

Myths and Memories of the Nation

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Introduction

'Ethno-symbolism' and the Study of Nationalism

This book seeks to explore one of the central issues of our epoch, the rise of nations and the world-wide appeal of nationalism. The late twentieth century has witnessed an unexpected resurgence of ethnic conflict, and nationalism has once again become the central fact of contemporary politics. Why is it that so many people remain so deeply attached to their ethnic communities and nations at the close of the second millennium? Why do the myths, memories, and symbols of the nation command such widespread loyalty and devotion? And why are so many people still prepared to make considerable sacrifices, even of life and limb, for their nations and cultures?

As might be expected, these questions have been addressed in a variety of ways and from very different standpoints. But most of the answers have fallen into four main categories of explanation: the primordialist, the perennialist, the modernist, and the ethno-symbolic. To date, these form the major paradigms of explanation of the nature, power, and incidence of nations and nationalism. The chapters in this book exemplify the last of these paradigms, and seek to explore its many facets in a variety of thematic contexts. But, since the main concerns and aims of 'ethno-symbolism' emerged as a response to problems raised by the other major paradigms, we must first outline the theoretical context in which they emerged. I shall begin, therefore, with a brief statement of the main features and problems of the primordialist, perennialist and modernist paradigms.¹

PRIMORDIALISM AND PERENNIALISM

Early explanations of nationalism tended to be greatly influenced by organic varieties of nationalism. Nations were seen as the natural and primordial divisions of humanity, and nationalism was thought to be

ubiquitous and universal. What is now termed *primordialism* emerged from these widely accepted assumptions. For the primordialists, the key to the nature, power, and incidence of nations and nationalism lies in the rootedness of the nation in kinship, ethnicity, and the genetic bases of human existence. There are, in fact, several kinds of *primordialism*, and I shall briefly outline three of them.

The first is popular, and, as we saw, nationalist. It sees nations as elements of nature, or the divine plan, not just of history. Nations, as the Abbé Sièyes put it, 'exist in the state of nature', and as such are the ultimate source of power, will, and law. They are like natural organisms, subject to the laws of nature, forgotten and silent perhaps, but continuing to exist beneath the debris of history until the moment of their rebirth. The trouble with this nationalist view of nations and nationalism is that it offers no independent evidence of the existence of nations outside the affirmations of the nationalists, nor does it confront the incidence and consequences of migration, colonization, and intermarriage for the composition of modern nations. It also fails to explain how and why nations were forgotten, why they were so often, in Ernest Gellner's phrase, 'determined slumbers', why only some of them 'awoke', and why the nationalist awakeners emerged when and where they did.²

A second variety of primordialism stems from the recent revival of sociology. Van den Berghe (1978, 1995), for example, argues that nations and ethnic communities are really extensions of kinship units and are built up from the same nepotistic drives of *inclusive fitness* as smaller clans and families. At root, they are all attenuated collective extensions of individual genetic reproductive drives, and this is attested by our choice of cultural signs (colour, language, religion) indicating biological affinity. Thus, for van den Berghe, myths of shared descent largely correspond to real biological ancestry, because of the need for at least some generations of endogamy to forge ethnic identity. But, as Walker Connor (1994) points out, such *myths* rarely correspond to what we know of real biological descent; even apparently endogamous ethnic communities have often had mixed ancestral origins and some degree of intermarriage with other peoples in the past. Besides, it is very difficult to demonstrate that the genetic pools of families and clans can be extended through nepotism to much larger population groups such as ethnic and national communities.³

Finally, there is the familiar cultural variety of primordialism, associated with Edward Shils and Clifford Geertz. Geertz (1963), in particular, while dismissing the political significance of biological descent groups, spoke of the overwhelming power of the *primordial tie* attributed to the *givens*

of human existence, namely, congruities of blood, speech, custom, religion, and territory, *givens* that threatened to dissolve the *civil ties* of the modern state. It is important to note that Geertz speaks of *attribution* by human beings of overriding efficacy; it is *we* who feel this ineffable power and endow it with life-enhancing primordiality. Nevertheless, while the cultural approach reveals what we may well call the 'participants' primordialism 'of the community's membership—the members' own sense of the immemorial nature of their nation—as well as the centrality of symbolism in the study of ethnicity and nationalism, it does little to advance the cause of explanation. Primordialism vividly identifies the problem, but is unable to provide any solutions. (Brass 1991, chs. 1–2; cf. Grosby 1994)⁴

A similar charge can be brought against the second major paradigm, the *perennialist*. This term denotes those who hold that nations (if not nationalism) have existed throughout recorded history, but are not part of the natural order. An older generation of historians, many of them influenced by an organic version of nationalism, tended to see *nations* everywhere in the historical record, from the ancient Egyptians and Babylonians to the modern French and British, and to explain the history of humanity in terms of national alignments and conflicts. Nations, in other words, were perennial collective actors but not *natural* or *primordial*. (Walek-Czernecki 1929; Levi 1965)

Actually we need to distinguish two kinds of perennialism. The first we may call *continuous perennialism*, because it claims that particular nations have existed for centuries, if not millennia. Thus, for many earlier scholars, nations like the French, Greeks and Egyptians are immemorial or *perennial*, whereas others in Africa and Asia are more recent. The second kind of perennialism is about nations-in-general. It claims that nations come and go, emerge and dissolve, only to reappear continually in different periods and continents; and here, we may speak of a *recurrent perennialism*.⁵

