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Ethnic Conflicts

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Forging a national identity is part of the nation building project. National identities attempt to create a common narrative about a people, this identity formation then fosters a sense of belonging for the people in the nation. However, in reality, identity is defined by the politics of exclusion and othering. In essence, people define themselves by who they are not. Furthermore, the nation-state is in what Arjun Appadurai calls in crisis. This crisis has been facilitated by the paradox of globalization. Globalization, which is characterized by free markets, open borders and good governance has now given rise to problems such as populism and xenophobia across the world.

In his book, *Fear of Small Numbers*, Appadurai examines the relationship between nationalism and globalization. The author asserts that the modern nation-state, which represents the idea of a “national ethnos” is dangerous and misleading. Appadurai shows that there is a growing chasm between “majority” and “minority” because globalization produced conditions that led to a sense of what he calls *anxiety of incompleteness*. Ian Bremmer also provides examples of how globalization is shaping the formation of ethnos around the world. In *Us Vs. Them*, Bremmer explains that “globalism” is failing because of the growing economic inequality within countries. The election of Donald Trump, Brexit and the rise of populism in Europe are clear examples of how globalism is shaping the world. Bremmer shows that the

world is becoming increasingly polarized because the majority feels that their needs are not met by their government.

This feeling of anxiety led to the election of Donald Trump. On election night, CNN contributor, Van Jones coined the term "[whitelash](#)" to describe the anger that the white middle class felt because of their perceived marginalization. Trump was able to appeal to his base of disgruntled middle class that he will bring back their jobs from China and stop Mexican gangs and rapists from coming to the country by building a wall. The slogan "Make America Great Again" struck a chord with white America which believed that their very existence was being [eroded](#) and threatened by minority groups like Blacks and Hispanics. As Bremmer explains, "nationalism grows from a need to reassert control by declaring a shared solidarity...it pledges to build strong walls to keep 'them' at bay." When such rhetoric about [nationalism](#) is utilized, it seeks to get power for the nation which in turn excludes and discriminates against minorities. Michelle Wucker demonstrates this complicity through the analogy of the gray rhino, which shows that some issues are threats that are predicted in advance and if actions are taken in time, it could be averted. The gray rhino in this was that the frustration of the middle class was there but it was ignored by many politicians who did not address this anger. The American middle class felt threatened and demanded change, unfortunately a bigot and political entrepreneur was elected.

Appadurai further explains that the 1990s marked a peculiar time because as globalization was expanding it caused the nation-state to be in crisis (65). An example of the fear of being overcome by the minority is seen in the Rwandan genocide, which claimed the lives of over 800,000 people. The ethnic distinction between the Hutus and Tutsis was

constructed by the Belgians during colonialism and this became ingrained in the national narrative. As Appadurai points out, globalization can exacerbate national identities. In the case of Rwanda, the media fueled this violence by playing on ethnic tensions and instigating [violence](#). In the Sri Lankan [ethnic conflict](#), which lasted for twenty-five years from the 1980s to the early 2000s, globalization played a significant role in the ability of the Tamil diaspora to fund the war. The Tamil diaspora was able to help the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE or Tigers) to wage a war against the Sri Lankan government as they demanded a separate state. The war in Sri Lanka caused the mass migration of Tamils to western countries such as Canada, the United Kingdom and Germany. While in the diaspora, the Tamils were able to mobilize and form networks (such as through mass media, publicity and propaganda).

Furthermore, globalization has exacerbated the inequality within countries thus giving rise to a lot of anxiety. In the developing world, this divide is very sharp. Bremmer cautions against ignoring this divide as this can fuel ethnic tensions. According to Bremmer, Nigeria is one of the few countries in the world where the number of people living in poverty has increased, while the rich is getting wealthier at the same time. Moreover, the country is divided between religious lines with Christians in the south and Muslims in the north. This tension has given rise to Boko Haram, an Islamist militant group. Boko Haram have killed more than 15,000 people and the violence has [displaced](#) more than two million people from their home. These widening inequalities can quickly turn into anger as seen in conflicts such as Rwanda, if it is not addressed immediately.

Lastly, in Maxine Greene's essay, "Towards Wide-Awakeness," she shows that a heightened consciousness is meaningful because it allows us to be reflective and pushes us

towards creativity. When talking about globalization, I think about my own home country of Ghana, which is becoming indicative of the downsides of globalization as we are witnessing all over the world. The difference between the rich and poor has become very pronounced as we see some parts of the country rapidly modernizing while other parts are still very poor. Greene cautions us to think about the things we take for granted so that we are able to challenge what goes on around us in order to make the world a better place.

Works Cited

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