Throughout the first four years of Nigeria’s Fourth [democratic] Republic (1999-2003), Nigerians continued to struggle with the costs and consequences of communal violence. Even so, scholars had generally neglected to consider how the articulation and promotion of democracy may have contributed to this violence. Even the exception, Amy Chua’s *World on Fire: How Exporting Free Market Democracy Breeds Ethnic Hatred and Global Instability* (2003), does not attempt to understand the discursive dynamics underlying democracy’s export and the resulting communal conflict. Without the theoretical cohesion that a discourse analysis could provide, Chua is left with a somewhat cliched causal chain through which she attempts to tie U.S. foreign policy to communal conflicts. The *democratic* element of “free market democracy” is effectively missing. Instead, Chua considers how the neoliberal *economic* policies exported by the first world exacerbate class inequalities and foster what she calls “market-dominant minorities.” This rise of market-dominant minorities then leads to communal conflict because democracy’s majority-rules electoral structure allows opportunistic leaders to inflame communal antagonisms between majority groups and the market-dominant minorities.

It is a compelling causal chain, but its focus on class disparity better describes undemocratic Nigeria leading up to the Biafran War than the democratic Nigeria of
today. It fails to account for conflict among “unranked” communal groups whose 
relations are not based on class hierarchy (Horowitz 1985, 21-32). Finally, it fails to 
probe beyond the overt material and institutional factors to explore the discursive 
formation of democratization and communal identities. Despite its shortcomings, 
however, Chua’s *World on Fire* draws attention to how global politics can affect 
domestic relations and make clear the high stakes involved.

I begin in this chapter to better address Chua’s guiding question by first 
considering several ongoing theoretical conversations regarding discourse, communal 
identities, and democratization. Each of these conversations, found in the academic 
literature, provides crucial insights into the relationship between global and domestic 
identities and between democracy and communal conflicts. Each also bears limitations 
bound in scholarly debates which each has difficulty alone transcending.

I end of this chapter with an attempt to draw these conversations together in terms 
of the Nigerian experience. In particular, I turn again to the agent-structure issues to help 
facilitate my argument that understanding the connection among the complex agents that 
together constitute the political practices in the Nigerian case requires the discursive 
practices approach.

1. Donald Horowitz (1985) draws the distinction between “ranked groups” 
wherein ethnic distinctions coincide with social class, and “unranked groups” wherein 
ethnic differences are not hierarchically organized. Unranked groups represent parallel 
groups each with its own internal class rankings unrelated to the communal division that 
separates one ethnic group from the other. Parallel groups, Horowitz claims, are 
“incipient whole societies and indeed may formerly have constituted more or less 
autonomous whole societies” (23, 1985).
Discourse Analysis

Discourse analysis is an approach to understanding the powers and processes underlying communal conflicts. In her use of discourse analysis, Doty wants, among other things, to “call attention to the meanings and identities that are constructed in the process of promoting democracy. . . [and examine] the representational practices that occur in the process of promotion. What meanings and identities are being (and will be) constructed?”(1996, 144)

This approach represents a decisive departure from more conventional understandings of democracy as an “object,” a “condition,” or a “status” with some determinable essence. The discourse analysis applied in this dissertation sets itself apart from academic attempts to define democracy, from political claims that determine which states are or are not democracies,² and from claims of what a democracy ought to be; such efforts are themselves all bound within a discourse to which each of those endeavors contributes but the implications of which they fail to recognize.³ Rather than lend power to academic efforts that attempt to articulate an essential meaning of democracy – a democracy waiting to be realized as soon as it can be properly operationalized and implemented – I suggest that the language and discourse surrounding democracy cannot

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2. The most recent and most overt attempt at classification is the 30th Anniversary Freedom House Survey. It marks Nigeria with an asterisk and explains, “* indicates countries that are electoral democracies” (Karatnycky 2003, 107).

3. Furthermore, all of these academic and political efforts demonstrate the unfixedness of this signifier, democracy, at the very moment they attempt to nail it down. Laclau and Mouffe describe this unfixedness as the “impossible suture between signified and signifier” (1985, 113).
be fixed. In fact, attempts to anchor democracy’s meaning reflect a constant struggle among political forces to naturalize its meanings.4

To assert that democracy has no essential meaning, should not lead the reader to anticipate a slippery descent into a cynical relativism. Instead, to contend that democracy has no fixable meaning is not to say that something called democracy does not exist. Contrary to the assumption that democracy has some fixed essence, discourse theory posits that “every object is constituted as an object of discourse . . .” (Laclau and Mouffe 1985, 107), or, in other words, “that all objects and actions are meaningful, and that their meaning is conferred by historically specific systems of rules” (Howarth and Stavrakakis 2000, 2).

But this does not imply that a material world does not exist or that territories geographically bound populations and bureaucratic networks do not exist. Nor should it be interpreted to claim that the discursive field is an exclusively conceptual domain. Laclau and Mouffe explain:

The fact that every object is constituted as an object of discourse has nothing to do with whether there is a world external to thought, or with the realism/idealism opposition. An earthquake or the falling of a brick is an event that certainly exists, in the sense that it occurs here and now, independently of my will. But whether their specificity as objects is constructed in terms of ‘natural phenomena’ of ‘expressions of the wrath of God’, depends upon the structuring of a discursive field (1985, 108).

4. Howarth and Stavrakakis describe this struggle as a “political project” which attempts “to weave together different strands of discourse in an effort to dominate or organise a field of meaning so as to fix the identities of objects and practices in a particular way” (2000, 3).
On the other hand, while the discursive approach does not deny the existence of a material world, it also does not suggest that a world of ideas exists somehow entirely outside of the material world. This real vs. ideal dichotomization is exactly the trap that Pierre Manent, Director of Studies at the *Ecole des Hautes Etudes et Sciences Sociales* in Paris, senses but fails to recognize when he claims that we are caught between “what democracy *wishes or claims* to be” on one hand, and “what one would have to call the *reality* of democracy” on the other (Manent 2003, 114-15). We are, he explains, perplexed, maddened, and caught in a malaise “at which point we no longer have the means to make progress toward *truth*” (Manent 2003, 115, emphasis added). Having thus posited an *ideal* of democracy opposed to its *reality*, one cannot help but be perplexed. A poststructural approach helps avoid the trap. Laclau and Mouffe continue, “What is denied is not that such objects exist externally to thought, but the rather different assertion that they could constitute themselves as objects outside any discursive condition of emergence” (1985, 108).

Given its discursive orientation, this dissertation will consider its primary data to be *text* broadly defined. These texts include policy makers’ statements; text and images presented in the media; images found in advertisements, posters, and campaign literature of political candidates; the spoken word of people, professors, and students; the policies of public officials and policy makers.
Representational Practices

Embedded within the texts to which I shall turn in this dissertation are representational practices that privilege various meanings and relationships. These representational practices follow a few key patterns of which I shall mention only those most relevant to this dissertation.\(^5\) The first among these is the use of *nodal points*, those privileged signs upon which meanings are fixed. Democracy, Sharia, Pariah, human rights, and civilized are all crucial *nodal points* whose meanings will be explored. Second, one finds *presuppositions*, those argued to be self-evident truths whose potentially political content has been neutralized in the discourse.\(^6\) Third, *classifications* that is, the presupposed categorization of states, people, and governments are evident in how U.S. policy makers and the Nigerian populations understand Nigeria’s international and domestic political relations. Fourth, these classifications are especially important in the *positioning* of states (U.S. and Nigeria), communal groups (Ibo and Hausa), religious groups (Christian and Muslim), and governments (democracy and nondemocracy) as being similar, opposed, or complementary. Fifth, the more complicated *logics of equivalence and difference* illuminate how political frontiers discursively divide political space into opposing camps or, instead, undermine that division.