Now, while it is quite possible to demonstrate in some cases a continuity of national identity going back beyond the Reformation, at least for their élites—as Adrian Hastings (1997) has done for the English, Irish, Scots and other Western nations—there is always the danger of imposing a *retrospective nationalism* onto communities and cultures whose identities and loyalties were local, regional, and religious, but barely national. This is the burden of Susan Reynolds' (1984, ch. 8) critique of the rather teleological approach of Hugh Seton-Watson (1977). While it might be possible, as a result of consistent definition and open-ended empirical investigation, to categorize certain communities in antiquity and the Middle Ages as nations (for example, the Jews, the Armenians, the Swiss, and the Japanese), this

would hardly suffice to allow us to claim that nations were recurrent phenomena of history, since the nationalist ideologies and the vast majority of nations can be shown to be of much more recent vintage, including all those *nations of design* (Tilly 1975, Conclusion) created by nationalists or by pragmatic politicians through international treaties in the aftermath of prolonged wars like the Napoleonic or First World War. (See Kohn 1967; Tipton 1972; Johnson 1995)⁶

MODERNISM

It is just these historical and theoretical observations that form the starting-point of modernism, the dominant scholarly paradigm today. Modernists regard both primordialist and perennialist approaches as expressions of nationalism itself, or at least as heavily influenced by its assumptions, and therefore fatally flawed. For modernists like Eric Hobsbawm and Ernest Gellner, the nation is not only recent, it is also novel, and a product of the processes of modernization. They regard the era of the French Revolution as marking the moment when nationalism was introduced into the movement of world history. It was then that the ideal of the sovereignty of the people was fused with the drive to cultural homogeneity, to forge self-determining nations of co-cultural citizens. Hence, nations as well as nationalism are purely modern phenomena, without roots in the past. (Gellner 1983; Hobsbawm 1990)

There are several varieties of modernism. The socio-economic version regards nations and nationalism as products of the uneven development of capitalism and of disparities in regional resources. Both Tom Nairn (1977) and Michael Hechter (1975), operating from a post-marxist base, argued that economic and political cores continually exploit the resources of the periphery, breeding a nationalist reaction to imperialism or to internal colonialism on the part of peripheral élites, notably their intelligentsias.

Ernest Gellner (1964, ch. 7; 1983), on the other hand, proposed a socio-cultural version of this model. He argued that nations and nationalism were exclusively modern phenomena; pre-modern societies and cultures had neither use nor room for nations.

The great tidal wave of modernization, as it swept outwards from the West, eroded traditional societies and cultures, uprooting masses of people and proletarianizing them in the anonymous city. Here, the sole means of communication was through a shared linguistic education, provided by a state-run, standardized, and public education system. Hence,

the drive to cultural homogeneity in a specialist, literate, state-supported *high culture* was built into the requirements of modernity. But the unevenness of the waves of modernization also generated conflicts over resources between the old inhabitants of the city and the newly urbanized ex-peasants. Such conflicts created the possibility and incentive for ethnic secession wherever social conflict was reinforced by cultural markers such as colour, language, and religion.⁷

But it can be argued that these rather abstract, materialist schemata are overly deterministic. They regard nations and nationalism as functional for industrial or capitalist modernity, and leave little room for collective choices. As a result, they appear to make detailed historical investigation of élite or collective actions irrelevant. Besides, Gellner fails to explain why so many pre-existing *low* (non-specialist and non-literate) cultures turned themselves into *high* cultures and managed to eject the former high culture of the rulers, as occurred in Bohemia and Finland.⁸

This failure to consider the pre-modern roots of modern nations also appears in the political versions of modernism. John Breuilly (1993), for example, claims that nationalism is a spurious historicist solution to the alienation brought on by the split between the absolutist state and civil society. Nationalism must be seen as an exclusively modern, and a strictly political argument and movement, rather than a sentiment of cultural identity. Nationalist ideologies and intellectuals, symbols and ceremonies, are not without importance, but only insofar as they are able to mobilize, co-ordinate, and legitimize the various sub-élites who seek power through control of the modern state. Here too the modernist failure to come to grips with cultural identity (and in this case, ideology) renders its explanation partial and one-sided.

Breuilly's rather narrowly defined, state-centred modernism, like that of Anthony Giddens and Michael Mann, suffers from an excessive emphasis on the role of political institutions, and is too dismissive of the legacies of pre-modern ethnic and cultural ties.⁹

Ideology, on the other hand, forms the key to Elie Kedourie's (1960) path-breaking approach. He is equally insistent on the modernity, and indeed the European philosophical provenance, of nationalism, but he accords a primary role to disaffected intellectuals who purvey nationalist ideology through philology, folklore, and the rediscovery of ethnic history and culture—first in Germany and then in Eastern Europe and the Balkans—in their pursuit of Enlightenment meliorism. In his later work, Kedourie (1971) traced modern nationalism, as a doctrine of the collective will and a quest for unattainable perfection on earth, to antinomian medieval

Christian millennial doctrines, whose influence he saw extending, through the ravages of European imperialism, to the violent messianic nationalisms of Asia and Africa, with their cults of the *dark* gods. Kedourie does not, however, ask why the nationalist message of the *marginal men* in Africa and Asia should continually fall on such receptive ears, nor how an ideology like nationalism can have such profoundly disturbing effects in so many parts of the world. There is also a world of difference between the pessimistic, world-negating visions of Christian apocalyptic millennialism, and the often earth-bound, auto-emancipatory optimism of even the most romantic nationalisms.¹⁰

A similar kind of cultural diffusionism can also be found in Benedict Anderson's influential account (1991) of the origins and spread of nationalism. But here it is allied to a species of post-modernist constructionism. Nationalism, for Anderson, is a modern cultural artefact. Its object, the nation, is defined as an *imagined political community*—imagined as sovereign, finite, and horizontal. In a world characterized by a basic linguistic diversity, and a widespread desire to transcend mortality, it was only the revolution of print-capitalism—the conjunction of the invention of printing with the capitalist diffusion of its products, books; and later newspapers, in the vernacular languages—that made it possible for people to imagine the nation, once a social space had been created by the decline of sacred monarchies and religious script communities. This in turn required a new conception of linear time, one that allowed people to see themselves as members of linguistic communities moving inexorably forwards through empty, homogeneous time. But, once created, the ideal of the nation could, like any other cultural artefact and construct, be pirated by others in different parts of the world, according to their historical circumstances, to produce different kinds of nationalism—creole, vernacular, official, communist and the like. Anderson is sensitive to these varied circumstances, yet he fails to explain how nationalism can have such a profound popular emotional appeal, how the possibility of *imagining* the nation turns into the moral imperative of a mass *dying for the nation*, and why imagined print communities should become prime candidates for nationhood and mass self-sacrifice.¹¹

