the imaginary of the nation-state is itself the cause of much global violence since many movements of emancipation and identity are forced, in their struggles against existing nation-states, to embrace the very imaginary they seek to escape. Postnational or nonnational movements are forced by the very logic of actually exist-
The al\textsuperscript{1},tional threat, their wealthy states, ethnic identities, Safe from the depredations of their home states, diasporic communities become doubly loyal to their nations of origin and thus ambivalent about their loyalties to America. The politics of ethnic identity in the United States is inextricably linked to the global spread of originally local national identities. For every nation-state that has exported significant numbers of its populations to the United States as refugees, tourists, or students, there is now a de-localized transnational, which retains a specific ideological link to a putative place of origin as a promissory note of community empowerment. No existing conception of American-Italian identities can contain this large variety of transnationals.

In this scenario, the hyphenated American might have to be twice hyphenated (Asian-American-Japanese or Native-American-Seneca or African-American-Jamaican or American-Bolivian) as diasporic identities stay mobile and grow more protean. Or perhaps the sides of the hyphen will have to be reversed, and we can become a federation of diasporas, American-Italians, American-Haitians, American-Irish, American-Africans, American-Chinese, and American-Indians. The Americanized Chinese and Africanized Indians might increase if the societies from which we came remain or become more open. We might recognize that diasporic diversity actually puts loyalty to a nonterritorial foundation first, while recognizing that there is a special American way to connect to these global diasporas. America, as a cultural space, will not need to compete with a host of global identities and diasporic loyalties. It might come to be seen as a model of how to arrange one territorial locus (among others) for a cross-hatching of diasporic communities. In this regard, the American problem resembles those of other wealthy industrial democracies (such as Sweden, Germany, Holland, and France), all of which face the challenge of squaring enlightenment universalisms and diasporic pluralisms.

The question is, Can a postnational politics be built around this cultural fact? Many societies now face influxes of immigrants and refugees, wanted and unwanted. Others are pushing out groups in acts of ethnic cleansing intended to produce the very people whose preexistence the nation was supposed to ratify. But America may be alone in hav-