

# 1 The rise of classical modernism

Three main issues have dominated the theory of nations and nationalism.

The first is ethical and philosophical. It concerns the role of the nation in human affairs. Should we regard the nation as an end in itself, an absolute value which is incommensurable with all other values? Or should we understand the nation and national identity as a means to other ends and values, a proximate value, and therefore bound to time, place and context, and especially to the conditions of a modern epoch?

The second is anthropological and political. It concerns the social definition of the nation. What kind of community is the nation and what is the relationship of the individual to that community? Is the nation fundamentally ethno-cultural in character, a community of (real or fictive) descent whose members are bound together from birth by kinship ties, common history and shared language? Or is it largely a social and political community based on common territory and residence, on citizenship rights and common laws, in relation to which individuals are free to choose whether they wish to belong?

The third is historical and sociological. It concerns the place of the nation in the history of humanity. Should we regard the nation as an immemorial and evolving community, rooted in a long history of shared ties and culture? Or are nations to be treated as recent social constructs or cultural artefacts, at once bounded and malleable, typical products of a certain stage of history and the special conditions of a modern epoch, and hence destined to pass away when that stage has been surpassed and its conditions no longer apply?

These three issues and the debates they have engendered recur continually in discussions of nations and nationalism. As we would expect, they often overlap and intertwine, and it is not unknown for theorists to take up clearcut positions on one issue, only to 'cross over' to the unexpected 'side' in one or other of the debates, to hold for example that nations are recurrent and immemorial yet means to other ends, or that they are social and political communities but constitute absolute values. Moreover, the third and last debate conflates two separate issues: the issue of the antiquity or modernity of the nation in history, and the question of its evolved or socially constructed nature. As we shall see, this conflation of issues makes it difficult to adhere to any simple characterisation of theorists or classification of approaches and theories in the field. Nevertheless,

there is enough consistency among analysts and theories to propose a general classificatory scheme based in particular on the third of the above three issues. Such a classification reveals the main lines of debate in the field in recent decades, though it can serve only as an approximation to understanding of the logic at work behind particular approaches and theories.

## The roots of classical modernism

### *Early forerunners*

The earliest scholars of nationalism were in fact happy to conflate these issues, mingling an evolutionary account of the development of nations with a degree of voluntarism, and a prescription for political activism with a sense of the long-term ethno-cultural roots of nations. Michelet, for example, viewed the nation as the best defence for individual liberty in the era of fraternity. The French Revolution had ushered in a Rousseauian religion of patriotism, of 'Man fraternising in the presence of God', with France, 'the common child of nations', surrounded by sympathetic countries like Italy, Poland and Ireland, whose nationalisms belonged to Mazzini's Young Europe movement. At the same time, he shared the naturalist assumption of Sieyès and others for whom nations existed outside the social and legal bond, in nature.<sup>1</sup>

For Lord Acton, on the other hand, the central question is ethical: the extent to which the (French) theory of national unity 'makes the nation a source of despotism and revolution', whereas the libertarian (English) theory of nationality harks back to the Glorious Revolution of 1688 and regards the nation 'as the bulwark of self-government, and the foremost limit to the excessive power of the State'. For Acton, the continental idealist view of

nationality does not aim at either liberty or prosperity, both of which it sacrifices to the imperative necessity of making the nation the mould and measure of the State. Its course will be marked with material as well as moral ruin, in order that a new invention may prevail over the works of God and the interests of mankind.

(Acton 1948:166–95)

Acton's conservative analysis nevertheless vindicates multinational empires, like the Habsburg, on the ground that, unlike the national state, it can 'satisfy different races'. His general commitment to diversity is not unlike that of Moser and Herder; and his belief in liberty he shares with John Stuart Mill who argued for the right of national self-determination and collective voluntarism.<sup>2</sup>

Perhaps the most influential of these early analyses was that contained in a lecture of 1882 by Ernest Renan, which he delivered to counter the militarist nationalism of Heinrich Treitschke. Renan combines a sense of ethno-cultural formation in Europe over the *longue durée* with a belief in the active political commitment of members of the nation. Renan starts with a contrast that is to

have a long history: between the fusion of 'races' in the nations of Western Europe, and the retention of ethnic distinctiveness in Eastern Europe. In France, by the tenth century, the idea of any difference in race between Gallic and Frankish populations had disappeared; what counts today are the shared experiences and common memories (and forgettings) of the members, which makes the nation

a soul, a spiritual principle.... A nation is a great solidarity, created by the sentiment of the sacrifices which have been made and of those which one is disposed to make in the future. It presupposes a past; but it resumes itself in the present by a tangible fact: the consent, the clearly expressed desire to continue life in common. The existence of a nation is a plebiscite of every day, as the existence of the individual is a perpetual affirmation of life.