THE ETHNO-SYMBOLIC ALTERNATIVE

This brings us to the central problem of every kind of modernist analysis, whether of Gellner, Breuilly, Kedourie or Anderson. I refer to their

systematic failure to accord any weight to the pre-existing cultures and ethnic ties of the nations that emerged in the modern epoch, thereby precluding any understanding of the popular roots and widespread appeal of nationalism. This failure stems from serious inadequacies in the social constructionism and instrumentalism that underpin their modernism, in providing convincing accounts of cultural and political phenomena like nations and nationalism. These limitations include:

- (1) a failure to distinguish genuine constructs from long-term processes and structures in which successive generations have been socialized;
- (2) a concentration on élite actions at the expense of popular beliefs and actions; and
- (3) a neglect of the powerful affective dimensions of nations and nationalism.

Historical ethno-symbolism emerges from the theoretical critique of modernist approaches, as well as from a different reading of the historical record. For ethno-symbolists, what gives nationalism its power are the myths, memories, traditions, and symbols of ethnic heritages and the ways in which a popular *living past* has been, and can be, rediscovered and reinterpreted by modern nationalist intelligentsias. It is from these elements of myth, memory, symbol, and tradition that modern national identities are reconstituted in each generation, as the nation becomes more inclusive and as its members cope with new challenges.

These cultural and historical elements also form the basis of competing claims to territory, patrimony and resources. Where there are clashing interpretations of ancestral homelands, and cultural heritages—as for example in Macedonia, Kashmir, Nagorno-Karabagh, and Palestine—normal conflicts of interest are turned into cultural wars, and moral and political crusades replace everyday politics. History and culture provide the motives for conflict as well as solidarity. They are not simply pretexts, by which the *atavistic emotions* of the masses, in Kedourie's words, are manipulated, nor are they simply *invented traditions* designed, as Eric Hobsbawm claims, to channel and control the energies of the newly mobilized and enfranchised masses. History and culture form integral parts of the fabric of popular visions, and of the social structures and processes in which the designated populations are embedded and through which their élites must forge their strategies. (Kedourie 1971, Introduction; Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983, Introduction and ch. 7)¹²

These are some of the considerations which have led scholars like John Armstrong, John Hutchinson, and myself to consider alternative approaches to an understanding of the continuing power of nationalism and

the nation in the modern world. These approaches have much in common and I have found it useful to term them *historical ethno-symbolism*. They seek to overcome the limitations of modernism, while acknowledging its insights, as well as those of the other major paradigms. In what follows, I shall outline the main features of these approaches, thereby highlighting the themes that unite the chapters in this book.¹³

The *ethno-symbolic* approaches make a number of claims, which constitute a set of basic themes or motifs.

1. *La Longue Durée*

The first theme is the claim that, if we want to grasp the power and understand the shape of modern nations and nationalisms, we must trace the origins and formation of nations, as well as their possible future course, over long periods of time (*la longue durée*), and not tie their existence and formation to a particular period of history or to the processes of modernization. Nations are historical phenomena, not only in the generic sense that they are embedded in particular collective pasts and emerge, sometimes over long time-spans, through specific historical processes, but also because, by definition, they embody shared memories, traditions, and hopes of the populations designated as parts of the nation. Indeed, a central theme of historical ethno-symbolism is the relationship of shared memories to collective cultural identities: memory, almost by definition, is integral to cultural identity, and the cultivation of shared memories is essential to the survival and destiny of such collective identities. That is why, as the first chapter on *Nationalism and the Historians* makes clear, historians have played so central a role in the delineation of the nation and in the rediscovery, transmission, and analysis of its ethnic heritage. It may also be the reason why historians dominated causal enquiry into the nature, course and appeal of nations and nationalism, at least in the earlier stages.

Historical enquiry, while it may demystify and dispel fictions, can also reinforce the shared memories and aspirations of members, their *ethno-history*, by providing material or documentary evidence for events and personages held in reverence by the community. At the same time, it may reveal the long-term processes in which the rise of nations and the spread of nationalism are embedded. For historical ethno-symbolism, this double historicity of nations and nationalism—their rootedness in shared long-term memories or *ethno-history*, and the resulting need to analyse them over long historical time-spans—constitutes an underlying methodological postulate. (See Llobera 1994, ch. 1; A. D. Smith 1986, chs. 1–2)

2. *National past, present, and future*

This long-term relationship between national past, present, and future constitutes a second major theme, and it can be examined under three headings: recurrence, continuity, and reappropriation.

