CHAPTER 4

Ethnicity Matters: Politics, Conflict, and Experiences

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After reading this chapter, you will be able to:

1. Define ethnicity and understand the characteristics, causal explanations, and expressions of this concept at different levels and across diverse domains.

2. Identify why ethnicity matters—for better or worse.

3. Describe why the reference to “ethnic” in “ethnic conflict” may conceal more than it reveals as an explanatory framework.

4. Explain how the politics of ethnicity in Quebec are situated within the framework of an intercultural (“post-ethnic”) nationalism.

5. Interpret how Canada’s official Multiculturalism policy seeks to neutralize (“depoliticize”) ethnicity.

DEBATE

Problematising the “Ethnic” in “Ethnic Conflict”: Inherent or Constructed?

If there is an iron law of ethnicity, it is that when ethnic groups are found in a hierarchy of wealth, power, and status, then conflict is inescapable. (Steinberg, 1989, p. 170)

If the postwar era could be described as the age of ideology involving capitalist and communist superpowers, the last decade of the twentieth century exposed yet another epoch in the making—the era of ethnic conflict (Crawford, 2006; Habaryirama et al., 2008; Shaykhutdinov & Bragg, 2011). With several major exceptions, virtually all global conflicts since 1990 have involved civil confrontations between and among ethnic groups within their existing borders (Arbatli, Ashraf, & Galor, 2015; Gurr, 2001; Taras & Ganguly, 2009). This observation hardly comes as a surprise: The so-called end of history (or the end of the Cold War) not only lifted the lid off political alignments, but also unleashed explosive ethnic revivals and animosities across the globe that have proven disruptive at best, destructive at worst (Hutchinson & Smith, 1996). From the Congo to Chechnya, from Somalia to

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the Basque region, from Rwanda to Kashmir, and from Bosnia to Myanmar (Burma), the proliferation of ethnically driven civil wars, genocides, sectarian violence, and secessionist movements during the 1990s proved dismaying and destructive. Millions have been displaced or killed—mostly civilians rather than soldiers, and mainly from starvation or disease rather than from bullets or landmines (Crawford & Lipschutz, 1998).

The prognosis for the twenty-first century is not much better (Taras & Ganguly, 2009). Although the number of countries experiencing conflict has declined from a peak in the early 1990s, as many as 35 countries since 2010 continue to be afflicted by civil conflict and sectarian violence (Arbatli, Ashraf, & Galor, 2015:1). The catastrophes in the Darfur region in Sudan and, more recently, inter-group clashes in the Ukraine and Syria attest to its prevalence, while US-led invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq have unleashed internal conflicts that eventually may prove more debilitating than the bloodbath that accompanied the occupations. The ascendancy of these ethnic conflicts is no longer seen as an international exception. Conflicts as clashes between culturally different groups appear to have evolved into a global norm, with no reason to believe an end is in sight to the destruction and death. Admittedly, ethnic differences per se do not necessarily culminate in large-scale violence and pitched battles (Habyarimana et al., 2008); nevertheless, there is potential for conflict and confrontation over a host of factors including social identity, territory, natural resources, self-determination, holy places, economic gains, cultural values, and personal and collective security (Ward, 2004).

But a problem of analysis persists: However disruptive to the governance process or deadly in its consequences, the meaning of ethnic conflict is not readily transparent (Taras & Ganguly, 2009). For some, the term “ethnic conflict” conjures up images of violent confrontations between tribes over pent-up hatreds. For others, it entails a clash of interests (both political and economic) involving cleavages within and competition between major ethno-religious clusters (Caselli & Coleman, 2006/2010). For still others, ethnic conflict is synonymous with any expression of violence between non-Western groups originating, in part, from the political vacuum created by collapsed states and stagnant economies. Curiously, incursions by the coalition forces (NATO/USA) and their “peacekeeping missions” into domains such as Serbia in 1999 are never framed as ethnic conflicts. Even reference to the “conflict” in “ethnic conflict” is problematic: Does the “conflict” in “ethnic conflict” refer only to armed confrontations between ethnically different groups, or can it be applied to any low-intensity competition involving different groups over valued resources (Steinberg, 1989)? For example, is Québec’s messy relationship to the rest of Canada a case of ethnic conflict or is it one of federal-provincial politics? No less puzzling is the concept of “ethnic” in “ethnic conflict” as an explanation. Is ethnicity per se a primary cause of hostilities? Or is ethnicity invoked after the fact to justify and explain a range of complex activities involving diverse groups? Should the origins of ethnic conflict be framed along instinctual (“primordial”) grounds (see Arbatli, Ashraf, & Galor, 2015)? Or should reference to ethnicity be one of several feasibility
factors or situational circumstances that construct conflicts? Or is the concept of ethnicity in a conflict manipulated as a smokescreen to achieve political goals or justify personal ambitions?

In theory, the persistence, salience, and intensity of ethnic conflicts should be an anomaly in this era of globalization and global citizenship. In reality, instead of diminishing, as might be expected because of an increasingly globalized world, ethnic-defined conflicts have escalated to the point where they are second only to international terrorism as a global security problem (Pieterse, 2007).

Factor religious intolerance into the equation and these hostilities often invoke a passion and fury that unsettles an abiding faith in the human condition (Tishkov, 2004). In short, ethnic conflicts (however defined) constitute a grave danger that threatens social cohesion, endangers public order, disrupts peaceful relations, and violates human rights and fundamental freedoms. That alone makes it doubly important to deconstruct the “ethnic” in ethnic conflicts to unravel what is going on and why. A set of responses to these dilemmas will be reexamined in the Debate Revisited box.

INTRODUCTION: GLOBAL IMPLOSION/ETHNICITY EXPLOSION

Two distinct but seemingly contradictory dynamics are in play at present. On the one hand are the imploding forces of globalization: Nation-states are inexorably drawn into the vortex of a single global economy, with its diversity-dampening commitment to rationality and universalism, conformity, and consumerism. The local and the national are conflated into a single world system that compresses and homogenizes, thanks to the interplay of mass communication, mass travel, mass consumerism, and mass education. But fears are mounting over a pending “McDonaldization” of societies—a kind of one-size-fits-all standardization in which differences are commodified as “ethnic chic” or, alternatively, a residual category to fall back on as a default option (Hutchinson & Smith, 1996).

On the other hand is an equally robust dynamic. The centripetal (the inward-leaning and pulling in) forces of globalization are in conflict with the centrifugal (outward-leaning and pushing out) dynamics of ethnicity. A powerful movement has evolved that transforms ethnicity into a cutting edge for collectively challenging the status quo. Ethnicity is now positioned as a potentially powerful (if enigmatic) social force capable of transformative disruptions that perplex as they provoke. The proliferation of ethnicity-based identity groups has proved equally unsettling, as ethnic minorities become increasingly assertive in capitalizing on ancestral differences for expressive and instrumental purposes. The politicization of ethnicity has not only redefined conventional intergroup relations; it has also eroded the rhythms of an established global order. The certainty and consensus that once prevailed is increasingly pervaded by uncertainty and confusion because of politicized ethnicities whose past clashes with the present, with no foreseeable resolution in the future (Castles & Miller, 2009).
Paradoxically, however, the surge in ethnicity may be directly related to the realities of globalization. That is, the greater the pressure for conformity because of standardization, the greater the incentive for promulgating ethnic differences. The very globalization that threatens a loss of distinctiveness may also spark a renewed interest in ethnic attachments in two ways: first, by creating new hybrid identities that oscillate between the “here” and the “there” by way of the “in-between” (Gillespie, 1996; Hall, 1996; Wiwa, 2003); and second, by uncoupling ethnicity from place because of global population movements, resulting in vastly more fluid identities that are increasingly transnational in scope and definition (Simmons, 2010). The corresponding dynamic is hardly inconsequential. A new set of “transnational” identities increasingly contests conventional notions of governance, in the process posing the question of whether it still makes sense to talk about multiculturalism or citizenship as place-based governance models when peoples’ notions of identity and affiliation are often unlinked from any fixed point of location (Fleras, 2014b).

The politics of ethnicity in shaping human behaviour and intergroup dynamics has elicited mixed reaction (Yinger, 1994). For some, ethnic experiences are dismissed as “regressive” because of their capacity to unleash dormant hatreds for settling old scores. The cult of ethnicity is demonized as an inexcusable reversion to “tribalism” that panders to humanity’s basest instincts. The “ethnification” (fragmentation) of society into squabbling ethnic communities also clashes with society-building imperatives, prompting some central authorities to dispose of this disruption by expulsion, extermination, cleansing, forced assimilation, or segregation (Taras & Ganguly, 2009). For others, ethnicity is seen as “progressive” in that it provides a community of like-minded individuals whose commitments and convictions secure an oasis of stability in a changing, confusing, and competitive world. Still others take a resigned view of ethnicity as a persistent presence in human affairs, with the potential to harm or help, depending on the circumstances. Societies that historically have championed ethnicity as an asset will flourish; conversely, those in arrears for managing ethnicity still struggle to balance the particular with the universal without spiraling into chaos or suppression. Not surprisingly, the preferred option lies in putting ethnicity to good use, without capitulating to a worst-case scenario of division or destruction. Or to put it differently: the challenge lies in making society safe for ethnicity as well as safe from ethnicity as grounds for living together with ethnic differences (Schlesinger, 1992).