(Renan 1882, cited in Kohn 1955:135–40)

In these early commentaries on the principle of nationality, written with specific political developments in mind, there is no attempt to fashion a general theory applicable to all cases, or to resolve the antinomies of each issue in a coherent and systematic manner. This was left to the next generation. By the late nineteenth century, when the concept of 'nation' was often used interchangeably with that of 'race', more comprehensive and reductionist schemes emerged. The racist schema of biological struggle for mastery of organic racial nations was only one, albeit the most striking and influential. Even the Marxists were not immune, despite their official instrumentalist attitude to nationalism. In judging nationalisms by their revolutionary uses, Marx and Engels had also been swayed by their German Romantic and Hegelian inheritance, with its stress on the importance of language and political history for creating nation-states and their animus against small, history-less, as well as backward, nations. Their followers took over this contempt for the 'unhistorical nations', thereby allowing to the concept of the nation a certain historical and sociological independence, and blurring the insistence on the dependance of nationality on the growth of capitalism and its bourgeois ruling classes.<sup>3</sup>

We can see this ambivalence on all the major issues—ethical, anthropological and historical—in the work of the Austro-Marxists like Otto Bauer. On the one hand, Bauer traces the long evolution of European nationalities from their ethnic foundations and class formations into 'communities of character'; on the other hand, he and his associates believed it was possible to influence the course of national (and international) evolution by active political intervention which would separate the principle of cultural nationality from territorial location and political rights. In this conception, the principle of nationality is both an absolute and a proximate value, both an evolved ethno-cultural community and a class-constructed social category. By organising nations within a wider multinational state, it would be possible both to preserve their unique historical character and also ensure that they contributed to wider societal integration and the realisation of social freedom and abundance.<sup>4</sup>

Even among the nationalists themselves, we find the same permutations and inconsistencies. Some, it is true, followed the principles of German Romanticism to their conclusion and became full-blooded organicists, believing in the seamless, immemorial and even biological character of nations. Others were less consistent, believing with Mazzini that, though geography, history, ethnic descent, language and religion might determine much of the character and situation of the nation, political action and the mobilisation of the people were essential if the nation was to be 'reawakened' and recalled to its sacred mission. From an early period, these dilemmas of evolution and intervention, of 'structure' and 'agency', were as acute for nationalists as they were for communists.<sup>5</sup>

### ***Intellectual foundations***

It is during this period, at the turn of the twentieth century, that we can discern the intellectual foundations of the classical modernist paradigm of nationalism. Broadly speaking, there were four major streams of influence: Marxism, crowd psychology, Weberian and Durkheimian. I shall deal briefly with the contribution of each to the formulation of a coherent modernist approach to the understanding of nations and nationalism.

- 1 It is important to stress at the outset that none of these traditions were concerned more than peripherally with the analysis of nations or nationalism. In the case of the Marxist tradition, this might be ascribed to the early period in which the founding fathers wrote; though in the world of 1848, nationalism was already a powerful, if limited, force in Europe. This lack of concern must rather be attributed to the conscious decision on the part of both the founders and their followers, in reacting against German idealism, to relegate environmental and cultural influences to the background, and concentrate on the explication of the role of economic and class factors in the evolution of humanity. This in turn meant that, in relation to the explanatory role attributed to class conflict and to the contradictions in the mode of production in the successive stages of historical development, ethnic and national principles and phenomena had to be accorded a secondary or even derivative role, becoming at most catalysts or contributory (or complicating) rather than major causal factors. There was also a crucial ethical consideration. Given the inbuilt propensity of human evolution to self-transcendence through stages of political revolution, and given the fundamental role of class conflict in generating revolution, there was no place for any other factor, especially one that might impede or divert from the 'movement of history', except insofar as it might contribute to hastening that movement in specific instances. It was in these circumstances that Marxists identified particular nationalist movements in strategic terms, judging their 'progressive' or 'regressive' character in relation to a given revolutionary situation. It was from this perspective that Marx and Engels passed favourable judgments on Polish and Irish nationalism, as they were

likely to weaken Tsarist feudal absolutism and British capitalism respectively and hasten the next stage of historical evolution; whereas nationalist movements among the 'backward' small nations of the western and southern Slavs could only evoke their contempt or disapproval, as they were judged likely to divert the bourgeoisie or proletariat from their historic task in the evolution of Europe (Cummins 1980; Connor 1984).

