8 Ethno-symbolism

In the writings of scholars on nations and nationalism, three antinomies are frequently proposed: the 'essence' of the nation as opposed to its constructed quality; the antiquity of the nation versus its purely modern appearance; and the cultural basis of nationalism contrasted with its political aspirations and goals. These antinomies are built into both the theories of scholars and the historical scholarship and political activities of nationalists themselves; and it is well to recall how deeply nationalist formulations (which themselves are quite varied) have influenced the development of historical analysis of nations and nationalism, and through the historians the whole range of theories that we have been exploring.

As far as the historians are concerned, a great debate has raged over the second and third antinomies, the antiquity of nations and the nature of nationalism in the Middle Ages (and indeed in general), a debate that harks back to the conflicting views of Heinrich Treitschke and Ernest Renan over the origins and nature of nations, and of the German and French nations respectively. By the early twentieth century, the lines of division between the 'objectivists' who stressed the role of culture, and more especially language, in the definition and formation of nations, and the 'subjectivists' for whom nations are formed by popular will and political action, were well entrenched in European historiography. One consequence of this debate was that for the 'objectivists', nations and national sentiment could be found as far back as the tenth century, whereas for 'subjectivists' both were products of the eighteenth century (Renan 1882; Tipton 1972; Guenée 1985:216–20; Guibernau 1996: ch. 1).

'Old, continuous' nations

The debate has its more recent echoes. While most historians would accept that national*ism*, the ideology and movement in general, was a modern phenomenon dating at the earliest to the late eighteenth century, there remain important divisions over the antiquity of nations and the nature of national sentiment. For many historians, national sentiment and nations can already be found as far back as the sixteenth century. Indeed, Liah Greenfeld's massive study presents

a wealth of literary evidence of the period to make a cogent case for the first manifestation of national sentiment and the nation in England in the early sixteenth century—in fact, somewhat earlier than Hans Kohn had argued for English nationalism. It is clear from her detailed and wide-ranging account that 'nationalism' signifies 'national sentiment' rather than 'nationalist ideology', although by the early seventeenth century, with its return to Old Testament ideals of chosenness and its development of a Protestant martyrology, English national sentiment had become political in content and turned to outright nationalist ideology couched in religious language. Theoretically, Greenfeld argues that we can only speak of nationalism when significant segments of the population come to identify the 'nation' with the 'people', that is the whole population of the realm, and it was in early sixteenth-century England, she claims, that the fusion took place for the first time, and the totality of the population was defined as the 'nation' (Kohn 1940; Greenfeld 1992: introduction and ch. 1).[1]

The Henrician Reformation is certainly an important moment in the evolution of national sentiment and political ideology in England, but for medieval historians like John Gillingham and Adrian Hastings, it is not clear why it should be preferred to an earlier period like the fourteenth century, when English became prevalent in administration and law, or even late Anglo-Saxon England, when an early nation-state with a common religion, vernacular language, administration and compact territory came into being. While we are unable to find explicit expressions of nationalism in this period, there are clear examples of an English national sentiment, such as the leading ecclesiastical writer, Aelfric, who explained in a letter to a nobleman why he had translated the *Book of Judith* into English:

> It is set down in English in our manner, as an example to you people that you should defend your land against the invading army with weapons.
> (cited in Hastings 1997:42)

Hastings argues, along with some other medieval historians, and against the modernist interpretations of Hobsbawm, Gellner and Anderson, that in England certainly, and less clearly in other West European countries, we can discern the features of nations and strong national feelings (including a similar use of terms like 'nation' to the modern sense) at least from the later medieval period. By the eleventh century, at least,

> England is seen in biblical terms, a nation to be defended as the Israel of the Old Testament was defended. One feels aware of the sense of a people, kingdom and land, something regularly called 'England' though sometimes more grandly 'Britain', holding together local loyalties.
> (Hastings 1997:42; cf. Gillingham 1992)

For Hastings, indeed, the Vulgate version of the Bible, translated into the vernacular and read regularly to the people, proved the decisive factor in the development of a sense of nationhood in the Christian West.

> The Bible, moreover, presented in Israel itself a developed model of what it means to be a nation–a unity of people, language, religion, territory, and government. Perhaps it was an almost terrifyingly monolithic ideal, productive ever after of all sorts of dangerous fantasies, but it was there, an all too obvious exemplar for Bible readers of what every other nation too might be, a mirror for national self-imagining.
>
> (Hastings 1997:18)

Hastings admits that Protestantism multiplied the effect of the Israelite model through its dissemination of vernacular translations of the Bible, as well as through the *Book of Common Prayer*.

> The impact of the two books on the intensification and re-formation of English consciousness cannot be over-emphasised.
>
> (*ibid.* 1997:58)

By the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, the many editions of the Bible, but even more the compulsory weekly church services, brought an English Protestantism to almost everyone, heightening and redirecting a long-standing English national sentiment, which came to see the English as a 'peculiar people' engaged in a long struggle for freedom, first from Catholic Spain and then from Catholic France, and as, in Milton's words, a

> Nation chosen before any other, that out of her as out of Sion should be proclaim'd and sounded forth the first tidings and trumpet of Reformation.
>
> (John Milton: *Areopagitica,* vol. II, cited in Hastings 1997:57)

By the early eighteenth century a more secularising and politicised version of this Protestant nationalism had become prevalent among the elites, although after the Union with Scotland the sense of 'Englishness' began to be conflated with, though never obscured by, ideas of a Protestant 'British' nation directed against France. Nevertheless, fully fledged *secular* political national*isms*, the first examples of Gellner's 'nationalism-in-general', a vast wave of nationalisms which for Adrian Hastings are 'said to constitute the "Age of Nationalism"' and represent 'a sort of Mark II nationalism', had to wait until the American and French Revolutions, which proclaimed the supremacy of the 'nation', conceived as a willed political union of fellow-feeling and culturally similar 'citizens' (Kohn 1967b; Newman 1987; Colley 1992: ch. 1; Hastings 1997:28).[2]

The examples of England and France have provided the litmus test of the antiquity of the concept of the nation and the nature of national sentiment, as well as of the historical continuity of particular nations. This is epitomised in

the well known distinction made by Hugh Seton-Watson between the 'old, continuous' nations and the deliberately created, new nations, those that Charles Tilly called 'nations by design'. For both historians, the distinction related mainly to the advent of political nationalise, the ideology and movement. 'Old, continuous nations' were those that existed before 1789, well before nationalist ideologies and movements demanded, and provided vehicles for, the creation of nation-states; 'new nations' were those that nationalists set out to create according to their ideological blueprints (Seton-Watson 1977:6–13; cf. Tilly 1975: Introduction and Conclusion).[3]

For Hugh Seton-Watson, the distinction is essentially European. He lists the nations that evolved gradually, and describes the process by which they were formed over several centuries:

> The old nations of Europe in 1789 were the English, Scots, French, Dutch, Castilians and Portuguese in the west; the Danes and Swedes in the north; and the Hungarians, Poles and Russians in the east.
>
> (Seton-Watson 1977:7)

> The process of formation of national identity and national consciousness among the old nations was slow and obscure. It was a spontaneous process, not willed by anyone, though there were great events which in certain cases clearly accelerated it.
>
> (*ibid.:* 8)

The new nations, on the other hand, were formed over much shorter periods, by well known leaders using the written word and modern communications. Language and linguistic politics were the main factors in creating national consciousness in modern European new nations. Economic and geographical causes were more important in the formation of overseas nations of European origin, while state boundaries imposed by imperial governments formed the matrix of ex-colonial nations in much of Asia and Africa (*ibid.:* 9).

Pre-modern nations?

Seton-Watson's narrative is impressive in its scope and the wealth of historical evidence he adduces, but it is not without its problems. Seton-Watson himself concedes the inevitability of some anachronism in singling out elements derived from the study of new nations in the formation of national consciousness of the old nations. And he admits to the impossibility of finding a 'scientific definition' of the nation, claiming that

> a nation exists when a significant number of people in a community consider themselves to form a nation, or behave as if they formed one.
>
> (*ibid.:* 5, 11)

This formulation, of course, begs the question not only of the number of people considered to be 'significant', but also of the nature of the 'community' in which they are located. In practice, it is the politically or culturally defined ethnic community that Seton-Watson has in mind, as the rest of his great book demonstrates; where this is absent, as in much of Asia and Africa, the 'nation' to be created is an imposition of European ideas through imperial state institutions.