Scholarly perceptions of ethnicity are also undergoing a conceptual shift (Simmons, 2010: 201). Ethnicity was once perceived as a relatively static and bounded category of ancestrally linked people whose shared distinctiveness isolated them from others. Classifying people into ethnic groups tended to “essentialize” ethnicity around fixed and uniform categories that not only determined how all members should think and act but also ignored the multidimensional nature of people’s identities. Metaphorical references to the Canadian multicultural mosaic solidified this line of thinking. But ethnicity is less frequently framed along these essentialized and reified lines of ancestry. It tends instead to be defined in non-essentialist terms as a fluid and flexible dynamic instead of a separate state of being into which differences are slotted into preexisting categories (Howard-Hassmann, 1999). It is increasingly framed as a contextual and contested process constructed and reconstructed through interaction and adjustment across porous and
overlapping boundaries at multiple levels and within a globalized world. No longer is ethnicity defined as a stable point of reference that determines how everyone will think and act (Fleras, 2015a). The focus now is on how ethnicity may inform a person’s identity rather than boxing them into ways of thinking and acting that uniformly applies to everyone in the group. And instead of treating ethnicity as an insulated and isolated social phenomena rooted in a single place, ethnicity is situated within transnational and global contexts. As Rogers Brubaker (2002:167) points out:

Ethnicity, race, and nation should be conceptualized not as substances or things or entities or organisms or collective individuals . . . but rather in relational, processual, dynamic, eventful, and disaggregated terms. This means thinking of ethnicity not in terms of substantial groups or entities but in terms of practical categories, situated actions, cultural idioms, cognitive schemas, discursive frames . . . contingent events. It means thinking of ethnization, racialization, and nationalization as political, social, cultural, and psychological processes . . . taking as a basic analytical category not the “group” as an entity but groupness as a contextually fluctuating conceptual variable.

The end result? Static and homogeneous, or “mosaic,” models of ethnicity (ethnicity as a thing, or noun) are ceding ground to more dynamic and hybridic discourses, or “kaleidoscope” models for framing the ethnic experience (“kaleidoscope” used in the sense of constantly moving shapes, thus ‘doing ethnicity’ as a process, or verb) (see Table 4-1; see also, Hall, 1996; Simmons, 2010).

As well, ethnicity is no longer framed as a cuddly nostalgic blanket or as an irrational and embarrassing relic from the past that—like religion—is largely incommensurable with the modernist project. On the contrary: Far from drifting into oblivion, ethnicity has catapulted to the forefront of intergroup dynamics and politicized claims as interest groups capitalize on ethnic attachments to mobilize and engage. Canada is no stranger to ethnic politics and the politics of ethnicity. A convergence of controversies and challenges associated with ethnicity attests to the turmoil. The politics of aboriginal ethnicity have challenged the very foundational principles that govern Canada’s constitutional order. The open conflicts at Ipperwash and Caledonia, Gustafsen Lake, and Burnt Church—and more recently the Idle No More movement—have seen to that. Québécois ethnicity continues to provoke English-speaking Canadians, many of whom are perplexed or apoplectic over Quebec’s brand of nationalism (discussed later in this chapter). Multicultural minorities

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<th>TABLE 4-1</th>
<th>Rethinking the Concept of Ethnicity</th>
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<td><strong>CONVENTIONAL MOSAIC MODEL</strong></td>
<td><strong>NEW KALEIDOSCOPE MODEL</strong></td>
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<td>Ethnicity Matters: as thing or noun</td>
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<td>Separated and bounded</td>
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<td>Uniform and essentialistic</td>
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<td>Canada = mosaic of ethnic communities</td>
<td>Canada = dynamic kaleidoscope of ethnicized belongings and identities</td>
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have been no less adamant in leveraging their ethnicity in the competition for scarce resources. Moreover, ethnic diversity is not only about numbers, although the growing ethnic composition of Canada’s population confirms the mobility of migrants and the mobilization of ethnic identities and enclaves (Belkhodia, 2014). Equally important are peoples’ subjective feelings as they relate to ethnicity. To the extent that ethnicity matters, the Centre for Research and Information on Canada (2006) found that 59 percent of all respondents in a study claimed that ethnicity was “important” or “very important” to their personal identity. Another 28 percent acknowledged the importance of ethnicity when selecting a spouse. Among racialized minorities, 75 percent asserted that ethnicity was “important” or “very important” for personal identity, another 37 percent said that ethnic background was “important” or “very important” in choosing a spouse. As well, a sense of ethnic attachment and its importance to people’s identity varies with length of time in Canada. Seventy-one percent of those who arrived in Canada after 1991 said it was “important”—as did 65 percent of those who arrived prior to 1991; 57 percent of those defined as second generation; and 44 percent of those defined as third generation (both parents born in Canada) (Statistics Canada, 2007). Clearly, ethnicity matters at individual levels, although its salience in terms of belonging and identity is highly varied and showing signs of decline over time (EKOS, 2013). Some want to preserve or promote their ethnicity at all costs; others can’t wait to discard their ethnic “straightjacket”; still others want to fully participate in society without discarding what makes them distinctive; and yet others don’t want to be boxed in by their ethnicity without necessarily discarding a sense of who they are (Malik, 2012, 2013).

This chapter explores the politics of ethnicity as a formidable dynamic in the creation of communities, identities, and activities. The chapter is organized around the theme that ethnicity once mattered, continues to matter even if many believed it wouldn’t or shouldn’t, and will continue to matter in the foreseeable future (albeit in forms that differ from the present and past). Ethnicity matters in two ways: First, it represents a key variable (“a difference that makes a difference”) that increases the probability of making something happen; second, it provides an explanatory framework for understanding behaviour, predicting success or failure (or justifying who gets what), mobilizing people into action groups, and legitimizing claims-making activities (Karner, 2007). Framing ethnicity in terms of “it matters” raises a series of questions: Why do individuals and groups turn to ethnicity for expressive or instrumental goals? What is it about this powerful force that threatens to dismantle the conventional in exchange for the unorthodox? Why has ethnicity assumed such salience in shaping Canada’s destiny? How do the politics of ethnicity pose a challenge to Canada-building? Answers to these questions are complex and contested; nevertheless, the quality of our responses will determine how adroitly Canadians can finesse ethnicity politics in advancing a cooperative coexistence.

More specifically, this chapter focuses on the politics of ethnicity when applied to a changing and diverse Canada. Canada’s ethnic relations (used in the broadest sense to include Aboriginal peoples) are shown to be predominantly relations of inequality. How, then, does ethnicity contribute to the creation and maintenance of inequities as well as to challenging and changing patterns of power and privilege? The chapter is organized accordingly: (1) What is ethnicity? (2) Why does it exist? (3) How is it expressed? (4) What are its impacts on and implications for Canada-building? Attention is focused on the different expressions of ethnicity: (1) ethnicity as community, (2) ethnicity as identity, including lived, situational/symbolic, hybridic, transnational, and insurgent, and
(3) ethnicity as *activity*, including social movements such as ethnic nationalism. Reference to the concept that "ethnicity matters" is sharply played out in Quebec where the politics of ethnicity and nationalism intermesh to create a zone of instability. Quebec’s distinctive brand of nationalism may be evolving toward greater inclusion of racialized minorities and migrants, although the process is proving trickier than many thought, given Quebec’s ambivalent status as a majority/minority society. The chapter concludes by discussing how the depoliticizing of ethnicity under Canada’s Multiculturalism banner establishes a governance model that makes Canada safe from ethnicity, yet safe for ethnicity.

**CONCEPTUALIZING ETHNICITY**

Most societies are composed of racially and ethnically diverse groups (Isajiw, 1999). The range of variation is almost limitless. Some societies are relatively homogeneous in terms of ethnic composition (Japan and Korea); others have a single dominant majority with numerous minorities in different stages of assimilation (United Kingdom); others consist of dominant and subdominant groups that are locked in competition for power (Fiji); still others, including Australia and New Zealand, are constitutive of white settler colonies with immigrant populations superimposed on increasingly powerful indigenous nations (Fleras & Spoonley, 1999).

On the surface, it might appear hopeless to extract a pattern from this seeming disarray. Nevertheless, two patterns can be discerned across societies. First, a dominant ethnic group prevails whose culture, language, values, and social patterns are privileged as normal and desirable. Those in control possess the power and resources to establish institutional arrangements and ideological systems consistent with their interests. Ethnocultural minorities have suffered as a result of this mistreatment, and many have reacted accordingly. A second pattern involves the proliferation of ethnically diverse groups who are increasingly restive because of their marginal status. Options open to these subdominant groups may be limited and limiting. Many endure constant pressure to absorb prevailing values, norms, and institutions. Others are kept securely in place to ensure a reserve pool of largely exploited labour. And still others are encouraged to retain diversity, but find themselves penalized or ostracized as a result. Needless to say, the prospect of defining ethnicity under such varied circumstances is daunting.

**Defining Ethnicity**

References to the term “ethnicity” continue to baffle and confuse as well as to infuriate and inflame. Ethnicity has evolved into an imprecise mélange of contested meanings that can be stretched to mean everything yet nothing, in the process acquiring the status of a cliché without much analytical clout. The term itself seems immune to rational analysis, thanks to its complexities and scope (Clarke et al., 2008): How can a single term encompass everything from ethnocide in the Darfur region of Sudan, to Québécois ethnic nationalism, to the contrived ethnicity of Kitchener-Waterloo’s annual Oktoberfest celebration? What can be done with a word that people often use as a more polite euphemism for “race?” As well, the term is subject to additional overuse. For example, consider how reference to ethnic conflict is routinely employed to describe intergroup hostilities in Africa, but never applied to Western intervention in the Middle East—even though ethnicity may well prove pivotal in explaining the conflict.
Part One: Conceptualizing the Politics of Race, Ethnic, and Aboriginal Relations

Still, any definition must reflect certain prerequisites. A working definition must be sufficiently broad to capture the politics of ethnicity as principle and practice, yet not so sprawling as to lose this focus. A distinction between race and ethnicity provides a useful starting point. Whereas race connotes biological variation, genetic determinism, and imposed classifications, ethnicity differs in emphasizing self-generated cultural differences related to values, lifestyle, and world view (Durie, 2005). Definitions must also acknowledge both subjective and objective dimensions at either individual or group levels. Or, as Yinger (1994) notes, three components must prevail: (1) members of a so-called ethnicity see themselves as different; (2) others see them as different; and (3) people participate in shared activities with the intent of affirming their distinctiveness. With ethnicity, individuals experience a sense of belonging to a community of like-minded individuals who share a common attachment to identity markers such as language, history, birthright, kinship, and homeland. Broadly speaking, then, ethnicity can be defined as a principle and process in which a shared awareness of a people’s ancestral linkages and perceived commonalities serves as a basis for community, identity, and activity. This definition captures the multidimensionality of ethnicity as (1) embodying a consciousness of being different because of tradition and transmission, (2) an awareness of differences as socially constructed yet grounded in historical origins and structural realities, (3) a recognition that people perceive themselves as different and are seen by others as being different, and (4) an acknowledgment that ethnicity matters in securing recognition (identities), rewards (entitlements), or relationships (engagements).

