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**NATIONALISM**

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## INTRODUCTION

Nationalism has been big news off and on for two hundred years. Just as often, it has been declared passé. Nationalism figured in revolutions and wars of independence. But it was a measure of the very success of nationalist projects that the existence and political autonomy of nations could be taken for granted most of the time. At least in the rich Western countries, we tended to ignore the nationalism that was embedded in our entire view of the world—organizing citizenship and passports, the way we look at history, the way we divide up literatures and cinemas, the way we compete in the Olympic games. We focused on nationalism only when it appeared in the form of conflicts between states and those who would change their boundaries or systems of government. This kind of collective action—often violent—ebbed and flowed visibly; each ebb allowed scholars to imagine that nationalism was a problem from the past now rapidly fading away. But behind the overt nationalist struggles lay deeper patterns of collective identity and pride, given form by nationalism as a way of talking and thinking and seeing the world—a world made up at one basic level of nations and their international relations.

In the 1990s, nationalism became front page news again. The break-up of the Soviet Union encouraged nationalists in a dozen of its former parts to declare their autonomy. Trying to get political borders to match ethnic boundaries, Armenians and Azeris fought in Nagorno-Karabakh. Chechen rebels clashed with Russia itself. And right-wing Russian nationalists complained about the loss of their country's former dominions.

Nor was nationalist fighting limited to the former Soviet Union. Serbian, Croatian and Bosnian neighbors began killing each other in what was once Yugoslavia. More peacefully, Czechoslovakia split into the Czech Republic and Slovakia. Quebec came within a percentage point of voting to secede from Canada. Norwegian voters expressed their national sentiments by rejecting membership in the European Union. Some argued that the EU was itself beginning to advocate Europeanness as a new nationalism—just as it was building a new state-like apparatus. Great Britain gave up one more of its claims to empire by ceding its colony of Hong Kong to China in the name of national sovereignty (even though this was anything but self-determination for the citizens of Hong Kong). American politicians competed with each other to prove their nationalist credentials by taking tough stands on immigration or on trade with Asia. Iraq invaded Kuwait, claiming the erstwhile province of colonial Iraq to be an integral part of the nation; the United Nations defended the national sovereignty of a Kuwaiti regime that constituted a minority of the country's inhabitants. In the same Middle East, when Palestinians' long pursuit of an

autonomous national state finally began to bear tangible fruit, an Israeli prime minister was murdered by an ultra-nationalist Jew. Eritrea became an independent state after thirty years of nationalist struggle with an Ethiopia that was first explicitly an empire and then the object of a brutal communist effort at nation-making. The new government of Ethiopia in turn boldly sought to preempt potential nationalist rebellions by offering a constitutional guarantee of the right to autonomy and even potential secession for its diverse constituent nationalities. Farther south, the African National Congress brought majority rule to South Africa. But in the Sudan, northerners killed southern separatists in the name of national unity.

The litany of examples could go on, powerful testimony to the continued currency of nationalism. In one sense, however, it is misleading. To look only at these often violent struggles encourages us once again to imagine that nationalism is simply a problem to be remedied, an issue that will fade as soon as borders are clarified and popular sovereignty established. This would be to forget the extent to which borders and popular sovereignty themselves are part of the nationalist discourse by which we give conceptual form and practical organization to the modern world. Nationalism is significant not only in crises and overt conflicts. It is basic to collective identity in the modern era, and to the specific form of state which has predominated for the last two hundred years. Indeed, nationalism is not only a matter of politics, but of culture and personal identity. The discourse of nations is couched especially in terms of passion and identification, while that of states—kindred in many ways—is phrased more in terms of reason and interests. Nationalism has emotional power partly because it helps to make us who we are, because it inspires artists and composers, because it gives us a link with history (and thus with immortality). Witness the nationalism in this review of a London exhibition of works “saved by the National Art Collections Fund” (itself conceived during the mid-19<sup>th</sup>-century “Springtime of Nations”): “Simply put, the central question is whether an ancient nation has the will and the financial means to retain the works of art necessary for the survival of its past and the continuity of its culture” (Melikian 1997: 7). Still more simply put, during the Falklands War (to give the conflict its English name), I visited Frank Harris, a worker from my Oxford college who was in the hospital dying of emphysema. “People die,” he said, “but there’ll always be an England.”

Nationalism comes in manifold forms, some benign and reassuring and others terrifying. Social scientists have sometimes been tempted to try to analyze “good” nationalism, or patriotism, and “bad” nationalism, or chauvinism, as though they were completely different

social phenomena. This makes each hard to understand, however, and obscures their commonalities. Both positive and negative manifestations of national identity and loyalty are shaped by the common discourse of nationalism. None of the particular cases can be understood fully without seeing how a more global--indeed *international*--rhetoric has helped to produce and give form to each. This goes for nationalist movements, nationalist state policies, nationalist traditions in literature and the arts, and ordinary people's everyday conceptions of where and how they fit into the world. Nationalism is, among other things, what Michel Foucault (1969, 1977; see also Brennan 1990) called a "discursive formation," a way of speaking that shapes our consciousness, but also is problematic enough that it keeps generating more issues and questions, keeps propelling us into further talk, keeps producing debates over how to think about it.