There is a basic problem with this kind of continuous perennialism. As Susan Reynolds points out, there is the temptation to read back into the formation of the 'old' nations the assumptions of modern nationalism, and in particular the idea that 'nations are objective realities, existing through history'. This tends to promote a ideological emphasis on the 'predestined nation-states'. As Reynolds notes:

> A more fundamental distortion arises from the fact that belief in the objective reality of nations inevitably diverts attention from itself: since the nation exists, belief in it is seen not as a political theory but as a mere recognition of fact. The history of nationalism becomes less a part of the history of political thought than of historical geography, while the starting-point of political development becomes the nation, with its national character or national characteristics. This pre-existing nation is then seen as moving through the attainment of 'national consciousness' to find its own rightful boundaries in the nation-state.
>
> (S.Reynolds 1984:251, 252–3)

It is from this standpoint that Susan Reynolds takes issue with the ideological framework of historians like Seton-Watson for whom

> The long process by which in Europe sovereign states arose and nations were formed has its origins in the collapse of the Roman empire, the attempts to revive an imperial power, the slow decay of the revival, and the still slower withering away of its mythology.
>
> (Seton-Watson 1977:15)

According to Reynolds, this kind of perspective prevents us from appreciating the ideas and sentiments of the early (or later) Middle Ages for what they were in themselves, without imposing a retrospective relationship

> between the medieval 'people' and its kingdom on the one hand and the modern 'nation' and its state on the other.
>
> (S.Reynolds 1984:253)

To avoid confusion, Susan Reynolds proposes to use the adjective 'regnal' in place of 'national', since the medieval kingdom

> corresponded to a 'people' *(gens, natio, populus),* which was assumed to be a natural, inherited community of tradition, custom, law and descent.
>
> (*ibid.*: 250)

By about 900, the idea of peoples as communities of custom, descent and government was well entrenched. Soon it became attached to the highest form of medieval government, the kingdom, and was provided with supporting genealogies and myths of origin, which were often traced back to Aeneas or Noah by writers from Isidore of Seville in the seventh century to Fredegar, Orderic Vitalis and Geoffrey of Monmouth, right up to the authors of the Declaration of Arbroath in 1320 (S.Reynolds 1983).[4]

This suggests that, in the medieval West at any rate, a *regnal* consciousness, which married ideas of kinship and custom with royal government, defined the 'peoples' of the area; and, though Reynolds regards the term 'ethnic' as nearly always combining 'connotations of both descent and culture' (and is therefore akin to 'racial'), her own idea of a 'people' *(gens)* as a community having beliefs of common descent, custom and law, associated with the residents of a particular territory, is fairly close to the perennialist's view of recurrent subjective ethnicity— although it is, in her case, clearly differentiated from modern nations and nationalism. For, like Connor and Grosby, Reynolds' analysis focuses on popular ideas, beliefs and perceptions of the participants, rather than on the analyst's view of the referents of those ideas, perceptions and beliefs (*ibid.*: 255, esp. note 8; 256–9).[5]

This still leaves open the question of whether we can speak of a measure of continuity between medieval (or ancient) ethnic or regnal formations and modern nations, in at least some cases. For organic nationalists, of course, the quest for 'our true ancestors' was essential to the cause of the nation. Even voluntarist political nationalists looked for some kind of ideological affinity with an ancient and preferably renowned exemplar, as the French *patriots* harked back to Roman virtue and glory, as well as their 'Gallic ancestors' (Rosenblum 1967: ch. 2; Herbert 1972; Poliakov 1974, ch. 1; cf. Viroli 1995).

But this kind of organic assumption has come in for sharp criticism. Lesley Johnson, who applies the Andersonian view of the nation as an imagined political community to the medieval world, cites a popular example from the introduction to an exhibition catalogue on the Anglo-Saxons, *The Making of England,* where the author argues that 'The Anglo-Saxons…were the true ancestors of the English of today.' The search for 'true ancestors' of the nation is part of the nationalist heritage and its concern for cultural authenticity. As such, it tends to assume what has to be proved, and posits a historical continuity which, given the silences and complexities of the historical evidence, is at best problematic (Johnson 1995).[6]

It is, of course, possible to find historical examples where a strong case for some measure of continuity between pre-existing ethnic communities *(ethnies)* and modern nations can be made. This is particularly true of peoples whose identities have been shaped and 'carried' by a scriptural religion, the Armenians

and Jews being the outstanding, but by no means the only, examples. At the same time, as John Hutchinson remarks:

> The point here is that one cannot deduce from the prior existence of *ethnie* that they necessarily have any causal status in the formation of modern national societies. To do so without empirical examination is to make uncritical assumptions about continuities between premodern ethnic and modern national identities and to fall into the *post hoc propter hoc* fallacy.
>
> (Hutchinson 1994:26)

What is needed, then, is more hard evidence of links–social, cultural and political–between medieval regnal or ethnic formations and modern nations. In the nature of things, such evidence is often difficult to obtain, especially if it is stipulated that both ethnicity and nationhood *must* be mass phenomena, and that in the medieval world, the peasants must therefore be aware of their ethnic and regnal ties, if we are to grant the existence of ethnic communities or nations.

But this is exactly what medievalists refuse to countenance. Hastings, for example, argues that

> one cannot say that for a nation to exist it is necessary that everyone within it should want it to exist or have full consciousness that it does exist; only that many people beyond government circles or a small ruling class should consistently believe in it.
>
> Equally it does not invalidate the existence of a nation in early modern Europe that many of the peasantry had little sense of being part of it. But, of course, if a specific society was overwhelmingly one of peasants and nobles only, then that might indeed be a decisive difficulty.
>
> (Hastings 1997:26)

As against Connor, Gellner and Hobsbawm, Adrian Hastings cites France as a case of a nation centred on Paris long before most of the peasants could speak French or have some sense of being French, as described by Eugène Weber, and therefore, like England, largely preceding 'its' nationalism (*ibid.*: 26–7). For Hastings, this is a crucial aspect of the 'historiographical schism' between modernists like Hobsbawm, Gellner, Kedourie, Breuilly and Anderson, and their critics, because 'the key issue at the heart of our schism lies in the date of commencement' (sc. of nations and nationalism) (*ibid.:* 9). It is equally, of course, a sociological and political schism, and the vital issue of 'commencement' takes us back to rival definitions of the nation and of nationalism. It is one to which I shall return.

For the moment, I want to focus on the third antinomy, the contrast between the cultural basis and political goals of nationalism, because it throws a different light on both the nature and the antiquity of nations.

Cultural and political nationalism

For Susan Reynolds, the conjunction of *regnum* and 'people' meant that medieval 'regnalism' was always both political and cultural in content. This refutes the common idea that modern nationalism is simply the later politicisation of purely cultural or ethnic sentiments in pre-modern periods, and that the distinctive feature of modern nations is their sovereignty as mass political communities. The Middle Ages were full of loose but politically independent communities or 'peoples', each with its own ruler. It also appears to refute the separation of a purely cultural from an exclusively political type of national (or regnal) sentiment. In the Middle Ages, at any rate, and perhaps also in antiquity, if Mendels is correct, no such distinction was made (Mendels 1992: ch. 1; Grosby 1991; but cf. E.Hall 1992).

In the modern world, however, such a separation is much more feasible. John Breuilly, as we saw, wished to confine the use of the term 'nationalism' to a purely political movement; and Eric Hobsbawm also argued that nationalism's only interest for the historian lay in its political aspirations, and especially its capacity for state-making (Breuilly 1993: Introduction; Hobsbawm 1990: Introduction).

But, as we saw, such a usage is unduly restrictive. It omits other important dimensions of 'nationalism' such as culture, identity and 'the homeland', and pays little attention to the character of the object of nationalist strivings, the 'nation'. The result is a serious underestimation of the scope and power of nationalism, and of its ethnic roots.