There is some value in distinguishing ethnicity from ethnic groups and ethnic minorities. Ethnicity consists of a principle whose distinctive attributes distinguish members of one category from another because of beliefs, values, emotions, and practices. Under the ethnicity principle, persons who are related by birth, loyalty, culture, or homeland have the “option” of joining goal-directed action groups in pursuit of instrumental or expressive ends. Ethnic groups, by contrast, refer to lived-communities of people who are socially and culturally distinct, who see themselves and are seen by others as distinct from other communities, and who are separated from others because of ancestries and boundaries. As widely noted, ethnic groups constitute a form of social organization with boundaries, a shared and transmitted culture, and a sense of identity among members that fosters patterns of belonging. The extent to which ethnic groups maintain a strong consciousness among members will fluctuate, too; that is, some ethnic groups seek rapid assimilation and are quickly accepted by the mainstream, while others may stoutly defend their identity because of mainstream rejection or a desire for distinctiveness (see discussion on dualisms in Chapter 1). Finally, the concept of “ethnic minority” refers to a group of culturally distinct people who occupy (or are seen to occupy) a marginal status in society, even though they may outnumber those of the dominant sector. In other words, references to ethnicity involving minority versus majority—as well as dominant versus subdominant—are about power and differences, not about numbers and proportions.

Attributes of Ethnicity

To ensure ethnic distinctiveness, boundaries are required. Ethnic boundaries can be defined as socially constructed barriers that provide a protective buffer by regulating of movement between ethnic groups (Barth, 1969). Neither totally impenetrable nor
excessively permeable, these boundaries can be likened to “membranes” that simultaneously inhibit yet permit the interflow of particles. In some cases, these boundaries are vigorously maintained for keeping some people in and others out. This boundary maintenance is especially true when group members consider themselves under threat because of racist legislation, restricted economic opportunity, restrained cultural expression, or social rejection. In other cases, boundaries are relatively porous-fluid, contested, context dependent, and increasingly complex (Cornell & Hartmann, 1998). But difficulties arise in maintaining a degree of bounded distinctiveness, especially in a country such as Canada, with its official Multiculturalism and absence of official assimilationist pressure (Weinfeld, 2001).

Consider how the politics of boundary maintenance are played out in light of Quebec’s commitment to the principles of interculturalism (Fleras, 2013). Quebec’s endorsement of interculturalism as ethnic governance was first introduced in the early 1980s, although not fully articulated until the 1990 Policy Statement on Immigration and Integration (Leroux, 2014). An intercultural governance model proposes a distinct political community whose cultural and language priorities supersede the salience of ethnic diversities. According to interculturalism as ethnicity governance, newcomers and their contributions are welcome, but their entry activates a “moral contract” involving a reciprocal exchange of rights, duties, and obligations between newcomers and the Québécois. Newcomers must agree to abide by the primacy of speaking French, acknowledge Quebec as a free and democratic society as well as secular and pluralist (within limits), governed by the rule of law, and committed to gender equality (Gagnon & Iacovino, 2007; Montpetit, 2011). Quebec, in turn, cultivates a pluralistic notion of society that is sensitive to immigrant rights; preserves the creative tension between the diversity of minority differences and the predominance of French culture; and emphasizes the centrality of integration and interaction to the Quebec-building project (Bouchard-Taylor Commission, 2008:121). Quebec has also proposed an obligatory seminar to instruct newcomers about the province’s common values, while cities such as Gatineau provide a statement of values to assist newcomer integration (Peritz, 2011). In short, an interculturalism commitment reflects what is metaphorically equivalent to an “arboreal” model of ethnic/immigrant governance; that is, the tree trunk is unflinchingly French in language and culture, while minority cultures constitute the branches grafted on to the trunk. With interculturalism, in other words, limits to diversity are explicit—you can be Haitian but always a Haitian in Quebec, with a corresponding commitment to its values, institutions, and norms as set out in laws, ideals, and constitution.

This emphasis on objective ethnic content has waned in recent years. In its place has emerged an interest in the subjective experiences that embrace and the symbolic boundaries that encircle. A subjectivist orientation rejects the notion of ethnicity as a clearly articulated cultural category with an easily defined set of objective features. Ethnicity instead is informed by a shared “we feeling” that infuses the members of a particular group with a sense of who they are, where they originated from, and where they are headed. Emphasis is focused on ethnicity as an intersubjective activity, that is, a flexible resource for crafting patterns of meaningful interaction (Barth, 1969; Isajiw, 1999). In acknowledging that people may manipulate ethnicity to adapt, gain, or play, there is an unmistakable shift away from conventional notions that embrace static and homogeneous models.
But just as a laundry-list approach to ethnicity has proven inadequate, so too has an overemphasis on subjective experience. Ethnicity is more than a feeling of apartness or a sense of shared awareness; it is also grounded around those visible cultural symbols deemed essential to group survival. Select tangible markers such as patterns of kinship, descent, and obligations are required to validate a sense of continuity, collectivity, and commitment. Of those characteristics that shine as indices of ethnicity, from appearances to dietary habits, the most prominent are birthright, homeland, and language. Birthright is critical: Only persons with proven (or perceived) descent from a common source can claim membership to a particular ethnicity. No less crucial is a powerful attachment to a territory or homeland that may have been lost or left behind. Ethnic homelands are valorized as an embodiment of the past whose value must be defended at all costs. Language often represents the quintessential component of group distinctiveness. It also serves as a powerful symbol of distinctiveness, cohesion, and integrity that performs integrative and identifying functions, as point out later in this chapter.

EXPLAINING ETHNICITY: WHY?

Ethnicity is evolving into one of the world’s most powerful dynamics. Its salience in defining, shaping, and advancing group relations within multicultural contexts such as those found in Canada is beyond doubt. Not surprisingly, many regard as a major challenge the construction of a society that is safe for ethnicity, yet safe from ethnicity. But such a concern was not always the case. The inevitable dissolution of ethnicity was widely predicted and anticipated as recently as two generation ago. Both socialism and liberalism attacked the particularist attachments associated with ethnicity as atavistic survival at odds with universal progress and modernization. Ancient tribal hatreds would melt into memory because of a modernist belief in liberal universalism, with its attendant notion that, for purposes of reward and recognition, peoples’ commonalities as individuals are more important than what divides them because of membership in racial or ethnically distinct groups (Maaka & Fleras, 2005).

Ideological considerations were no less dismissive of ethnicity. Capitalism rejected ethnicity as anathema to progress or prosperity. With its backward-looking attachments to tribes and traditions, ethnicity would imperil the unfettered flow of labour, capital, and markets. A Marxist perspective was equally dismissive. If class relations constituted the fundamental dynamic in society, everything else, including ethnicity, was deemed to be derivative or residual. To think or to act otherwise, namely, in terms of ethnicity, perpetuated the false consciousness that bolstered the principles of capitalism. In short, both functionalism/capitalism and conflict/Marxist theorists pounced on ethnicity as inferior, irrelevant, doomed to obscurity, and an obstacle to progress and prosperity.

Predictions of its demise have been premature, to say the least. Ethnicity has proven both resilient and tenacious, with no signs of diminishing or disappearing, despite powerful pressures to the contrary. Perpetuated at times by individuals as genuine culture (i.e., enjoyed in its own right); as an impetus for mobilizing people into goal-directed action (i.e., employed as a means to an end); and as a source of meaning, identity, and solidarity (Karner, 2007), the ethnicity “revolution” has profoundly redefined the notion of what society is for. People have turned to ethnicity as a means
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of protecting their immediate interests, especially when central authorities are unable or unwilling to offer protection. No longer are ethnic attachments dismissed as archaic survivals from the past—quaint and colourful, perhaps, but quite irrelevant to contemporary realities. On the contrary, ethnicity matters, and this renewal of ethnic pride and identity has revealed a double-edged capacity not only to enhance or empower, but also to destroy or dispossess.

The rejuvenation of ethnicity in Canada and elsewhere raises many questions: How do we account for the popularity and proliferation of ethnicity in contemporary societies? Why might people prefer to affiliate along ethnic lines rather than associate with political parties or trade unions? How can the visceral appeal of an inward-looking ethnicity possibly supersede the cosmopolitan lure of a modern society? Or rephrased along more grounded lines: Why would anyone want to be thought of as a Québécois or Aboriginal or Lithuanian-Canadian when they can identify solely as non-hyphenated Canadians? Three explanatory frameworks help to isolate the factors that underscore the popularity and persistence of the ethnicity experience, namely: the primordial, the constructivist, and the instrumentalist.

Primordial Explanation

The primordial explanation argues that the boom in ethnicity is essentially an extension of powerful and immutable instincts that cannot be indefinitely suppressed. People appear to have a genuine preference for aligning themselves with closely related blood kin; as a result, ethnicity represents an ancient and deep-rooted impulse for being with your “own kind.” Suppression of these ascribed statuses for belonging with similar others, given at birth, and perceived as fixed and permanent, doesn’t make ethnicity go away (Clarke et al., 2008). Rather, this ethnicity is forced to go underground, only to re-emerge in an often explosive rage when the lid is lifted. These bonds are primordial because they appear to have been hardwired by evolution into the human species for survival purposes. This intrinsic dimension may help to explain the intensity of passions and emotions associated with the ethnic experience. Consider this statement by a Serbian-Canadian in rationalizing his loyalties during the 1999 NATO-led bombings of Serbia: “I’m a Canadian by birth and a Serbian by blood. I think family values come ahead of values or loyalties to your country . . . It’s not a question of loyalty to Canada or Serbia” (as cited in Sarick, 1999). The primordiality of ethnic attachments may also explain the popularity of staunchly ethnic social movements in advancing collective interests (Bell-Fialkoff, 1993).