The issue is not only whether participants use a specific term (cf. Greenfeld 1992). It is, rather, whether participants use a rhetoric, a way of speaking, a kind of language that carries with it connections to other events and actions that enables or disables certain other ways of speaking or acting, or that is recognized by others as entailing certain consequences. When Quebecois partisans use the rhetoric of nationalism, for example, they make implicit reference to anti-imperialist nationalisms, they inhibit those who might espouse joining with the United States or France, and they lay a claim to legitimacy as a potentially autonomous state.

Recognition as a nation clearly requires social solidarity--some level of integration among the members of the ostensible nation--and collective identity--the recognition of the whole by its members, and a sense of individual self that includes membership in the whole. But social solidarity and collective identity can exist in many sorts of groupings, from families to employees of business corporations to imperial armies. They are minimal conditions for calling a population a nation, but far from a definition. What additional characteristics should ideally also be present for us to call a population with social solidarity and collective identity a nation?

This is where the discursive formation of nationalism comes in. This way of thinking about social solidarity, collective identity, and related questions (like political legitimacy) plays a crucial role both in the production of nationalist self-understandings and the recognition of nationalist claims by others. It is in this sense that Benedict Anderson has described nations as "imagined communities." As he says, "all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined. Communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity-genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined" (1991: 6). There are other ways of distinguishing communities, of course, such as their scale, extent of administrative

organization, degree of internal equality, and so forth. But our first task is indeed to get some grasp of the distinctive form of “imagining” collective identity and social solidarity that is associated with nationalism.

The following features of the rhetoric of nation seem most important, though none of them is precisely definitive and each may be present in greater or lesser degree in any nation. It is the pattern formed by having a preponderance of them that is crucial:

1. Boundaries, of territory, population, or both.
2. Indivisibility, the notion that the nation is an integral unit.
3. Sovereignty, or at least the aspiration to sovereignty, and thus formal equality with other nations, usually as an autonomous and putative self-sufficient state.
4. An “ascending” notion of legitimacy—i.e., the idea that government is just only when supported by popular will or at least when it serves the interests of “the people” or “the nation.”
5. Popular participation in collective affairs, a population mobilized on the basis of national membership (whether for war or civic activities).
6. Direct membership, in which each individual is understood to be immediately a part of the nation and in that respect categorically equivalent to other members.
7. Culture, including some combination of language, shared beliefs and values, habitual practices.
8. Temporal depth, a notion of the nation as such existing through time, including past and future generations, and having a history.
9. Common descent or racial characteristics.
10. Special historical or even sacred relations to certain territories.

Note again that these are features of the rhetoric of nation, claims that are commonly made in describing nations. Nations cannot be defined effectively by empirical measures of whether they are actually able to achieve sovereignty, to maintain integrity by defending themselves against internal splits, or to enforce sharp boundaries, by whether their culture is perfectly unified or particularly ancient. Rather, nations are constituted largely by the claims themselves, by the way of talking and thinking and acting that relies on these sorts of claims to produce collective identity, to mobilize people for collective projects, and to evaluate peoples and practices.

There is no perfect list; we are identifying a common pattern, not a precise definition of nation. The points listed can help us to develop an “ideal type,” but this is an aid to

conceptualization, not an operational definition or an empirically testable description. The word “nation” is used sensibly and commonly understood when it is applied to populations which have or claim most of the characteristics listed. Which six, or seven, or eight characteristics will be most important will vary from nation to nation. Recognition of nations works not by discerning the “essence” of nationhood, but through what Ludwig Wittgenstein (1953) called a pattern of “family resemblance.” Some siblings may have the family nose without the family jaw, or the family’s characteristic green eyes without its characteristic high forehead; none of the features is shared among all the members of the family without also being shared with others who are not part of the family. Yet we can see the pattern. National ideology in any one setting may lack one or more of its characteristic features, or place greater or lesser emphasis on others. Recognition as a nation is not based on strict definition, but on a preponderance of this pattern.<sup>1</sup>

Nationalism, in this sense, has three dimensions. First, there is nationalism as discourse: the production of a cultural understanding and rhetoric which lead people throughout the world to think and frame their aspirations in terms of the idea of nation and national identity, and the production of particular versions of nationalist thought and language in particular settings and traditions. Second, there is nationalism as project: social movements and state policies by which people attempt to advance the interests of collectivities they understand as nations, usually pursuing in some combination (or in a historical progression) increased participation in an existing state, national autonomy, independence and self-determination, or the amalgamation of territories. Third, there is nationalism as evaluation: political and cultural ideologies that claim superiority for a particular nation; these are often associated with movements or state policies, but need not be. In this third sense, nationalism is often given the status of an ethical imperative: national boundaries *ought* to coincide with state boundaries, for example; members of a nation *ought* to conform to its moral values, etc. It is through some of the actions that follow from these ethical imperatives that nationalism comes to be associated with *excesses* of loyalty to one’s nation--as in ethnic cleansing, ideologies of national purification, and hostility to foreigners.