Neither Marx nor Engels, Lenin nor Stalin, Luxemburg nor Kautsky, endeavoured to present a theory or model of nations and nationalism *per se*, not only because these phenomena were viewed with suspicion, if not outright hostility, even by those who conceded their political significance, but because the 'science' with which they were concerned was intimately linked to a specific worldview and political strategy that sought to reduce all phenomena, at the explanatory level at least, to their economic basis, deriving cultural and political identities and movements from the class alignments thrown up by a specific stage in the development of the mode of production. It was in this context that the 'formalism' associated with Marxist analysis became prominent: the idea that nations provided the forms and vessels, while class formations and their ideologies provided the content and ends to which the next stage of history aspired. This type of reductive reasoning has left a strong imprint on some latterday approaches to the study of nationalism, even where the theorists no longer accept the worldview and strategy in which it was embedded, and even when they eschew the cruder forms of economic reductionism and ideological formalism found in some of Marx's followers.<sup>6</sup>

Equally important for the legacy of the early Marxist tradition has been its historical and global emphasis, and its Eurocentric bias. For Marx, Engels, Lenin and their followers, nations and nationalism were intrinsic to the development of the modern capitalist era. They were to be understood as manifestations both of European capitalism's need for ever larger territorial markets and trading blocs, and of the growing distance between the modern capitalist state and bourgeois civil society and the levelling of all intermediate bodies between state and citizen characteristic of advanced absolutism. Of course, these themes were not confined to Marxists, and they remained relatively undeveloped in the early Marxist corpus. But it is fair to say that with the rediscovery of the early Marx's writings and their debt to Hegel and the Left Hegelians, they assumed a new importance at the very moment when a significant number of scholars were increasingly turning their attention to the theory of nationalism. Similarly, the current interest in the concept of 'globalisation' which can in part be traced to Marxist concerns with the development of late capitalism, has been increasingly linked to the role of nation-states and nationalism in advanced industrial society and as such reasserts the Western and modernist bias characteristic of the Marxist tradition (Davis 1967; Avineri 1968; Nairn 1977).

- 2 The influence of the second tradition of crowd psychology and Freud's later social psychological work has been more pervasive but also more

limited. It would be difficult to point to particular theorists of national identity and nationalism who have made explicit use of the crowd psychology of Le Bon or the herd instinct of Trotter, or even of the analyses of Simmel, Mead, Adorno and the later theories of Freud—despite the work of Leonard Doob or Morton Grodzins. On the other hand, many of their insights have permeated the thinking of recent scholars of nationalism. Perhaps the most obvious case is that of Kedourie's portrait of the social psychology of restless, alienated youth resentful of parental traditions and the humiliations of authority. But we can also discern the influence of an earlier crowd psychology in some of the functionalist analyses of mass-mobilising nationalism as a 'political religion' in the work of David Apter, Lucian Pye and Leonard Binder, and of crowd behaviour in social movements in the work of Neil Smelser. There is also a measure of influence exerted by the later Freud, as well as Mead and Simmel, in recent theories that emphasise the role of significant Others in the formation of national identities and the oppositional framework of inclusion and exclusion in nationalism.<sup>7</sup>

What these approaches have in common is a belief in the dislocating nature of modernity, its disorientation of the individual and its capacity for disrupting the stability of traditional sources of support. It is in these respects that the influence of certain kinds of earlier social psychology contributed to the overall picture of nations and nationalism presented by classical modernism. More generally, social psychological assumptions drawn from a variety of sources can be found in the most unexpected places—among social anthropologists and sociologists as well as historians and political scientists—but these are not confined to those who adhere to the modernist framework (see Brown 1994).

- 3 The third major influence derives from the work of Max Weber. Strongly imbued with the prevailing tide of German nationalism, Weber never managed to produce the study of the rise of the nation-state which he intended to write; yet his writings contain a number of themes that were to become central both to classical modernism and its subsequent development. These included the importance of political memories, the role of intellectuals in preserving the 'irreplaceable culture values' of a nation, and the importance of nation-states in the rise of the special character of the modern West. But what has most marked out the Weberian path of analysis is its emphasis on the role of political action, both generally in the formation of ethnic groups and specifically in the evolution of modern European nations. Weber cannot himself be categorised as a modernist, although when he writes about nations and nationalism, he has in mind mostly contemporary European examples; yet his influence has helped to legitimise the more political versions of the modernist paradigm (see Weber 1948:171–9, 448, note 6; A.D.Smith 1983b; Guibernau 1996: ch. 1)

Insofar as Weber's huge corpus of writings touches on issues of ethnic identity and nationalism, it ranges far and wide in time and place. This is especially true of his analysis of ethnic groups which, for Weber, are a species

of *Stände* (status group) based on the belief in common descent. Again, Weber emphasises the importance of political action and political memories: 'All history', he writes, 'shows how easily political action can give rise to the belief in blood relationship, unless gross differences of anthropological type impede it'. Examples are provided by the Swiss and the Alsatians. Of the latter, Weber writes:

This sense of community came into being by virtue of common political and, indirectly, social experiences which are highly valued by the masses as symbols of the destruction of feudalism, and the story of these events takes the place of the heroic legends of primitive peoples.