Within the primordialist camp are various biologically informed theories of ethnic bonding, the most popular of which is sociobiology. According to this slant, ethnicity is biogenetically “wired” into the human species as a mechanism for maximizing the transmission of genes from one generation to the next. Pierre van den Berghe (1981), for example, traces the origins of ethnic bonding to an extension of kinship group solidarity. Any kinship group tends to act in a self-preservative manner by providing mutual aid and cooperation for those related because of a common ancestor. Involvement with related others ensures the long-term survival of the kin groups—albeit at some expense to any specific individual. It follows from this that even ostensibly altruistic actions have the effect of protecting and promoting the evolutionary survival of one’s own ethnic kin.
There is something of value in sociobiological explanations of ethnicity. Situating ethnic experiences within our genetic and evolutionary past captures the tenacity and the intensely emotional appeal of ethnicity (Brown, 1989). But sociologists are divided over the merits of sociobiology as an explanation, especially as many reject those frameworks that exclude the social as primary cause. Many are unsettled by the political implications of reductionist arguments that conflate biology with culture. True, we may be genetically “hardwired” to identify with our “own kind”; nevertheless, definitions of what constitutes our “own kind” will vary over time and across space. The fact that people are also free to choose otherwise, and that many have done so by repudiating their ethnic heritage is a strike against primordiality.

**Constructivist Explanation**

Opposing the primordial explanation is a **constructivist explanation** that focuses on the creation of ethnicity through meaningful interaction. The constructivist approach tends to see ethnic identity and affiliation as a complex and contested process whose construction cannot be understood outside the context of situational circumstances (Koenig & de Guchteneire, 2007). The “construction” in a social constructivist position confirms how there is nothing natural or normal about the world we live in, despite continued efforts by vested interests to make it seem so. Social conventions that guide or organize are continually constructed and reconstructed through a process of meaningful engagement. Similarly, ethnicity is not a natural feature of society but a constructed response to challenges such as material exclusion, a search for social meaning, a quest for identity, the relief in being with “one’s own kind,” and a struggle for creating culturally safe spaces. Inasmuch as ethnicity represents a social construct, it is “imagined.” But its effects on the lives and life chances of minority women and men are far from imaginary.

The identity thesis represents a variant of a constructivist explanation. According to the **identity thesis**, ethnicity persists because it provides a coping mechanism for addressing the globalizing demands of contemporary urban society. An identity perspective points to ethnicity as a buffer for insulating individuals from the pressures of an impersonal and competitive world. A commitment to ethnicity secures a source of stability in a world of diversity, uncertainty, and change; as an oasis of tranquility, it restores a measure of meaning in an increasingly meaningless world. Appeals to ethnicity foster a sense of relief, continuity, belonging, importance, security—and even enjoyment—especially for those at the margins of society without alternative channels for coping with societal stress caused by intense global competition, radicalized individualism, a disintegrating civil society, increasingly porous territorial borders, the erosion of the nation-state as the primary source of legitimacy, and cultural upheavals created by the proliferation of digital technologies. The dissolution of the familiar and reassuring may undermine a people’s sense of social belonging, including a rootedness in traditional collectivities such as kinship or community. The confluence of uncertainty and change may also induce individuals to withdraw into ethnic shells both familiar and emotionally satisfying (Littleton, 1996). As Manuel Castells (1997) writes:

> When the world becomes too large to be controlled, social actors aim at shrinking it back to their size and reach. When networks dissolve time and space, people anchor themselves in places, and recall their historic memory. (p. 66)
Ethnic involvements, in other words, permit meaningful identity to be crafted when meanings are in short supply. A “quasi-kinship” community is sustained that provides a buffer against the backdrop of unremitting rationality, standardization, and central control (Scott, 1998). This binding and bonding dimension also helps to explain the universal appeal of such affiliation for people whose cultural moorings have been cut adrift by the relentless pressure for conformity and integration.

Instrumentalist Explanation

An instrumentalist explanation views ethnicity as a resource for the pursuit of diverse goals (Hutchinson & Smith, 1996). One version refers to elite competition for scarce resources, in which ethnic symbols are manipulated to secure mass support. A second version refers to a process by which both leaders and followers maximize preferences, since pooled resources provide a competitive advantage in advancing vested interests. An instrumentalist approach is firmly grounded in a sociological understanding of group competition and rational choice theory; that is, ethnicity is designed to maximize in-group advantage by excluding others. The drawing power of ethnicity provides a competitive edge in the struggle for scarce and valued resources as groups rely on their ethnic attachments to mobilize, challenge, and change. Especially in contexts in which an ethnic division of labour persists (Hechter, 1975), dominant sectors tend to monopolize wealth and power at the expense of ethnically different subdominant groups, many of whom are locked into a position of inferiority because of their unskilled status. Resentment over this differential treatment boils over when expectations soar but the means to achievement are blocked, resulting in escalating frustration, hostility, or conflict. These conflicts are further bolstered by the actions of opportunistic elites who often cloak personal interests behind a facade of altruism.

Two questions arise from an instrumentalist approach to ethnicity: First, why do ethnically like-minded persons prefer to act collectively, rather than as individuals, to achieve their goals? Put simply, a collective basis is superior for coping with the demands of a complex and bureaucratized society. According to resource mobilization theory, large-scale social movements possess the human resources and critical mass to compete effectively in the competition for scarce resources. Second, why are ethnic attachments important in securing the loyalty and commitment of members? What is the tactical advantage of relying on ethnicity as a basis for mobilizing people into groups? The best answer may be the most obvious: Recruitment by appealing to ethnicity is perceived as more natural and durable than the “artificial” linkages associated with political or economic ties. Ethnic bonds are consolidated by emotional involvement with persons of one’s own kind, a kind of quasi-kinship that needs no justification beyond its own existence. These quasi-kinship ties also infuse the movement with the commitment for waging a protracted struggle against even seemingly insurmountable odds.

To sum up: Each of these three explanatory frameworks described above may be partially correct in that each provides insights into aspects of the ethnic experience that others prefer to ignore, including (1) ethnicity as an inherent affiliation that reflects an intrinsic need for belonging to one’s own kind (primordial), (2) ethnicity as a constructed buffer for securing meaning and continuity in a changing and uncertain world (constructivist), and (3) ethnicity as a tool for the attainment of goals through collective
action (instrumentalist). That said, there is no reason why primordial explanations cannot be incorporated into a broader explanatory framework (including the constructivist and instrumentalist explanations) in securing a multi-textured insight into the complexities of the ethnicity experience.

**EXPRESSING ETHNICITY: HOW?**

Ethnicity can be expressed at different levels of reality. At one level, ethnicity is manifested in ethnic groups who live together in relatively self-sufficient communities. At another level, ethnicity manifests itself through different expressions of identity, including lived, symbolic and situational, hybridic, insurgent, and transnational. At a third level, ethnicity reflects activity best expressed through social movements with nationalistic overtones. These different expressions of the ethnic experience—community, identity, and activity (see Table 4-2)—may be analyzed separately; in reality, however, they tend to coexist, overlap, and intersect in complex ways.

**Ethnicity as Community**

Ethnicity refers to a principle of potential group/community formation. Persons with shared and felt identification may be classified into a category that mobilizes ancestrally related persons into action groups to advance individual or collective claims. Ethnicity also provides a basis for relatively permanent communities with clearly defined rules for living together. Preference for being with one’s own kind may foster a commitment to community. Or pressures from the outside may also compel a closing of the ranks along community lines to cope with unfriendly environments. Quebec, for example, represents an ethnicity and ethnic group/community as well as a nation and distinct society with its own distinct language, culture, and culture that distinguishes it from the rest of Canada and North America.

Parts of urban Canada are composed of a mosaic of ethnic communities, including the widely celebrated Chinatowns in Vancouver and Toronto, South Asian communities in Brampton, and the relatively self-sufficient Hasidic Jews in Montreal. Or consider the town of Markham, located just north of Toronto, where nearly 72 percent of the population, according to 2011 data, identified themselves as ethnic—including one ward where 95 percent of the population self-identified as ethnic. According to Qadeer, Agrawal, and Lovell (2009), the percentage of South Asians residing in their respective ethnic

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<th>TABLE 4-2</th>
<th>Expressing Ethnicity: Community, Identity, and Activity</th>
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<td>Ethnicity as community</td>
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<td>Enclaves</td>
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enclaves in Toronto’s Census Metropolitan Area in 2006 was 49.6 percent, followed by Chinese at 48.2 percent and Jewish at 40.6 percent. These ethnic communities can be conceptualized in different ways—either as segregated ghettos that intensify downward spirals or as vibrant ethnic enclaves both distinctive and prosperous (Qadeer, Agrawal, & Lovell, 2009).

An important study of ethnocultural minority enclaves in Montreal, Toronto, and Vancouver by Daniel Hiebert (2015) uncovered interesting trends and developments. First, the proportion of racialized migrants and minorities living in enclaves has remained stable in Montreal, but enclave landscapes are increasingly more prevalent in Toronto and Vancouver. Second, racialized groups vary in their likelihood of living in an enclave, with some members residing in enclaves and another component living in other parts of the city. Certain racialized minorities and more recent migrants are more likely to settle in enclaves. Third, the socioeconomic characteristics of persons living in enclaves is difficult to generalize. In Montreal, enclaves are sites of relatively more poverty and unemployment, but the situation is much more complex in Toronto and Vancouver, with some indicators pointing to socioeconomic marginalization and other indicators indicating relatively high home ownership, a middle class commitment, and conformity to core values. Evidence also indicates that more members of a racialized minority who experience poverty live outside enclaves than those who live in them. Fourth, even those enclaves dominated by a single dominant group are not monocultural domains but characterized by high levels of internal diversity owing to the presence of other ethnocultural minorities. In short, unlike the situation in many parts of Europe, as Hiebert (2015) concludes, the existence of ethnocultural enclaves do not necessarily lead to residents leading “parallel lives” in terms of socioeconomic disadvantage or social isolation from the rest of Canada—although exceptions and departures from patterns do exist.

