



Back to the future

Nationalism, internationally

From Yugoslavia to Somalia, from Iraq to Zaire ... Nationalism and nationhood are tearing the world apart. **PIERRE BAUDET** investigates

THE FEVER OF NATIONALISM HAS spread across our globe. Nightly, on TV screens, we encounter an extreme expression of the crisis of the nation state: the Yugoslavian catastrophe.

The ex-Soviet Union is the theatre of multiple cataclysms, as the old republics collapse. Similar processes are jolting Canada, Spain, Italy, even historically strong states like Britain and France.

The phenomenon is just as pronounced in the third world. Centrifugal forces are pulling apart Senegal, Ethiopia, Somalia, Sudan, Zaire, Iraq, Lebanon, Sri Lanka, India and many other countries.

More than 70 years after the intense debates of the 1920s on nationalism and nationhood — and three decades after the wave of post-colonial states emerged — the questions of nationalism and nationhood are back with a vengeance. Can we make sense of them?

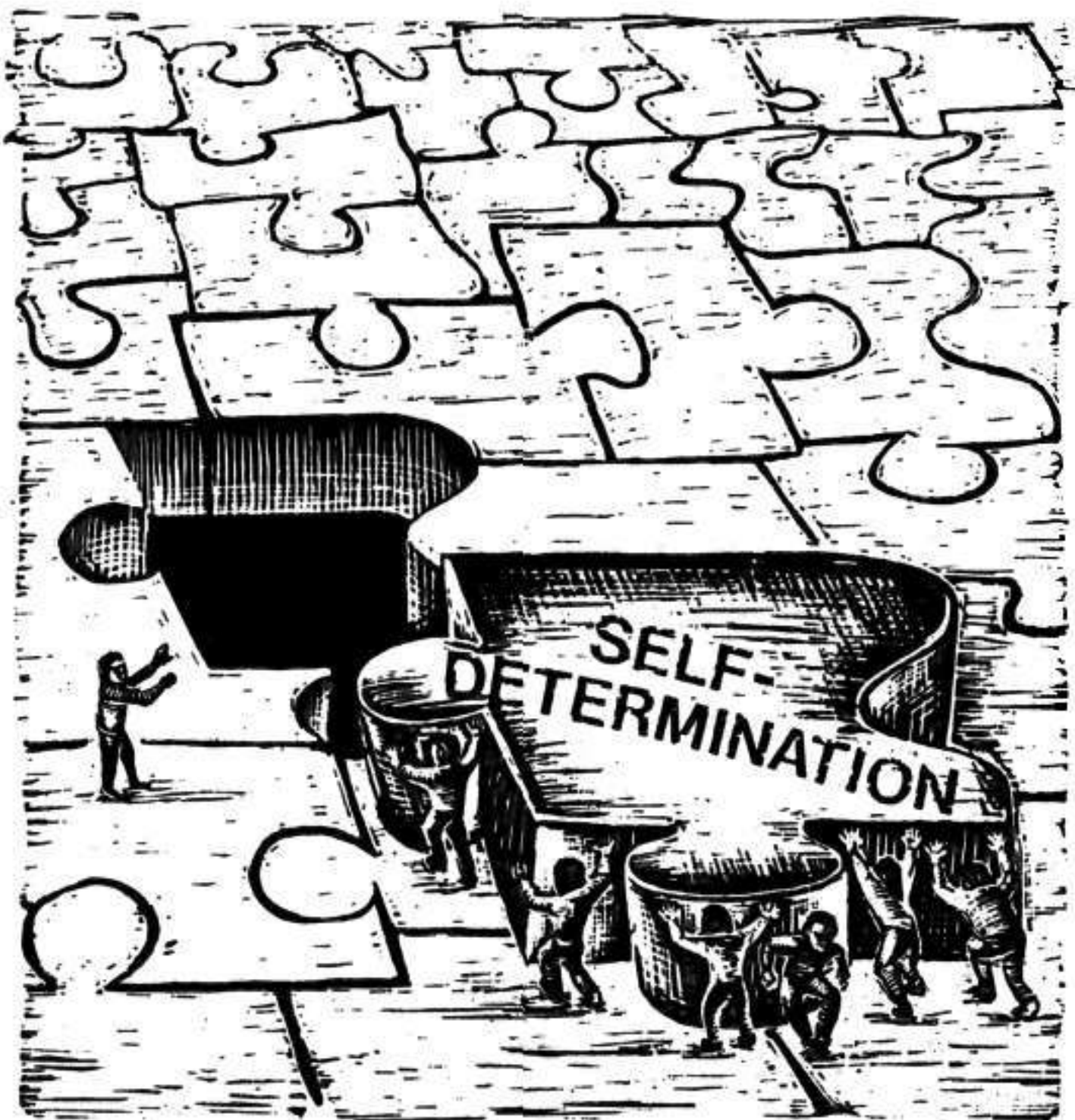
Viva neo-nationalism!

The debate has spawned some combative views. On the one side are those who promote this flourishing neo-nationalism as an escape route from the crisis of the “big” centralised states. “National liberation struggles,” as the National Somali Movement declares in ‘independent’ Somaliland, have become more than “simply decolonisation struggles”. Increasingly, the boundaries of many nation-states, especially in the third world, seem to be “unviable” vessels for nationhood.

In his new book, *The Black Man's Burden*, Basil Davidson tries to explain the failure of such states in Africa. He describes how they mimicked European state-building by forcing proto-nations and proto-states to abandon the stage of history — only to watch them bounce back a few decades

later.

That argument is now catching on. Along the Casamance in West Africa, Western Senegalese are rediscovering their roots. The Oromos in Ethiopia are demanding independence or autonomy. Although not linguistically or ethnically homogenous, south-



■ THE 90s PUZZLE: The hunger for self-determination has swept the world