

# **RECENT THEORIES OF NATIONALISM**

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## INTRODUCTION

This paper has two major objectives: to create a typology of nationalist theories and to describe and assess the contributions of the major authors in this area. Theories of ethnicity have also been included in the survey. Generally speaking, only those authors who attempt to be explanatory have been included. The final section is largely a summary of my own theoretical approach. Smith (1998) provides the most comprehensive panorama of the different theories of nationalism to date.

## I. PRIMORDIALIST AND SOCIOBIOLOGICAL THEORIES

Among the few universalist theories of nationalism one should mention the primordialist and the sociobiological perspectives. Primordialism assumes that group identity is a given. That there exist in all societies certain primordial, irrational attachments based on blood, race, language, religion, region, etc. They are, in the words of Clifford Geertz (1973), ineffable and yet coercive ties, which are the result of a long process of crystallisation. Modern states, particularly, but not exclusively, in the Third World, are superimposed on the primordial realities which are the ethnic groups or communities. Primordialists believe that ethnic identity is deeply rooted in the historical experience of human beings to the point of being practically a given. Sociobiologists take this perspective a step further and assert the biological character of ethnicity.

Primordialist approaches contend that ethnic bonds are 'natural', fixed by the basic experiences that human beings undergo within their families and other primary groups. Edward Shils was the first to express this idea when he remarked that in family attachments there is a significant «relational quality» that can only be called primordial. And this is because there is an ineffable significance attributed to the ties of blood (Shils 1957: 142).

The primordialist position was further elaborated by C. Geertz (1973). Three major ideas follow from his work:

- 1) Primordial identities are natural or given.
- 2) Primordial identities are ineffable, that is, cannot be explained or analysed by referring to social interaction, but are coercive.
- 3) Primordial identities deal essentially with sentiments or affections.

Another contribution to primordialism that we will examine is that of Harold Isaacs. In his book *Idols of the Tribe* (1975) he mentions the existence of a basic group identity which, for each individual, is the

result of being born into a group at a certain historical time. There are a number of elements which contribute to the basic identity of each person:

- a) The physical body (which includes skin colour, size, type of hair and facial traits).
- b) The person's name (an individual name, a family name and a group name).
- c) The language one learns first to speak and with which one discovers the world.
- d) The religion one is indoctrinated into.
- e) The history and origins of the group one is born into.
- f) One's nationality, or ethnic affiliation.
- g) The geography of the place of birth.
- h) The culture that one inherits.

Primordialism has been subjected to extensive criticism. In particular, the three qualities emphasised by Geertz -apriorism, inefability and affectivity- seem to preclude the possibility of sociological analysis. Furthermore, primordialism is unable to account for the origins, change and dissolution of ethnic groups, not to speak of the more modern processes of fusion of ethnic groups through intermarriage.

Many of the problems associated with primordialism disappear if the term is understood in a more flexible, less biologically-determined, way. Without rejecting the idea of primordial attachments, it is possible to insist in their malleable character. These bonds are essential to human life, but the individuals of a group confer meanings to what they do in a symbolic way. For example, the passion and strong sense of loyalty that a person feels towards a socially constructed entity like an ethnic group or nation is often as powerful as that felt for a blood-based group like the family.

The sociobiology of man is an evolutionary science which is concerned with the explanation of human behaviour. In particular, human association is investigated by reference to three mechanisms: kin selection, reciprocity and coercion. Kin selection is the tendency to nepotism and it is a possible way by which individuals may maximise their reproductive success by indirect as well as direct means; ethnicity is produced by the extension of kin selection to a wider sphere of individuals who are defined in terms of real or putative common descent. Reciprocity refers to mutually advantageous cooperation tending to augment reproductive success. Cooperation takes place between kin, but can also be extended beyond this circle. As to coercion, the term just means an imbalance of power occurring within an ethnic group or between ethnic groups. At this stage it is important to emphasise that sociobiology does not suggest that ethnicity can be explained solely in terms of these mechanisms, that is, without linking them with the results of the human and social sciences. The fact that some practitioners may have been carried away with excessive generalisations is to be expected, but not condoned, in a new discipline like sociobiology.

