National Symbols: Effective Mechanisms to Accommodate Diversity

Omer Awadalla Ali[1]

Looking at the functioning of different contemporary multiethnic and multicultural federations, one can see that their constitutional way of tackling diversity and of realizing national integration differ from one experience to another. In most cases, their conceptual understanding of the nation-state has had a remarkable role in forming their strategies for diversity. For instance, those who conceived their nation-state as being dominated by one single ethnic group dedicated special strategies that considered diversity as a risk for both nation- and state-building, e.g. Germany. Where the nation-state has a high degree of fragmentation (as in a multiethnic or multicultural state), state strategies can be divided into three ways of coping with these fragmentations:

1. *Ignoring* this diversity and adopt the policy of assimilation, France being a typical example;

2. *Excluding* culture from politics as in the case of the United States of America; and

3. *Recognizing* diversity and even compelled to promote these diversities, Switzerland being the best example of this approach.

Comparative studies, generally speaking, have demonstrated that ignoring, eliminating and excluding diversity are mistaken and impractical when the suppressed groups emerge and adopt violent means to restore their rights. It shows also accommodating diversity is attainable in plural states through developing a "multicultural federalism." In this context, multicultural federalism means, *all federal arrangement for the societies with major cultural cleavages, be it of ethnic, religious, linguistic nature, designated and designed to accommodate given multicultural differences*.

If so, still, constitutional and institutional designations are not enough or do not automatically guide the construction of a nation. The nation itself, in my opinion, should establish certain preconditions before any attempt at constitution-making especially in the context of multicultural societies, which actually encompass different nations. Take, as in some instances, the principles of mutual recognition, tolerance and trust that has presumably

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[1] Dr. iur. Omer Awadalla (Fribourg, Switzerland), Legal Advisor-Ministry of Justice, and
  Director of Legal Studies Department, Future Studies Centre, Khartoum, Sudan.

marked every peaceful and democratic society. Despite the fact that both principles of tolerance and trust can develop during the formation of a state's structures and through the passage of time, in the case of an absence of "mutual recognition" between society's components (between its majority and minority) makes it is meaningless to speak about nation–building or a political compromise with which to establish a state. This is because the underpinning element of the multicultural state does not exist. Instead, what exists is a mono-cultural society that may treat minorities in a paternal way but rarely on an equal footing.

In other words, the accommodation of diversity can be achievable when the society's components demonstrate enough capacity for the mutual acceptance of differences within the society; and respect for the consequence of these differences (social and cultural values, beliefs and ways of life). Without the willingness of its social components to recognize and respect each other the state would have had no chance to survive and succeed as a multicultural state.

The Swiss society, for instance, plays a constructive role towards diversity. Four cultures with great differences in terms of language, religion, way of live, tradition, and political interest, successfully live together in peace and in a small territory. The elixir of this peaceful coexistence emerged not only due to the political system, but primarily from mutual recognition and respect (*the Swiss nation is dependant on the will of the different composing groups*).

It is noteworthy that mutual recognition does not necessary signify cordial inter-relationships between the social components. As experience tells us, the inter-relationship between the Swiss German people and the French people, for instance, was not that friendly during the establishment of the Swiss Confederation in 1848. But within that stage, the degree of recognition was high enough to determine positive political action. As a result, the role of the Swiss federal system offered first of all better opportunities to each culture to maintain their particularities, and later to adopt different policies that enabled the absorption of this antagonism (e.g. different economic interests led to mobilization of different cultures, military service, etc.).

What can be learnt from the above argument is that nation-building is not only the task of the state's institutions but requires a constructive approach towards diversity from the nation itself. Given that, the role of the state, subsequently, is to demonstrate the principle of inclusiveness among its social components. This principle of inclusiveness, as many argue, is to be considered not only in the state institutions and policies but, more importantly, in the national symbols which reflect the internal and external images of the state. The discussion of

these national symbols is helpful in understanding the big gap that exists between appearance and reality, theory and practice, in how the state treats diversity. These symbols, *inter alia*, include:

1- The issue of *religion*;

2- The *nations' capital*;

3- The issue of *language*;

4- The *Head of the State*;

5- The *flag, currency and the national anthem*

It is usual that these symbols are established on the basis of national consensus in a way that ensures and protects the inclusiveness of the state. Where a nation's symbols are designed to reflect one culture, other cultures tend to be perceived as excluded and internal groups are left feeling inadequately represented, irrespective of their actual treatment in their respective regions. In contrast, when different cultural groups are represented in these symbols, as one scholar rightly states, it can genuinely transform the state/nation orientation from exclusion to inclusion, which is the decisive factor for the development of self-conscious.