Recurrence: For perennialists, the nation is a recurrent form of social organization and nationalism a perennial mode of cultural belonging. But this is to read the history of earlier epochs in the light of the nationalist present. The empirical evidence of such past ages presents a much more problematic picture. Chapter Three, *The Problem of National Identity: Ancient, Medieval and Modern?*, explores some of the historical evidence which may support perennialist or modernist arguments, and concludes that, on the whole, the concept of the nation, like the ideology of nationalism, is largely modern, as are most nations. There may well be exceptions like the Jews and Armenians (perhaps also the medieval Japanese and Ethiopian Amhara), and much depends on the tightness of the definition of the nation employed. Using my own definition of the nation—as a named human population sharing an historic territory, common myths and historical memories, a mass, public culture, a common economy and common legal rights and duties for all members (admittedly a fairly modernist definition)—it is clear that the majority of nations, and nationalisms emerged in the modern world inaugurated by the French and American Revolutions. At the same time, as we saw, there may be some nations that predate modernity, and there are certainly some widely diffused ethnic elements that recur throughout recorded history: these include ethnic origin myths, beliefs in ethnic election, the development of ethnoscape, the territorialization of memory, and the vernacular mobilization of communities. All of which suggests that *modern* nations may have *pre-modern* precursors and can form around recurrent ethnic antecedents.¹⁴

Continuity: Under this heading falls the vexed question of the 'date of commencement of nations' (Hastings 1997, ch. 1)—or how far back in time it is possible to trace the origins of particular nations. If the first heading signalled the recurring components or potential *building-blocks* of nations-in-general, the rubric of continuity points to the persistence of cultural components of particular nations, for example, elements that have been handed down through the generations—names, symbols, languages, customs, territories and rituals of national identity. Some of these continuities are explored in Chapters Two and Four, on *National Identity and Myths of Ethnic Descent* and on the myths of *Chosen Peoples*, and again

more theoretically and in connection with nationalist ideology, in Chapter Six, *Gastronomy or Geology*? Clearly, much more work needs to be done on identifying the links between earlier ethnic components and modern national cultures, a point made forcefully and critically by John Breuilly (1996).

However, with ideas of ethnic election and their secular transformations, as with memories of golden ages, a start has been made in establishing important cultural continuities, despite the breaks often introduced by conquest, colonization, migration, and assimilation. (See also A. D. Smith 1993) This should help to counteract what John Peel has called the *blocking presentism*, and constructionism of so much current work on ethnicity, which views our understanding of the ethnic past as social construction based on present needs and reflecting the interests and preoccupations of present generations. (Peel 1989)¹⁵

Reappropriation: If continuity signifies the forward reach of the ethnic past to the national present, the rubric of *reappropriation* represents the converse movement, a reaching back into the ethnic past to obtain the *authentic* materials, and ethos for a distinct modern nation. This is the subject of Chapter Six, *Gastronomy or Geology*?, which depicts nationalist intellectuals as *political archaeologists* who aim, not to return to the past, but to recover its pristine ethos and reconstruct a modern nation in the image of the past *ethnie*. Hence, the quest for rediscovery, authentication, and reappropriation of the ethnic past by philologists, historians, archaeologists and ethnologists. Despite many instances of self-delusion and manipulation, it is necessary to treat these activities of nationalist intellectuals as an essential element of the complex interrelationship between national present (and future) and ethnic past. (See A. D. Smith 1981, chs. 5–6; Pinard and Hamilton 1984; Anderson 1991, ch. 5)¹⁶

3. The ethnic basis of nations

The third fundamental theme, and claim, of ethno-symbolism concerns the ethnic foundations of nations and nationalism. The ubiquity of ethnicity is its starting-point. Ethnic groupings can be found in every epoch and continent, wherever human beings feel that they share common ancestry and culture. Such groupings come in various forms and display varying degrees of organisation and self-awareness. As a first step, we may distinguish *ethnic categories* from *ethnic communities*, with other organizational forms such as ethnic associations in between. *Ethnic categories*

are populations distinguished by outsiders as possessing the attributes of a common name or emblem, a shared cultural element (usually language or religion), and a link with a particular territory. *Ethnic communities* or *ethnies* (to use the French term) are human populations distinguished by both members and outsiders as possessing the attributes of:

1. an identifying name or emblem;
2. a *myth* of common ancestry;
3. shared historical memories and traditions;
4. one or more elements of common culture;
5. a link with an historic territory or 'homeland';
6. a measure of solidarity, at least among the élites.

This allows us to define an *ethnie* as a named human population with *myths of common ancestry, shared historical memories and one or more common elements of culture, including an association with a homeland, and some degree of solidarity, at least among the élites*. (A. D. Smith 1986, ch. 2; cf. Horowitz 1985, chs. 1–2)

There is, in most cases, a more or less powerful link between modern nations and pre-existing, and often pre-modern, *ethnies*. Ethno-symbolism claims that most nations, including the earliest, were based on ethnic ties and sentiments and on popular ethnic traditions, which have provided the cultural resources for later nation-formation; and that even those new *state-nations* in Africa and Asia that sought to turn ex-colonies into territorial nations must forge a cultural unity and identity of myth, symbol, value, and memory that can match that of nations built on pre-existing ethnic ties, if they are to survive and flourish as nations. It is this *ethnic model* of the nation that has proved the most influential, with its emphasis on genealogical descent, vernacular codes, popular mobilization and historical nationalism in a *homeland*. Most nations, including the first nations in the West (if we leave aside the earlier cases of the Jews, Armenians and Ethiopian Amhara), have been formed around *ethnic cores*—dominant populations united by presumed ties of shared ancestry and vernacular culture—and have gradually expanded their social depth, territory, and geopolitical range around this dominant ethnic core and presumed descent group, to include other ethnic populations, as was the case with the English, the French and the Castilians. This is the burden of the second chapter, on *National Identity and Myths of Ethnic Descent*, which represents an early statement of some theoretical aspects of historical ethno-symbolism, and especially of its emphasis on the role of one or more ethnic myths of descent in the formation of nations and national identity. (See also A. D. Smith 1989)¹⁷

A crucial part of this third theme is the popular basis of nations and nationalism. Nations may have emerged around élite groups, but even in these early stages, élites were repeatedly forced to take the cultures and interests of wider strata into account. These vernacular cultures and interests were often popular and ethnic in character; they assumed ties of affinity based on presumed common origins and shared customs, linked to *regna* or kingdoms, as Susan Reynolds has argued for early medieval Europe. Even a modernist like Eric Hobsbawm admits the importance of pre-existing (and often pre-modern) *proto-national* communities of language, religion, and region, though he refuses to allow any linkage between them and the rise of a modern, state-creating nationalism. (Reynolds 1983; Hobsbawm 1990, ch. 2))