(Weber 1968:I/2, 396)

Whatever Weber's intentions, the political bias in his writings has inspired a number of latterday theorists of nation-states to emphasise the political dimensions of nationalism and especially the role of the modern Western state. In this, they receive strong support from Weber's well known definition of the nation:

A nation is a community of sentiment which would adequately manifest itself in a state of its own; hence, a nation is a community which normally tends to produce a state of its own.

(Weber 1948:176)

This quest for statehood is what distinguishes nations from other communities of solidarity, just as it is political, and especially military, action that is required to turn an ethnic group into a nation. For Weber the modern state is a rational type of association, the apogee of occidental rationalism and one of the main agencies of rationalisation in history, whereas the nation is a particular type of community and prestige group. In the modern world, both need each other: the state requires the legitimation and popular direction accorded by the nation, while the nation needs the state to protect its unique culture values against those of other communities (*ibid.*: 176; see Beetham 1974)

Indirectly, then, the elements of Weber's writings on nations and nationalism that have had greatest influence have served to support the different versions of political modernism which stress the role of power, and especially state power, in the definition of the nation and the explanation of nationalism. Latterday theorists have generally accepted the picture of occidental rationalism (if not rationalisation) that forms the background of the Weberian approach to modern politics, extending it globally and revealing its many implications for international relations and the impact of the state on civil society.<sup>8</sup>

- 4 The final source of influence on the classical modernist paradigm is probably the most important: the legacy of the Durkheimian emphasis on community.

Again, despite the fervour of his French nationalism, Durkheim wrote little on nations or nationalism until some polemical, occasional pieces during the First World War; it never figures as a theme in itself in his major works. Yet, in a sense, the idea of the nation as a moral community with its *conscience collective* is the guiding thread of his entire work, and it is made explicit in his analysis of religion and ritual in his last major book, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (Durkheim 1915; Mitchell 1931; see A.D. Smith 1983b; Guibernau 1996: ch. 1).

Much of what Durkheim has to say which bears on ethnicity and nationalism has a timeless quality about it. This is especially true of his analysis of religion as the core of moral community and his consequent belief that 'there is something eternal in religion', whatever the changes in its symbolism, because all societies feel the need to reaffirm and renew themselves periodically through collective rites and ceremonies. In this respect, he claims, there is no difference between Christian or Jewish festivals, and

a reunion of citizens commemorating the promulgation of a new moral or legal system or some great event in the national life,  
(Durkheim 1915:427)

as occurred, most memorably, during the French Revolution when

under the influence of the general enthusiasm, things purely laical in character were transformed by public opinion into sacred things: these were the Fatherland, Liberty, Reason. A religion tended to become established which had its dogmas, symbols, altars and feasts.  
(*ibid.*: 214)

While such an analysis could serve, and was indeed used, to define the role of mass-mobilising nationalism in the new states of Africa and Asia, it was another aspect of Durkheim 's theories that proved most influential for classical modernism. This was his analysis of the transition from 'mechanical' to 'organic' solidarity. Whereas in ethnic or tribal societies, argued Durkheim,

mechanical causes and impulsive forces, such as affinity of blood, attachment to the same soil, ancestral worship, community of habits, etc.

(Durkheim 1964:278)

bring men together, in modern, industrial societies these forces decline, along with tradition and the influence of the *conscience collective*, and their place is taken by the division of labour and its complementarity of roles. Population growth, increased interaction and competition, and urbanisation and social mobility, have all eroded tradition and the links with grandparents. This is exactly what has happened in the advanced industrial societies of the West.

Yet elements of the earlier 'mechanical' type of solidarity remain even in the most modern societies, above all, the cohesion and self-renewal required by every society and the sense of social dependance and individual belonging engendered by professional groups and collective rituals. Here Durkheim foreshadows the theme of ethnic revival which has become an important element in some modernist theories of nationalism (Durkheim 1964; Nisbet 1965; Giddens 1971). For classical modernists, then, Durkheim provided the framework for inserting nations and nationalism into the evolutionary logic of structural differentiation and modernisation to be found primarily in the West. What the classical modernists understood Durkheim to be saying was that modern societies required a new principle of cohesion and reintegration, after all the dislocations and strains of modernisation, and this was to be found in the idea of the nation and the mobilising power of nationalism. Yet, as we shall see, classical modernism introduced a quite different conception of the nation which amounted to a sharp break in the continuity envisaged by Durkheim's analysis.