The first important text which presented ethnicity in a sociobiological framework was Pierre van den Berghe's *The Ethnic Phenomenon* (Elsevier, 1981). The book is an attempt to show how human sociality rests on the mechanism of biological relatedness which expresses itself in nepotistic behaviour. Van den Berghe is not saying that kin always cling together; just that holding other factors constant, the likelihood of conflict or

cooperation can be predicted by reference to how closely related people are. In the absence of kinship ties he believes that cooperation appears when all parties can profit from a transaction. As to coercion, which requires the potential or actual use of force, it is common to most human societies, but it escalates with the emergence of the state.

Van den Berghe is not the first to have emphasised the continuity between kinship and ethnicity. After all, the readers of Evans-Pritchard are well aware of the fact that between the nuclear family and the ethnies there is a layer of intermediate institutions (extended family, lineage, clan) which interact according to the processes of fusion and fission. Perhaps what can be said about van den Berghe is that he has centred his work on this continuity and has derived from it a set of predictions concerning the role of nepotistic behaviour in the forming of human groups. Ethnicity is, therefore, firmly grounded on the belief of common descent, even when the number of people who make the ethnic group is very large, as is the case in our times. If this continuity between kinship and ethnicity has been recognised in anthropology for quite a long time, the reason for the behaviour had escaped the discipline. A long quote from van den Berghe will provide us with a sociobiological answer:

"The missing link in the analysis was an explanation of why people tend to behave nepotistically, both in a narrow sense, toward kinsmen, and in a broad way toward fellow ethnics. The sociobiology paradigm of maximisation of inclusive fitness [ie. total reproductive success] provided a promising hypothesis covering both kinship and ethnicity. It also parsimoniously solved many problems that had plagued social science in both areas. More generally, it provided a new way of looking at culture. Instead of treating culture as an almost infinitely plastic and arbitrary system of rules and values shaping the behaviour of individuals through enculturation, culture, in evolutionary perspective, is a flexible but non-random mechanism whereby we adapt quickly to a wide range of environmental changes (including those of our own creation). Culture is the specifically human way of adapting fast. It determines behaviour in a direct, proximate way, but it is itself determined, within broad limits, by genetic constraints. Genes and culture co-evolve, in short, to produce human adaptation (...) The main thrust of that evidence is not going to reduce the crucial evolutionary importance of all the things that are specifically human: symbolic language, self-consciousness, culture and so on. Rather, it is going to show that all these species-specific traits evolved by natural selection and continue to co-evolve with genes to produce our uniquely human adaptive strategy" (1989:295-297).

The second important text to appear on ethnicity in the 1980s was a collection of papers entitled *The Sociobiology of Ethnocentrism* (Reynolds 1983). The book was the result of a conference which brought together biologists, psychologists and social scientists. The central question addressed by the participants was: what kind of mechanisms contribute to the formation of in-groups and out-groups? Genetic distance was put forward as the key factor accounting for amity and enmity. Linguistic and cultural markers make sure that people are easily classified either as insiders (potential collaborators) or outsiders (potential foes). Conflict, however, does not always follow when two different ethnic groups enter into contact. There are innumerable examples of cooperation along pragmatic lines of common interest. Under which environmental, economic, political or ideological conditions conflict and violence arise is the key question to answer; and this, of course, requires a close collaboration between sociobiology and the social sciences.

Another important topic has to do with the way in which ethnocentric behaviour is learnt. The sociobiological input makes clear that learning cannot be seen as simply a psychological and cultural issue. The fact that as a result of its peculiar evolution the human species has developed certain neural characteristics means that we have certain learning predispositions. Historical and ethnographic material points out that in-group patterns are easy to learn and difficult to eradicate; after all, ethnocentrism is conducive to inclusive fitness. From the premise that ethnocentric behaviour is part of our evolutionary past it does not follow that we are condemned to repeat it. This rigid vision of human nature that critics of sociobiology would like us to believe is totally unwarranted. A better knowledge of our own genetic tendencies can be used to culturally and socially curtail our ethnocentric biases.