\(^{5}\) In a concise enumeration of these “representational practices” Doty (1996, 10-12) draws on the works of Lacau and Mouffe (1985), Spurr (1993), Morrison (1992), Foucault (1978), and Wolfe (1982).

\(^{6}\) In Laclau’s words, “The social world presents itself to us, primarily, as a sedimented ensemble of social practices accepted at face value, without questioning the founding acts of their institution” (Laclau 1994, 3).
Logics of Equivalence and Difference

The logic of equivalence is a term that can be misleading because the equivalences to which it draws our focus rely on a differentiated system and require a separation of political space (for example divisions between democracies and nondemocracies, Northerners and Southerners, Moslems and non-Moslems). Nevertheless, the ultimate consequence of the divisions of political space is the binding of equivalential identities on each side of that gross division.

Norval explains that “where the logic of equivalence predominates, social division tends towards a dichotomisation of political space, a paratactical7 division of the social sphere into two opposing camps” (Norval 2000, 221). This happens, she explains quoting Mouffe,8 because political discourse “attempts to create specific forms of unity among different interests by relating them to a common project and by establishing a frontier to define the forces to be opposed, the ‘enemy.’” It is this uniting of different interests that justifies the use of the term “equivalence.” Norval (1997) applies this logic to explore the First versus Third world distinction, to show how that broad division of the political world formed equivalential links between otherwise disparate interests among communities of the First and Third world. I intend to use of the logic of equivalence to

7. Norval’s word choice further illuminates the political/discursive parallels running through the works of Laclau and Mouffe and their students. Tactics are so often associated in common usage with military strategy, but the grammatical denotation of the word is often forgotten; the Oxford English Dictionary, defines tactical as “relating to the construction of a sentence” (definition 2b). Parataxis (the nominal form of paratactical) involves the arranging of clauses absent any connecting coordinating or subordinating articles, as opposed to syntax.

8. The original reference is found at Mouffe 1993, 50.
illuminate the equivalencies made possible through the democratic vs. nondemocratic
dichotomization in Chapters 3 and 4, various ethnic and religious dichotomizations in
Chapter 5.

The logic of difference, on the other hand, acts to “dissolve the existing chains of
equivalence . . . to weaken and displace a sharp antagonistic polarity” (Howarth and
Stavrakakis 2000, 11) that had propelled the logic of equivalence to operate. In Norval’s
words, “Where the logic of difference is deployed as a dominant strategy, a more
complex articulation of elements, militating against such dichotomisation, is facilitated”
(Norval 2000, 221). For example, the end of the cold war polarity weakened the links
binding nations within the eastern and western blocs, the end of World War II weakened
relations among the allied nations. The end of any foreign war might weaken sense of
national unity shared by citizens of each opposing nation.

The Empty Signifier

Finally, in addition to the representational practices of nodal points,
presuppositions, classification, positioning, and the logics of equivalence and difference,
another powerful concept will further illuminate the discursive relations connecting
democracy to communal relations—the concept of the empty signifier. Laclau explains
that “An empty signifier is, strictly speaking, a signifier without a signified” (1996a, 36).
By introducing this representational practice with the paradox, Laclau raises a number of
fascinating questions regarding how societies organize themselves around efforts to
signify the absent. Laclau is careful to explain that an empty signifier represents more
than just an equivocal signifier (which varies by context) or an ambiguous signifier (which “floats”) (36). In other words, the notion of an empty signifier carries more theoretical significance than its simple indeterminacy. Rather than forcing us to deal with the “excess or deficiency of signification,” Laclau explains that the empty signifier compels us to deal with “the precise theoretical possibility of something which points, from within the process of signification, to the discursive presence of its own limits” (36).

By employing spacial imagery, Laclau describes a signifying system filled with identities and values inextricably bound together in essentially differential relations. This is Saussure’s holistic language in which any “single act of signification” necessarily mobilizes into service the totality of that signifying system. That said, Laclau suggests that the very notion of system requires limits, and limits require exclusion. Without exclusion and without limits a system cannot exist. It may help to illustrate Laclau’s spacial imagery with an astronomical metaphor. If you were to be asked to imagine what is beyond the Universe, you might momentarily answer that we do not and can not know. Yet, here Laclau’s ideas push us to acknowledge that unless there is something beyond the Universe, the very notion of ‘Universe’ ceases to have meaning.

Speaking of those limits made necessary by the notion of a system of signification, Laclau explains that the “limits cannot themselves be signified, but have to show themselves as the interruption or breakdown of the process of signification” (Laclau 1996a, 37, original emphasis). Furthermore, limits suggest an exclusion from the system from which “the system cannot have a positive ground and that, as a result, it
cannot signify itself in terms of any positive signified” (Laclau 1996a, 38). That which lies “beyond the frontier of exclusion is reduced to pure negativity” or “pure threat” therefore making those limits, frontiers, and systems possible.

As with so much of Laclau and Mouffe’s *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* the reader is largely free to apply the logics of equivalence and difference both to the more abstract relations of signs and meanings as well as the empirical relations of peoples and states. In other words, one has the unbalanced feeling that movements of peoples parallel movements of language, and vice versa. So here in Laclau’s explanation of the empty signifier, his descriptions can easily be imagined both as they apply to the structures of meanings as well as the structures of societies. It is this social application that follows that helps illuminate the movement of meaning that it implies.

It is here, however, that a crucial point must be made clear. It is not the signifier identified with what is beyond the frontier that is empty, but rather the signifier within the political frontier which is emptied of its meaning. In Laclau’s words:

> That which is beyond the exclusion delimiting the communitarian space – the repressive power – will count less as the instrument of particular differential repressions and will express pure anti-community, pure evil and negation. The community created by this equivalential expansion will be, thus, the pure ideal of a communitarian fullness which is absent – as a result of the presence of the repressive power. (Laclau 1996a, 42)

Griggs and Howarth provide a clear social application.

> The political construction of identity via the creation of boundaries involves the production of empty signifiers, which represent the ‘absent fullness’ of a group – their lack of unity and community. Empty signifiers are thus means of representation that enable the welding together of internal differences, while simultaneously showing the limits of the group identity, and its dependence on the opposition of other groups. (2000, 56)
Laclau uses Thomas Hobbes’ conception of “order” to illustrate this character of the empty signifier; I shall use democracy.\(^9\) Applying the logic Laclau uses in his closing example (Laclau 1996a, 45) to my study of democracy, I suggest that if a pro-democracy\(^{10}\) struggle is successful, democracy may become the signifier of all struggles against the nondemocratic. If this were to happen, democracy also “becomes the surface inscription through which all [such] struggles will be expressed, so that the chain of equivalences which are unified around this signifier tend to empty it, to blur its connection with the actual content with which it was originally associated” (Laclau 1996a, 45). In other words, if the nondemocratic becomes so socially repulsive that every state begins to identify itself in opposition to it, the signifier democracy begins to lose its meaning. The bright side of the this Fukuyaman End of History was described in 1993:

The triumph of democracy as an abstract idea is nearly complete, and further democratization is on the agenda world wide. There is scarcely a political leader, analyst, dissident, or activist who would today justify his

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9. Thomas Hobbes constructs his argument upon the claim that natural man finds himself in perpetual disorder which manifests itself in a war or every man against every man. To counter the pure threat of disorder, a radically opposing state of order must be imposed. Order, in the form of a king, must be sustained not because of what it is, but what it is not. A memorable image of the powerful and hollow nature of the empty signifier is found in George Orwell’s *Animal Farm* (1946). The omnipresent threat of the ever-absent Framen Jones unifies the animals within their animal identity, but at the same time renders that identity (and its attendant ideology, animalism) meaningless over time.