### ***Historians and social scientists***

If the pre-1914 sociological and social psychological traditions provided the framework for the paradigm of classical modernism, the immediate impetus to its construction and much of its historical content was provided by the labours of sociologically inclined historians from the 1920s. The object of their detailed investigations was the rise and course of the nationalist ideology and its varieties; the hallmark of their studies was a sustained attempt at dispassionate analysis of the ideology. In this they were not entirely successful. The Western and European bias of their enquiries is evident in the work of the major historians of nationalism, Carlton Hayes, Hans Kohn, Frederick Hertz, Alfred Cobban, E.H. Carr, Louis Snyder and Boyd Shafer. There was also a tendency to treat nationalism as an ethical issue and the nation as an ambivalent means to nobler ends. The result was frequently to blur moral judgment with historical analysis, which was understandable, given the horrors of Nazism and the Second World War, and the general disposition to regard fascism as the logical denouement of a chauvinistic nationalism. Perhaps the best known example is Hans Kohn's influential distinction between 'Western' and 'Eastern' nationalisms—east and west of the Rhine: in the West, in England, France, America and Holland, a rational, voluntaristic version of nationalism emerged, whereas in the East, in Germany, Italy, Eastern Europe and Asia, an organic, determinist variety found fertile soil. But there are other examples: Carlton Hayes' distinctions between 'humanitarian', 'liberal', 'traditional' and 'Jacobin' (and later 'economic' and 'integral') varieties of nationalist ideology, the stages of national self-determination in the analyses of Alfred Cobban, and the early chronological typology of nationalisms espoused by Louis Snyder carry similar moralistic overtones (Hayes 1931; Snyder 1954; Kohn 1967a; Cobban 1969).<sup>9</sup>

Two aspects of these early historical analyses have been particularly important for the growth of classical modernism. The first is an increasing recourse to sociological factors, if not explanations. Again, the most obvious case is that of Hans Kohn. The pivot of his typology of Eastern and Western nationalisms is sociological: the presence or absence of a strong bourgeoisie at the moment when the ideology of nationalism was diffused to the particular area or state. States and areas with strong bourgeoisies tended to opt for a rationalist and voluntaristic version of the ideology of nationalism, which required everyone to choose a nation of belonging but did not prescribe a particular nation; whereas states and areas with weak bourgeoisies tended to spawn shrill, authoritarian nationalisms led by tiny intelligentsias who opted for organic nationalisms which prescribed the nation of belonging for each individual from birth. E.H.Carr, too, had recourse to sociological factors in delineating the successive stages of European nationalism: at first monarchical, dynastic and mercantilist, then from the late eighteenth century popular and democratic and free trading (under the financial aegis of London), and finally (from the 1890s to 1940s) the growing economic nationalism of fully socialised mass nations proliferating across Europe and plunging the continent into total war (Carr 1945; Kohn 1955; Kohn 1967a, 329–31).

The second aspect is the provision of detailed evidence for the modernity and European origins of nationalism, the ideology and movement. This is not to say that all the historians agreed on a ‘date of birth’ for nationalism. Kohn placed it in the English Revolution, Cobban opted for the late eighteenth century following the Partitions of Poland and the American Revolution, while Kedourie placed it in 1807, the date of Fichte’s *Addresses to the German Nation*. But most accepted the French Revolution as the event and period of nationalism’s first full blown manifestation, and thereby tied it firmly to the civic and democratic movements of that period in Europe. They also concentrated on charting the evolution of nationalism, the ideology and movement, within modern Europe. If they chose to look further afield, they tended to derive the later nationalisms of India, Japan, China and Indonesia, or of the Arab and African peoples, from this or that version of European nationalism, imbibed by native intellectuals in the metropolis or at home. Such analyses served to reinforce the conviction that nationalism was a manifestation of a particular *Zeitgeist*, and tied to a specifically modern and European time and place. Chronological modernism was *ipso facto* Eurocentric: the ideology that sprang to life fully fledged in the French Revolutionary Wars was fundamentally European in character as well as location. This was to have profound implications for the paradigm of classical modernism and the theory of nationalism.<sup>10</sup>

The historians in question were mainly historians of ideas and political history, and of European ideas and political history at that. It was only in the 1950s, with the acceleration of the process of decolonisation and the rise of the new states in Africa and Asia, that their work began to be supplemented and then to some extent overtaken by a spate of political science and sociological analyses of Third World anti-colonial nationalisms. It was only in the late 1950s that the

traditional predominance of historians in the study of nationalism came to an end, and the field was opened up to scholars from a variety of disciplines. This was also the moment when the classical paradigm of modernism took shape (see A.D.Smith 1992c).

### **The classical modernist paradigm of nationalism**

The 1960s, the era of Western liberalisation following economic expansion and accelerated decolonisation in Asia and Africa, also saw the widespread adoption of the model and ideal of ‘nation-building’. It was a perspective well attuned to the optimistic, heady temper of the decade, and it marks the classical expression of what I have termed the modernist paradigm of nationalism.