Ethnic communities can also be seen as complex matrices of intergroup relations and intragroup dynamics. They consist of communities that offer emotional and material support for facilitating the transition from the society of origin to urban Canada. Recent immigrants may find economic and cultural refuge in ethnic communities because of organizations that assist in the preservation of language and transmission of culture. In providing a framework for collective activities, they also establish a power base for advancing political consciousness and action. These communities may attract resources and influence if local leaders can command community loyalty and deliver this “commodity” as electoral support for government initiatives. Still, internal tensions may threaten community solidarity or consensus on issues. Despite a constructed facade of unity, social fissures are readily apparent as vested interests jockey for position, resulting in a high potential for factional infighting and political cleavages among community members because of politicized differences in age, sex, income, education, and length of residence.

**Ethnicity as Identity**

One of the identities open to Canadians is that of ethnicity. In a multicultural society such as Canada, many individuals regard their ethnicity as important in defining their self-identity (see Cornell & Hartmann, 2007; Liu et al., 2006; Muir & Wetherell, 2010). Identity entails how a person defines who he or she is by seeking a degree of consistency in responding to questions such as these: How do I see myself? How would I like
to see myself? How do I think others see me? How would I like others to see me? (As we shall see in the next chapter, ethnicity also serves as a critical determinant of "who gets what.") Ethnic identities can also be broadly defined as personal attachments involving a subjective sense of belonging to or identification with a group or tradition over time, based on commonalities with similar others (Driedger, 1989; Satzewich & Liodakis, 2013). In certain cases, ethnic identities are imposed by outside sources; in others, they are voluntarily adopted on the basis of how individuals or groups feel about themselves. Some identities, such as "white ethnicity," are somewhat muted since whites rarely express a conscious awareness of their whiteness unless challenged to do so. Other identities may be active in that individuals are conscious of them and act accordingly to protect or promote them. Still other identities are politicized in securing the basis for collective action to achieve goals. In all cases, identities are relational in that they are constructed through meaningful interaction rather than psychologized as labels that are inherent or maturational (Drummond, n.d.).

Expressions of ethnic identities are varied (Simmons, 2010). Some Canadians reject their ethnic background except for on special occasions, preferring instead to be identified only as Canadians for purposes of recognition, relationships, and rewards. Others maintain a dual (or "transnational") identity without much difficulty: Modern communication and transport technologies allow ethnic minorities to transcend national borders by participating in the internal affairs of the homeland without relinquishing a commitment to Canada. Such a dynamic makes it difficult to think of Canada as a collection of self-contained localities. Rather, the intensified transnational exchanges between localities and the homeland have altered how people think about identity, place, and borders (Fleras, 2015b; Papillon, 2002). Still others thrive on multiple identities. They flit in and out of different ethnic identities without a sense of a crisis of confusion. Their identities are fluid and contextual—even contradictory—in coping with the many opportunities that a complex society has to offer, especially as individuals and groups are drawn into an ever-expanding nexus of networks and linkages (Handa, 2003). And yet still others remain locked into an “old country” identity with neither the intent nor energy to alter who they are. Five expressions of ethnic identity can be discerned, at least for the purposes of analysis, namely lived, situational/symbolic, hybridic, transnational, and insurgent.

**Lived Ethnic Identity** Individuals with common cultural values or religious beliefs may strongly identify with a particular ethnic group. Under a **lived ethnic identity**, individuals are born into these primary groups, membership is irrevocably assigned at birth, and the group remains a virtually exclusive source of identity throughout an entire lifetime. An attachment to the norms, values, and institutions of the group constitutes a serious statement about personal affiliation. Anabaptist sects such as the Hutterites are ethnic communities governed by rules, values, and sanctions. Here, the principle of ethnicity reflects and reinforces the organization of viable groups, with a corresponding powerful influence in shaping members’ lives. These individuals admit that their identification with the cultural past makes a difference in how they think and behave. Involvement at this level presupposes a framework of constraints, demands, and responsibilities that cannot be casually discarded as moods shift or personalities change.

A lived ethnicity represents a difference that makes a difference in defining “who we are.” There is no option or choice; either people conform or they are shunned or expelled.
Chapter Four: Ethnicity Matters: Politics, Conflict, and Experiences

Not surprisingly, this “old-fashioned” style of ethnicity is disappearing. Restricted largely to rural areas and certain urban enclaves of Canada, conventional ethnic groups have lost much of their moral authority as arbiters of correct human behaviour. Many of these groups can no longer supply a common set of shared values, enforce mutual obligations or responsibilities, offer incentives or impose sanctions, or secure compliance from members. Furthermore, a lived ethnicity rarely appeals to those who want to fully participate in an achievement-oriented society; they prefer a more flexible arrangement.

**Situational/Symbolic Ethnic Identity** Ethnicity in a multicultural society takes on a different dynamic. Ethnic identities may shift toward the part-time, focus on symbols rather than substance, and become situation-specific. The obligations of a lived ethnic identity are discarded in exchange for the flexibility associated with symbolic commitments and situational adjustments. This situationally specific and symbolically loaded identity often takes the form of a strategic personal resource that allows individuals to improve their life chances without rejecting their life sources. References to ethnic identities as situational or symbolic are not intended to trivialize or demean the ethnic experience as inauthentic or contrived. Emphasis instead is on its adaptiveness and resilience across time and place.

An ethnic identity based on situation and symbols reflects a uniquely distinct process of immigrant adaptation. Through involvement in their adopted country, incoming immigrants may become increasingly estranged from their cultural heritage—especially in terms of language use, friendship circles, and residential patterns—preferring instead to identify with the values and lifestyle of the host society. Ethic attachments to the homeland culture begin to dissipate in light of host-country pressures to adapt and integrate. Involvement in ethnic organizations declines (except on isolated occasions or in favourable circumstances) to the point of insignificance—if measured by the frequency or intensity of institutional participation. Yet there is a reluctance to casually discard tradition, given its former importance as a blueprint for identity and relationships, with the result that many new Canadians may retain a strong emotional connection to the symbolic aspects of their cultural past. In resisting the lure of wholesale assimilation, they reveal an affective attachment to the community as a reference group, but reject as unacceptable both the restrictions and responsibilities of a lived ethnicity (Roberts & Clifton, 1990).

The emergence of this “part-time” ethnicity is known as **situational or symbolic ethnic identity**—situational because its expression is context-dependent rather than constant across time and space; and symbolic because identity is informed by an attachment to symbols rather than the substance of ethnicity. Ethnic salience is not measured by levels of participation in ethnic clubs, knowledge of ethnic language, circle of friends, place of residence, or marital patterns. Importance instead is attached to identifying with the symbols of that ethnicity, with a willingness to activate those symbols when appropriate or for advantage. Individuals do not so much belong to an ethnic group as they voluntarily affiliate with relevant cultural symbols as preferences dictate and situations demand (Amarasingam, 2008). Admittedly, not everyone possesses a choice of options. The centrality of racialized visibility make this option less applicable to people of colour, who may find ethnic identities imposed on them against their will, rather than something they can opt into or out of when they please.

The situational and symbolic nature of ethnic identity provides insights into (and questions about) the ethnicity experience. First, can distinct ethnic identities survive in
situations where the traditional culture has disappeared? Second, can individuals continue to identify themselves as “ethnics” long after abandoning all involvement in group activities? According to the logic of situational and symbolic ethnicity, the answer to both questions is “yes.” The decline of a particular lifestyle will not necessarily diminish the validity of the ethnic experience. What is critical for ethnic identity is the identification with select aspects of that cultural lifestyle—not the scope or intensity of affiliation. Needless to say, this style of identity is relatively painless and voluntary; moreover, its abstract and effortless style makes it well suited to the needs of an upwardly mobile society.

A third question is also of interest: Is a hyphenated Canadian a contradiction in terms? Is it possible to identify and participate as a Canadian, yet retain an affiliation with a certain ethnic heritage, such as Lithuanian (or New Zealander or German)? Again, the answer is in the affirmative. A hyphenated identity entitles people to compartmentalize their identities, then activate the appropriate identity according to the demands of a particular context. Dual (even multiple) identities are not mutually exclusive; rather, they may complement each other in fulfilling diverse personal needs and goals. Nor does identification with select symbolic elements necessarily compromise the business of making a living. As long as identification is restricted to the cognitive rather than the behavioural level, everyone can regard themselves as an “ethnic” without relinquishing a commitment to Canada.

**Hybridic Ethnic Identity** Most perspectives on ethnicity reflect a modernist or “structuralist” approach. Structuralists tend to see social groups or institutional arrangements as the fundamental building blocks of society, a primary source of human identity, a critical factor in shaping behaviour, and the key determinant of intergroup relations. According to structuralist thought, for each identifiable group there is a single ethnoculture with a unique and unchanging essence that can be categorically grasped independently of context. Ethnicities are envisioned as reflecting separate and fixed states of being into which individuals are slotted, with an attendant belief that everyone in this ethnic group will think and act in the same way.

But the seemingly locked-in identities of the modern era are giving way to the emergence of the postmodern self as relatively free-floating and detached from conventional structures of identity (Fleras, 2015a; Paradies, 2006). Individuals move into and out of so many different contexts and identities that it no longer makes sense to categorize people into stable ethnic groups (Uitermark, Rossi, & van Houtum, 2005). People are known to define themselves in terms of multiple national attachments involving identities that are both contested and contextual as well as fluid and flexible (Simmons, 2010). As personal resources for coping with diverse realities, ethnicities are increasingly evolving as hybrid identities that oscillate between the past and present, involving a multiplicity of crossovers and contingencies in a world where people live their paradoxes without fears of contradiction (Handa, 2003; Wiwa, 2003). **Hybridic ethnic identities** reflect the predicaments and opportunities of a contemporary era. The increasingly postnational world we live in is a diasporic and transmigrant reality where (1) immigrants mingle with national minorities and Indigenous peoples; (2) increasingly porous cultural boundaries are constantly being invented or renegotiated; and (3) migrants and minorities assert multiple and overlapping patterns of belonging based on intersecting lines of gender, sexual preferences, homeland, and ethnicity. As a
result, ethnic identities may no longer reflect stable points of reference for pre-slotting individuals into fixed boxes. Rather, ethnic identities reflect situational dynamics that come into being through interaction—continually changing and reinventing themselves by fusing the old with the new alongside other ethnicities, to create new and provisional hybrids that are neither stable nor coherent. Instead of being fixed in some kind of essentialized past, they are evolving, highly adaptive, involve crossings and connections, and are subject to the continuous play of context (Hall, 1996).