This is the point made by John Hutchinson in his pioneering and thought-provoking analysis of cultural nationalism. Hutchinson does not deny the importance of 'a political nationalism that has as its aim autonomous state institutions'. But he thinks that we cannot overlook the recurrent significance of cultural forms of nationalism; despite their much smaller scale and often transient character, we must accord due weight to 'a cultural nationalism that seeks a moral regeneration of the community' (Hutchinson 1994:41). In fact, we often find the two kinds of nationalism alternating in strength and influence; as political nationalism falters and ebbs, cultural nationalists, as it were, pick up the torch and seek to rejuvenate a frustrated and oppressed community.

What exactly is the vision of cultural nationalism and how does it differ from that of political nationalism? The latter's ideal is of

> a civic *polity* of educated citizens united by common laws and mores like the *polis* of classical antiquity.
>
> Their objectives are essentially modernist: to secure a representative state for their community so that it might participate as an equal in the developing cosmopolitan rationalist civilisation.
>
> By contrast, the cultural nationalist perceives the state as an accidental, for the essence of a nation is its distinctive civilisation, which is the product of its unique history, culture and geographical profile.
>
> (Hutchinson 1987:12–13, original emphasis)

For cultural nationalists, the nation is a primordial expression of the individuality and the creative force of nature. Like families, nations are natural solidarities; they evolve in the manner, so to speak, of organic beings and living personalities. Hence the aim of cultural nationalism is always integrative: it is a

> movement of moral regeneration which seeks to re-unite the different aspects of the nation…by returning to the creative life-principle of the nation.
>
> (*ibid.*: 14)

Hence the importance of historians who rediscover the national past and chart its destiny, and of artists who celebrate the heroes of the nation and create out of the collective experience of the people. So the small circles of cultural nationalists form clubs and societies, read poetry, edit journals and engage in rituals, and seek to promote national progress through communal self-help. If popularised by educators and journalists, cultural nationalism can spawn a

> loose network of language societies, dramatic groups, publishing houses, lending libraries, summer schools, agricultural cooperatives and political parties.
>
> (*ibid.*: 16–17)

Under the influence of Herder, this kind of cultural nationalism took root especially in Eastern Europe, for example among the Czechs and Ukrainians of the mid- to late nineteenth century. It could be found both among populations that existed only as ethnic categories, without much self-consciousness, such as the Slovaks, Slovenes and Ukrainians, who had few ethnic memories, distinctive institutions or native elites; and among well defined nations with definite borders, a self-aware population and rich memories, like the Croatians, Czechs, Hungarians and Poles; or among peoples with religious memories and institutions like the Greeks, Serbs and Bulgarians (*ibid.*: 17–18, 21–2).[7]

Hutchinson draws three conclusions from his analysis of the dynamics of cultural nationalism. The first is 'the importance of historical memory in the formation of nations'. The second is 'that there are usually competing definitions of the nation', and their competition is resolved by trial and error during interaction with other communities. And the third is 'the centrality of cultural symbols to group creation', which are only significant because 'of their power to convey an attachment to a specific historical identity' (*ibid.*: 29–30).

This does not mean that cultural nationalism is a regressive force. It may look back to a presumed glorious past, but it repudiates both traditionalism and modernism. Instead, cultural nationalists should be seen

> as moral innovators who seek by 'reviving' an ethnic historicist vision of the nation to redirect traditionalists and modernists away from conflict and

> unite them in the task of constructing an integrated distinctive and
> autonomous community, capable of competing in the modern world.
>
> > (*ibid.:* 34)

Such movements are recurrent. They continually re-emerge in times of crisis
even in advanced industrial societies, because they answer to 'a deep-seated
conflict between the worlds of religion and science'. Here Hutchinson disputes
Hans Kohn's account of the transient nature of cultural nationalism in Eastern
Europe as a response to the misalignment of ethnic and political boundaries
there and its socioeconomic backwardness. Kohn had argued that once a middle
class entered the political arena in Eastern Europe after 1848, cultural nationalism
was superseded by a 'rational' political nationalism. But this very common
assumption, echoes of which reverberate in today's debate about 'civic' and
'ethnic' nationalism, fails to acknowledge that the

> continuing hold of the historic religions suggests that there is no final
> resolution to this conflict (sc. between religion and science).
>
> > (*ibid.:* 40)

It is better, therefore, to see

> cultural and political nationalism as competing responses–communitarian
> and state-oriented–to this problem. They form typically in alternating cycles,
> each eliciting the other. Their effect…is frequently to reinforce rather than
> to attenuate religious sentiments.
> > (*ibid.:* 40–1; Hutchinson 1994: ch. 3; cf. Kohn 1967a: ch. 7)[8]

As a sociological historian, Hutchinson underpins this theory with a rich and detailed
analysis of the three national-cultural 'revivals' in modern Irish history: that of
eighteenth-century intellectuals which culminated in the founding of the Royal Irish
Academy in 1785; the romantic archaeological and literary movement of the early
nineteenth century under George Petrie which culminated in the Young Ireland
movement of Thomas Davis; and finally the much larger Gaelic revival of the 1890s
around the Gaelic League and later the journals edited by Moran, Ryan and Arthur
Griffith. Hutchinson is at pains to highlight the alternations between failed political
nationalism and resurgent cultural movements, and the reasons why the cultural
movements appealed to an intelligentsia whose mobility was blocked by professional
and occupational restrictions under British rule. For an instrumentalist concerned
with ethnic responses to state penetration, an explanation in terms of blocked mobility
and frustrated class interests might well suffice. But Hutchinson's analysis is concerned
to reveal how the interests and needs of particular classes and strata, caught between
religious tradition and modern science, are met by historicist visions which derive
from memories and symbols of Ireland's often distant past, and how these
rediscoveries could fire the disaffected youth to political action (*ibid.:* chs 4–5).
    In his later judicious discussion of the main approaches and debates in the

field, Hutchinson distances himself from the modernist positions, while approving of their role in exposing 'the anachronistic Eurocentric and national assumptions of much scholarship about the human past' and 'exploding the primordialist account' of nations and nationalism (Hutchinson 1994:37). For Hutchinson, Walker Connor's insistence on the either/or nature of collective identities is misplaced. In all ages, most people have had multiple identities and the question we need to ask is: 'do national identities become primary under certain circumstances in pre-modern periods?' (*ibid.:* 12). This means that, *pace* the modernists,

> a politicised ethnicity is neither entirely absent before the eighteenth century nor all-pervasive after it, but may be one of many identities that individuals might simultaneously adopt. There is a reluctance, therefore, to recognise that there may be *recurring* factors in the relationship between populations (e.g. military and cultural conflict) that may embed ethnicity as a political and cultural force in human history.
>
> (*ibid.:* 37, original emphasis)

If this is so, then 'the premodern structure of ethnic groups should have an important bearing on how the modern nation does form'. In other words, leaders and elites do not have the autonomy from previous ethnic traditions and cultures in their projects of nation-building that modernist instrumentalists claim for them. They are constrained by beliefs and ideas about the past and by the cultures of particular communities.[9]

For Hutchinson, then, memories and symbols play an important role in defining the nature and history of the nation, and in securing the attachment of many people to particular nations. He is rightly concerned to vindicate a separate realm for culture in the formation of nations, and argues convincingly for a distinct politics of cultural nationalism. Hutchinson is more cautious about accepting perennialist notions, perhaps because he is concerned to repudiate any form of primordialism and essentialism; his acceptance of a recurrent ethnicity throughout history is qualified. However, his historical analysis of Ireland and other nations and his emphasis on historical memory and historic religion, suggest a continual interest in the importance of the process of 'reaching back' into the ethnic past and in the revival of older cultural traditions. This implies a rejection of any idea that nations are 'invented'.

