

Introduction

Nationalism is not a moral mistake. Certainly it is too often implicated in atrocities, and in more banal but still unjust prejudices and discriminatory practices. It too often makes people think arbitrary boundaries are natural and contemporary global divisions ancient and inevitable. But it is also a form of social solidarity and one of the background conditions on which modern democracy has been based. It has helped secure domestic inclusion and redistributive policies even while it has inhibited cosmopolitan attention to the needs of non-nationals. Nationalism helps locate an experience of belonging in a world of global flows and fears. Sometimes it underwrites struggle against the fantastically unequal and exploitative terms on which global integration is being achieved.

We should approach nationalism with critical attention to its limits, illusions, and potential for abuse, but we should not dismiss it. Even where we are deeply critical of the nationalism we see, we should recognize the continued importance of national solidarities. Even if we wish for a more cosmopolitan world order, we should be realistic enough not to act on mere wishes.

The term “nation” has roots in ancient Rome. Part of what we mean by both nation and nationalism is even older. Greeks had loyalty to city-states with distinctive ways of life and to Hellas vs. its enemies (however much they also fought among themselves). Egyptians and Assyrians had the memories of vanquished golden ages.

The ancient Jews were a still stronger prototype. The Hebrew Bible is among other things the story of the formation of the Jewish nation. There is continuity between the Hebrew term translated as “nation” and the Roman usage. Both refer to a people organized as such on the basis of descent. For the Romans, however, this distinguished subject and barbarian peoples from the Roman polity itself, for that was organized as a state in which citizenship (and other forms of participation) were not

essentially matters of family and lineage. Rome never saw itself primarily as a nation; to be Roman was to be a member not merely of a people but a polity, and (to play on terms from the nineteenth century), to be part of a civilization not only a culture. This was particularly true as the Roman Empire worked out structures of inclusion for people who were not "ethnic" Romans (and less true to the extent ethnic prejudices limited such inclusion).

Rome did have culture, of course. It had language and historical accounts of itself; it promoted both a civic religion and family piety. The religion of the Jews was arguably a more basic feature of their collective identity but Jewish "faith" and ethnonational identity were closely bound with each other. Christianity would momentarily join the mix before the Roman Empire entered its decline. Like Rome itself, it would claim to transcend particularities of ethnocultural and national belonging. It was available in principle to all. Its Western variant remained explicitly supra-national but Eastern Christianity came eventually to be organized more clearly on national lines, differentiated by language as well as patriarchal authority.

Many features of modern nations were thus in play well before the modern era. The subject peoples and barbarian challengers of the Roman Empire had collective identities, ways of life and ways of belonging organized more or less on bases of kinship and descent. The different "nations" into which the scholars at medieval universities were organized reflected territorial origins and linguistic differences Latin had to bridge. Byzantium too was a meeting place of different cultures and more than in Western Europe their self-organization was complemented by imperial rule. Islamic rulers would develop this pattern further in the Ottoman Empire with its millet system. Islam was as supra-ethnic and universalistic as Christianity but the Ottoman rulers tolerated diverse *ethnie*, granting them autonomy in religious life and much of everyday life as well as demanding military service.

But in neither the Ottoman Empire nor the West were nations basic units of political organization before the rise of the modern state. In neither were they understood as formal equivalents, or sovereign – basic units for recognition of self and other at the same time. In neither was the collective organization of "the people" basic to political legitimacy in the way that descent, divine authority, and sometimes simply military success were. In neither was the development and integration of national culture an active project nor the relationship of culture to territory marked by sharp boundaries.

All these were new features. They did not develop overnight. They were shaped by both the religion and the wars of the Protestant Reformation. They were influenced by both the internal organization

of early modern empires and rebellions against them. The Peace of Westphalia codified interstate relations as international. Through the whole early modern period increasingly effective state administration was crucial. So eventually were modern empires in which the relations between "home" nations and colonies were basic.

Nations were understood in largely "ethnic" terms, but ethnicity was thereby transformed (see Chapter 3). While the rhetoric of descent, familial relations, and blood ties were widespread, language and common culture transcending kinship ties became more influential. In cities, market relations, and military service, ethnicity worked more as a cultural category and less as a network of kin relations. Ethnicity was sometimes sustained and given sharper boundaries by differential incorporation into states – not least where other dimensions of cultural difference coincided with religious distinction. But while nation-builders frequently discriminated against minorities they were typically more respectful of majorities than earlier elites had been. Where lords and serfs had often spoken different languages, sharing demotic tongues became basic to official affairs as well as daily life. National culture became increasingly a literature culture (though it did not cease being culture and in important ways culturally particular, thereby; it did not leap into simple universalism). Commoners enjoyed increasing opportunities in state service as well as in business. Social mobility, often accompanied by geographic mobility to cities, underwrote a sense of belonging to the nation. The rise of individualism and modern nationalism informed each other as persons came to be understood as more or less sovereign, and – if not equals in all senses – equivalently members of the nation. Increasingly, nations became structures of integration at the level of states (or aspirations to autonomous states).