4. The cultural components of *ethnies*

The fourth major claim of ethno-symbolism is that the pre-existing components and long-term continuities of ethnic communities and nations are cultural and symbolic rather than demographic. The *differentia specifica* of *ethnies* and nations, as well as their continuities, appear in the myths, memories, symbols, values, and traditions of an ethnic community which regards itself as ancestrally related, culturally distinct, and linked to a particular historic homeland. For John Armstrong, following Fredrik Barth, the contents of the *myth-symbol complex* communicated by vernacular linguistic codes, tend to differentiate *ethnies* and guard the cultural border of the community against outsiders. (Armstrong 1982, ch. 1) For myself, this differentiating function needs to be complemented by an analysis of the unifying role of a whole range of cultural and symbolic components—myths and symbols, but also values, memories, rituals, customs, and traditions. Distinctive clusters of these components mark out the boundaries of various *ethnies*, but they also serve to unite the members of each *ethnie* and structure their relations and activities. Hence, although in one sense the major symbolic and cultural elements of an ethno-symbolic approach are *subjective*, in that they focus on the perceptions, memories, beliefs, and values of individuals and communities, their long-term patterning produces a *structure* of relations and processes that is independent of those beliefs and perceptions, one which can provide a framework for the socialization of successive generations of ethnic and national members and for the regulation of their interests through myths of ethnic descent and symbols of territory and community. (See A. D. Smith 1998, ch. 8)

This emphasis on culture, in the broadest sense, introduces some flexibility into ethnic membership, which in normal circumstances allows for a degree of demographic replenishment and cultural borrowing, and hence social and cultural adaptation. This suggests that, contrary to approaches that sharply distinguish between an open and flexible *civic* nation and a rigid and closed *ethnic* nation, the *ethnic* components constitute only one, albeit ever-present, set of (often contested) elements within the totality of modern nations, and they can also encourage openness and receptiveness to outside influences. The history of modern Catalan nationalism is a case in point. (See Miller 1995; A. D. Smith 1995, ch. 4)¹⁸

There are, however, circumstances, internal and external, that bring to power nationalist intelligentsias who, in their quest for authenticity and cultural purity, increasingly seek to purge their cultures of foreign elements and ultimately of outsiders. Despite the very different emphases on *genealogy* or *ideology* in myths of descent, the drive for cultural homogeneity and purity is more common in the case of *ethnic* nationalisms, that is, those whose criterion of national membership is genealogical rather than territorial. This point is the focus of Chapter Seven, on *Ethnic Nationalism and the Plight of Minorities*, which analyses the dire effect of cultural homogenization and purificatory ethnic nationalisms on ethnic minorities and the consequent flow of refugees, and hence on the stability of regional inter-state orders.

5. Ethnic myths and symbols

Of particular importance among the cultural components of ethnicity are myths of ethnic origin and election, and symbols of territory and community.

Myths of origin and descent constitute the primary definers of the separate existence and character of particular *ethnies*. As Chapter Two on *National Identity and Myths of Ethnic Descent* illustrates, they include accounts of the time and place of the community's origins, and trace the lines of descent from presumed common ancestors; thus Turks trace their ancestry to Central Asia in the first millennium, and to their founding father, Oghuz Khan, and Jews do likewise to Abraham and Canaan (or even to Ur or Haran). Equally important for the survival of *ethnies* has been the development of myths of ethnic election. These may be missionary or covenantal in character. Missionary election myths exalt their *ethnies* by assigning them god-given tasks or missions of warfare or conversion or overlordship; so the Franks or the medieval French monarchs interpreted their role as latter-day king Davids defending the new Israel (France

and/or the Church), and the Russian Tsars came to see in Orthodox Russia a third Rome, the only truly Christian kingdom after the fall of Constantinople. Covenantal election myths tend to set the chosen people apart from their profane surroundings, through a covenant between the deity and the elect, namely, a conditional promise of continued divine favour in return for constant observance of divine commands and ceaseless performance of a singular moral and ritual code, such as the Israelites were enjoined to practise in the Old Testament. These variations and their consequences are explored in Chapter Four on *Chosen Peoples*, and more briefly in Chapter Ten on *The Resurgence of Nationalism?* (See Armstrong 1982, chs. 6–7; Akenson 1992).

Symbols of territory and community take a variety of forms. They include emblems of difference (flags, totems, coins, ritual objects), hymns and anthems, special foods and costume, as well as representations of ethnic deities, monarchs and heroes—like Pharaoh's double crown, the Jewish Menorah or the fleur-de-lis. Particular interest and significance attaches to the symbolism of ancestral or sacred territory and the development of *ethnoscapes*—landscapes endowed with poetic ethnic meaning through the historicization of nature and the territorialization of ethnic memories. These poetic landscapes often come to be associated with crucial events and personages in the history of the ethnic community and may be invested with sacred significance, a powerful motif of ethnic nationalism, explored in Chapter Five, *Nation and Ethnoscapes*.

6. 'Ethno-history'

A further major theme concerns the multiple, changing and uneven nature of *ethno-history*. By *ethno-history* is meant the ethnic members' memories and understanding of their communal past or pasts, rather than any more *objective* and dispassionate analysis by professional historians. Such a mode of historical discourse has three facets: it is multi-stranded and contested; it is always subject to change; and it is globally uneven.