Loyalty to one’s own group is certainly of ancient origins. It is the dimension of nationalism that has the clearest claim to be primordial, to have existed since before memory, before human history was recorded. But groups and group loyalty can take many forms and hardly constitute or explain nationalism by themselves. One can be loyal to a family--a much

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<sup>1</sup> No definition of nation (or of its correlative terms such as nationalism and nationality) has ever gained general acceptance (Alter 1989; Connor 1994; Hall 1995; Motyl 1992; Smith 1973, 1983).

more common loyalty through history than that involved in nationalism--or to a city, whether or not the city is considered part of a nation. Machiavelli's loyalty to Florence in the 16th century is part of the history of nationalism because it led him to write extensively and influentially on the nature of the state, on political rule, and on the relationship that binds individual members of political communities to their rulers. But 16<sup>th</sup>-century Florence was not a nation, and neither was the relationship of the identity "Florentine" to the broader "Italian" decisive for Machiavelli or fully worked out in his time. It was not until the 19<sup>th</sup>-century "Risorgimento" that the "nationalist" idea of unifying all Italians under a single state gained widespread currency. Even then, the ideology was ahead of the reality. As Massimo D'Azeglio worried: "We have made Italy, now we have to make Italians" (Hobsbawm 1990: 44).

Such a program suggests the promotion of an internally homogenous national identity. This is the domestic mirror image to the notion of external differences. The idea that each people has an "essential" identity—internally unified and different from all others--is an important thread in the history of nationalism. Such a notion can easily turn oppressive, and indeed it figures in both "ethnic cleansing" and the project of encouraging correct culture and behavior among those who are deemed parts of the nation. There is an important distinction between webs of interpersonal solidarity and demands for oneness with broad categories of ostensibly similar people.

In what was becoming England in 1066, thus, it was one thing to be loyal to one's king and kinsmen when faced with Norman invaders. It was quite another, in the years that followed, to nurture English nationalism by mythologizing Camelot, making the "Norman Yoke" the focus of quasi-class complaint, and proclaiming that "there will always be an England." Loyalty to the abstract category England was quite different from loyalty to one's actual and specific comrades. A web of interpersonal relationships locates a person locally, but membership in the category "nation" locates people in a complex, globally integrated world. It cannot be dismissed lightly. At the same time, it is a source of conflicts and an often problematic way of dealing with personal and collective grievances.

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In the first chapter, we shall explore further the meaning of nation and nationalism, emphasizing the "discursive formation" that has helped to structure the whole modern era, providing a common rhetoric to diverse movements and policies. One of the major debates in the literature on nationalism is between those who see it as simply an extension of ancient ethnic

identities and those who see it as distinctively modern. In presenting nationalism as a discursive formation with several different dimensions, I shall argue that though some features are much older than others, the pattern we now recognize as nationalism is distinctive to the modern era. The second chapter will develop this theme by comparing nationalism to ethnicity and both to kinship as ways of organizing (“imagining”) social solidarity and collective identity. The content of different nationalisms may draw on ethnicity, but it is transformed by the discourse of nationalism and not a full explanation either of that discourse or of the pattern of actual nationalisms. A closely related question is whether nationalism should be understood primarily as inherited or invented, as primordial or constructed—and how we should understand the ways in which nationalisms invoke (and sometimes manipulate) history. We shall examine this in the third chapter, where I shall argue that the literature presents us with an unnecessarily dichotomous choice, that “primordality” may be constructed and relatively new without losing its force or significance. The fourth chapter will explore how nationalism figured in the formation of a new kind of political community linked to the rise of the modern state. The fifth chapter will take up the tension between universal and parochial themes in nationalism, the contrast between reliance on “civic” and ethnic conceptions of national membership, and the transformations wrought by constituting the local as a token of more universal type. The sixth chapter will consider nationalism in relationship to imperialism, colonialism, and economic globalization, and examine the ways in which “domestic” nationalisms depend on and are shaped by being located in a world of nations and nation-states.

For better or worse, this book will not offer a comprehensive theory of nationalism. Nationalism is a rhetoric for speaking about too many different things for a single theory to explain it—let alone to explain each of those different movements, cultural patterns, state policies or other projects shaped in part by the rhetoric of nationalism. This does not mean that theory isn’t needed, but rather that grasping nationalism in its multiplicity of forms requires multiple theories. To address a question like “Why do nationalist movements seem to come in waves?” will require a different theory from the question “Why is nationalist ideology pervasively bound up with sexuality and gender?” Yet dealing adequately with either question will call for a more general grasp—partly theoretical, partly historical—of the discursive formation of nationalism and its structuring influence and emotional power in the modern world.