10. For example, Francis Fukuyama argues that “a remarkable consensus concerning the legitimacy of liberal democracy as a system of government had emerged throughout the world over the past few years, as it conquered rival ideologies” (Fukuyama 1992, xi).
or her preferred polity in anything but the language of democracy (Dryzek and Berejikian 1993, 48).11

On the other hand, an understanding of the empty signifier reveals a darker side to history’s end as well. In the chilling words of one Nigerian Scholar:

“The contemporary world is not a favorable environment for democracy . . . because we have trivialized democracy to the extent that it is no longer threatening to those in power or demanding to anyone. Democracy spreads because it has been rendered meaningless and innocuous without losing its symbolic value. While it spreads, our world is more repressive” (Claude Ake quoted in Adetula 1997, 1).

Political consequences flow from the emptying of a signifier like democracy, but this emptying is itself a political consequence. Political considerations are crucial because there is never a predetermined particular difference that would presuppose the existence of any particular empty signifier, or in Laclau’s words, “It is impossible to determine . . . which particular difference is going to become the locus of equivalential effects” (Laclau 1996, 43). Here, discourse and power meet because “[t]his relation by which a particular content becomes the signifier of the absent communitarian fullness is exactly what we call a hegemonic relationship. The presence of empty signifiers – in the sense that we have defined them – is the very condition of hegemony” (Laclau 1996a, 43). Democracy/Pariah, Order/Anarchy, Good/Evil, Animal/Man – the nature of hegemonic power is to determine which will matter most when.

11. This preferred (or perhaps better said, compensatory) language is evident everywhere. It is especially interesting to look at names of divided states. Of the Cold War Germanies, east Germany was named the “German Democratic Republic.” Of the two Koreas, the North was called “Democratic People's Republic of Korea”. Of the two Yemans, South Yeman was “People's Democratic Republic of Yeman.” Of the two Congos, Congo Kinshasa was the “Democratic Republic of Congo.”
Howarth, for example, explores blackness as an empty signifier in his examination of South Africans’ resistance of Apartheid (2000b). He looks to the language that people used to articulate their identities and imagine alternative to Apartheid’s racist system. He finds, however, that blackness presents “two substantial limitations that prevent the stabilisation of blackness as a universal point of identification and precluded its full evolution into collective social imagery” (2000b, 175). These limitations and what they expose about the nature of the discursive concept, empty signifier, are worth noting. In expressing the first limitation, Howarth makes the clearest statement available differentiating an empty from a floating signifier: “In the first place, the transformation of blackness from a floating signifier into a relatively fixed empty signifier was never fully accomplished . . . [because] the signifier of blackness in the philosophy and discourse of Black Consciousness could not conceal its manifest ambiguities” (2000b, 175).

Closhesy applies the empty signifier to justice in the construction of Irish Provisionalism (2000, 74-81). Closhesy’s study is especially relevant to this dissertation. He presents the British and the Irish Provisionals who are engaged in a dialogue over control of Northern Ireland. But this dialogue overlies a more subtle play of power “to hegemonize the space of justice and democracy, to decontest the meaning of these signifiers, to force others to enter into dialogue with it in the context of its interpretation of the nature of the conflict” (Closhesy 2000, 71).12 Provisionalism, he demonstrates,

12. In a similar endeavor, Adamson demonstrates how Romania’s PDSR party in its early years drafted the empty signifiers of revolution, reform, and democracy into service (2000, 128) and (most applicable to my argument) how two of Romania’s post-Ceaușescu political parties vied to fill ‘democracy’ with neoliberal versus social market
linked justice to the sense of a unified Ireland different ways in different historical eras, but regardless of the changing nature of that link, “these strategies were performing the role of ‘filling the void’, of providing the ‘empty signifier’ of justice with an intelligible and positive content” (Closhesy 2000, 74).

In his application, Closhesy also elaborates on the politics of the empty signifier. He defines ‘empty signifier’ by its two basic functions, the first of which is to “provide a discourse with a focal point and unity. If a discourse succeeds in becoming hegemonic, then that conception of justice will also function as the general horizon which provides the society with a representation of its collective identity” (Closhesy 2000, 83 n16). He continues to explain that the “theorization of justice as an empty signifier is important. It is precisely because it is a signifier that can accommodate so many different interpretations that it must always be understood as empty or, at least, partially empty in that, although its meaning will always be contested, at any time there will always be a dominant discourse that will be controlling and delimiting its meaning” (Closhesy 2000, 74).

The discourses within which American and Nigerian practices proceed are rife with these representational practices. U.S. policy makers and Nigerians share presupposed understandings of the democracy in opposition to the nondemocratic pariah. This shared discourse faces its limits, however, when the presupposition of all these nodal points and their relative positions is confronted by the Sharia (Islamic law) which occupies radically different positions in the discourse of Southern Nigeria and the United meanings (Adamson 2000, 130).
States than in Islamic, Northern Nigeria. The discourse of which I speak is represented in the following chapters. How international space is divided between ‘democracies’ versus others will be the consideration of Chapters 3 and 4, and how Nigerian communal groups compete to fill the void of democracy is a central focus of Chapter 5.

**Academic Discourse**

As a way to provide a general theoretical basis for the remainder of the dissertation, I shall now explore the discursive currents flowing through three relevant bodies of academic literature. First, I present literatures on communal relations and democratization as captured by the discipline of political science and applied to several African cases. I find this literature lacking and attribute the shortcomings in part to the field’s dichotomization of the rational and the cultural in approaching political relations. I turn, therefore, to a second exploration of the cultural-rational diad in the political science literature and attribute that in part to another dichotomization, agent-structure, still more deeply embedded in the literature. My third consideration is consequently of the so-called agent-structure debate and how that debate’s underlying assumptions blind the field to more important understandings of the relationship between the cultural and rational, and the manifestations of that relationship in understanding communal relations. This exploration of the agent-structure debate then provides not only crucial insights into the shortcomings of the previously discussed literatures, but is also opens wide the door to more productive and more meaningful literatures and conceptualizations of communal identities, communal relations, and the relationship between communal relations and
An understanding of this debate is of the utmost importance. It ties the academic discourse of communal identities in to both the economistic logic dominating the defining IR theories of our era as well as the oversimplified tribal or primitive discourse of the popular press and media. Most importantly, it exposes the limits of a discipline which thrives on boundaries and an inability to bring together the agent and the structure, the emotional and the rational, without subsuming either to the other.

**Communal Identities' Great Debates: The Rational, Primordial, and Cultural**

Ethnically and religiously stratified violence has long been with us – long before our post-cold-war world emerged – and scholars have long sought to understand its nature, especially in its most violent manifestations. Curiously, this academic quest has paralleled the very phenomena it has attempted to address. Scholars have divided themselves into camps and taken up banners to mark their identity and their intellectual territory. A broad survey of this scholarly terrain reveals both its Kuhnian dynamics and the representational practices operating within.