The difficult question here is how to reveal this inclusiveness into the daily life of ordinary citizens in order to satisfy the will of the people in a way that can foster national feeling "legitimacy." Such legitimacy in the eyes of less educated peoples can be achieved in a rational and direct way between the people and the state if every person within each of the diverse groups realizes that they are represented in the state's principles and symbols.

1. Religion

Religion is the first issue that a multicultural state must address in order to show its inclusiveness. In this regard, the State should make a clear provision in its constitution and reflect that in its policies that:

- every human being has the right to freedom of conscience and religious creed;

- the basis of rights and duties is *citizenship*, irrespective of race, sex or religious creed;

- to avoid the assumption of a competition between certain religions the state should pronounce preaching and missionary activities for any religion as legitimate, as long as there is no coercion involved. In other words, proselytising is part of the freedom of religion as long as no one is forced to adopt the faith. Nevertheless, it is not legitimate if religion and religious organizations are used for political purposes. In this regard, especially in Africa, the state should observe carefully the contemporary

means used by many religious organizations to polarize the people, for example the manipulation of food and education. This is because peoples are sometimes forced to adopt a faith to gain the above advantages;

- the nature of the relationship between religion and state should be clarified carefully to manage the unavoidable clash between the community's preferences and individual liberties. This because, the right of community liberties, according to self-rule, enables them to legislate with reference to their own concept of the relationship between state and religion. In the case of a secularized concept, one could not end up with a religious problem, as is the case in many federations. Everyone is therefore free to move without community restrictions. In some countries like the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, Egypt, Malaysia, Northern Nigeria and Sudan, most of the Muslim community, opt to refer their source of legislation to the Islamic Sharia law, and therefore reject the concept of a secular state because its may compel them to capitulate their options.

Federalism through territoriality can avoid the controversial debate over the relationship between religion and state. When the federal constitution is inclusive or neutral, the relations between state and religion can vary from one state to another, based on territoriality. This enables a different religious minority to make a decision as to whether the religion shall be tied in with the state or remain separate. Such arrangements, in addition to developing their own legal system and performing their own codes of procedures, can preserve the state's identity.

2. The Nation's Capital

The status of the nation's capital also has a great symbolic impact among plural countries. Firstly, it should welcome different peoples on the basis of their citizenship and not as members of certain cultural or ethnic groups. Secondly, the capital is where the seats of the federal government are allocated.

3. The Issue of Language

The issue of language at both federal and regional level is of major importance in accommodating diversity. Wise and carefully considered arrangements for language can reinforce the peaceful co-existence of different groups and can even prevent future conflicts.

To facilitate this, viable legal and institutional arrangements should, in my opinion, guarantee the following provisions in the constitution:

- *Freedom of language in private and public life:* The liberty of language, which the State law should undertake to protect, encompasses two domains: the private and the public. With regards to the former, the right to speak in one's own language in the private sphere is guaranteed out of logical necessity and for national and international protection of fundamental rights. Concerning the public domain, the state should look at the possibility of guaranteeing the right to receive information and teaching in one's own language, although this should be limited to the official language(s). Additionally, the state should as much as possible guarantee the use of the local language in the state organs to all the non-speakers of the national language(s) to express themselves fully in the national institutions (e.g. the National Parliament).

- *Freedom of language in the regional sphere:* In this regard, the principle of territoriality can also guarantee the freedom of language where it could be, as in the case of many federations, under the state administration. Accordingly, the states have the right to determine the language of education in primary schools or other spheres of regional life. Nevertheless, it is important that adopting a certain language in certain regions, or at the national level, is not just the result of the will of the community because automatic approval could lead to linguistic turmoil. Such recognition rather requires strong measures by the public authorities.

- Normally, the state dedicates special committees to set and observe these measures, as in the case of India, which take the form of a Commission and a Committee of Parliament to oversee the official language. Such a committee is crucial for setting the necessary criteria, to make sure the state language has enough popular support and the capacity to be recognized at the regional level as an official language. It can also prevent problems envisaged with, for example, recognizing a certain language and the problems associated with imposing the use of another language.

- *Protection and promotion of local languages:* the third important issue that needs to be addressed by the state is making efforts to develop local languages. To do so, the state should recognize the dignity of speakers of other languages and facilitate the promotion of the local language. This means making the effort to standardize the local language, provide the necessary funds for any local attempts to promote the language

through the regional radio and television stations which enable different groups to express their own identity.