Nevertheless, it could be argued that Hutchinson does not go far enough; the movement back, from the present to the (ethnic) past, needs to be supplemented by the movement forward, from the past to the (national) present, even though that method is fraught with problems, something of which Hutchinson is acutely aware. But if we make no attempt to move forward from the past, in an open empirical manner, we risk reading the past only through the eyes of the present, as the product of the needs and preoccupations of present generations and elites. That is as unsatisfactory as to assume the converse, that the past shapes the present, thus leaving no room for rupture and innovation.[10]

Myth-symbol complexes

Reaching back into the past and moving forward from it to the present, implies a concern and a method based on a conception of long-term history. This is the starting-point of John Armstrong's monumental, path-breaking analysis of medieval Middle Eastern and European civilisations and ethnic identities, *Nations before Nationalism*. Its overall aim is to explore 'the emergence of the intense group identification that today we term a "nation"', and its basic assumption is that 'the key to the significance of the phenomena of ethnic identification is persistence rather than genesis of particular patterns'. For this reason,

> A time dimension of many centuries (similar to the *longue durée* emphasised by the *Annales* school of French historiography) is essential for disentangling independent ethnic experiences from the effects of diffusion and mimesis. An extended temporal perspective is especially important as a means of perceiving modern nationalism as part of a cycle of ethnic consciousness. Because the epoch of Absolutism that immediately preceded European nationalism involved, at least for elites, an exceptionally strong rejection of ethnic differentiation, nationalism is often seen as utterly unprecedented. A longer look suggests that widespread intense ethnic identification, although expressed in other forms, is recurrent.
>
> (Armstrong 1982:4)

Here it is quite clear that, as we saw earlier, the terms 'ethnic' and 'nation' form part of a continuum, and that what matters is not the form they take in different epochs, but the persisting group perceptions and sentiments themselves. Although pre-modern persistent group identities, whether labelled 'ethnic' or 'national', are distinguished from 'nations' after the late eighteenth century, 'where consciousness of ethnic identity became a predominant force for constituting independent political structures', the body of Armstrong's book suggests that he regards ethnicity and nationhood as continuous, even though it is ethnic identities that form the subject of his analysis.[11]

Armstrong's point of departure is ethnic exclusion, the boundary between 'us' and 'them', and the universal comparison with the 'stranger'.

> Terms like *'goyim', 'barbaroi'* and *'nemtsi'* all imply such perception of the human incompleteness of persons who could not communicate with the in-group, which constituted the only 'real men'.
>
> (*ibid.*: 5)

The universality of ethnic opposition is why John Armstrong finds Fredrik Barth's boundary approach so illuminating. Whereas previous approaches to ethnicity had started from the unique cultural traits of each group, Barth's anthropological model focused on the interactions and perceptions of members of a social group, which was no longer defined by some cultural 'essence', but rather by its self-

perceived boundaries. For Barth, ethnicity is a socially bounded type of category, and one that is both ascribed by others and self-ascribed. In Earth's own words:

> A categorical ascription is an ethnic ascription when it classifies a person in terms of his basic, most general identity, presumptively determined by his origin and background. To the extent that actors use ethnic identities to categorise themselves and others for the purposes of interaction, they form ethnic groups in this organisational sense.
>
> (Barth 1969:14)

If ethnic continuity depends on ascription and the maintenance of a social boundary, then cultural features that signal the boundary may change over time, as may the members' cultural characteristics.

> The critical focus of investigation from this point of view becomes the ethnic boundary that defines the group, not the cultural stuff it encloses.
>
> (Barth 1969:15)[12]

From Armstrong's point of view, this means that we cannot distinguish 'ethnic' from other types of group in a purely definitional manner.

> The boundary approach clearly implies that ethnicity is a bundle of shifting interactions rather than a nuclear component of social organisation.
>
> (Armstrong 1982:6)

We must also abandon the idea of every ethnic community occupying an exclusive territory; and this in turn means that ethnicity is part of a continuum of social collectivities, especially classes and religious bodies. Though certain tendencies mark out each of these types of community, over long time periods, each of these may transmute into one of the others. The dividing line between class and ethnicity is sharper, but also harder to define than that between religion and ethnicity. However, lower classes in themselves rarely constitute ethnic collectivities; they lack an elite with the necessary skills in communications and bargaining, and so are unable to maintain a distinct identity within a larger polity (*ibid.:* 6–7).

For John Armstrong, as for Barth, symbols are crucial to the survival of ethnic identification, because they act as 'border guards' distinguishing 'us' from 'them'. But symbols such as words act as signals both to others outside and to members of the group, and so symbolic interaction is always a type of communication, with symbols as the content and communication the means by which they become effective. The content of symbols, such as linguistic 'border guards', is often established generations before they act as cues to group members; that is why 'ethnic symbolic communication is communication over the *longue durée,* between the dead and the living' (*ibid.:* 8).

As important as symbols are legitimising myths. Symbols usually persist because they are incorporated in a mythic structure, and over long periods of time

> the legitimising power of individual mythic structures tend to be enhanced by fusion with other myths in a *mythomoteur* defining identity in relation to a specific polity.
>
> (*ibid.*: 8–9)

The recital of myths can engender an intense awareness among group members of their 'common fate', by which is meant the extent to which an episode

> arouses intense affect by stressing individuals' solidarity against an alien force, that is, by enhancing the salience of boundary perceptions.
>
> (*ibid.*: 9)

A framework of national emergence

Myth, symbol and communication, then, are the three major components in any attempt to analyse the persistence of ethnic identities in pre-modern periods. It is impossible, argues Armstrong, to present a single coherent theory of ethnogenesis, and more broadly, ethnic and national identity, except at a purely abstract and very general level. Instead, we can only isolate recurrent cultural, social, political and economic factors, and try to build up a picture of the patterns of influences which bear on the rise and persistence of such collective cultural identities, proceeding from the broadest and most long-term to the most circumscribed and immediate. Here I can only summarise the main points of Armstrong's argument.

Perhaps the broadest of all factors, but also the most general and hence remote, concerns different ways of life. The most striking thing here is not material attributes, but mental attitudes. Of these, the most important are different kinds of nostalgia, defined as 'a persistent image of a superior way of life in the distant past' (*ibid.*: 16). Two kinds of nostalgia for a lost 'golden age' are historically significant: nomadic attachment for the vast expanses of the desert, typified in the Arab idea of paradise as shady, watered oases with date-palms–despite Islam's urban setting– or the Central Asian ideal of luxuriant pasture with cool mountain conifers. Compare this with the European, and Christian, peasant ideal of secure, tranquil plots of earth, derived from semi-nomadic Jewish roots and the pastoral background of Indo-European peoples such as the Greeks and Romans who sought compact territorial settlements. This contrast between nomadic and sedentary lifestyles and nostalgias found its cultural counterpart in the two main principles of social organisation: the genealogical which was characteristic of the Middle East, and the territorial which was most highly developed in Europe (*ibid.*: ch. 2).

These contrasts tended to be reinforced, with some variations, by the creeds

of medieval Christendom and Islam, which provided legitimising myths and symbols for two great civilisations.

> Indeed, their common origins, as well as their geographical proximity, made the Islamic and the Christian civilisations the major negative reference points for one another. In this respect, the two civilisations resembled on a grand scale ethnic groups that commonly define themselves by reference to out-groups.
>
> (*ibid.*: 90)

Armstrong them explores the legacies of different types of city and empire and the effect of their legal systems and especially their universal myths, derived ultimately from Mesopotamian models, for the persistence of ethnic identities. As important to these empires as their economic and military power was their legitimising constitutive political myth, or *mythomoteur*. The growth of capital cities and centralised administrations has been critical to the diffusion of such *mythomoteurs* and the penetration of 'myth-symbol complexes' in wider populations.

This part of the analysis is predicated on Armstrong's belief that politics, notably state formation, was critical in ethnic evolution, though it could never be a sufficient condition, and care must be taken not to ascribe causal roles to earlier institutions that bear superficial resemblances to those familiar in our own time (*ibid.*: 129).

As important for Armstrong are religious organisations. This is especially clear in the archetypal diasporas of the Jews and Armenians, with their relatively decentralised ecclesiastical organisation, which has been as effective in penetrating the population in symbolic communication as the more hierarchical organisations of the established churches or the Islamic courts and ulema. Heretical sects and diasporas also illustrate the way in which ethnoreligious identities were as crucial for preserving ethnic identities as language (*ibid.*: ch. 7).

Indeed, the two main diaspora cases demonstrate how sacral language is separable from everyday vernaculars, and how language itself functions as a marker and symbol of ethnicity, at least within the major 'fault lines' of language groups (Slav, Latin and Germanic). Language as a definer of ethnic boundaries may therefore be regarded as a product of the interplay of other factors.

> In other words, in the long run politics and religion have been the independent variables in the linguistic interaction within each European language family. For somewhat different reasons and with considerably different effects, politics and religion also constituted the principle formative variables in Islam.
>
> (*ibid.*: 282)

In conclusion, Armstrong reiterates his belief in the centrality of myths and symbols in cultural history.