Given the multiplicity of interests, needs and outlooks of members of any community, the likelihood of a single, unified version of the communal past emerging in any relatively free society must be minimal. In fact, the past is as much a zone of conflict as the present, and we can therefore expect to find, at any given point in time, two or more versions of the ethnic past, often in competition or conflict. This was the case in Greece throughout the nineteenth century, when a classical *Athenian* version of Hellenism held by westernised intelligentsia and merchants was pitted against

a Greek Orthodox popular ethno-history which harked back to the medieval glories of the Byzantine empire, a point underlined in Chapter Eight, on *Zionism and Diaspora Nationalism*. A similar conflict erupted in France in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and particularly during the Dreyfus Affair, when a medievalizing monarchist and Catholic vision of French ethno-history was challenged by a secular, revolutionary and classicizing interpretation of the French past. (See Campbell and Sherrard 1968, ch. 1; and Gildea 1994, chs. 3, 7)

If *ethno-history* is always multi-stranded and contested, this implies a continuous process of reinterpretation of national identities. Homi Bhabha's dualism of traditional *pedagogical* and everyday practical *performative* narratives of *the people* fails to capture the complexity of a situation in which every generation fashions its own interpretations of national identity in the light of its reading of the ethnic past or pasts. The fund of ethnic elements, the ethno-historical heritage handed down through the generations, is always being reinterpreted and revised by various social groups in response to internal differences and external stimuli. Hence, British, Japanese or Egyptian *national identity* is never fixed or static: it is always being reconstructed in response to new needs, interests and perceptions, though always within certain limits. (Bhabha 1990, ch. 16)

From a comparative standpoint, the incidence of ethno-history is markedly uneven. Some communities can boast a *rich* or well-documented, and eventful, ethnic past; others can only summon up the barest memories and sketchiest traditions. (For example, Russian or Arab ethno-histories are eventful and abundantly documented, while Slovak and Estonian ethno-histories are more sketchy and poorly recorded). This *unevenness* of ethno-historical cultural resources is itself a source of national competition and conflict, as the less well endowed communities seek to attain cultural parity with the better endowed. Hence, the appeal for Finns of the national epic of the *Kalevala*, edited in 1835 by Elias Lönnrot, as they strove to free themselves from Russian political and Swedish cultural domination—a theme taken up in Chapter Eight, on *Zionism and Diaspora Nationalism*, in the context of richly documented ethno-histories with vivid memories of *golden ages*, as well as in the concluding chapter. (See Branch 1985, Introduction)

7. Routes to Nationhood

Another central ethno-symbolic concern is the manner in which nations in the modern world have come to be formed. Armstrong, indeed, presents

a complex schema on the emergence of nations, showing how a variety of factors operating at broader or narrower levels, combine to create the terrain and impetus for particular nations. These factors include differences in nomadic and sedentary lifestyles with associated nostalgias; the influence of great religious civilizations like Islam and Christianity; the impact of imperial administrations and *mythomoteurs* (constitutive political myths); the differences in ecclesiastical organization; and, at the lowest and most dependant level, the role of language *faults* and of particular languages. (Armstrong 1982, ch. 9)

As Chapter Four on *Chosen Peoples* illustrates, I have sought to identify *patterns* of nation-formation, depending on the initial ethnic starting-point. The important distinction here is between *lateral* and *vertical* *ethnies*. The former are aristocratic and extensive, their boundaries are ragged, and they rarely (seek to) penetrate culturally or socially the middle or lower classes. The latter are demotic and intensive, their boundaries are compact, barriers to entry are relatively high, and their culture spreads across all classes, if unevenly at times. There are also immigrant *ethnies*, or rather, *part-ethnies*, which have hived off from the main body to set up colonies and gradually form a separate new *ethnie*. We can then trace the routes by which modern nations have been formed from these three ethnic *bases*: a route of *bureaucratic incorporation* by which aristocratic *ethnies* may forge strong states and incorporate outlying regions and lower classes into their upper-class ethnic culture and symbolism; a route of *vernacular mobilization* whereby an indigenous intelligentsia uses folk culture to mobilize middle and lower strata and create ethnic nations; and finally, an *immigrant-colonist* route in which the founding immigrant *part-ethnie* is supplemented by waves of pioneering colonizers who together create a *plural* or polyethnic immigrant nation and culture. (See A. D. Smith 1989)

8. The longevity of nationalism

The final theme of ethno-symbolism concerns the power and durability of nations and nationalism. Nationalism is a modern ideological movement, but also the expression of aspirations by various social groups to create, defend or maintain *nations*—their autonomy, unity and identity—by drawing on the cultural resources of pre-existing ethnic communities and categories. Nationalism, defined as *an ideological movement for attaining and maintaining identity, unity and autonomy of a social group some of whose members deem it to constitute an actual or potential nation*, has proved a powerful instrument for forging a world of nations based on

pre-existing ethnic ties and sentiments; and it is one that has by no means run its course.¹⁹

These aspirations for nationhood can be found in pre-modern epochs, but they are particularly widespread and powerful in the modern era. This suggests that nationalisms, as well as nations, are likely to be recurrent phenomena in future, as they were in past epochs (Billig 1995). However, the underlying ground of their persistence is not simply their frequency and intensity in the modern epoch. Both frequency and intensity are products of deeper causes, namely the ability of modern nationalisms to draw sustenance from the pre-existing memories, myths, symbols, and traditions of each ethnic community and region. Where such memories, myths, symbols, and traditions are either lacking or negative—conflictual, ambiguous, and disintegrative—the attempt to create new communities and cultural identities is likely to prove painfully slow and arduous, especially where the new identities lack clear boundaries and must compete with well established and deep-rooted identities and communities. This is the theme explored in Chapter Nine, on *National Identity and the Idea of European Unity*, in the context of attempts to create a European cultural identity that could underpin the drive for European economic and political union. These attempts raise serious doubts about the possibility of transcending nations and superseding nationalism, since the very idea of 'Europe', insofar as it can be pinned down and given systematic coherence, appears as a pale reflection of the much more rooted, vivid and tangible national identities. Here, again, I have employed an ethno-symbolic approach to uncover some of the deeper, unspoken cultural myths, memories and assumptions about the 'new Europe'. (See Delanty 1995; Benda-Beckman and Verkuyten 1995)

The ambiguities and nebulous character of European cultural identity contrast strongly with the dramatic and powerful diaspora nationalisms of the Greeks, Jews, and Armenians with their rich memories of golden ages of saints and heroes, their stark symbols of trauma and suffering, and their potent popular myths of glorious restoration in their age-old homelands, discussed in Chapter Eight on *Zionism and Diaspora Nationalism*. The implication, spelt out in the concluding chapter, is that the continuing power of myths, symbols, and memories of ethnic chosenness, golden ages and historic homelands has been largely responsible for the mass appeal of ethnic nationalism in the aftermath of the Cold War and the demise of the Soviet empire; and that we are therefore unlikely to witness the early transcendence of ethnicity or the supersession of nationalism.