**The Rational Debate**

Since the early 1950s, and especially since the behavioralist revolution, scholars have exerted a constant tension between the more versus the less rational facets of communal identities, and over time the whole field has periodically swayed back and forth from rational to the non-rational conceptualizations of communal identities. Most recently, as studies of ethnic and religious relations have been adopted into and adapted...
to the discipline of international relations, the field’s understanding of communal identities has become decidedly unbalanced in this regard. Despite some productive advances in exposing the structural environment surrounding communal relations, many IR scholars fail to appreciate the prestructural contributions or to comprehend the poststructural possibilities that provide an understanding of discursive conditions within which communal identities are constructed and expressed in their sometimes profound and arational power.

As studies of ethnic and religious relations crossed from their more traditional anthropological and sociological domains to those of political science, political science scholars felt it necessary to apply their newly recognized rigors of science and rational institutional remedies to solve these ancient problems. Arend Lijphart began in 1967 to explore institutional remedies to communal divisions by manipulating the rational elements of ethnic groups’ actions through consociational arrangements best distilled in his article, “Consociational Democracy” (1969), and his book, *Democracy in Plural Societies* (1977). This institutional focus has since become one of the most productive and voluminous research programmes in political science.14 With his theories on this institutionalized (consociational) democracy, Lijphart began the concerted effort of finding ways to contain communal cleavages into democratic institutions. Critiquing the winner-take-all models of majoritarian democratic rule, Lijphart wrote about alternative institutional arrangements that would involve more proportional representation and

therefore focus communal interests onto an institutionally constructed, rationally oriented arena of competition.

Somewhat in reaction to this perceived rationalization and institutionalization of communal relations, other scholars began to focus more on the arational, identity-related dimensions that Lijphart largely assumes.\textsuperscript{15} Crawford Young’s \textit{The Politics of Cultural Pluralism} (1976), Donald Horowitz’s \textit{Ethnic Groups in Conflict} (1985),\textsuperscript{16} David Laitin’s \textit{Hegemony and Culture} (1986), and Walker Connor, best represented in his collection, \textit{Ethnonationalism: The Quest for Understanding} (1994), refocused the discipline through the 1970s and 80s on how the arational facets of ethnic identity and culture relate to economic and political institutions. At times they reacted quite strongly against the rationalization of communal relations.

Walker Connor, perhaps the most vocal of this force wrote about the $R^N$\textsuperscript{ational} question (1993) and suggested that what was being described as rational decisions (i.e. communal groups mobilizing to seek economic and political resources) is really just an expression of deeper cultural identities that must not be discounted. For example, it is

\textsuperscript{15} Lijphart has received much criticism for this point. Horowitz addresses the democratic transition in the Republic of South Africa and criticizes consociational institutions as not allowing the flexibility for ethnic identities and cultures to evolve and adapt, instead grounding them in a permanent institutional framework (1991). Maphai (1996) argued that “consociationalism was not the cause of tolerance, but the result. . . . Consociationalism is designed to minimize conflict in ‘deeply divided’ societies. Yet it would appear that such societies would not adopt consociationalist measures in the first place until levels of hostility had diminished substantially” (1996, 70).

\textsuperscript{16} Referencing Karl Deutsch in particular, but referring to the field in general, Horowitz suggests that in the political science discipline’s approach to communal conflicts, “Many proposals have a distinctly rationalistic and materialistic bias” (1985, 14). Horowitz later engages with Lijphart in an extensive debate of just this matter and its policy consequences.
fundamentally irrational, he argued in “Eco or Ethno-nationalism,” to die for economic gain (1984). All of these observations are based on an ontological foundation he laid out in a 1972 *World Politics* article under a section titled, “A Misunderstanding of the Nature of Ethnic Nationalism and a Resulting Tendency to Underestimate Its Emotional Power” (336). Here he argues that there is a “tendency of scholars to perceive ethnic nationalism in terms of its overt manifestations rather than in terms of its essence. The essence of the nations is not tangible” (336-7). His use of the word, “essence,” is not the easy target that those who carry the anti-primordialists banners would hope. Instead, he speaks of *identity*; of the ethnic, nationalistic, and the *social* (341); of those who define themselves more Ibo than Nigerian (337); and of a “divergence of basic identity which manifests itself in the ‘us-them’ syndrome” (341).

Horowitz echoed many of these sentiments interpreting identity as manifested by emotion. Arguing that rational calculations cannot account for the emotional power underlying many communal conflicts, Horowitz claims that “the sheer passion expended in pursuing ethnic conflict calls out for an explanation that does justice to the realm of the feelings. A bloody phenomenon cannot be explained by a bloodless theory” (1985, 140). Finally, David Laitin’s *Hegemony and Culture: Politics and Religious Change among the Yoruba* (1986) presents a compelling argument for the centrality of ethnic identity (framed now as culture) by studying religious relations in southwestern Nigeria. Furthermore, Laitin, more than any other author to date has attempted to transcend this dual nature of communal identity.
Laitin acknowledges from the beginning culture’s “Janus-faced” nature, differentiating one face that reflects the values, meanings, and identities associated with a culture, from the other face which facilitates collective action and acts as a resource for political entrepreneurs (1986, 11). He then links these two faces to two social science approaches and two accompanying scholarly traditions: social systems theory drawing on Weberian thought, and rational choice theories of the Benthamite traditions. Laitin’s greatest strength, however, is not that he recognizes, develops, and applies each of these approaches, but that in the end he is not satisfied with the simple additive approach to theory building. To reach a more meaningful synthesis, Laitin develops a conception of hegemony which, he claims, “resolves the Janus-faced image of culture and politics” (1986, 180). This hegemony envelopes actions of elite bargaining and institutionalized activities familiar to rational choice theories, but does so within a cultural “framework that reigns as common sense” (183) and “privileged categorizations of identity” (183). Such notions of the commonsensical and privileged identities recall ideas shared by the Weberians, and they foretell concepts more carefully developed by poststructuralists.

Primordial Debates

At this point in the world’s history two things happened. First, the Cold War ended, leaving many scholars of international relations scratching their heads and wondering how to proceed. Second, and in part as a consequence of the Cold War’s conclusion, the world appeared to explode with ethno-political violence. Even before the Cold War’s conclusion, Donald Horowitz lamented the poverty of the field and claimed that the discipline could no longer ignore ethnic
driven, political scientists soon produced a plethora of new scholarship addressing communal relations.

One approach justified its pursuit through the construction of the primordialist straw man and a newly constructed debate between primordialists and anti-primordialists. Representative of this trend was John Bowen’s “The Myth of Ethnic Conflict” (1996), in which he constructs one side of the debate citing the conceptually anemic works of Robert Kaplan’s *Balkan Ghosts* (1993) and Samuel Huntington’s *Clash of Civilizations* (1993). Bowen then proceeds to dismiss these pale primordial forms of the identity-centered arguments to suggest instead that the rational, calculating actions of national leaders are instead responsible for ethnic war. The signifier, primordialism, was coined by Edward Shils in his 1957 article, “Primordial, Personal, Sacred and Civil Ties” but seems to have since been most associated with Clifford Geertz whose chapter, “Primordial Sentiments and Civil Politics in the New States” (1963b) has remained a prime target. Both Shils and Geertz were targets of a Coughlan and Eller (1993) who reduce the concept of primordialism into a timeless ethnic state which they can easily critique by citing the fact that new ethnic identities arise under certain conditions (1993, 188) and that any emotional expression is not theoretically grounded (1993, 191-92).18

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violence. It had “fought, burned, and bled” its way onto the scholarly scene (1985, xi) but as a reactive field, “the spilling of ink awaits the spilling of blood” (1985, 13). Ted Gurr documents that in 1995 there were 58 militarized conflicts, only one of which was interstate, and 49 were ethno-political (Gurr 1996).