Not least of all, nationalism was transformed by its new role in a discursive formation which treated nations as the prepolitical bases for political legitimacy. If the authority of rulers derived not from descent, or God, or from might itself but from the well-being of "the people" over whom they ruled, the constitution of such peoples mattered in a new way. In this context, whatever was ancient about "nations" was transformed by nationalism.

The idea of a nation-state is arguably pernicious. The hyphen ties the notion of a historically or naturally unified people who intrinsically belong together to that of a modern polity with unprecedented military power and capacity for effective internal administration. It has been a recipe for conflicts both internal and external. Populations straddle borders or move long distances to new states while retaining allegiances to old nations. Dominant groups demand that governments enforce

cultural conformity, challenging both the individual freedom and the vitality that comes from cultural creativity.

And yet, the nation-state neither can be nor should be wished away. Source of so many evils, it is also the framework in which the modern era produced history's most enduring and successful experiments in large-scale democracy. It continues to shape not just the fact of democracy but diversity in its forms (as Chapter 7 suggests). It is basic to the rule of law, not only because most law remains a domestic matter of nation-states but because most international law is literally that: structured by agreements among nation-states. Not least of all, while globalization has produced innumerable paths across state borders, it has opened these very unevenly and disproportionately to the benefit of those with access to high levels of fluid capital. Conversely, it has made belonging to a nation-state and having clear rights within a nation-state more, not less, important. The fact that Hannah Arendt observed more than half a century ago remains true: human rights are secured mainly when they are institutionalized as civil rights.¹

In the 1990s, optimistic after the end of the Cold War, a number of enthusiasts for globalization suggested that sovereign states were obsolete. Money, media, and human migrations all flowed across borders; Why should military and political power maintain borders? States bolstered by nationalist passions – and nationalists eager to gain state power – were behind many of the twentieth century's bloody wars. Surely there was – and remains – a good *prima facie* case for hoping nation-states might organize less of human loyalty, power, and conflict. And of course new reasons for hating abuses of state authority merged with ancient resentments of state power. But it is one thing to seek limits on the exercise of state power and another to contemplate transcending it. It is one thing to encourage a cosmopolitan pluralism of perspectives and another to regard nationalism as merely a fading inheritance and not a recurrently renewed source of solidarity. It is one thing to seek to advance global civil society and another to imagine democracy can thrive without effective states.

The many evils of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries called forth a widespread indignation and, among many, a determination to act. The idea of human rights moved to the forefront not only of discussion but of court cases and treaties. Humanitarian interventions were proposed and implemented in a widening range of circumstances. Ethnic cleansing and genocidal nationalism made the notion that sovereignty should be a barrier to international efforts to do good ring hollow. An international criminal court was created (if not universally recognized). Indeed for a time there seemed no occupation more virtuous than that of a human rights activist or humanitarian aid worker.

Almost imperceptibly these shifted from volunteer pursuits and accidental careers for physicians and pacifists to new professional roles, complete with academic courses and credentials, funding from major foundations and national governments, and increasing bureaucracy. And humanitarian action became increasingly intertwined with military interventions, whether for peacekeeping or regime change.

At the same time, protesters challenged the dominance of capitalist corporations over the course of globalization. This was misleadingly termed the anti-globalization movement. Though there were some campaigners truly bent on enhancing the autonomy of local populations, most were actually proponents of a different sort of globalization. They objected to environmental depredation, sweatshops, and high prices for necessary drugs but they worked on a global scale and imagined the world in terms of global connections – albeit connections among ordinary people without the powerful mediation of corporations and states.

The movement contesting capitalist globalization has not been theory-driven, but its protagonists have shared a general account of the problems of the world in which the twin centers of power – capitalist corporations and nation-states – pursue a logic of self-aggrandizement that neither the natural world nor its human inhabitants can afford. Many have found the language of Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri sympathetic: they represent the heterogeneous “multitude” of the world who struggled to be free of a seamless and destructive but nearly exhausted “empire.”²

Something of the same quasi-theory – that states and corporations are both bad and unnecessary – has been widespread among human rights activists and humanitarian aid workers. Both groups, of course, saw first hand the vicious ways in which state elites pursued or held on to power and firms sought or sustained profits. The Sudan is one of the largest scale and longest-lasting examples. Its central government has seldom cared much for the people of Darfur in its west, the non-Arabs of its south, or for that matter most ordinary Sudanese. But the central government has cared about holding the country together and defeating any secessionist movements. It cared all the more when oil was discovered in the south – as did global corporations seeking to extract that oil in “peace.” And it cared all the more when it took on a more pronounced Islamic identity and mission. Despite religious commitment (and partly because of intra-Islamist struggles), it became a peculiarly bad government, but also one too weak to establish peace or prosperity in the Sudan; it unleashed brutal war and civil violence against and among its own people. So there were refugees and internally displaced people, rape as a tactic of war, robber militias, and spreading diseases left untreated. The state did not look very good.