> Whatever the ultimate source of the myths, symbols and patterns of communication that constituted ethnic identity, their persistence is impressive.
>
> (*ibid.*: 283)

Armstrong sees ethnic identity as a particular affect phenomenon and a specific value conditioned by the boundary between 'us' and 'them', whereas the great religions have been the major sources of a range of values and value differentiation (*ibid.*: 291). They have also provided much of the myth-symbol content of ethnic identities in Islam and Christendom. Hence Armstrong's typological schema, entitled 'Emergence of national identity', presents a complex matrix of factors influencing the rise of national identity, in which religion and the legitimising myths and *mythomoteurs* it inspires, plays the central role.

Culture and the border

In so bald a summary, it is impossible to do justice to the scope and richness of the historical and sociological materials which John Armstrong presents in his analysis of particular themes and cases, as he compares historical patterns from the medieval Islamic and Christian civilisations. No other work attempts to bring together such a variety of evidence–administrative, legal, military, architectural, religious, linguistic, social and mythological–from which to construct a set of patterns in the slow formation of national identity. Few other works pay such attention to the importance of tracing causal chains over the *longue durée* to disentangle the multiple effects and reciprocal influence of so many factors in the persistence of ethnic identities. In doing so, Armstrong makes a strong case for grounding the emergence of modern national identities on these patterns of ethnic persistence, and especially on the long-term influence of 'myth-symbol complexes'. This represents, by implication, a powerful rebuttal of the more extreme modernist views that reject any connections between modern nations and nationalism and earlier ethnic identities.[13]

This does not mean that Armstrong has given us a complete, alternative 'grand narrative' to that of the modernists. It is indeed doubtful that he would aspire to do so. It is vain, therefore, to look to him for an alternative 'theory' of the kind that Gellner offered, or indeed for a single line of argument through his taxonomy of historical factors. For those in search of *a single* theory, that may be a criticism. For others, it is a virtue, since it sensitises us to the vast range of influences that go into the making and persistence of cultural identities, and thereby puts us on our guard against the temptation to think of ethnicity as something infinitely malleable and 'inventable'.

Nevertheless, in a sense, Armstrong has provided, if not a theory, then a definite perspective from which to judge and research the rise and persistence of both ethnic and national identities. We may regret that he has not sought to detail the differences between pre-modern ethnic and modern national identities or the part played by nationalist ideologies in those differences. This is liable to

cause confusion, and to raise questions about the influence of 'retrospective nationalism' and the danger against which Armstrong himself had cautioned, of conflating the effects of earlier collectivities which bear only superficial or very general resemblances to later ones.

There are other, more serious, problems. They spring from John Armstrong's peculiar combination of Earth's transactionalism and the phenomenological approach to social attitudes over the *longue durée*. One problem concerns the difficulty of reconciling a description of ethnic identities as 'affect phenomena', clusters of attitudes and bundles of shifting interactions, with the many examples of ethnic communities that have survived over the centuries, and even millennia. In his concern to recognise the fluctuations of attitudes and sentiments that members of ethnic groups display, Armstrong opts for a phenomenological approach which may be useful in delineating the mixed and changing ethnic identities of the modern West, but is less suited to the much slower rhythms of ethnic identification and communication in pre-modern epochs.

It is clear that other factors must be invoked in the very *definition* of ethnicity if we are to explain such long-term persistence. That definition comes near the end of Armstrong's analysis: it is myths, symbols and patterns of communication that 'constitute' ethnic identity, and it is myths, including *mythomoteurs,* that entrench sets of values and symbols over long time-spans (*ibid.:* 283). But this raises a further problem, this time for the Barthian framework which Armstrong has adopted. In fact, Barth's approach is much more 'transactional' than phenomenological; it focuses on the ways in which transactions between ascriptive categories, far from fragmenting and dissolving them, reinforce the social boundary between them. This element is rather underplayed in Armstrong's own analysis, except in relation to the Crusades and religious heresies. But, more important, Fredrik Barth's own approach suggests that ethnic identities cannot be regarded solely, or even mainly, as bundles of shifting interactions and expressions of affect alone; the ascriptive boundary creates an inter-generational as well as inter-ethnic social organisation of identification, and so is not easily subject to alteration by individuals and their attitudes.[14]

In fact, Armstrong supplies what Barth was at pains to reject: the 'cultural stuff' which the border encloses—in the form of myths, symbols and patterns of communication. The fact that these are often broadly (but not wholly) similar in neighbouring ethnic groups does not mean that the border encloses a black box or that 'culture' lacks potency. On the contrary: the myths, memories, symbols, values and patterns of communication that constitute ethnic identity constitute the distinctive elements of culture which the border encloses. This can be appreciated the moment we focus on the boundary mechanisms and ask: what does the border guard? Why is it that people within the border respond to particular signals and recognise certain myths and memories, while the same myths, symbols and memories leave those outside cold and unmoved? Even more, given the ubiquitous presence of the stranger, why is there so much variation in the scope and intensity of arousal of group members' passions?

Symbols represent to particular human groups distinctive shared experiences

and values, while myths explain to them the meanings of those experiences and exemplify and illuminate those values. If myths and symbols fail to resonate with the members of the group, it is because they do not, or no longer, perform these functions; they no longer represent, explain and exemplify. Hence they can no longer unite the members of the group, and they are correspondingly weakened and fragmented. Culture, therefore, the meanings and representations of symbols, myths, memories and values, is not some inventory of traits, or a 'stuff' enclosed by the border; culture is both an inter-generational repository and heritage, or set of traditions, and an active shaping repertoire of meanings and images, embodied in values, myths and symbols that serve to unite a group of people with shared experiences and memories, and differentiate them from outsiders. Such a conception supplements the boundary approach and suggests a fuller method for explaining ethnic persistence (see A.D.Smith 1984b).

'Dual legitimation'

If Armstrong reached forward from the distant past to the age of nationalism, my own work has taken the opposite route: working back from the modern epoch of nation-states and nationalism to the earliest manifestations of collective cultural sentiments.

   My starting-point was the ideology and movement of nationalism itself. Given the problems of definition in this field, it was necessary to observe certain methodological procedures. The first was to distinguish the various usages of the term 'nationalism', as

1   doctrines or ideologies,
2   movements,
3   sentiments, and
4   processes of 'nation-building', to which later we could add
5   symbols and languages (of nationalism).

The ideology of nationalism itself could be reduced to its essential propositions, and its main tenets summarised:

   1   the world is naturally divided into nations, each of which has its peculiar character and destiny;
   2   the nation is the source of all political power, and loyalty to it overrides all other loyalties;
   3   if they wish to be free, and to realise themselves, men must identify with and belong to a nation;
   4   global freedom and peace are functions of the liberation and security of all nations;
   5   nations can only be liberated and fulfilled in their own sovereign states.
                                                                (A.D.Smith 1973a:10)[15]

Thus we might term these propositions the 'core doctrine' of nationalism. In practice, specific nationalisms have added all kinds of secondary ideas and motifs, peculiar to the history and circumstances of each ethnic community or nation.

Next it was important to distinguish 'nationalism', the movement and ideology, from 'national sentiment', feelings on behalf of the welfare and strength of the nation, because one could have elite nationalisms without nations or widely diffused national sentiments, and vice-versa. Third, we should examine the basic ideals of the self-styled nationalists to establish a baseline for working definitions. This allowed one to define ostensively 'nationalism' as

> *an ideological movement for the attainment and maintenance of self-government and independence on behalf of a group, some of whose members conceive it to constitute an actual or potential 'nation'.*

(A.D.Smith 1983a:171)

Fourth, the 'independence ideal' of nationalism has a number of ideological correlates, including national integration and fraternity, territorial unification, economic autarchy, national expansion, cultural renewal and the accentuation of cultural individuality, and each of these can be selected as the goal of particular nationalisms at various times and in differing degrees. However, three basic leitmotifs can be found in every kind of nationalism: the ideals of national autonomy, national unity and national identity.