18. This construction of primordialism seems to serve the same discursive function as the ‘pariah’ or the ‘rogue’ does in democratic discourse. Primordialism in academic debate serves as the other against which which ‘rational-choice’ theories can rally, unify and achieve some hegemonic status. Rational choice is yet another empty signifier in this context, positioned against “that which is beyond the exclusion delimiting the
This gross oversimplification attempts to draw a clear boundary between those it associates with primordialism (i.e. Shils, Geertz, van den Berghe, Scott, Hoben, and Hefner (1993, 196)) and those who would take a more rational, scientific, approach toward understanding ethnic relations. Such oversimplification does a great violence to the accused, whose ideas are much more complex than a one-dimensional depiction purports them to be.

Steven Grosby brought some of this to light in his 1994 rebuttal, but a reading of the indicted works provides the best defense. In Shils and Geertz there is no indication that lines are being drawn and banners raised. In Geertz’s discussion of Nigeria’s pre-independence mosaic (1963b, 150-153), he made no claims that the then extant ethnic groups had always existed, but considered only the current “tensions between various primordial groups” (1963b, 150). Nor did he believe the ethnic attachments permanent, but argued that his one overarching observation is the aggregation of smaller localized identity groups into larger ones over time, like the Egba into the Yoruba for example. Finally, he did not consider only the affect component of this identity as well as a need to both their potential for conflict and their attempt to institute a constitutional arrangement based on rationality assumptions even using game theory rhetoric (1963, 150-151).19

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communitarian space. . .pure anti-community, pure evil and negation” (Laclau 1996, 42). Again, “the presence of empty signifiers – in the sense that we have defined them – is the very condition of hegemony” (Laclau 1996, 43).

19. Geertz is also one of the first, I know of to use the term “identity” (154) to describe the nature of communal association.
Nevertheless, as Coughlan and Eller were drawing battlelines in their sociological fields, other scholars more central to the canons of international relations have drawn similar boundaries by their aversion to consider identity-level arguments. Barry Posen’s 1993 article is typical of this new wave of scholarship. He draws on Kenneth Waltz and Stephen Van Evera to present a theory of the security dilemma applied to ethnic antagonisms which, he implies, operate by the same rational-action assumptions that realists had long applied to states-as-actors. Michael Brown canonized this rationalized-communal-relations wave in three volumes (1993, 1996, and 1997) in a manner also representative of this trend. The focus throughout these books is on the leaders, the international environment, and the political and economic calculation/conditions of the populations. Nowhere does identity or (non-leader) individual level decision making enter the fray.

Most telling, perhaps, is that Brown’s 1996 and 1997 volumes both carry almost identical introductions even though the focus in the 1996 volume is on general conflict and the 1997 volume is explicitly focused on ethnic conflicts. The 1996 introduction presents a broad list of possible variables to consider, which are then transported in whole to the 1997 volume on ethnic conflict with barely a change, suggesting that the forces driving ethnic conflict are identical to those driving other non-ethnic domestic conflicts. Identity, introduced as the last perceptual variable on the list, is typically considered just to be discounted. It seems that the rational-choice explanations were unable or unwilling to integrate cultural/identity elements.
A Cultured Debate

A third manifestation of this broader rational vs. nonrational debate grew out of the comparative politics discipline and the study of political culture and its more rational opponents. The study of political culture has a long heritage which could be traced back to Plato’s *Republic* – “governments vary as the dispositions of men vary, and that there must be as many of the one as there are of the other? For we cannot suppose that States are made of ‘oak and rock,’ and not out of the human natures which are in them” (ch. VIII, para. 10) – and much more recently to Max Weber’s work on the Protestant ethic (1958). *Civil Culture* by Almond and Verba (1963) brought political culture into the forefront of the comparative subfield. Assessing the cultural elements of five cases, Almond and Verba argued that the variance in governmental systems (from democratic to authoritarian) could be accounted for by such cultures. Such assumptions did not long stand unchallenged.

Soon a rational choice paradigm emerged to challenge the dominant cultural paradigm. Rogowski wrote the seminal *Rational Legitimacy* in 1974 to rebut the role of culture and to argue that a much more rational process can account for the choice of and strength of particular political institutions. In this tradition, Adam Przeworski produced *Democracy and the Market* in 1991, in which he used game-theoretical modeling to demonstrate how completely rational, noncultural processes influenced political institutions. In this book, Przeworski explains that a rational equilibrium can be established by using sanctions and rewards that create a payoff matrix that offers even the
temporary loser a better situation than had he not played at all. 20

Other rational choice advocates, such as Barbara Geddes (1995) and William Reisinger (1995), present rational choice in its strengths and cultural approaches in their weakness. Rational choice approaches, they claim, have powerful deductive power. By resting on an ontology of methodological individualism, and given a preference ordering, they can simply explain a lot with just a little (they are parsimonious). They also avoid the abundant pitfalls of cultural explanations: definitional problems, relationships between cultures and subcultures, and the relationship between an individual’s beliefs and a nation’s culture.

Other authors still insist that culture cannot be ignored. The World Values Survey had offered a more scientific face to this otherwise “soft” science. Ronald Inglehart (choosing Almond and Verba’s behaviorist approach to culture) in Modernization and Postmodernization (1997) presents a broad range of survey data to support his argument that regions and cultures express coherent cultural characters with political consequences. Turner (1995) and Lagos (1997) likewise present compelling data suggesting a coherent and powerful Latin American culture.

Eckstein (1988) presents cultural explanations of political change. When rebutted by Werlin (Werlin and Eckstein 1990), who privileges the effects of rational political engineering over culture to account for institutional change, Eckstein replies that the very

20. Przeworski’s more recent works in the Journal of Democracy (1996) on democratic endurance and World Politics (1997) on modernization use similar reasoning to suggest that economic development does not necessarily lead to democracy but does help it endure once established.
preferences that underlie that engineering are themselves determined by culture (Werlin and Eckstein 1990). In a later article (1996) Eckstein suggests that cultural is the one element that sets the social sciences apart from the hard sciences.

Others attempt a fusion of culture and rational choice. Wildavsky (1987) demonstrates the relationship between the two. Rational choice approaches, he claims, deal with choice but they cannot account for the preference formation that necessarily underlies those choices. Culture (the beliefs, values, and perceptions of the actors), accounts for this initial preference formation. Only in society, he claims, can we even construct a self that constructions of self-interest may take for granted.

Likewise, Ian Shapiro takes a unitarian approach. Shapiro (1998) suggests that there are three ways to deal with the rational choice-culture debate. First, one can replace rational choice with culture, the hegemonic paradigm with its challenger. This approach, however, will create new problems much like the old. Second, one can amend rational choice theories with culture – stop up its explanatory holes with *post hoc* cultural patches. This, Shapiro claims, is just the problem with rational choice theories: they brag of their parsimony, yet so often must resort to a number of *post hoc* solutions to avoid falsification. Third, one can use both approaches in conjunction. When a scholar holds the tool of rational choice alone in hand (like a hammer), suddenly every problem around him begins to look like a nail. Instead, we should we place a screwdriver (cultural explanations) in the other hand. Then, by determining which explanatory strategies are most appropriate for which puzzles, by discovering the conditions that
make one approach better for each, we can provide much more accurate and convincing solutions.