### ***Anti-perennialism***

Essentially, classical modernism, and especially the model of nation-building, was a reaction to the often tacit ideas and principles of an older generation of scholars of nationalism, many of whom had accepted the main premisses of the nationalist ideologies around them, even where they distanced themselves from their more extreme manifestations. This was evident in their language, which often equated the idea of ‘race’ with the concept of the nation, which saw in national characteristics the underlying principles of history, and which tended to judge international events and relations in terms of national actors and overriding national interests. Behind these views stood a perspective that viewed nations as the basic communities of history, at once ancient and immemorial, and that regarded national sentiments and consciousness as fundamental elements of historical phenomena and their main explanatory principles. We may term this the ‘perennialist’ perspective. Many a popular history in Britain, France, Germany and other countries accepted the spirit of this perspective and retold the story of the nation in terms of its rude beginnings, early migrations, golden ages of saints and heroes, its vicissitudes and servitudes, its decline and rebirth, and its glorious future. More serious historians were content to recount the activities of national leaders and aristocracies in antiquity and the medieval era, thereby demonstrating the centrality and durability of the idea and manifestations of the nation in history.<sup>11</sup>

All this was challenged and dismissed by the rising tide of modernism. For these scholars, the propositions on which perennialism was based were either unverifiable or erroneous. They contended that:

- 1 nations were in no sense ancient or immemorial. This was an assumption unwarranted by any documentary evidence and as such an act of faith in the antiquity of a modern cultural collectivity;
- 2 nations were in no sense givens, let alone existing in nature or in the first time. Any such assertion was again an act of faith unsupported by any historical or sociological evidence;

- 3 many nations were in fact relatively recent, both in Europe and latterly in Africa and Asia, and this alone disproved the immemorial or primordial character of nations;
- 4 we could not, and should not, read the elements of modern nations and nationalism back into earlier, pre-modern collectivities and sentiments; this kind of 'retrospective nationalism' only served to distort our understanding of the quite different identities, communities and relations of the ancient and medieval worlds;
- 5 nations were not the product of natural, or deep rooted, historical forces, but rather of recent historical developments and of the rational, planned activity made possible and necessary by the conditions of the modern era.

This was a decidedly anti-historicist and rationalist critique. It viewed with suspicion all genetic explanations and substituted a functionalist analysis of the place of nations in history and the role of nationalism in the modern world. It was also markedly optimistic in tone and activist in spirit, arguing that nationalism created nations and that the activities of national elites served to promote the needs of social and political development. Hence the model of nation-building, at once structural and interventionist, with state elites assigned the key role of constructing the edifice of the nation-to-be along rational, civic lines.

The activist, interventionist character of classical modernism accounts for the way in which it construes the older perennialism. Generally speaking, it tends to treat the nation as not only perennial but also 'primordial' in character. Classical modernism was bitterly opposed to what it saw as the naturalism and essentialism inherent in the older perspectives, the belief that nations are elements of nature, existing before time, and that we possess a nationality in the same way as we have eyes and speech, a view that it regarded as responsible for the extremist emotions and mass following of nationalism. It therefore regarded any idea that any particular nation or nations in general might have deep historical 'roots' as part of the naturalistic and genetic fallacy.<sup>12</sup>

It was equally opposed to the non-rational and passive character of perennialism. If nations are 'essences' and elements of nature, and if individuals belong to this or that nation from birth and are stamped with its being throughout their existence, then nationalism of whatever hue is simply the non-rational expression of the nation and individuals are passive exemplars of its essence. Nationalism can never on this view be a rational strategy employed by individuals for their individual or collective interests, nor an expression of deliberate choice and judgment. Such a view conflicted sharply with the activist and auto-emancipatory spirit of the postwar epoch.

### ***Nation-building***

In contrast, the main tenets of the modernist paradigm, and especially of its classical nation-building model, stressed the political nature of nations and the

active role of citizens and leaders in their construction. Broadly speaking, the theorists of nation-building contended that:

- 1 nations were essentially territorial political communities. They were sovereign, limited and cohesive communities of legally equal citizens, and they were conjoined with modern states to form what we call unitary 'nation-states';
- 2 nations constituted the primary political bond and the chief loyalty of their members. Other ties of gender, region, family, class and religion—had to be subordinated to the overriding allegiance of the citizen to his or her nation-state, and this was desirable because it gave form and substance to the ideals of democratic civic participation;
- 3 nations were the main political actors in the international arena. They were real sociological communities disposing of the political weight of the world's populations and the sole legitimating and coordinating principle of inter-state relations and activity;
- 4 nations were the constructs of their citizens, and notably of their leaders and elites, and were built up through a variety of processes and institutions. The key to the success of nations was balanced and comprehensive institutionalisation of roles, expectations and values, and the creation of an infrastructure of social communications—transport, bureaucracy, language, education, the media, political parties, etc.;
- 5 nations were the sole framework, vehicle and beneficiary of social and political development, the only instrument for assuring the needs of all citizens in the production and distribution of resources and the only means of assuring sustainable development. This was because only national loyalty and nationalist ideology could mobilise the masses for the commitment, dedication and self-sacrifice required by modernisation with all its strains and dislocations.