**Transnational Ethnic Identity** Both symbolic/situational and hybridic ethnicities reinforce the constructed nature of ethnic identities. References to transnational ethnic identities also follow this path. The concept itself acknowledges an emergent and fundamental reality: Globalization has challenged the conventional notions of belonging that linked a person’s identity to a particular place (Fleras, 2014b). No longer is it useful to frame homeland and host country as an either/or dichotomy in winning an immigrant’s sense of identity and belonging. New notions of multiple homelands and multiple attachments in light of diasporic movements of people are emerging instead, with a corresponding fresh perspective on how online ethnic identities can be imagined and constructed across national borders (Fleras, 2011b; Simmons, 2010).

Reaction to transnational identities is understandably varied. Some see multilocal identities as beneficial for society by providing linkages of value that span the borders of a global market economy. For others, however, these seemingly divided identities conjure up images of split loyalties, thus compromising the potential for political governance, societal integration, and assumption of citizenship responsibilities (Duncan, 2006). Place-based governance models such as multiculturalism become unsettled when peoples’ notions of identity and belonging are no longer linked to a specific locale but splintered across diverse domains (Fleras, 2015b). For example, addressing a sense of belonging and attachment beyond Canada’s borders may well undermine what it means to be Canadian. For still others, benefits come with costs, making it doubly important to understand how and why diasporic populations maintain ties with real and imagined homelands, what this means at the personal and community levels, and what kind of impact this has on society and culture (Satzewich & Wong, 2006; Sommerville, 2008).

The mixed reaction to transnational identities makes one thing abundantly clear: There is a growing acknowledgment of ethnic identities as a process or verb (“doing ethnicity”) rather than a thing or a noun. Ethnic identities are no longer defined as rigid or fixed, especially as online ethnicities from around the world regroup into new points of being and becoming (Marotta, 2011). Because of transnational mobility, these diasporic experiences are not defined by essences or purity, but by the dynamics of hybridity and heterogeneity that define both the construction and negotiation of identities as well as how they are practised and experienced (Braziel & Mannur, 2003; Vertovec, 2006).

**Insurgent Ethnic Identity** Both lived and situational/symbolic ethnic identities appear to be relatively innocuous. Hybridic identities are equally harmless because of their preoccupation with the discourses of authenticity rather than the politics of power. Abiding by the liberal slogan of “agreeing to disagree,” each of these identities upholds the multicultural axiom of “live and let live.” But not all ethnic identities are so accommodating. **Insurgent ethnic identities** are much more assertive about what they believe is right or wrong.
Part One: Conceptualizing the Politics of Race, Ethnic, and Aboriginal Relations

highly politicized in terms of what they want, and appear more aggressive in achieving their goals. In transcending mere identification or celebration, an insurgent ethnicity projects an exaggerated notion of a shared and conscious attachment to a people, tradition, or territory. Cooperative coexistence is replaced by a politicized assertion of peoplehood that establishes a new political order reflecting and reinforcing their superiority. An intense dislike of others may be actively fostered, especially when issues pertaining to religion, language, or homelands are factored into the equation. Such collectivities are willing to take whatever measures necessary to achieve their goals, including the revival of dormant grievances and recourse to violent measures, if necessary (Taras & Ganguly, 2002).

Ethnicity as Activity: Nationalist Movements

Ethnicity as activity involves the process by which ideas and ideals are put into practice for goal attainment. Nowhere is this more evident than in the reality of ethnically related peoples engaging in organized action to achieve the political goals of identity, voice, or land. Appeals to ethnicity provide a criterion for mobilizing individuals into collective action; they also furnish the motivation and rationale to achieve ethnically defined goals. This surge of ethnic-based movements has come about for various reasons. The UN-based principle of national self-determination articulated a normative basis for making ethnically based political claims against the state. The collapse of superpower colonialism realigned social-political formations that emphasized ethnic loyalties rather than the abstractions of statehood (Ignatieff, 1994). Inter-tribal hatreds, once suppressed by colonialist control or Cold War politics, have created fertile conditions for a robust ethnicity to flourish (Snyder, 2000). Or as Michael Ignatieff wrote in 1994, the “key narrative of the new world order is the disintegration of nation states into warring factions. The key architects of that order are warlords; and the key language of our age is ethnic nationalism (emphasis added).”

Nationalism constitutes the political expression of a nation whose peoples claim a common ancestry and shared destiny to govern themselves in a place they call a homeland. The nineteenth century gave rise to ideologies of nationalism in Europe, resulting in the birth of modern Germany, with its rallying cry of “Germany for the Germans,” but also in the dismissing of Slavs, Jews, and Gypsies as unwelcome residue from past empires (Guibernau, 2007). Defining the nation-state around a shared language, culture, and identity (Smith, 1999) demonstrates how all expressions of nationalism remain grounded in a coherent ideal: namely, the ideas of group exclusiveness, cultural superiority, and collective loyalty against outside threats. The ideology of nationalism asserts the divisibility of the world into fundamentally autonomous political communities by peoples who define themselves as a nation. They claim the status of an actual or potential nation, with corresponding rights to self-determination over homeland, identity, and political voice, either as independent entities (nation-states or countries) in their own right or as subunits within society (nations) by vesting political sovereignty in a people’s right to self-rule (see Pearson, 2001). In making this claim for self-determining autonomy, unity, and identity, nations are seeking to establish jurisdictional control over a defined homeland, in addition to reclaiming the sovereignty denied to them as a subject people.

Nationalisms can be classified by who is entitled to join and belong. Two ideal-typical patterns of belonging are discernible—ethnic and civic—based largely on divergent patterns of belonging as criteria for group membership (Medrano & Koenig, 2005).
**Ethnic nationalism** assigns membership on largely ascriptive characteristics such as kinship ties and blood lines to include or exclude. It is aimed at building nationhood by strengthening a “people” (or nation) at the expense of others, if necessary. This focus on ascription, bloodlines, and descent restricts membership in the nationhood to those who can demonstrate common roots rather than shared attachments to key institutions and central values. A moral community is proposed in which members express an emotional commitment to each other with a passionate attachment to a homeland as the site of preexisting ethnic entitlements (Mead, 1993). Membership defined on the basis of birthright and descent privileges loyalty to the group or the homeland as paramount over any commitment to the state or to social classes. The territorial rights, distinctive language, and shared ethnicity of this imagined political community must be defended from hostile interlopers, both internal and external, by whatever means necessary (Pettinicchio, 2012).

By contrast, **civic nationalism** bases its appeal on loyalty to a set of political ideals, rule of law, the principle of inclusiveness, and institutions that are perceived as just and effective (Heath & Tilley, 2005; Snyder, 2000). Civic nationalism maintains that society should be composed of all individuals, regardless of race or ethnicity, as long as they subscribe to the norms of this constructed community. This nationalism is usually called civic: It envisages society as a constructed community of equal rights-bearing citizens organized around a commitment to the rule of law (although some civic nationalisms have proven more ruthless than ethnic nationalism in advancing their goals). Ethnicity is largely irrelevant in determining belonging or inclusion, as membership is open to anyone who abides by core values and constitutional principles.

To be sure, the distinction between these nationalisms is problematic. Few, if any, nationalisms qualify as purely ethnic or civic: Ethnic nationalisms have proven more civic-oriented than theory suggests; civic nationalisms, in turn, have proven more ethnically grounded than theory suggests (Kymlicka, 2001; Resnick, 2001; Vickers & de Seve, 2000). The case of Quebec is instructive in debating the definition of nation and nationalism: Does it include all Quebecers or only those of French-Canadian descent? Historically, Quebec’s political aspirations (as were those of English-speaking Canada at large) were equated with ethnic nationalism because of a historical tendency to promote a predominantly white French character (Ignatieff, 1994). But Quebec’s drive for autonomy within the Canadian state is now defended as a kind of civic nationalism, in that it’s broad, tolerant, and inclusive of all who make the commitment to construct a modern political community without compromising its distinctiveness (Piche, 2010). The emergence of a hybrid or “post-ethnic”) nationalism around the principle of interculturalism points to a conceptual framework that is neither a defensive reaction nor a delusional embrace.

**Québécois Intercultural Nationalism: Towards Hybridity?**

The proliferation of ethnonational conflicts may pose a definitive challenge for the twenty-first century (Maclure, 2004; see also Gagnon, Guibernau, & Rocher, 2003). Canada is hardly exempt from these challenges: French-English relations (or, more accurately, French- and English-speaking relations) have coexisted uneasily since 1841, when Upper and Lower Canada combined into an incipient nation-state, a tinderbox aptly described by Lord Durham as the equivalent of “two nations warring in the bosom of a single state.” Insofar as Confederation constituted a response to these internal rifts (LaSelva, 2004),
Quebec entered into the agreement with assurances that it would retain its status as a nation and its entitlements as a founding member of the Confederation. Quebeckers continue to see themselves as a “peoples” with a shared language, culture, and homeland rather than as another province with equal rights or an ethnic group whose differences are quaint but superficial. They claim to constitute an ethnic nation-within as well, not only deserving of recognition of their differences, but also entitled to those self-governing powers equivalent to that of English Canada (Harty & Murphy, 2005; McRoberts, 2003). Predictably, then, the language of nationhood remains at the forefront of Quebec’s interests because (1) it provides a standing and legitimacy within the international community, (2) it distinguishes Quebec’s claims from those of ethnic minorities, (3) it imparts a sense of history and authenticity to Quebec’s demands, and (4) it equalizes the bargaining power between Quebec and Ottawa (Kymlicka, 1998b). In November 2006, the House of Commons voted in favour of a motion introduced by Prime Minister Stephen Harper to recognize the Québécois as a “nation within a united Canada” (Thompson, 2006).