These debates have profound practical implications beyond the interesting theoretical issues they raise. The most immediate practical effect of this dialogue is the approach one might take to settle these conflicts, especially applying the tools of democracy. Whether democratic institutions can change the rational rules of the game, or whether they might affect identity/cultural/affective elements of ethnicity, lies at the center of several other related academic debates.

Democratization

Before World War I21 democratic governance was still considered a rarity, and in fact, it was not until after the world wars that scholars began to articulate what they considered were the global benefits of democracy and the costs of nondemocracy. In that post-World War II era, scholars have felt compelled to discover what went wrong: Why did some countries develop free, democratic institutions, when others did not? The seminal work to emerge from this period was Barrington Moore’s *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy* (1966). In a detailed description of history, Moore exposed the array of political-economic classes that aligned or competed, as conditions allowed,

21. Aristotle is credited with having been the first to apply a comparative method to the puzzle of governmental structure. He collected, compared, and contrasted the constitutions of a number of city-states around him. He undertook this task in order to discover certain patterns and then derive political explanations from those patterns. Just as Aristotle was driven to understand the conditions of his time, so have today’s scholars of comparative politics felt compelled to understand the political dynamics of our modern world, and foremost among those dynamics is democractization.
to form vastly different political systems. Democratization’s success or failure, he claimed, could be found in the strategic alliances of social classes.

Others have addressed the “What went wrong [with Germany in particular]?” question from another perspective. Almond and Verba in Civil Culture (1963) explain the success and failure of democracy by looking to the country’s cultural roots. Surveying five states, Almond and Verba found that each contained a combination of three different cultural typologies ranging from the civically participatory to the passive subject.

Always an event driven field, as WWII began to fade into our collective memory, new questions regarding democratization soon emerged. With the German problem behind them, new issues emerged for political scientists. The number of independent states was growing at an unprecedented rate, and economic changes were sweeping the world. Unfortunately, the economic prosperity filling the north almost wholly bypassed the increasingly politically independent south. Democratization also seemed to ignore the southern hemisphere. Modernization theory claimed to be able to explain why. Adhering to the assumption of linear progress defined in political and economic terms, modernization theory dichotomized the advanced (modern) from the traditional societies. Joining very late in the game, the new southern countries would eventually develop and progress along the path led by their northern predecessors. Democratization, they explained, would follow this general path of development. Events proved otherwise.

More often than not, these new countries stagnated politically even when they progressed economically. Then, when even modest economic progress faltered in the
lost decade of the 1980s, scholars began to lose hope in modernization’s’ promise of universal progress. Andre Gunder Frank and Fernando Cardoso explained the lack of progress, both economically and politically in the form of democratization, by exposing the south’s dependency on the north. Where democracy did gain a foothold, it was in distinctly southern forms of Bureaucratic Authoritarianism or Corporatism. Then, in the midst of this pessimism, world events again determined the course of scholarship.

When the Berlin Wall fell and the iron curtain receded in 1989, few had seen it coming. Democracy now spread like wildfire across the north, and even penetrated parts of the south. Samuel Huntington capitalized on the democratic euphoria by publishing his landmark *The Third Wave* (1991). With another apparent wave of democratization, came another wave of democratization literature.

*The Third Wave* portrayed events from 1974 (which marked Portugal’s liberation from authoritarianism) which, Huntington claimed, snowballed across the continent and across the globe. *The Third Wave* set out to explain the fastest and most extensive expansion of democracy the world had yet seen. To accomplish this task, Huntington considered a broad array of variables, both external and internal to the state. Huntington’s book also introduced a newer brand of modernization. Looking to the south, he found that those few states that democratized were some of the richest among them. In a matrix, he was able to lay out the democratic and nondemocratic countries along economic lines and reveal a distinct association. From this he induced that there was an economic transition zone which represented a level of economic development that would enable and encourage democratization.
This work was greeted by other political scientists with both cheers of praise and mountains of criticism. Philippe Schmitter and Terry Karl (1991) responded by clarifying “What Democracy Is . . . and Is Not.” Here, Schmitter tackled the difficult definitional problems regarding democracy and democratization. Contrary to Huntington’s definition based primarily on suffrage, Schmitter argued that democracy was actually much more. In fact many of the most authoritarian governments in the world had wider suffrage and better voter turnout than the most liberal democracies.22 Following this theme, Fareed Zakaria (1997) wrote in Foreign Affairs about “Illiberal Democracy” and stressed that the civil liberties and political freedoms are an essential element of a liberal democracy. Rowen (1995) wrote in the “Tide Underneath the Third Wave” that Huntington neglected other essential elements in the democratization process that regard education and economic development. He argued that it is more the content than the quantity of education that determined a population’s ability or desire to sustain democracy.

Marta Lagos wrote of “Latin America’s Smiling Mask” (1997) to underscore the cultural elements of democratization to which Huntington gave little attention. Using the Latinobarometro (Latin America’s equivalent of the World Values Survey), Lagos demonstrated that the cultural lenses and perceptions of trust, honesty, and the desirability and efficiency of democracy all have an impact on the states’ institutions. Francis Fukuyama’s “Primacy of Culture” (1995) uses the cultural patch to explain why

22. In Iraq’s elections almost 100% of the population as young as 16 turned out to re-elect Saddam Hussain. This extreme example under underscores a problem that often occurs in much less overt ways.
democratization had not yet reached his “end of history.” Not all cultures are compatible
with democracy, he claimed, but not in the same way Huntington had argued. In The
Third Wave, Huntington called Confucian democracy a contradiction of terms, whereas
Islam could prove compatible with democracy. Fukuyama (1991) claimed just the
opposite. Claiming that Huntington mistook Confucian ideology for Confucian culture,
he failed to see how compatible with democracy a harmonious, family-centered culture
might be.

Chege in “Between Africa’s Extremes” (1995), stressed much more than did
Huntington the vital role that leaders can play to make or break the democratization
process. One of the primary factors separating the horror in Rwanda from the peace in
the Republic of South Africa was the set of motives and skills of the leadership. Linz and
Stepan (1996) brought in yet another crucial variable missing from Huntington’s model:
the issue of “stateness.” What Huntington and others like him took for granted, they
claimed, is that there exists a consolidated state in place awaiting democratic institutions.
For most of the south this is not the case.23

Communal Relations and Democratization in Africa

According to Diamond and Platter (1994) communal relations stand as perhaps
the most direct threat to state-civil society relations and, as a consequence, to the
prospects for democratization. Nowhere else are the dynamics of ethnic relations so

23. A point also made by Jackson and Rosberg (1986) in a discussion of
negative sovereignty in Africa.
visible as they are in Africa. According to James Scarritt (1993) Africa, more than any other region, has the greatest number of minority ethnic groups, has the most geographically concentrated groupings, and has ethnic groups with the strongest sense of identity. At worst, these factors contribute to large-scale militarized conflict. At best, they represent conditions that make the introduction and consolidation of democracy extremely problematic.