The final contribution that I wish to refer to is a book by Paul Shaw and Yuwa Wong entitled *Genetic Seeds of Warfare* (1989). The basic assumption of the authors is that there is a human propensity for warfare; this, of course does not account for actual instances of warfare, which require the introduction of proximate causes, whether ecological or socio-cultural, or both. The fact that mankind has evolved such a propensity over its long evolutionary past, obviously means that it has served small human groups well in terms of their survival and inclusive reproductive success.

The model presented by Shaw and Wang is comprehensive and ambitious, and they use it to account for a variety of phenomena: from the role played by ethnicity in the unleashing of military coups d'état in Africa to emphasising the mobilising role of nationalism (in ethnically homogeneous societies) and patriotism (in multiethnic societies) in modern warfare. The identification mechanism, that the authors define as «a set of psychological processes that characterise interactions between the environment and priorities of inclusive fitness maximisation so as to determine preferred-group membership» (p. 92) is the clue to how allegiance was transferred from small ethnic groups to large nations and multinational states. The following hypotheses are put forward by the authors:

1. Over evolutionary time, individuals have identified with groups larger than their nucleus ethnic group due to balance-of-power considerations. They have done so voluntarily or through coercion (that is, defeat and forced amalgamation with conqueror).

2. To belong to and fight for a larger group, priorities of inclusive fitness maximisation and related biases in mental development must be linked with priorities and choices in the cultural environment.

3. Over evolutionary time, linkages, presumed by assumption 2 have been accommodated, psychologically, by an identification mechanism. The identification mechanism operates continually to answer two questions: To what group should the individual belong to and fight for, assuming choices are available? If choices are not available, if membership in a larger group such as a state is mandatory, with what degree of intensity and commitment should the individual serve that group in warfare?

4. To answer the questions in assumption 3, the identification mechanism extracts information from cultural environments via two cognitive processes: reification and heuristics. The message of these cognitive processes -to identify with a particular group or not- is reinforced by emotive processes. Cognition and emotion work simultaneously to produce powerful group alliances. They are part of the epigenetic apparatus of all individuals.

5. The identification mechanism is not necessarily deterministic. There is no innately driven preference for any particular larger group. Rather, it operates to select a preferred group from the choices available. The identification mechanism does, however, operate universally to select a preferred group from the choices, if any, available.

6. The identification mechanism operates best to identify preferred-group membership when groups are naturally cohesive. Natural cohesion arises when five recognition markers are in congruence and intensity of emotion concerning these recognition markers is strong. The recognition markers are common phenotypes, descent, language, homeland and religion.

7. When one or more of the five recognition markers are 'out of step' or not present, ambiguity presents itself to the cognitive and emotive processes in the identification mechanism. Allegiance to the larger group is automatically weakened.

8. The identification mechanism tends to function most effectively (least ambiguity) in an ethnically homogeneous society. (We call such a society a cultural ethnic group to distinguish it from a nucleus ethnic group in the development of our theory).

9. When the identification mechanism operates in situation of nonambiguity (cultural ethnic groups), strong nationalism results. Inclusive fitness priorities are well aligned with interests of the larger group's boundaries, mobilisation for conflict against out-groups is relatively easy, and continuities in humanity's propensity for warfare are highly visible.

10. When the identification mechanism operates in situations of ambiguity, such as multiethnic states, group cohesiveness is threatened. In environments shaped by balance-of-power considerations, this becomes problematic - a noncohesive group may not be trusted by its members to foster and protect inclusive fitness priorities.

11. When group cohesion is threatened, the identification mechanism will tend to direct membership and allegiance to a subgroup, thus fostering intergroup strife, secessionist movements with the larger group, and perhaps civil war. To avoid this, cultural incentives must be introduced to foster and protect inclusive fitness priorities. In this case, patriotism is typically used by leaders to promote group cohesion and mobilise for warfare" (p. 109-110).

The sociobiological approach starts with the assumption that nationalism is the result of the extension of kin selection to a wider sphere of individuals who are defined in terms of putative or common descent. Sociobiological explanations are not necessarily articulated in terms of genetic determinism, although it may be heuristically useful to make such an assumption.