For their examples, the theorists of nation-building had no need to look further than the contemporary processes of decolonisation in Asia and Africa. There they could witness the efforts of nationalist leaders to 'build' nations by creating effective institutions which would express the norms of a civic nation, aggregate the interests of its citizens and enable them to translate their needs and ideals into effective policies. These so-called 'state-nations' (territorial states attempting to create cohesive nations out of heterogeneous ethnic populations) testified to the importance of 'nation-building', revealing the limitations of territorial sovereignty and pointing the way forward through the mobilisation and participation of an active citizenry (see Deutsch and Foltz 1963).<sup>13</sup>

The theorists who subscribed to the classical modernist paradigm, and especially to the model of nation-building—notably Deutsch, Foltz, Lerner, Eisenstadt, Apter, Almond, Pye, Bendix and Binder—differed over the particular elements which were crucial for modernisation and nation-building. Some stressed the role of social mobilisation and social communication, others of mobility and

empathy, still others of interest aggregation, political religion and systems of mass mobilisation. But each subscribed to the idea, and ideal, of the nation as a mass participant political culture and as a popular civic-territorial community, into which, as Bendix's work in particular demonstrated, ever wider strata of the territorial population were drawn through processes of employment, mass education and citizenship. This emphasis on civic participation was indicative of the modernism of their outlook. For it was only in a 'modern', i.e. both recent and industrial-bureaucratic, era that a high level of political participation by the masses was possible; and so it was only in the modern era that nations could flourish and become the sole political actors and units of government. The modern era was the first era in which self-government of the people could be conceived and achieved (see Bendix 1996).<sup>14</sup>

Equally important, this was the first era in which self-government was essential. It was necessary because the nation was the ideal agent and framework for social development, and the modern era was the first era in which sustained social development could take place. This in turn implied that nations, and nation-building, were functional for social development. In a non-developmental era, there was no need, no room, for nations. On the contrary: traditional religions acted as barriers to the formation of both nations and the desire for social change and development. With the erosion of traditional religions and the rise of nations, national self-government was the only way to harness the social and political resources necessary for social development. Hence the first aim of nation-building must be to secure the independence necessary for citizens to participate in political decisions and govern themselves. Without independence, as Engels had realised long before, there could be no sustained economic development, because there could be no real commitment and self-sacrifice demanded of those who were not masters of their own destinies (Davis 1967).

### ***Modernism and perennialism***

Behind this immediate model stood the larger paradigm of classical modernism. Broadly speaking, it contended that:

- 1 nations were wholly modern—modern in the sense of being recent, i.e. since the French Revolution, and in the sense that the components of the nation were novel, i.e. part of the new age of modernity, and so modern by definition;
- 2 nations were the product of modernity, i.e. their elements were not only recent and novel, but also could only emerge, and had to emerge, through processes of 'modernisation', the rise of modern conditions and modernising policies;
- 3 nations were therefore not deeply rooted in history, but were inevitable consequences of the revolutions that constituted modernity and as such tied to their features and conditions, with the result that, once these features

- and conditions were transformed, nations would gradually wither away or be superseded;
- 4 nationalism likewise was embedded in modernity, or more accurately, in the processes of modernisation and the transition to a modern order, so that when these processes were completed, nationalism too would wane and disappear;
  - 5 nations and nationalisms were social constructs and cultural creations of modernity, designed for an age of revolutions and mass mobilisation, and central to the attempts to control these processes of rapid social change.

In its pure form, the paradigm of classical modernism can be regarded as the polar opposite to the older perennialist assumptions and ideas which regarded nations as more or less persistent and recurrent phenomena of all epochs and continents. Modernism objected to the assumptions of naturalism and immemorialism held by the older generation of scholars on political as well as intellectual grounds. They regarded both fallacies as pernicious influences on the public mind, and in varying degrees responsible for the catalogue of wars and atrocities that had engulfed Europe and the world in the twentieth century. They systematically opposed the assumptions which underlay perennialist accounts of the role of nations in history, and sought to demystify national identity and counteract the claims of nationalism by revealing its inherent absurdity as well as its historical shallowness.