African nations’ have had many varied experiences with democracy. In the most popular narrative, the euphoria of the independence movement soon gave way to the grim reality of the political hardships the new African nations faced. Where democracy took hold it often degenerated into single-party systems as in Nyerere’s Tanzania and in Nkrumah’s Ghana. More often than not, independence from the colonial powers gave way to bondage under the founding father or his party. Over time, however, a much more mixed picture of African democracy emerged. While Guelke wrote of the “African miracle” (1996), others described “Democracy without Consolidation” (Sandbrook 1996), or stressed what was wrong (Kaplan 1994), and of democracy’s abandoned hopes (Kaplan 1997).

Two authors attempted to paint what they considered a more balanced picture of Africa’s condition. Crawford Young (1996) wrote about both successes and failures. Although he could claim only a few clear successes (e.g. Namibia), he also labeled only a handful as utter failures (e.g. Somalia, Liberia, Sudan). Forty-two of Africa’s fifty-two

24. The single-party system was long the dominant and sometimes preferred system in African politics as evidenced by the longevity of Daniel arap Moi’s, Biya’s, and Jerry Rawling’s ruling parties.
countries, he claimed, have adopted elements of a democratic governance, even if incomplete. Chege (1995) contrasted the extremes of 1994: the unbelievable dream of successful elections and peaceful transition in the Republic of South Africa versus the horrors of the Rwandan massacres. In the words of the Nigerian poet, Wole Soyinka, greeting President Clinton in 1998 “Rwanda is our nightmare, South Africa is our dream.” The efforts of both Young and Chege were well received because of their reluctance to paint all of Africa with one broad stroke, but the representational practices they employ by establishing categories of success and failure and tying each to certain presupposed conditions and values is problematic. Each of these works also turned scholarly attention to the communal conflicts that were associated with Africa’s failures.

Many authors have now considered ethnicity’s effect on the prospects of what they would consider a consolidated democracy. Huntington (1997) suggested that ethnically splintered societies risk awakening or escalating ethnic violence once the political trophy of the state is thrown open to competition. Like Kaplan (1997), Huntington saw that political parties could easily form along ethnic lines and therefore magnify already competitive relationships. Especially in a winner-take-all system, ethnic relations could sour upon democratizing. Linz and Stepan (1996) likewise questioned the prudence of introducing a democratic government before the “stateness” of the country can be established – a nation must be built before a state can handle democracy. A rich literature has dealt more exclusively with this ethnic question.25

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25. At the broadest level, Rothchild (1986) writes about nine methods for dealing with ethnic cleavages ranging from one extreme, subjugation, to the other, power-sharing.
At the heart of these literatures on democratization and communal relations, lies Arend Lijphart whose work on consociational democracy now spans several decades. Described by Lustick (1996), consociationalism represents one of the most productive Lakatosian research programmes in the field. It is founded on the premise that specially adapted political institutions are necessary for democracy to survive in ethnically divided societies. Based on his Dutch experience, Lijphart distilled four features of a consociational democracy. These are: 1) electoral system of proportional representation producing a grand ethnic coalition, 2) a federal division of powers, 3) a minority veto, and 4) a system of power sharing. In an attempt to apply this remedy to South Africa’s woes, Lijphart, in *Power-Sharing in South Africa* (1985), prescribes such a system, which he declares in a later publication (1994) as exactly what South Africa adopted. Lijphart’s work has, of course, attracted a number of critics.

Connor (1996) addresses Lijphart’s approach to South Africa in particular. Consociationalism, he claims, runs the risk of permanently marking ethnic divisions in the political arena. It denies the fluid nature of ethnicity that might otherwise allow peaceful adaptation, and freezes ethnic relations in ways that could later lead to conflict. Guelke (1992) likewise criticizes Lijphart’s prescriptions suggesting that he does not understand the hostility South Africans have toward ethnic labels that consociational remedies might require. Finally, Lustick (1997) criticizes Lijphart’s whole programme. It has, Lustick argues, abandoned the early Lakatosian rigor and instead relies principally on its aesthetic appeal. It simply does not fit well with reality.
The most notable among these critics is Donald Horowitz. Having already written extensively about ethnicity in democratic systems (1985), Horowitz likewise took on the South African issue in *A Democratic South Africa?* (1991), and in a more generalizeable forum, Horowitz addresses the issue more broadly in the “Democracy in Divided Societies” (1993). There he explained that the remedy of consociationalism begs the question – it requires consensus and an accommodation to enable the consociational institutions that are allegedly needed to foster that very cooperation. Actual events in Nigeria support many of these concerns.

A grand coalition in which many ethnic groups are forced to cooperate to run the country sounds like a practical and potentially ideal application of consociationalism, but events in Zambia suggest otherwise. The broad coalition that led the independence movement in Zambia degenerated over time along ethnic lines. Smaller partners in the coalition were easily abandoned once power was consolidated (Zambia’s experience with the MMD providing a perfect example).26

The solution to this, said Lijphart, was to find coalitions that roughly split the country in half. This might work especially well in Nigeria where a natural geographic and religious fault line divides northern and southern Nigeria almost in half. There are, however, two problems with this ‘ideal.’ The first is noted by Diamond and Platter (1994). Unlike ruling coalitions in societies not fragmented by ethnicity, ethnic parties are very resistant to changing membership. Cleavages are not cross-cutting, and the

26. Something of a “grand ethnic coalition” brought Nigeria’s new president, Obasanjo, to power. The Hausa of the north allied with the Ibo and the Plateau groups.
dominant cleavage, ethnicity, is resistant to negotiation or bargaining. Ethnic identity cannot be divided, bartered, or traded off like political power or economic wealth or opportunity. Second, resulting from the first problem, a near 50-50 split might not lead to a regular exchange of power (as with the Democrats and Republicans in the U.S.), but instead enable the permanent marginalization of the near minority. This, claims Horowitz, is what happened to Nigeria leading to the Biafran wars and some of the worst bloodshed, starvation, and suffering in modern Africa.\footnote{Run-off elections also prescribed to create a near majority situation also runs this risk. In Benin, a run-off election prevented a small minority taking power on a plurality vote, but the run-off too was divided along ethnic lines. The winning president won 90\% of the North’s vote, but lost 94\% of the south’s.}

Horowitz’s remedy for deeply divided societies differs from Lijphart’s in its accent on the divisive nature of ethnicity and a different application of federalism. Prudently applied federal structures can ease the potential threat of ethnic cleavages in several ways. To the extent that provincial districts are not cut along ethnic lines, they establish another, cross-cutting cleavage of power. Ethnic groups lumped together in one region will have new incentives to cooperate as they compete against other regions for influence at the national level. On the other hand, ethnic groups that are divided among regions may be institutionally compelled to compete politically among themselves where regional interests trump unified ethnic interests. This appears on the surface to resemble Lijphart’s reliance on institutional remedies, but it also presupposed a very different conception of communal identities. By constructing an extra-rational facet of communal identities, Horowitz sought not to institutionalize them but to acknowledge their ranked
and nested nature and create an environment in which political, provincial identities temper ethnic identities.

**Enter Poststructuralism**

Within the context of these debates over rationality, identity, and culture and their consequences for policies of democracy’s implementation, a common frontier is drawn. All seem to pit some sense of agent against various structures (either institutional, cultural, or social). Each of these debates, therefore, draws on ontological issues underlying the agent-structure metatheoretical debate. Each of these debates would benefit (or subside) if the more fundamental agent-structure debate were addressed.