Finally, as a first step towards explanation, we need to distinguish different kinds of nationalist movement, and especially between voluntarist and organic varieties, and between territorially grounded and ethnically based nationalisms. Nevertheless, the three ideals of autonomy, unity and identity are always present in all these sub-types. In my view, they could even be traced in the 'ethnocentric' nationalisms of the ancient world, even though the idea of the nation tended to be submerged in other ideals, as well as in the more outward-looking 'polycentric' nationalisms of the modern world.[16]

This attempt to relate nationalism to ethnocentrism suggested a view of the 'nation', as deriving from the 'ancient social formation of the *ethnie*', where the term 'ethnic' represented those elements of a group's culture that derived from its origins and history. In accordance with its etymology, the 'nation' should therefore be defined as

> *a group of human beings, possessing common and distinctive elements of culture, a unified economic system, citizenship rights for all members, a sentiment of solidarity arising out of common experiences, and occupying a common territory.*

(A.D.Smith 1973a:18, 26)[17]

With the above important proviso, I accepted the modernity of both nations and nationalism, as befitted a student of Ernest Gellner. However, the initial sketch of the origins of ethnic nationalism which I offered stressed the role of

political and religious, rather than social and cultural, factors. It argued that the modern epoch is characterised by the rise of the 'scientific state', a state whose efficacy depends on its ability to harness science and technology for collective purposes. The advent of this type of state challenges the legitimacy of religious explanations, and especially the theodicies which they offer in response to human suffering and evil. This gives rise to situations of 'dual legitimation', in which rival grounds of authority dispute for the allegiance of humanity. Particularly affected by this duality are the modern equivalents of pre-modern clerisies, the intellectuals. Typically, they respond to the painful mental dislocations of the 'dual legitimation' situation in one of three ways. The first is 'neo-traditionalist': adopting modern ways and means to reject the authority of the secular state and reassert traditional divine authority. The second response is 'assimilationist', a kind of messianic leap into the secular future, rejecting divine authority for that of the scientific state. The final response is 'revivalist', an attempt to combine in different ways the two kinds of authority, on the basis that 'God works through the scientific state' and that, when tradition is no longer relevant, human reason and divine providence can bring material progress and spiritual salvation. In this schema, the road to a nationalist solution to the deep crisis of dual legitimation is twofold. First, the messianic assimilationists are disappointed, their mobility is blocked and they are rejected by the (Western) scientific state, so they turn back to their ethnic communities and indigenous values. Second, the religious revivalists despair of abstract reason as the essence of a purified religion, and seek in indigenous culture and ethnic 'history', the specific pasts of their ethnic communities, that 'authentic value' which traditional religion no longer possesses and the secular state by itself can never acquire. From this twofold return to an ethnic past springs the desire to determine the course of the community oneself, without outside interference, and so become a 'nation' (A.D.Smith 1983a: ch. 10; 1973a:86–95).

To this general schema, *The Ethnic Revival* (1981) attempted to add a more rounded picture of the rise of romantic historicism of which nationalism was the political outgrowth, and a fuller account of the reasons why the intellectuals, and more especially the intelligentsia, turned to nationalism as a cure for their status discontents. Basically, the continual overproduction of high-skill professionals by the scientific state and the rigidities of their line bureaucracies, coupled with the contrast between the imperialist rhetoric of impersonal merit and frequent cultural discrimination, meant that highly educated men and women were being turned away from the centres of wealth and power in increasing numbers, and were thereby made available for mobilisation by historicist intellectuals seized by their community's plight (A.D.Smith 1981a: chs 5–6). If we add die tendency for neo-romantic nationalism, of the kind that flourished in Western Europe's 'ethnic revival' of the 1960s and 1970s, to surface as the result of a bureaucratic cycle of centralisation, alienation and fragmentation, followed by a renewed cycle of centralisation and state penetration, the inevitability of the nation and nationalism in an era of bureaucratic modernity becomes assured (A.D.Smith 1979: ch. 7).

However, by the early 1980s, I came to feel that, while this analysis of alienated and deracinated indigenous intelligentsias radicalised by alien bureaucratic states helped to explain part of the phenomenon of nationalism, it signally failed to account for the broader social picture or explain the configurations of nations and the incidence and intensity of nationalisms. Its rather intellectualist analysis of the elites' movement towards nationalism, from abstract 'reason' to ethnic 'history', hardly explained the passion with which they and their followers embraced indigenous 'history' and culture. Moreover, emphasis on intellectuals and elites obscured the broad, often cross-class nature of the movement and the national attachments of middle and lower strata. Such a 'top-down' modernism failed to do justice to the constraints on elite action and the limits on intellectual 'construction' set by popular ideas and culture. Finally, by using the same term 'nationalism' for both, I had overlooked the real ideological differences between ancient religious motifs and modern political ideologies, while obscuring the possible links between ancient and modern social formations. 'Ethnocentric nationalism' did not mark out a type peculiar to pre-modern epochs, and it assumed an ideological similarity across the ages which could not be supported by historical evidence. The problem, and its resolution, lay elsewhere.[18]

Ethnies and ethno-symbolism

In effect, what was needed was an historical sociology of nations and nationalism. In terms of ideologies, the specific concepts and movements of national*ism* could be fairly securely dated to the later eighteenth century, even if there were earlier religious nationalisms in England and Holland. But in terms of national structures, sentiments and symbolism, the picture was much more complicated. It was possible to trace examples of all three, in sufficient and well documented quantities, back to at least the late medieval period in a number of European nations from England and France to Poland and Russia. Here was evidence of *some measure* of *national continuity*. But more important, it was possible to find examples of social formations in pre-modern periods, even in antiquity, that for some decades or even centuries approximated to an inclusive definition of the concept of the 'nation', notably among the ancient Jews and Armenians, but also to some extent among the ancient Egyptians, and perhaps the medieval Japanese and Koreans. In other words, the concept of the 'nation' was perennial, insofar as *recurrent instances* of this formation could be found in various periods of history and in different continents. Here, then, one could speak of *national recurrence* (see Greenfeld 1992: chs 1–3; A.D.Smith 1994; cf. Lang 1980; Lehmann 1982).

Though hardly sufficient to undermine the modernist paradigm, these examples seemed to cast doubt on Gellner's insistence on the impossibility of nations in pre-modern periods. But there was a further problem. Throughout history and in several continents, there was considerable evidence, not just of 'objective' cultural (linguistic, religious, etc.) differences and categories, but of 'subjective' ethnic identities and ethnic communities, many of them locked into

paired antagonisms. Again, one could point to both *ethnic continuity* and *ethnic recurrence.* Greeks, Armenians, Jews, Persians, Chinese and Japanese could be cited as examples of ethnic continuity, since, despite massive cultural changes over the centuries, certain key identifying components—name, language, customs, religious community and territorial association—were broadly maintained and reproduced for millennia. In other cases, such as the peoples of Ethiopia, the Fertile Crescent, northern India and the Balkans, ethnicity has been more of a recurrent phenomenon. That is to say, these regions have seen a succession of often well defined and well documented ethnic communities, with different groups forming, flourishing and being dissolved, usually through conquest, absorption or fragmentation (see Wiseman 1973; Ullendorff 1973; A.D.Smith 1981b, 1986a: chs 2–5).

In the light of these considerations, the focus of my analysis began to shift from nationalisms to nations, and from nations to ethnic communities. The study of *ethnies* (the French term for 'ethnic communities') became central to the understanding of why and where particular nations are formed, and why nationalisms, though formally alike, possess such distinctive features and contents. The focus of this analysis was the role of myths, memories, values, traditions and symbols. Already in *The Ethnic Revival,* I singled out

> the myth of a common and unique origin in time and place that is essential for the sense of ethnic community, since it marks the foundation point of the group's history, and hence its individuality.
>
> (A.D.Smith 1981a:66)

Symbols, too—emblems, hymns, festivals, habitats, customs, linguistic codes, sacred places and the like—were powerful differentiators and reminders of the unique culture and fate of the ethnic community. So were shared memories of key events and epochs in the history of the community: memories of liberation, migration, the golden age (or ages), of victories and defeats, of heroes and saints and sages. So, in *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (1986), ethnic communities *(ethnies)* were defined as

> *named human populations with shared ancestry myths, histories and cultures, having an association with a specific territory, and a sense of solidarity.*
>
> (A.D.Smith 1986a:32)

and their main components—collective name, myth of ancestry, historical memories, shared cultural elements, association with a homeland, and (partial) collective sentiments—were explored (*ibid.:* 22–32).[19]