Yet by the beginning of the twenty-first century, there were not many left for whom the fantasy of overcoming the state was not tinged with anxiety. Yes, state power was often overweening, often corrupt, and often mobilized in evil ways. But weak states typically failed their citizens and crises in strong states often unleashed violence and disrupted both lives and livelihoods. Pandemic diseases, global crime, human rights abuses, and forced migration all revealed the dark side to globalization – yet all seemed to call at least in part for better states, not an end to states. Could outsiders make peace in Sudan or would that depend on a more representative, honest, and competent Sudanese government? Or in a range of other African countries, could outside interventions contain the spread of AIDS unless states joined the struggle? And yet, partly because of structural adjustment programs pushed with fiscal good intentions and disastrous human consequences by the World Bank and others, most African states had neither money nor personnel nor health care systems to address AIDS – or for that matter malaria and other diseases. The “failed state” seemed as problematic as the abusive state. And this was not only an issue in Africa but in different local configurations around the world.

A great buzzword of the 1990s was “civil society” (see Chapter 4). And indeed, strengthening civil society – loose institutions part neither of the state nor of large-scale projects of capital accumulation – has been an important trend in many places. Both local and transnational voluntary organizations have grown and played crucial roles. Many are religiously inspired and some denominationally organized. Others are secular. All reflect efforts to create social organization on the basis of voluntary relations among people rather than the coercion of either political authority or capital. And yet, civil society organizations depend on money as well as personal connections. And except where states are able to regulate such organizations they are largely unaccountable and non-transparent. Civil society without a public sphere is not necessarily democratic. Civil society is a hugely valuable complement and sometimes corrective to states and markets, but not a substitute for either.³ It is no accident that “global governance” has become almost as ubiquitous a concern in the current decade as global civil society was in the last. But the issues are not only global; they are also national and local. Intermediate powers and solidarities still matter.

Individual sovereign states confront a variety of global flows and processes against which they are weak and which in turn weaken some of their other capacities. Global currency and equity markets make it hard for individual countries to operate autonomous fiscal or industrial policies. Global crime is hard to fight with the tools of national legal systems (and especially their domestic criminal law). Global diseases

challenge domestic health care systems. Yet these challenges faced by contemporary states no more make them irrelevant than the history of abuses of state power makes the stability and public services states can deliver unimportant. And crucially, most actually existing democracy has been achieved in and through states.

Nationalism figured significantly in the rise of democracy. It developed as a reflection of growing popular political participation – and demands for recognition by ordinary people – and as a source of solidarity among citizens. Of course nationalism was also promoted from above and used to mobilize ordinary people for war. It reflected the development of the state system but it also informed it. Today, however, nationalism is considered most often – at least in cosmopolitan global circles – as at best the basis for a morally illegitimate (and perhaps ill-educated, even tasteless) preference for one’s countrymen or culture over those of the rest of the world. More basically, it is identified with its role in coupling ethnic differences to state projects and resulting horrors from Bosnia and Kosovo to Rwanda and Burundi. Or in its American form it is identified with an overeager resort to force internationally and an overzealous domestic patriotism used to justify erosion in civil liberties.

This has left liberal political theory at something of an impasse. It is grounded implicitly but deeply in the presumption of states and nationalist ideas of how these relate to peoples. Yet it is also deeply committed to ideas of liberty and rights framed largely in individualistic terms. On the one hand there is a long tradition of work on “getting governance right.” On the other hand there is a long tradition of debunking nationalism as the source of either state legitimacy or citizen solidarity. The two traditions came together in visions of cosmopolitan democracy, or at least global politics organized in terms of a hierarchy of identities and organizations, none conceived as exclusively virtuous, or important, or sovereign.⁴ These are largely attractive visions, but they have two important limits which I attempt to address in this book.

First, they tend to underestimate the work done by nationalism and national identities in organizing human life as well as politics in the contemporary world. They often treat nationalism as a sort of error smart people will readily move beyond – or an evil good people must reject – and so as theories they grasp less well than they should the reality of the contemporary world. They generalize largely from the “bad nationalism” of fascism, ethnic cleansing, and war and neglect the many other dimensions of national solidarity. And what goes for nationalism goes also to a considerable extent for ethnicity and religion and other forms of solidarity, identity, and cultural valuation that seem merely sectional from some cosmopolitan vantage points.