Quebec’s emergent nationalism would appear increasingly liberal and tolerant. In shifting from a defensive, inward-looking community to a more open and cosmopolitan society (Salee & Coleman, 1997), this new nationalism is couched in secular and universalistic terms without abandoning an overriding commitment to the primacy of the French language, culture, and values (Harty & Murphy, 2005). Unlike conventional ethnic nationalisms, Quebec’s more civic-oriented nationalism reflects a willingness to integrate immigrants as equals into society (Simon and Piche, 2011). Such a transition is not without its glitches: Quebec’s dual status as a minority/majority society—a politically mature majority in its homeland (72 percent of Quebec is francophone), but a fragile minority within the broader North American context (Ha, 2007)—creates a social climate that breeds a suspicion of those minorities whose culture, religion, and commitments appear contrary to the Quebec consensus (EKOS, 2013). As a result, debates in Quebec vacillate between democratic impulses for inclusiveness and universal citizenship versus xenophobic anxieties over losing its distinctiveness, identity, and political relevance as an isolated ethnic outpost in North America.

Quebec is also regarded as one of the more socially liberal provinces. Social policies such as low university tuition fees and provincially subsided day care make Quebec the envy of many progressive-minded Canadians. In other words, a seemingly pejorative attitude toward religious minorities and diversity often appear at odds with its liberal principles and Canada’s multicultural agenda (Conway, 2012). Points of controversy range from the controversial Herouxville code of conduct aimed at (Muslim) immigrants, to the equally controversial Bouchard-Taylor hearings on reasonable accommodation. More recently, Quebec’s proposed secular charter has projected a ban on all conspicuous religious symbols for public sector employees, while fully veiled women are threatened with a denial of access to government services. Other evidence is equally damning. On the surface, it would appear that Quebeckers possess more negative attitudes toward ethnocultural religious minorities than do Canadians in general (Christiano, 2013). An Angus Reid Global poll (2013, September 16) indicated that nearly two-thirds of Quebeckers believe that Quebec is too accommodative of religious/cultural diversity and that laws should not be modified to accommodate diversities. Just over three-quarters take the view that reasonable accommodation poses a risk to Quebec’s values, while over two-thirds of those polled in 2013 hold an unfavourable view of Islam (compared to just over half in the rest of
Canada)—up from just under half in 2009. It is interesting to note that a Privy Council Office poll of 3000 Canadians in mid-March of 2015 found that, while 82 percent of the respondents agreed with the federal government’s stand to ban the full veil during the citizenship oath ceremony, the figure increased to 93 percent of respondents in Quebec (Levitz, 2015). (See Chapter 6 for additional discussion on the niqab and citizenship.) Of course, it’s quite possible that Quebecers are no more biased or anti-religious than other Canadians; they simply are more open in admitting their biases. Concerns appear to be exacerbated by a belief that too much freedom of religion (which is a protected right under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms) may be used to justify practices incommensurate with core Quebec values.

Quebec continues to struggle with the politics of accommodating ethno-religious expression in the public domain, most recently with the controversy over a proposed Charter of Quebec Values (Brosseau, 2013). In late 2013, the Parti Quebecois released plans for a values charter (Bill 60) that would impose restrictions on religious clothing (from niqabs and kippas to turbans) and conspicuous religious symbols (large crucifixes) across all government institutions such as schools, hospitals and courts. Ostensibly, the Parti Quebecois argued, this ban extolled progressive intentions, namely, (a) ensuring gender equality by rejecting any accommodation for public service employees at odds with the rights of women; and (b) keeping Quebec secular and neutral (separation of church and state). The Charter was marketed as part of an ongoing struggle to liberate Quebec from the grip of religion in general, Catholicism initially, Islam more recently, amidst fears that any religious accommodation runs the risk of a slippery slope.

Reactions varied, with some such as David Rand (2014) supporting the Charter as a reasonable measure to limit religious privilege and influence. For him, ensuring the neutrality of the state and denying privileges to religions is not a threat to religious freedom, but protects everybody’s freedom. Others saw it differently, arguing that the Charter was really an electoral ploy—a political wedge issue that distracted public attention from the government’s mishandling of economic issues, at the same time appealing to Quebec nationalists and xenophobes to bolster waning electoral approval (Frappier, 2013). Criticism of the Charter by English-speaking Canada was subsequently framed in Quebec as an affront to the sovereignty of Quebecers, the Parti Quebecois contended—yet again “proving” the fundamental and irreconcilable differences between Quebec and the ROC. Finally, the Charter was deemed to be a discriminatory rights violation. Prohibiting many racialized and religious minorities from working in the public domain put Quebec’s civil authorities and public servants in the awkward position of choosing between a career or religion (Hamilton, 2014). The defeat of the Parti Quebecois as the governing party in the spring of 2014 put the initiative on hold, although support for the Charter remains steady, according to a poll by Leger Marketing (Jedwab, 2014), despite sharp distinctions in outlooks between young and old, francophone and non-francophone, and Montreal and the rest of Quebec. Nevertheless, the underlying issues remain unresolved.

Does establishing a social code of conduct or charter of secular values constitute a reasonable restriction on the rights of migrants and minorities? Or should such draconian measures be seen for what they really are: A socially acceptable discourse for marginalizing those who do not fit into Quebec’s normative framework, espoused by that sector of the population that resents public displays of difference or fears that society has gone too far in accommodating religious and cultural practices (Whyte, 2007)? Debates must be situated within the context of Québécois nationalism and Quebec’s status in Canada (Cairns, 2007).
Insecurities over Quebec as a beleaguered francophone minority engulfed by a giant English-speaking sea are seen to intensify the province’s discomfort with religious and cultural minorities (Ha, 2007). Yes, francophones in Quebec constitute a majority within the province, albeit with an extremely low birth rate, but the 5 million or so francophones also constitute a minority within English-speaking Canada and North America. In other words, Quebecers as a North American minority believe they cannot let their guard down if they want to preserve their language and culture against Anglo predations. The ambiguities associated with a majority/minority status generate a heightened sensitivity and defensiveness to any perceived threats to their identity and integrity as a French-speaking island in an English-speaking North American sea. Or as Bouchard and Taylor (2008) concluded as the quintessential lesson from the accommodation “crisis”: “Moreover, it is quite possible French-speaking Quebec is a minority culture and needs a strong identity to allay its anxieties and behave like a serene majority.”

Clearly, then, appearances may be deceiving. Quebecers, especially in urban areas, may not be any more prejudiced than other Canadians toward religious and cultural minorities. The Bouchard-Taylor Commission concluded as much, claiming there is no evidence that Quebecers are less accommodating or more racist/xenophobic than other Canadians (see also EKOS, 2013). To the extent that Quebecers appear to be more racist, the issue is blown out of proportion by opportunistic politicians both in Quebec and in the ROC. As well, the English newmedia fixation with the negative and conflicting tends to inflate the perception by conveying the impression that Quebecers are intolerant or unreasonable. Not surprisingly, says Valerie Raoul, professor of women’s studies and French at the University of British Columbia, the English media sensationalize anything in Quebec that even remotely suggests a whiff of racism or xenophobia (cited in Delaney, 2008). Daniel Weinstock, professor of philosophy at the University of Montreal, points to a hidden agenda:

When you’re in a political conflict with someone else or a situation where you have to compromise, it’s much easier to view the other side as being unreasonable, because that way you don’t even have to think about how to accommodate them (cited in Delaney, 2008).

DEPOLITICIZING ETHNICITY: MAKING CANADA SAFE
FOR ETHNICITY, SAFE FROM ETHNICITY

Ethnicity can no longer be dismissed as some primitive relic or primordial rage. Ethnicity goes beyond an obsessive craving to discover “roots” in the hopes of uncovering the past or collecting compensation. Nor should it be trivialized as a transient whimsy or a cultural backwater on the path to rational progress and democratic governance. Rather, ethnicity matters—for better or worse—in making things happen that advance collective interests and maximize social advantages (Gross, 1996). Recourse to ethnicity provides an anchor of security in a highly impersonal and mechanized society by buffering the old from the new, the individual from society, and the familiar from the strange.

Ethnicity’s potential for greatness or depravity is further magnified when coupled with the conflicting demands of a new global order. The new millennium is proving to be a bewildering place (Taras & Ganguly, 2009). Gone are the global certainties of the past: The relatively simple verities of an established order have been superseded by a complex and multipolar world of moral ambivalence, shifting allegiances, and political ambiguity. With the obvious exception of the United States, no comparable political or military power has
reclaimed the political vacuum created by the disintegration of the USSR, thus encouraging both intermediate powers and ethnic nationalisms to compete for vacated space. Not surprisingly, the very forces that many thought would reduce the risk of group conflicts have, paradoxically, increased inter-ethnic strife (Snyder, 2000). The politics of ethnicity are here to stay, whether we like it or not. And as the global competition for scarce resources intensifies, more ethnic conflicts are inevitable.

Canada is not unaffected by these political and cultural upheavals. Just as international relations are animated by a clash of competing and often incommensurable world views, so too does Canada’s ethnicity agenda reflect both conflict and confusion (Kymlicka, 2001). Rules that formerly defined right from wrong are openly challenged or dismissed as irrelevant. What once were defined as virtues are now vices, and vice versa. Aboriginal peoples are no longer willing to abide by colonial paradigms (Alfred, 2005); the Québécois are looking for a foundationally different kind of partnership with the rest of Canada (Gibbins & Laforest, 1998); and multicultural minorities want to re-contour Canada along inclusive lines (Fleras, 2014a). The politics of ethnicity are proving double-edged: Canada may be enriched by weaving national unity from the strands of diversity. Alternatively, ethnic forces may ignite a chain reaction that could derail Canada’s society-building aspirations. This paradox—how to make Canada safe from ethnicity, yet safe for ethnicity—raises the question of Canada’s resolve in the face of potentially divisive forces.