In the ancient and medieval worlds, ethnicity played a much larger role than modernists, who rightly rejected the conflation of earlier collective cultural identities with modern nations and nationalisms, were willing to concede. There were ethnic minorities, diaspora communities, frontier *ethnies,* ethnic amphictyonies and even ethnic states, states dominated by particular ethnic

communities such as ancient Egypt or early medieval Japan. In particular, the role of ethnic cores of empires such as the Assyrian had to be distinguished from that of peripheral *ethnies,* and the chances of survival of each assessed. The problem of ethnic survival seemed particularly important for later nationalisms: the ability to call on a rich and well documented 'ethno-history' was to prove a major cultural resource for nationalists, and myths of origins, ethnic election and sacred territories, as well as memories of heroes and golden ages, were crucial to the formulation of a many-stranded ethno-history. All this points to the importance of social memory; as the example of the relationship between modern and ancient Greeks shows,

> *ethnies* are constituted, not by lines of physical descent, but by the sense of continuity, shared memory and collective destiny, i.e. by lines of cultural affinity embodied in myths, memories, symbols and values retained by a given cultural unit of population.
>
> (A.D.Smith 1991:29; cf. A.D.Smith 1992a)

This also reveals the distance between my 'historical ethno-symbolic' type of analysis and any version of primordialism. It is the sense of cultural affinities, rather than physical kinship ties, embodied in a *myth* of descent, shared historical memories and ethnic symbolism, that defines the structure of ethnic communities; and the same is true for any nations created on the basis of cultural affinity.[20]

In line with Armstrong's perspective, but without his specific phenomenological analysis, I came to see clusters of myths, symbols, memories, values and traditions, emerging from the shared experiences of several generations of cohabiting populations, as the defining cultural elements from which ethnic groups emerged. On the other hand, their crystallisation as self-aware *communities,* as opposed to other-defined ethnic *categories,* was the product of external factors such as folk cultures resulting from shared work and residence patterns; group mobilisation in periodic inter-state warfare producing memories and myths of defeat and victory; and especially the impact of organised religions with scriptures, sacred languages and communal priesthoods. From time to time, outside attacks on the homelands or customs of the community could inspire a heightened ethnicism, and a determined ethnic resistance, as occurred among some Greeks at the time of the Persian invasions or among some Jews under the hellenisation policies of the Seleucid monarch Antiochus Epiphanes IV But on the whole, ethnicity in pre-modern periods was not normally the basis of alternative polity formation, except where it combined with religion (A.D.Smith 1986a:32–41).[21]

As John Armstrong points out, this was to alter significantly in the modern world. Here the modernists make an important point. It was the revolutionary nature of the economic, administrative and cultural transformations of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Europe that brought culture and ethnic identity to the fore as a basis for polity formation. But the origins of such a

transformation can, in some cases, be traced even further back than the growth of vernacular printed literature stemming from Gutenberg and Luther's Bible. A recent study of elite Scottish identity found that the crucial moment came in the reflective aftermath of Bannockburn and the Wars with England, with the rise of a distinctive ethno-history in historical and literary writings of the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The same is true of the early formation of Swiss national identity. Its foundations in the Rütli Oath and Tell exploits were first recorded in *The White Book of Sarnen* (c. 1470) and subsequent writings. In these and other cases, we can trace the beginnings of an elite nationalism, and of the coalescence and gradual transformation of ethnic communities into early nations (Webster 1997; Im Hof 1991).[22]

Origins and types of nation

How then is this transformation effected? Basically, there are two routes in the formation of nations, and they depend on the kind of ethnic community that served as their point of departure.

Of the two kinds of pre-modern *ethnie,*

> The first is lateral and extensive, the second is vertical and intensive. In the first, we find communities that rarely penetrate deep in the social scale, but extend in ragged and imprecise fashion in space. Typically, 'lateral' *ethnie* are aristocratic, though usually clerical and scribal strata are included, along with some of the wealthier urban merchants. Equally typically, 'vertical' *ethnie* are urban-based, priestly, trading and artisan in their composition, with their ruling strata often thrown up from the wealthy and powerful factions in the towns; alternatively, they are loose coalitions of tribesmen under their clan chiefs, united for battle and later amalgamating, or co-existing with a dominant if primitive state and its monarch. In either case, the bond that unites them is of a more intensive and exclusive kind than among the lateral, aristocratic *ethnie;* hence its often marked religious, even missionary, quality.
>
> (A.D.Smith 1986a:77–8)

The first route to nationhood, that of *bureaucratic incorporation,* involves the transformation of a loose, aristocratic *ethnie* into a territorial nation. The upper-class members of most lateral *ethnies* had no interest in imbuing their middle classes, let alone their subject lower classes, with their own ethnic culture. But, perhaps because of the failure to recreate the (Holy) Roman empire in Western Europe, the ensuing competition between the various monarchs and courts of France, England and Spain forced them to mobilise their urban middle classes, if only to extract their wealth, in order to wage war and display their pomp, as Henry VIII and Francis I did so conspicuously on the Field of the Cloth of Gold. Inadvertently at first, they drew their middle classes into an increasingly accented, territorialised and politicised 'national' culture, i.e. one that, from being

a preserve of the court, the aristocracy and the clergy, became a culture of 'the people', at first identified with the urban middle classes, but some centuries later with the mass of working men and, later, women. The result has been a more 'civic' type of national identity, fuelled by a largely territorial nationalism, although assimilating ethnic and cultural elements are usually to be found in even the most ardent civic nationalisms, such as the republican nationalism in France (A.D.Smith 1995a: ch. 4; cf. Corrigan and Sayer 1985).

In these cases, it was the bureaucratic state itself which forged the nation, gradually penetrating to outlying regions from the ethnic core and down the social scale. The second route to nationhood we may term one of *vernacular mobilisation*. Here a demotic *ethnie* is transformed largely under the aegis of an indigenous intelligentsia into an ethnic nation. In Central and Eastern Europe, and later in the Middle and Far East, and parts of Africa, native intellectuals and professionals rediscovered and reappropriated a selective ethno-history out of the pre-existing myths, symbols and traditions to be found in the historical record and in the living memories of 'the people', the mainly rural lower strata. This latterday return to an 'ethnic past' (or pasts) is a corollary of the nationalist quest for 'authenticity'. Only that which can be shown to be 'genuine' and 'ours' can form the basis for a national identity, and that in turn requires a cultivation of indigenous history and vernacular languages and cultures, and the *vernacular mobilisation* of 'the people' in and through their own history and culture. The result is a type of nation founded on 'ethnic' conceptions, and fuelled by a genealogical nationalism; although even here, the nation, as in Germany or Greece, is simultaneously defined in territorial and political terms and minorities are, albeit more precariously, admitted (A.D.Smith 1989; cf. Kitromilides 1989; Brubaker 1992).

There is, in fact, a third route in the formation of nations which consist largely of immigrant fragments of other *ethnies,* particularly those from overseas. In the United States, Canada and Australia, colonist-immigrants have pioneered a providentialist frontier nationalism; and once large waves of culturally different immigrants were admitted, this has encouraged a 'plural' conception of the nation, which accepts, and even celebrates, ethnic and cultural diversity within an overarching political, legal and linguistic national identity (A.D.Smith 1995a: ch. 4; cf. Hutchinson 1994: ch. 6).

Of course, none of these routes ensures the automatic attainment of nationhood. To begin with, it depends on the degree to which the great modern revolutions of market capitalism, the bureaucratic state and secular, mass education have penetrated given areas and communities, either directly, as in the West, or through the mediation of imperialism and colonialism (A.D.Smith 1986a: 130–4). Nor should we forget the role of historical accident in specific cases of nation-formation. More generally, human agency, individual and collective, has been vital in the process of uniting *ethnies* and transforming them into nations. Kings, ministers, generals, merchants, priests, missionaries, lawyers, artists, intellectuals, educators, journalists and many others have contributed to the formation of particular nations, now more consciously and deliberately, now

unintentionally. Among these groups, modern nationalist leaders and their followers have often played a disproportionate role; as 'political archaeologists' they have furnished blueprints of the 'nation-to-be' by rediscovering an 'authentic' popular ethno-history and providing convincing narratives of historical continuity with a heroic, and preferably glorious, ethnic past. By their quest for heroic legends and poetic landscapes, the nationalists aim to provide cognitive 'maps' and public 'moralities' for the members of their nation-to-be (A.D. Smith 1986a: ch. 8; A.D.Smith 1995b; cf. Just 1989).