Second, in failing to attend well enough to nationalism, ethnicity, and related claims to solidarity, the otherwise attractive cosmopolitan visions have also underestimated how central nationalist categories are to political and social theory – and to practical reasoning about democracy, political legitimacy, and the nature of society itself. I don't mean that we should prefer nationalist accounts, but rather that we should take them seriously and see how deeply imbricated they are in our conceptual frameworks rather than trying to wish them away. As Chapter 2 asserts, nationalism matters.

Nationalism matters not least because it has offered such a deeply influential and compelling account of large-scale identities and structures in the world – helping people to imagine the world as composed of sovereign nation-states. The world has never matched this imagining, but that does not deprive the nationalist imaginary of influence. Even the most emphatically anti-nationalist political philosophers reveal this influence, for example when they uncritically distinguish domestic from international affairs. Historians organize not only their individual studies but most of the very profession of history in terms of national categories. Sociologists draw more of their concept of society from the nationalist imaginary than they realize (see Chapter 5).

Discussion of political and legal citizenship requires attention to social solidarity. Current approaches to citizenship, however, tend to proceed on abstract bases, neglecting this sociological dimension. This is partly because a tacit understanding of what constitutes “a society” has been developed through implicit reliance on the idea of “nation.” Issues of social belonging are addressed more directly in communitarian and multiculturalist discourses. Too often, however, different modes of solidarity and participation are confused. Scale is often neglected. The model of “nation” again prefigures the ways in which membership and difference are constructed. The present volume suggests the value of maintaining a distinction among relational networks, cultural or legal categories, and discursive publics. The first constitute community in a sense quite different from either of the latter two. Categories, however, are increasingly prominent in large-scale social life. But the idea of public is crucial to conceptualizing democratic participation.

My effort here is not to offer a comprehensive account of nationalism or national identity and still less of ethnicity or all the problems of belonging in an increasingly global world. More modestly, I try to lay out some of the character and influence of nationalism, to make clear something of why and how it matters, and to situate nationalism and ethnicity in relation to the idea of a cosmopolitan global order. This last involves recognizing the tensions between two different ways of imagining the world. These social imaginaries are powerful enough, moreover,

that they shape the world, making it what it is, not just making pictures that match it more or less well. Most cosmopolitan visions oppose themselves to nationalism, but it has also figured in their conceptual heritage. The very formative opposition of ethnic and civic nationalism, discussed in detail in Chapter 6, is itself part of a framing of cosmopolitanism within the nationalist imaginary.

The present book is not a history of nationalism, but it is informed by insistence on seeing nationalism as a historical phenomenon. Nationalism is neither simply an inheritance always already there before modernity nor is it simply a set of values or beliefs which might become obsolete or be corrected and therefore vanish without trace. Rather, nationalism – as a conceptual framework, a discursive formation, a rhetoric, a structure of loyalties and sentiments – takes shape within history and informs history. There are specific histories within the era of nationalism's influence, histories shaped by the availability and pervasiveness of nationalism. But there is also a history of nationalism.⁵ And both sorts of history involve changes that come as people think with old concepts in new circumstances and make innovations that have influences beyond their intentions. Most historical change is a matter of greater or lesser transformations in what exists, not abandonment of the existing for a new ideal.

If we are to limit, or reform, or move beyond nationalism we need to take it seriously, not dismiss it. We need to ask for whom it is easy and for whom it is hard to make such moves and why. We need to consider the changing meanings of nationalism and the innovations people make in nationalist rhetoric and practice. We need to respect the importance of belonging to nations and other groupings of human beings smaller than humanity as a whole. We need to understand that such belonging does different sorts of work for different people – inspires some, protects some, consoles some, as well as makes political opportunities for some.

Not only is nationalism not a moral mistake, it is not vanishing. National identities and loyalties and structures of integration are among the many complications of the actual historical world in which moral decisions must be made. Globalization challenges nation-states and intensifies flows across their borders, but it doesn't automatically make them matter less. Because nations matter in varied ways for different actors, it is important to think carefully about how they are produced and reproduced, how they work and how they can be changed. It matters whether nationalist appeals mobilize citizens for ethnic cleansing, external war, or internal loyalty to regrettable regimes. It matters whether nationalist appeals mobilize citizens for democratic projects, mutual care, or redistribution of wealth. Prior histories of nation-

making may predispose people towards one sort of project or another, but the projects themselves also make and remake nations. Whatever is made of them, nations matter.