Most sociobiologists do not suggest that nationalism can be explained solely in terms of genetic mechanisms, that is, without linking them with the results of the human and social sciences. The sociobiological approach insists that nationalism combines both rational and irrational elements, that is a 'primitive mind' with modern techniques. The word nationalism expresses different realities: a love of country, the assertion of national identity and national dignity, but also the xenophobic obsession to obtain these things through violence and sacrificing other nations. Nationalism builds on ethnocentrism towards the in-group and xenophobia towards the out-group.

For Shaw and Yuba, nationalism "fosters pride, dignity and related sentiments among members of the in-group, thereby constituting a moral and philosophical basis on which to demand political sovereignty" (Shaw and Yuba 1989: 137). Nationalism has its roots in the past, but it is a contemporary vehicle to vent out human propensities to war. It is important in this context to emphasise the psychological dimensions of nationalism; a bond is established between the individual and the nation based on the idea that the latter is a family writ large. The individual identifies with the nation and hence tends to prefer it to, other nations. The extensive use of kin terms to refer to the nation reflects this psycho-affective reality that Edgar Morin has called "matri-patriotic", with an associated fraternal/sororal component.

Sociobiologists often fail to account for the formation, evolution and eventual disappearance of nations; in this respect the historical and social sciences have an essential role to play. However, sociobiologists, by identifying certain human propensities for conflict and warfare which have served **homo sapiens sapiens** well as successful inclusive fitness maximiser, point out that these mechanisms, useful at an early stage of development, today risk the global annihilation of the human species. Recognising these propensities can be the first step towards their neutralisation.

## II. INSTRUMENTALIST THEORIES

This group of theories refer essentially to ethnic groups rather than nations, but some of their conclusions are often generalized to encompass both ethnies and nations. Instrumentalists believe that ethnic identity is flexible and variable; that both the content and boundaries of an ethnic group change according to circumstances.

Under the label of instrumentalism one can range a variety of approaches which are based on the idea that ethnicity is the result of economic, social or political processes, and hence that it is by definition a flexible and highly adaptable tool. Ethnic groups have no fixed boundaries; they are rather collective entities which change in size according to changing conditions. As to individuals, not only they are not assigned permanently to an ethnic group, but they can be members of more than one at the same time. Ethnicity is then seen as dynamic.

Some instrumentalists insist that ethnic affiliation is simply a ploy to promote economic interests, and that individuals are ready to change group membership if that suits their sense of security or their economic interests. Marxists have tended to see ethnicity as false consciousness, as a ruse of the dominant groups to hide class interests of a material kind. Furthermore, the persistence of ethnic ties in modern societies does not quite tally with the expectations of Marxist theorists, who predict that these ties will eventually fade away and be substituted by working class solidarity.

The best known and most influential instrumentalist approach is that of Fredrik Barth (1969). Two sources of inspiration can be noted in Barth's approach. In the first place, the supersession of the idea of corporate group theory of British social anthropology. These groups were: a) biologically self-perpetuating; b) the members of the group shared fundamental cultural values; c) the group made up a field of interaction



and communication; and d) the members identified themselves and were identified by others as belonging to the group. Secondly, the interactionist theory of the American sociologist Erving Goffman, who "interprets behaviour as a manipulative game of play-acting in which we 'manage' the impression or image we create in others, and vice versa" (Berghe 1978: 280). Barth's methodological steps concerning the definition of ethnicity are as follows:

1) Ethnicity is envisaged not as an expression of a vague culture, but as a form of social organisation. In any case, it referred to culture; it emphasises the cultural differences between groups.

2) The main focus of research is the boundary that defines the group, as well as the process of recruitment of its members, and not the characteristics of the culture of the group. Boundaries have to be understood in the symbolic and social sense of the term.

3) Boundary maintenance is thus essential for the ethnic group and it is not primordial, but rather the outcome of specific ecological, economic, historical or political situations.

4) In terms of identity ethnic groups are characterised by both ascription and self-ascription. Constraint only follows when members accept to form part of the group.

5) The cultural features chosen by the members of a group to differentiate themselves from other groups, that is, to establish a boundary, are to a certain extent arbitrary.

6) Ethnic groups are mobilised, not so much by popular will but to a great extent by ethnic entrepreneurs or leaders.