If nationalism is modern and shapes nations in the image of its *weltanschauung*, then nations too are the creations of modernity. But this is only half the story. Specific nations are also the product of older, often pre-modern ethnic ties and ethno-histories. Not all nations, of course. There are 'nations-in-the-making' (Tanzania, Eritrea, Libya) that are relatively recent and do not appear to be rooted in a longer ethnic past. One may ask how firmly based and secure are these colonial creations; certainly, the recent experience of other African 'state-nations' does not give grounds for optimism. But the real point is that the first and most influential examples of the concept of the 'nation' did have such pre-modern grounding, as have a great many others, and they provided the basic models, civic and ethnic, for later examples, even if the stages of attaining nationhood have been telescoped and even inverted.

The nation, then, as concept and ideal formation, is historically firmly embedded; and so, in varying degrees, are its most influential and successful exemplars. In our day, the nation has become the norm of social and political organisation, and nationalism the most ubiquitous of ideologies. Attempts to construct supra-national unions have to date failed to attract the passions and loyalties commanded by nations; even a European 'identity'

> has looked pale and shifting beside the entrenched cultures and heritages that make up its rich mosaic.
> If 'nationalism is love', to quote Michel Aflaq, a passion that demands overwhelming commitment, the abstraction of 'Europe' competes on unequal terms with the tangibility and 'rootedness' of each nation.
>
> (A.D.Smith 1995a:131)

As for the predictions of a global culture, they fail to take into account the rootedness of cultures in time and place, and the ways in which identity depends on memory. A truly non-imperial 'global culture', timeless, placeless, technical and affectively neutral, must be memory-less and hence identity-less; or fall into a postmodern pastiche of existing national cultures and so disintegrate into its component parts. To date, we cannot discern a serious rival to the nation for the affections and loyalties of most human beings (A.D.Smith 1990; 1995a: ch. 1).

Ethno-symbolism considered

On one level, this account is an empirical tautology, in that my definitions of the nation and of the *ethnie* are closely aligned. It is, then, not difficult to show nations being based on, and being created out of, pre-existing *ethnies*. At least, some nations. There is, of course, no necessity about this transformation; otherwise, nationalism and nationalists would be superfluous. But they are not. Hence, we are dealing with something more than an interesting empirical tautology. It is exactly those features of nations that *ethnies* lack—a clearly delimited territory or 'homeland', a public culture, economic unity and legal rights and duties for everyone—that make nations ultimately quite different from *ethnies,* despite the fact that both possess such features as an identifying name, myths of common origins and shared historical memories. These differences need to be kept in mind when considering the ways in which, as Hastings so clearly shows, nations transcend ethnic communities, and can in principle include more than one culture-community (Hastings 1997:25–31).

A more serious objection is that levelled at the versions of perennialism I considered in the last chapter, namely that ethno-symbolism is guilty of 'retrospective nationalism', of projecting back onto earlier social formations the features peculiar to nations and nationalisms. But this is to confuse a concern with *la longue durée* with perennialism. Armstrong may use the terminology of 'nation' for pre-modern *ethnies,* but he clearly differentiates modern nations from these earlier ethnic identities. Hutchinson reserves the term 'nation' for the modern period and, like myself, he clearly separates off a modern nationalism from pre-modern ethnic sentiments. The differences in historical context are too great to permit such retrospective generalisation. The 'family analogy' in nationalism which Connor, for example, rightly emphasises is not central to the concerns of ethno-symbolists; kinship affords too narrow a social base for larger *ethnies,* let alone nations. Rather, it is a question of tracing in the historical record the often discontinuous formation of national identities back to their pre-existing cultural foundations and ethnic ties—which is a matter for empirical investigation rather than *a priori* theorising.

A more recent criticism of my position, brought by John Breuilly, is that it assumes too close a connection between pre-modern ethnic identities and modern nations and neglects the necessary role of institutions as historical carriers of national or ethnic identities. Pre-modern ethnic identities, he argues, are essentially local and apolitical.

> The problem with identity established outside institutions, especially those institutions which can bind together people across wide social and geographical spaces, is that it is necessarily fragmentary, discontinuous and elusive.
>
> (Breuilly 1996:151)

In contrast to such kinship-based ethnic identities, only those carried by institutions like dynasties or churches could have their 'myth-symbol' complexes codified and reproduced. However, dynasties were actually threatened by modern national identities and churches were universalist. Only when their universal mission had failed did they accomodate to ethnic identities and furnish rallying-points for later movements of national autonomy. On the whole, claims Breuilly, the *discontinuities* of ethnic sentiments with 'modern national identity' are more striking. This is as true of the invention of myths, such as the epic of Ossian, as of the codification of written languages and their institutional uses in law, the polity and the economy. As long as language is simply a repository of national culture, myth and memory, it has significance only for a few self-selected cultural elites; only when it is used for legal, economic, political and educational purposes, does it have real political significance. Breuilly concludes:

> Pre-modern ethnic identity has little in the way of institutional embodiment beyond the local level. Almost all the major institutions which construct, preserve and transmit national identities, and which connect those identities to interests, are modern: parliaments, popular literature, courts, schools, labour markets, et cetera…. National identity is essentially modern, and any useful approach to the subject must begin from this premiss.
>
> (*ibid.*: 154)

That institutions are important as carriers and preservers of collective cultural identities is indisputable; if nothing else, Armstrong's monumental work demonstrates their crucial role in pre-modern epochs. But I would argue that Breuilly's understanding of such 'institutions' is narrowly modernist. It is quite true that many people in pre-modern epochs were not included in 'institutions' to the extent that they are in the modern state and its organs. But significant numbers of people in several pre-modern societies were included, going back to ancient Egypt and Sumer: in schools, for instance, in legal institutions, in temples and monasteries, sometimes even in representative political institutions, not to mention extended aristocratic families like the Alcmaeonids or the Metelli. But perhaps more important was their inclusion in linguistic codes and in popular literature, in rituals and celebrations, in trade fairs and markets, and in ethnic territories or 'homelands', not to mention the corvée and army service. Certainly, not all these 'institutions' reinforced a straightforward sense of ethnic identity, but many did. Breuilly himself concedes that

> ethnic identity does have some meaning in past times and that it can impose limits upon claims made in modern nationalism.
>
> (*ibid.*: 150)

I would add there are many more cases of vivid ethnic identities in pre-modern periods than he allows, and some of them do have 'political significance', such

as the ethnic states of hellenistic antiquity (see Tcherikover 1970; Wiseman 1973; Mendels 1992).

The question that John Breuilly, like Eric Hobsbawm, raises is whether even widespread ethnic identities can have any connection with modern nationalism. By stressing only its modern features, Breuilly necessarily widens the gap between the modern nation and pre-modern ethnicity. But the historical evidence is often contradictory; it can point to clear links with modern nationalisms, and not just because latterday nationalists sincerely believed in and needed a usable ethnic past. The basic point is the one I raised in connection with Hobsbawm's account: the 'inventions' of modern nationalists must resonate with large numbers of the designated 'co-nationals', otherwise the project will fail. If they are not perceived as 'authentic', in the sense of having meaning and resonance with 'the people' to whom they are addressed, they will fail to mobilise them for political action. Better, then, to 'rediscover' and reappropriate an ethnic past or pasts that mean something to the people in question, and so reconstruct anew an existing ethnic identity, even where it appears shadowy and ill documented.

Clearly, Breuilly has raised an important issue when he challenges ethno-symbolists to provide the historical links with the past ethnic identities and communities which they postulate as the basis for the formation of subsequent nations. There is clearly much work to be done here. But it requires a broader conception of the channels through which such identities are transmitted and transformed, and of the links which bind them to modern nations. Only then will we be able to gauge the depth of the ties that bind the members of nations and the passions which such ties can arouse. In this task, we should not dismiss the evidence provided by the intense nationalist concern with the 'heroic legends' of antiquity, and with the 'poetic spaces' of the homeland. They point us in directions which reveal the religious foundations of nationalism and the often sacred status of its concerns (see Hooson 1994; A.D.Smith 1997a, 1997b).