4. Head of the State

Another crucial issue facing a multicultural state is the form of the executive government and the head of this government in particular. The value of the office of president is present not only in the power he holds, but additionally in the symbolic representation of the office in which different groups want to be represented. This is why a multicultural state should carefully identify the most type of government that satisfy the aspiration of its social components bearing in mind that each society has distinct characteristics (social configuration, political background, etc). However, certain characteristics must be considered in any attempt to form any type of government: *the need for a strong government, the degree of trust between the parties, their ability to set aside their differences in the national interest, the need for compromise, and the necessity to think long-term as well as short-term, the need for flexibility and so on*.

The two famous types of governments to which most established countries (whether federal or not) subscribe is: the *parliamentary system* which is based on the concentration of power within the parliament, e.g. Britain, Canada, Australia and Germany; and the *presidential system* such as the United States of America, which is based on the concentration of power within the presidency. Nevertheless, a small number of other countries adopt some elements of both parliamentary and presidential systems (known as *semi-presidential system*), for example France, Portugal, Finland, and Sri Lanka. Switzerland, unlike the others, can provide a unique type of government that includes some form of separation of power (*collegial government*).

The following table will illuminate very briefly the main positive and negative aspects of each system in so far as they affect the needs of a plural society.

System of government	Advantages	Disadvantages
The Parliamentary System	can include the participation of all significant groups, including minorities in the government	- often fails to eliminate the fear of the minority about majority domination, where one group forms an absolute majority; - it does not ensure the strong government and political stability

		that is extremely important for responding to the serious conflicts that can occur in a fragmented society e.g. Sudan
The Presidential System	- can provide stable and strong government to tackle the conflicts present in a plural society. - symbolizes the national unity of the state	- the president may represent certain cultural group and therefore may perceived as a symbol of political domination
The Semi-Presidential System	may have the advantages of the above systems	- in many cases the offices of the president and prime-minister represent regular single parties; a matter that repeats the disadvantage of the presidential system - having two key positions of power that can lead to conflict between the president and the prime minister, e.g. Lebanon
The Collegial Government	- the government is ruled by a supreme or federal council that is comprised of several members (representing different language and religious groups, and gender) -the presidency rotates annually among its members and therefore can truly represent the different elements and groups within a multicultural state.	

5. Flag, Currency and the National Anthem

Flag, Currency and the National Anthem are the most tangible symbols in people's daily lives as well as in projecting the state's image externally. These symbols should reflect and express the national allegiance of different cultural groups. In contrast, the monopolization of these symbols by the dominant culture will effectively exclude those who do not share this culture. As a natural consequence, a national sense of belonging cannot develop and flourish in such a situation.

It is not justifiable for the state to song national anthem, for instance, only in the official language if there are some non-speakers of the national language(s) who often used verbal dialects. It is however important to consider the emotional feelings of the non-speakers of the national language(s) who need to sing the anthem at national festivals, or the feeling of

someone representing the country abroad. The state can simply translate the national anthem, as Switzerland has successfully done, into the major dialects (it does not matter if it the lyrics are written or not), so that everyone can sing it in his/her own language and dialect. The state can also try to maintain the same melodies and tone in order to preserve it at home and internationally.

Yet, it might be possible for a multicultural state to reflect the symbols of certain linguistic or cultural groups in the national image, if this is part of a comprehensive compromise where some groups gain something here and lose something there; the prize is that ultimately everybody will gain something. Switzerland can provide the best example of this compromise, where the national currency is expressed by French word *franc* despite the fact that the French-speaking group is a minority and represents not more than 18 per cent of the total populations.

Conclusion

The major emphasis of this paper is that accommodation of diversity requires not only exploring the approach of different contemporary multiethnic and multicultural federations towards diversity and their constitutional designations for achieving national integration, but also requires a constructive approach from the society itself. The priority of diversity as a value is therefore has to be realized from the society, and the role of the state, subsequently, is only to provide an acceptable means that allows all social components to articulate, first, these diversities and second their differences through the federal political system in a peaceful way.

It argues also a visible mechanism to clarify whether different group are represented or undermined by a certain culture is to look for the national symbols of a state. I have considered the issue of religion, the nation's capital, official language, head of the State, national flag, currency, and the national anthem, as the best symbols to recognize whether certain groups are excluded or included as well as the best mechanism to accommodate diversity if different cultures are adequately represented in these symbols.

A multicultural state should understand that the unsuccessful attempt to manufacture national feelings cannot be explained as the decline of applying the "federal solution" but to failure by different governments to reflect all the country's social components in the state and in the national symbols.

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