A precious few scholars have sidestepped the structuralist-reductionist debates to consider the nature of that relationship. Alexander Wendt (1987) first popularized the agent structure “problem” in international relations by presenting what has been the often repeated two truisms: agents affect structure, and structures affect agents. Without a proper integration, Wendt and his followers would imply that structural theories remain isolated theoretically from the lower levels. Unable to integrate satisfactorily the levels of analysis, theorists would be left to debate among the levels of analysis. Scholars would be doomed to defend structural theories from above, attack them from below, or shrug their shoulders and use both. Any more penetrating analysis would be difficult and epistemologically and ontologically unsure.

Wendt (1987) claimed to have a solution drawing on Giddens’ structuration theory (1979) and Bhaskar’s scientific realism (1975, 1979). Scientific realism promised
to provide structural theories with an ontological footing, endowing structures with autonomy and power. Structuralism promised the linking mechanism, granting the structures and agents equal ontological status, neither being dependent on or independent of the other.

Despite Wendt’s clever fusion, scientific realism and structuration are essentially incompatible (Dessler 1989; Doty 1997). Scientific realism reifies the structure (suggesting that structural theories may at least remain intact if not dominate), whereas structuration binds the structure ontologically to the agents. Forced to choose between incompatible tools, Dessler rejected structuration as inherently impractical (by Gidden’s own admission) and adopted scientific realism and thus suggested that Waltz’s structural realism should adopt a transformational model wherein a theory of the agents allows for their intentional actions to affect the structure.

Archer (1985) similarly rejected Gidden’s structuration for its impracticality, and like those to follow him (Carlesneas 1992), suggested that Gidden’s conflation of agent and structure was problematic. Instead, the two are ontologically distinct and should be kept separate. She thus suggested that an introduction of time into the agent-structure mix would resolve the “problem” and thus introduced morphogenesis. This slight transition from Gidden’s “oscillatory bracketing” to a bracketing over time was readily adopted by Carlesneas (1992) who illustrated (in his handy Figure 2) how holding first the agent, then the structure, then the agent (and so on) constant, one can sort out the causal relationships between agent and structure. Hollis and Smith (1994) take
Carlesneas (and thus Archer) to task, arguing that the addition of time resolves nothing, and demonstrates only how intractable the agent-structure problem is.

From this brief sketch of the debate, several preliminary issues emerge to address the question at hand. First, and most consistently, all of the authors entering the debate do so testifying of the necessity of structural theories to find grounding in some relationship to their constitutive parts or agents. Whereas some might apply this to Waltz’s neorealism by claiming that he needs a theory of the state, Wendt says Waltz’s theory is not structural in the first place. The units (states) are ontologically primitive. What Waltz needs is a better than micro-economic theory that can portray a system without first assuming the nature of the constituent parts. In defense of Waltz in particular, and structural theory in general, Barry Buzan and especially Richard Little in *Logic of Anarchy* (Buzan et al 1993) claim that Waltz is not reductionist, and it is, in fact, the theoretical interdependence of his state and structural dimensions that overcomes the agent-structure problem. Drawing in some previously unintroduced players in the agent-structure debate, Layder and Taylor, Little is able to make a very weak case for using scientific realism to support the *Logic of Anarchy*’s emerging theory of “structural

28. Note that this seems to be the opposite of Ashley’s (1984) argument that because the two dimensions are self-supporting and self-defending, Waltz has a theory of neither. Using the template of E.P. Thompson’s critique of Althusser’s structural Marxism, Ashley discloses that the agent (sovereign state) and structure (Waltz’s system), by assuming one another and relying absolutely on one another for their ontological grounding, are left naked and embarrassed once exposed. Like Thompson’s snake, the structure and the agents vanish in a plop. Fortunately, a person, unlike a theory of a state, cannot go plop. Although it is impossible to theoretically separate the agent from the structures surrounding it, it is nevertheless possible to carve out some theoretical space for individual agency.
I say “unfortunately” because as Doty mentioned, the promise of scientific realism for international relations structural theories is (was) “big” (1997, 369) – the smallest and most appropriate word possible to portray its grand promise and subtle disappointment.

Unfortunately, the solution offered by scientific realism cannot be realized due to arguments presented by poststructural scholars. The poststructural move in international relations theory, credited to Ashley (1984) by Walker (1993), threatens the potential of structural theories by at least two paths.

First, poststructuralist discourse is now firmly embedded in the agent-structure debate. Drawing on Jonathan Culler (1981), Ashley suggests in “Living on Borderlines” (1989) that the agent-structure problematique is not a puzzle to be solved, but an intractable paradox. Drawing on Derrida’s critique, Ashley suggests that Le Texte General – an uncentered (uncenterable) endless production of intertexts – prohibits the grounding that other agent-structure theorists were seeking. Doty (1997) presents an account of the agent-structure problematique and applies post-structural reasoning to demonstrate how the very nature of the relationship prohibits closure and therefore prohibits an essentialist grounding of structural theory.

29. I say “unfortunately” because as Doty mentioned, the promise of scientific realism for international relations structural theories is (was) “big” (1997, 369) – the smallest and most appropriate word possible to portray its grand promise and subtle disappointment.
Doty lays bare the linguistic structural assumptions attributed to Saussure and adopted by Dessler. Dessler, in fact, mentions Saussure as a key to unlocking the agent-structure problem applying Saussure’s linguistic structures to political structures. Doty, however, points out that Saussure’s *Langue* and *Parole*, which Dessler adapts to agent and structure, have been highly problematized in poststructuralist thought. Looking to Laclau and Mouffe (1985), Doty demonstrates that Saussure’s proposed relationship between the *langue* and the *parole* depended on a sign to center a meaning and provide a fixidity to the agent and structure. Derrida (1978) counters Saussure by demonstrating that the relational signs cannot be fixed, because they rely on an endless and infinite regression of relational meanings. Given these slippery discursive horizons, Laclau and Mouffe (1985) suggest that the subject position (agent) can find space but never grounding. The agent that most scholars must assert in a religious moment and the structures they rely on to give the agents ground all slip away once Saussure’s *langue* and *parole* are exposed as utterly contingent and never fixed.

My initial discussion of the value of discourse analysis (presented in Chapter 1) is therefore justified. Laclau, Mouffe and the Essex school take agency seriously because “questions surrounding the way social agents ‘live out’ their identities and act – questions that pertain to the concept of subjectivity – are of central importance” (Howarth and Stavrakakis 2000, 12). It is important to note, however, that the implications of Laclau and Mouffe’s writings on the agent-structure debate are not beyond debate. David Howarth presents a thorough and concise account of these critics and the points they raise (2000, 121). Rustin (1988), Dallmayr (1989), and Osborne (1991) suggest that Laclau
and Mouffe privilege agents over structures. Mońnik (1993) and Žižek (1990) make
exactly the opposite case, claiming the Laclau and Mouffe’s “Foucauldian ‘subject
position’ within a discursive structure robs the subject of any political agency and
substance” (Howarth 2000, 121).

In the end, Doty’s (1997) application of the insights of Laclau and Mouffe
creates room for agency within the agent-structure problematique. Building on the
conception of practice and the understanding of subject-position that follows, Doty draws
on Laclau and Mouffe (1985) to demonstrate that these understandings enable “us to
conceptualize agents and agency without falling into the trap of attributing some timeless
and unexplained quality to all subjects. . .” (1997, 384). Especially since “discourses are
inherently open, contingent and overlapping [and] can create spaces within which
practices of resistance are made possible” and because discourses are “often
contradictory, as are the subject-positions that are made available within them,” agency
becomes possible (Doty 1997, 384-5).