PLAN OF THE BOOK

These are the major themes and considerations that account for the plan of the book, which is divided into two parts.

Part One is more theoretical and historical in focus.

Chapter One considers the relationship between nationalism and those historians who have sought to describe its course and explain its appeal. In particular, it explores the assumptions and myths in the work of historians who have investigated the phenomena of nations and nationalism, from Michelet, Acton, and Renan to Seton-Watson, Hobsbawm, and Breuilly.

Chapter Two is an early statement of some ethno-symbolic concerns. It reveals the importance of an ethno-symbolic approach in uncovering the crucial role of myths of ethnic descent in the formation of modern nations and national identities. It explores the nature and consequences of such myths in their different versions, in England, France, Greece, Turkey, and Israel, and emphasizes the differences between 'genealogical' and more 'ideological' myths of descent.

Chapter Three applies these arguments to the question of 'national identity' in ancient and medieval epochs, both on the theoretical and the historical levels. Setting aside the sweeping claims of perennialists and modernists, it enquires how far it is possible to speak of nations before the modern epoch, notably in antiquity, and whether the term 'nation' can have a single, clear and unambiguous meaning in both pre-modern as well as modern epochs.

Chapter Four looks at the role of myths of ethnic election and the beliefs in chosen peoples as critical factors in the survival of ethnic groups, from the covenantal model of the ancient Israelites to the looser missionary models of many peoples in Europe and outside. It also explores the implications of these beliefs, and their subsequent transformation in the rise of modern nations.

Chapter Five, the final chapter in *Part One*, considers the nature and role of the territorial dimensions of ethnic communities and nations. It explores the central role of the territorialization of memory and of 'ethno-scapes' in the formation of nations, laying particular emphasis on the

sacralization of historic territories in aggravating and prolonging conflicts between nations.

Part Two is more empirical and contemporary in focus.

Chapter Six provides a general account of the role of nationalist ideologies and movements in the formation of modern nations. Comparing the ethno-symbolic approach with other perspectives, such as perennialism and modernism, it shows how nationalism can best be understood as a form of 'political archaeology', particularly on the part of intelligentsias intent on the reconstruction of modern nations.

Chapter Seven applies this ethno-symbolic approach to the ways in which demotic ethnic nationalisms politicize cultures and seek to purify their communities of alien elements. This 'darker side of nationalism' has particularly serious consequences for ethnic minorities within the boundaries of these demotic communities, and it helps to explain the incidence and flow of ethnic refugees all over the world.

Chapter Eight is a comparative study of diaspora nationalisms and, in particular, of Zionism. It emphasizes the role of myths, memories and symbols of ethnic chosenness, trauma, and the 'golden age' of saints, sages, and heroes in the rise of modern nationalism among the Jews, Armenians, and Greeks—the archetypal diaspora peoples.

Chapter Nine considers the current debates about European unity and national identity. It emphasizes the significance of myths, memories, symbols and traditions, or their absence, in recent attempts to forge European unity and create a European cultural identity. It also explores the potential of a European 'family of cultures' for greater cultural unity, while pointing to the difficulties of a nebulous analogy of the nation competing with well entrenched and vivid national identities.

Chapter Ten, the final chapter, provides a concise overall statement of the ethno-symbolic approach, and applies its insights to the current resurgence of nationalism since the collapse of the Soviet Union. It emphasizes the deeper roots of the persistence and variety of ethnic nationalisms in the uneven distribution of ethno-history and 'golden ages', the impact of religious ideals, notably of myths of ethnic election, and the differential nature of ancestral 'homelands'.

Notes

1. Another fashionable approach, or rather set of approaches, which we can term 'post-modernist', views the nation as a composite or hybrid construct of various cultural, social, and ethnic groupings. But such approaches hardly amount to a separate explanatory paradigm (or aim to provide one). As Chapter Five, on *Gastronomy or Geology?*, attempts to show, they really accept the modernist paradigm and apply it to contemporary Western polyethnic states. (See A. D. Smith 1998, ch. 9)
2. For these nationalist metaphors, see Pearson (1993). Some nationalists adopt a voluntarist view, according to which people must belong to a nation; but can choose to which nation they wish to belong, a tradition epitomized in Ernest Renan's lecture, *Qu'est-ce que la nation?* (1882), a reply to Heinrich Treitschke's ethnic German justification for the annexation of Alsace-Lorraine. See Guibernau (1996, ch. 1).
3. For all his 'primordialism', Clifford Geertz (1963) considers kinship groups too small and hence politically irrelevant. As for endogamy, it is again the belief, rather than any documented fact, that is significant.
4. For Eller and Coughlan (1993), cultural primordialism is non-rational and sociological insofar as it places primordial attachments outside the domain of social interaction and construction in an unexplained realm of 'emotion'. But, as Grosby (1994) demonstrated in his response, this is to narrow our understanding of the 'sociological' and to miss out other important kinds of human relationship that are neither constructed nor part of a means-end causal chain.
5. This is a view put forward by John Armstrong (1982; 1995), though on occasion he combines it with a more specific 'continuous perennialism' in respect of the French and Russians, for example. For a clear-cut example of this 'continuous perennialism' in respect of the British Isles, see Hastings (1997, chs. 2-3).
6. I have recently explored this question again in A. D. Smith (1998, chs. 7-8). Even Hastings (1997) concedes that most nations are modern, and post-date the French Revolution.
7. I have conflated the earlier (1964) and later (1983) formulations of Gellner's theory. Both Nairn and Hechter use Gellner's earlier version; Nairn acknowledges his debt to Gellner's specific concept of uneven development.
8. Gellner (1983, ch. 3) is clearly concerned with this issue, and accepts the advantages of cultural legacies from the past for nation-creation. Yet, in his last work (1997, ch. 15), Gellner takes a stronger line, arguing that most nations do not have 'navels'; they are invented for them. For this debate and my reply, see A. D. Smith (1996).
9. For similar analyses that stress the centrality of the 'modern state' in the genesis and diffusion of nationalism, see Giddens (1985, chs. 4, 8) and Mann