An official Multiculturalism represents Canada’s answer to the politics of ethnicity. Multiculturalism as ethnic governance pivots on the premise that a Canada of many different cultures and diverse peoples is possible, provided that ethnic differences don’t get in the way of living together with differences. With Multiculturalism, this seemingly implausible balancing act is possible, in part by transcending the specifics of cultures to ensure that no one is excluded from full and equal participation in society for reasons beyond their control (namely, their ethnicity); in part by acknowledging the legitimacy of ethnic differences as long as they stay within limits; and in part by taking these differences into account when necessary to ensure full participation and equal citizenship rights.

But there is a catch in endorsing ethnocultural diversity as grounds for living differently together. Canada’s official Multiculturalism is not concerned with promoting ethnic diversity or ethnic communities. Few societies could survive the strain of multiple competing groups, with clearly demarcated political boundaries, separate power bases, and parallel institutions. Even fewer are equipped to address the society-busting demands of ethnic nationalism. This aversion to a politicized ethnicity is evident in Canada, where the politics of ethnicity threaten to dismember or dissolve. Ethnicity under Canada’s multicultural commitments is justified when stripped of its potency to divide or incite. In rejecting those politicized ethnicities that compete for scarce resources, Multiculturalism as policy endorses the symbols of differences at personal or private levels. Or differently put, an official Multiculturalism accommodates the appearance of ethnicity and endorses “pretend pluralism” rather than taking its substance seriously.

In other words, an official Multiculturalism as ethnicity governance is not about promoting ethnic cultures as distinct and coherent lifestyles (Modood, 2007). More accurately, a multicultural commitment to creating an inclusive Canada by integrating migrants and minorities into the existing status quo promotes a depoliticizing (“neutering”) of ethnicity by removing its potency to challenge or change. Under an official Multiculturalism, ethnicity is rendered tolerable to the extent that (1) people identify only with the symbols of
Part One: Conceptualizing the Politics of Race, Ethnic, and Aboriginal Relations

their difference; (2) this identification is restricted to the personal and private rather than the public realm; (3) this affiliation does not violate the laws of the land, interfere with the rights of others, or contravene core Canadian values and constitutional principles, and (4) ethnicity is deployed to bolster people’s sense of belonging to Canada rather than for erecting inward-looking communities. Put bluntly, then, Canada’s official Multiculturalism does not exist to “celebrate” ethnicity. More to the point, official Multiculturalism is concerned with neutering ethnicity as a framework for living together with what’s left of our differences. Or to put it more finely, under Multiculturalism, all Canadians can belong to, and identify with, Canada through their ethnicity.

Herein, then, lies the appeal of hybridic, transnational, and situational/symbolic ethnic identities within a multicultural society. In contrast to insurgent or lived ethnicities, they (a) do not directly challenge the status quo, (b) are more concerned with the symbols of attachment, and (c) are more diffuse because of their potential to combine identities. Endorsing ethnic identity at these levels comes across as relatively innocuous, since the recognition of multiple and complementary identities does not fundamentally alter the political landscape and economic status quo. Depoliticizing the potential of ethnicity as a destabilizing force under an official Multiculturalism puts Canada firmly ahead of the governance curve in making society safe for ethnicity, as well as safe from ethnicity. Time will tell whether Canada’s multicultural response for engaging ethnicity will be sufficient for those politicized ethnicities who want to reverse the governance formula by making ethnicity safe from Canada, yet safe for Canada.

DEBATE REVISITED

Ethnic Conflicts or Conflicts That Are Ethnicized?

The debate at the beginning of this chapter posed some tricky questions. Are ethnic conflicts really about ethnicities at loggerheads with each other? Or is it more accurate to say that certain conflicts are “ethnicized”; that is, ethnicity inserted into the equation to justify or advance a variety of political or economic purposes? If ethnicity is a factor, which theories of ethnic expression are most apt: primordialism, constructivism, or instrumentalism?

Which of the following responses appears most credible in light of this chapter’s content?

- The conflict that erupts between mutually antagonistic groups may be motivated by historically deep-seated hatreds (Crawford, 2006).
- Tribal- or clan-based impulses that once were dormant or suppressed may be activated when the grip of central control is relaxed. Once unleashed and whipped into a frenzy by manipulative leaders, these primordial forces are difficult to stop, especially in clan- or tribal-based societies (since people trust only their own kind), while collective interests are defined in opposition to other group interests. In other words, the tribe (or clan) is everything—mutual aid, protection, source of trust—while dangers await life
outside the tribe (Clarfield, 2007; Kay, 2007).

- Ethnicity is one of many variables driving the dynamics of intergroup competition for scarce resources (Shaykhudinov & Bragg, 2011). Consider Africa, where states and boundaries between states were created for political, military, economic, and diplomatic reasons, with little regard for ethnic differences and tribal borders. With decolonization, these artificially constructed and politically expedient nation-states proved brittle and prone to fracture from within by tribal groups who sought a degree of autonomy or advantage at the expense of others (but see Bass, 2006). The risk of ethnic conflict is amplified when governments collapse and there is no state capable of guaranteeing personal security. Patterns of intergroup inequality (including poverty, corruption, and tribalism [Perry & Blue, 2008]) can also generate ethnic conflict, especially in those contexts where globalization unsettles an established social contract that once normalized access to scarce resources or power relations along ethnic lines. Disruptions to these social contracts produce new ethnic patterns of discrimination and exclusion; in turn, resentment over the new arrangements provides fertile ground for opportunist leaders to mobilize public support around ethnic identities for advancing vested interests (Crawford, 2006).

- Ethnicity may not be a direct factor in the conflict; nevertheless, it may be invoked to impart a sheen of legitimacy by concealing political motives and economic interests. Most ethnic conflicts are not about ethnicity per se. Contexts involving sharp inequalities in power and wealth often foster coalitions along ethnic lines in the competition for scarce resources, with the result that ethnicity serves as an identity marker in sorting out winners from losers (Caselli & Coleman, 2006/2010). Conflicts in this competitive context often become “ethnicized” via political elites, who apply an ethnicity spin as a propaganda tool for self-serving reasons (Collier, 2007; Marger, 1997). Power-hungry elites will readily exploit ethnic tension during times of political uncertainty and social upheaval, such as the wave of democratization and institutional change that swept through Asia and Africa during the 1990s (Carment, 2007). In short, ethnic conflicts do not just erupt; they are constructed (Bass, 2006).

- Perhaps references to the ethnic in ethnic conflict are largely “fictional.” Without first-hand accounts, people’s knowledge about ethnic conflict is conveyed by mainstream media, who perhaps unwittingly impose an ethnic-conflict spin in defining situations that may have little to do with ethnicity or conflict. Complex issues are framed into simple—even simplistic—binary formats that intensify North American stereotypes of tribal life as nasty, brutish, and short (Taras & Ganguly, 2002). The tendency to frame conflicts in ethnic terms—to “ethicize” conflict by casting it as a conflict between ethnic

(Continued)
groups—is not without consequences. Labelling these disputes as ethnic may legitimize and amplify the claims of ethnic militants by playing into the hands of those who have ethnicized the conflict in the first place. In other words, a heightened sense of ethnicity may not cause conflict, but is a likely consequence of conflict (Taras & Ganguly, 2009).

Let's put all this into perspective: The phrase “ethnic conflict” is generally deployed in a descriptive and explanatory sense (Collier, 2007). As a description, it is unexceptional; as an explanation, it leaves much to be desired. Caution must be exercised in assuming that ethnic conflicts consist of “tribal” groups with uncontrollable instincts and insatiable urges to slaughter the demonized “other.” Although spontaneous or irrational outbursts cannot be dismissed as immediate causes, ethnic conflicts often involve a calculated opportunism in the competition over identity, autonomy, or resources. Moreover, references to ethnic conflict may be misleading in yet another way: Hatred and conflict against ethnic others reflect the manipulations of a small cadre of calculating militants (rather than the actions of entire ethnic community) who claim to act on the group’s behalf (Crawford, 2006).

The debunking of myths about ethnic(ized) conflict cannot come too soon if there is any hope of solving problems that many perceive as quintessential challenges to our existence. Ethnic conflicts are real enough; nevertheless, most conflicts involving an ethnic dimension speak to broader issues pertaining to power and inequality. The question, then, is how and why do conflicts become ethnicized, especially in contexts involving competing yet legitimate claims to the same territory or valued resources? In that conflict appears to be an inescapable feature of the human species, particularly in those societies marked by shifting patterns of power and privilege, the challenge is before us. The solution is not in eliminating the “ethnicity” in ethnic conflict. The key to success is in channeling the “conflict” part into more constructive avenues (Marger, 1997).

Chapter Highlights

- Ethnicity matters because it increases the probability of something to happen. Ethnicity represents a key variable in shaping people’s identities, experiences, and outcomes. It also provides a framework that helps explain patterns of behaviour at individual and group levels.
- Ethnicity can be defined as a shared awareness of ancestral differences as a basis for community, identity, and activity. Both subjective experiences and objective properties are integral for mobilizing individuals into action groups.
- The why behind ethnicity can be explained by reference to primordial, constructivist, and instrumentalist approaches, while the how behind ethnicity is expressed in three ways: communities, identities, and activities.
The politics of ethnicity in Quebec tend to focus on establishing an intercultural ("hybrid") nationalism that respects diversities without sacrificing the primacy of French language and values.

In looking to make Canada safe from ethnicity and yet safe for ethnicity, official Multiculturalism provides a framework for depoliticizing ethnicity as a basis for living together with ethnic differences.

Review Questions

1. Three major approaches—primordial, instrumentalist, and constructivist—have historically been used to explain the power and popularity of ethnicity. Compare how each frames the nature and extent of the ethnic experience.

2. Compare ethnic nationalism and civic nationalism as ideal types with respect to their underlying logic in creating a new society. Which nationalism best describes Quebec’s commitment to preserve and protect the ethnic nation?

3. How is ethnicity expressed? Focus on the notions of community, identity, and activity.

4. Indicate the role played by an official Multiculturalism for managing ethnicity in Canada’s continuing efforts to make the country safe for ethnicity as well as safe from ethnicity.

5. Ethnicity is seen by sociologists as a key variable that accounts for patterns of human behaviour. Explain, with reference to the concept of ethnic conflict, to demonstrate how ethnicity matters.