If we follow through the assumptions and claims of perennialists and modernists, we discover a series of recurrent dichotomies, which can be summarised as follows:

- 1 For the perennialists, the nation is a politicised ethno-cultural community, a community of common ancestry that stakes a claim to political recognition on that basis. For the modernists the nation is a territorialised political community, a civic community of legally equal citizens in a particular territory;
- 2 For perennialists, the nation is persistent and immemorial, with a history stretching back centuries, if not millennia. For modernists, the nation is both recent and novel, a product of wholly modern and recent conditions, and therefore unknown in pre-modern eras;
- 3 For perennialists, the nation is 'rooted' in place and time; it is embedded in a historic homeland. For modernists, the nation is a creation. It is consciously and deliberately 'built' by its members, or segments thereof.
- 4 For perennialists, the nation is a popular or demotic community, a community of 'the people' and mirroring their needs and aspirations. For modernists, it is consciously constructed by elites, who seek to influence the emotions of the masses to achieve their goals.
- 5 For perennialists, belonging to a nation means possessing certain qualities. It is a state of being. For modernists, it means possessing certain resources. It is a capacity for doing.

- 6 For perennialists, nations are seamless wholes, with a single will and character. For modernists, nations are typically riven and divided into a number of (regional, class, gender, religious, etc.) social groups, each with their own interests and needs.
- 7 For perennialists, the underlying principles of the nation are those of ancestral ties and authentic culture. For modernists, the principles of national solidarity are to be found in social communication and citizenship.

These dichotomies can be summarised as follows:

*Attributes of the nation according to perennialists and modernists*

| <b>Perennialism</b> |               | <b>Modernism</b>    |
|---------------------|---------------|---------------------|
|                     | The nation as |                     |
| Cultural community  |               | Political community |
| Immemorial          |               | Modern              |
| Rooted              |               | Created             |
| Organic             |               | Mechanical          |
| Seamless            |               | Divided             |
| Quality             |               | Resource            |
| Popular             |               | Elite-construct     |
| Ancestrally-based   |               | Communication-based |

These are, of course, ideal-type dichotomies. Not all the scholars who hold in general terms to the perennialist and modernist paradigms would subscribe to all the elements of 'their' paradigm, as listed above. I have deliberately magnified the differences, to bring out some of the antagonistic underlying assumptions which can, and have, been made about nations and nationalism. In fact, a number of theorists have evolved permutations which cross the lines of these paradigms, combining elements from both paradigms in often unexpected ways.

One should add that nationalists themselves, perhaps not unexpectedly, have wanted to have things both ways: seeing the nation as organic and rooted in history and territory, but at the same time as created and engineered by nationalist elites. This is not just opportunism. Nationalism is itself an activist, autoemancipatory programme for the oppressed; at the same time the nation which they seek to 'reawaken' is often seen as part of nature and subject to the laws of evolution like any other organism.

There is a further and critical point. The above inventory of polar types conflates perennialism with the more radical positions of 'primordialism'. Not all perennialists would regard themselves as primordialists or accept primordialist assumptions. Many would refuse to see the nation as organic, seamless and ancestral. Instead they would simply argue from what they saw as the historical record, and regard nations as recurrent and/or persistent phenomena of all epochs and continents, but in no way part of the 'natural order'. This is a distinction to which we shall return in Part II.

From a logical standpoint, however, these dichotomies underlie many of the positions adopted by theorists of nationalism. As such, they demand clearcut choices between the polar types, or a conscious decision to combine elements of each type. In each case, the logic of these paradigms and their dichotomies requires the theorist to clarify the arguments and produce the evidence that has led him or her to adopt a particular standpoint in the debates about nations and nationalism.

The modernist paradigm, and its nation-building model, became the standard orthodoxy by the 1960s, at a time when functionalism was dominant and when even its critics stressed the role of classes, elites and leaders in the processes of modernisation and nation-building. Scholars as different in their theoretical persuasions as Elie Kedourie, J.H.Kautsky, S.N.Eisenstadt, W.C.Smith, Peter Worsley and Ernest Gellner all adhered to the modernist paradigm, and stressed the role of active participation, elite choice and social mobilisation in the building of modern nations, factors which Karl Deutsch and the communications theorists had popularised. Whatever their other theoretical and ideological differences, they all agreed that the age of nation-states was recent and modern, that modern conditions provided fertile soil for the formation of nations and that nationalism was one of the more successful ideologies of modernisation.<sup>15</sup>

In the following chapters I propose to examine in more detail the main varieties of classical modernism—sociocultural, economic, political and ideological—as they were developed during the 1970s and 1980s. In these different versions, classical modernism reached the limits of its explanatory power and heuristic utility, and ultimately exhausted its possibilities, paving the way for critical movements which carried with them the potential for its dissolution.