- (1993, ch. 7; 1995). I have discussed their contributions, along with Breuilly's, more fully in A. D. Smith (1998, ch. 4).
10. Kedourie's analysis also suffers from a degree of idealism, in that nationalism is seen as the intellectual product of a fusion of ideas of self-determination derived from Kant with ideas of cultural diversity derived from Herder. This heady brew spreads like an epidemic and, like an opiate, it destroys those who administer the drug, as well all those on whom it is inflicted. Kedourie's one-sided and hostile portrait of nationalism overlooks its constructive aspects, and its vital role in creating, as well as controlling, social and political change.
11. Anderson's 'imagined community' is generically related to Hobsbawm's 'invented tradition', so important in the latter's eyes for the creation of nations. But Anderson reveals a more profound and positive appreciation of the persisting role of nations and nationalism, and a greater sensitivity to the underlying cultural changes that made national imaginings possible. See A. D. Smith (1998, ch. 6).
12. Hobsbawm (1990, ch. 2) elaborated his earlier analysis of 'invented traditions' (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983) by distinguishing an earlier nineteenth century mass civic-political nationalism from a late-nineteenth century divisive ethno-linguistic variety of nationalism. But, despite his acknowledgement of 'proto-national' regional, linguistic and religious communities, he refused to allow them any influence on the rise of a state-creating modern nationalism which he suggested was largely a product of the need of capitalist élites to control the recently mobilized and enfranchised masses through the use of national 'invented traditions'.
13. There are important differences between Armstrong, Hutchinson and myself. Hutchinson (1987; 1994) argues for the importance of cultural nationalism, but also suggests a role for pre-modern ethnicity in, for example, Irish nationalism. Armstrong (1982) adopts a mainly phenomenological approach, but couples it with a social 'boundary' approach derived from Fredrik Barth; yet he also assigns a major role to myths and symbols in the preservation of ethnic identities over *la longue durée*.
14. For this definition of the nation, see A. D. Smith (1991, ch. 1). For a general discussion of the problems of defining the concept of the nation, see Connor (1994, ch. 4). Though the distinction between *ethnies* and nations is crucial, it does not correspond to the chronological or the sociological divide between pre-modernity and modernity. Not only do many *ethnies* persist (or are crystallized) in late modernity and also become 'modernized'; a few nations antedate modernity (chronologically and sociologically) and owe little or nothing to the processes of 'modernization'.
15. This is very much the view put forward by the editors and most of the contributors to Tonkin *et al.* (1989); reacting against the idea that the 'past determines the present', they have opted for an equally unilateral understanding in which, for the most part, 'the present shapes the past'—or, at any rate,

our understanding of it. One could equally well claim that our 'understanding' of the past is inevitably shaped by the frameworks of meaning handed down from previous generations, even when we dissent from their particular views of the past. (See also Eriksen 1993) The question of continuities of nations is also bedevilled by definitional problems. For Walker Connor (1994, ch. 9) we can only speak of mass nations; nations only exist when a majority of the designated population participates (indeed votes) in public life; whereas for Adrian Hastings (1997, ch. 1) nations can be said to exist when a significant minority of the population outside the ruling élite reveal a national consciousness, in which case we can speak of medieval nations.

But are these 'nations' in the full sense of the term (a modern, and modernist, sense?), or only potential or 'pre-national' peoples? Perhaps we should avoid trying to draw too hard-and-fast lines between *ethnies* and nations in each case, but rather identify processes (of territorialization, homogenization, legal standardization, etc.) by which nations are formed, often discontinuously, out of pre-existing *ethnies*.

16. That is why cultural nationalism, as Hutchinson (1987, ch. 1) highlights, is so important for the creation of nations. This was also probably the case with pre-modern *ethnies*. A religious culture provided the foundation for the crystallisation and persistence of fluid ethnic categories. From this standpoint, nationalist 'political archaeology', for all its rhetoric, is not as fictive and fantastic as modernists are apt to portray.

17. This suggests that the fashionable distinction between 'ethnic' and 'civic' nations and nationalisms is not as clear-cut as is often assumed. (See Breton 1988) Western 'civic' nations assume a fundamental ethnic core which has allowed them to tolerate a measure of cultural hybridity through immigration and intermarriage. This is because the more cultural elements of language, territory, and history can be separated to some extent from their ethnic moorings, so allowing outsiders to join the nation and assimilate its culture.

18. The open, assimilatory character of Catalan linguistic nationalism can be contrasted with the relatively closed and more exclusive character of Basque religious and 'racial' nationalism. For a rich and illuminating study of these ethnic nationalisms, see Conversi (1997).

19. For this definition of nationalism, see A. D. Smith (1991, ch. 4). On globalization and nationalism, see Billig (1995, esp. ch. 6) and Guibernau (1996, ch. 7).

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180

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