Following on Barth's approach, it is possible to distinguish four major levels of ethnicity:

**Micro:** it looks into how the identity is formed and experienced by individuals in the context of interacting with other individuals.

**Median:** it examines the formation and mobilisation of groups. At this level the key focus should be on leadership and entrepreneurship. Stereotypes are often important at this level. The median level exerts a constraint on the micro level, shaping the way in which individuals express their identity.

**Macro:** it considers how the state affects ethnic groups through legal frameworks and specific policies, as well as through the use of force and the threat of force. At the ideological level the state has also a vast machinery (schools, media, etc) to control and manipulate information and to imprint particular ethnic/national worldviews.

**Global:** it investigates recent developments which are based on the emergence of a global discourse on human rights, the increasing role of the United Nations as a peace keeper and a peace enforcer and of the NGOs. All these elements have added a new dimension to ethnicity.

Over the years the Barthian paradigm has been subjected to a number of criticisms. These are some of the most important ones:

- a) Not all situations permit manipulation.
- b) In situations of racial differences, choice may be very limited.
- c) Barth's theory of fluidity of ethnic groups applies better to the Third World than to the First World -where ethnic identities are often more fixed because of a longer period of nation-building and state formation.

- d) The lack of historical depth obscures the processes of ethnic fusion and fission.
- e) By focusing on interpersonal relationships, there is a tendency to minimise the role of the state.
- f) The transactionalist approach is often blind to situations of imbalance of economic or political power among ethnic groups.

We should also briefly refer two other approaches. A rather sophisticated sociological approach is that put forward, among others, by Susan Olzak and Joanne Nagel in their edited collection *Competitive Ethnic Relations* (1986). **Competition theories** try to account for the rise and decline of ethnic movements. They are based on the assumption that ethnic identities tend to appear or reappear to become the foundation of collective action when distinct groups compete with each other for the access to relatively scarce resources (jobs, political positions, status, etc.). The objective of each competing group is to have exclusive access to the resources -a process that Max Weber labelled 'social closure'.

Finally, an approach which has gained some notoriety in the past few years is that of the **rational choice theorists**. Authors like Michael Banton (1983) and Michael Hechter (1988) insist on the importance of the role played by individual preferences in ethnic affiliation. This school is based on two assumptions: 1) individuals behave with a view to maximise their benefits (in terms of economic gains, security or prestige); 2) present actions restrict future choices.

### III. MODERNIZATION THEORIES

Most theories of nationalism assert the modern character of the phenomenon and account for its appearance and development by reference to a variety of factors associated with modernity. While some authors like John Armstrong and Anthony D. Smith contend that nations precede nationalism and that there is a continuity between old and modern nations (in that medieval or even ancient ethnic communities are often a springboard for the modern nation), only primordialists and sociobiologists take perhaps the nation as perennial, that is, an entity which has existed throughout history.

In general terms modernization theories maintain that nationalism emerges as a result of the process of transition from traditional to modern society; some of these theories focus more specifically on the spread of industrialization, and on the socio-economic, political and cultural conditions functionally associated with it, as the main cause for the development of nationalism.

The ideological roots of modernization can be found in the Renaissance, the Scientific Revolution and the Enlightenment. At the economic level, modernization was brought, at first, by the development of trade and commerce, and subsequently by the process of industrialization. At the political level it implied the appearance of the modern national state -a centralized, bureaucratic, territorial, sovereign polity. When applied to non-Western societies some features of modernity such as commercialization, bureaucratization, secularization, urbanization, mass communications, literacy, etc may be present, while industrialization is often absent.

Modernization theories of nationalism come under different guises. Authors do not always fit easily into rigid typologies. Furthermore, in the course of their work they may have shifted their theoretical stand substantially. With all these provisos in mind we can distinguish three major types of modernization theories:

1. Social communication theories (Deutsch, Rustow, Rokkan, Anderson)

2. Economistic theories

- 2.1. Marxist-inspired

- 2.1.1. Classical

- 2.1.2. Internal colonialism (Hechter)

- 2.1.3. Uneven development (Nairn)

- 2.1.4. World-system (Wallerstein)

- 2.1.5. Hroch

- 2.2. Non-Marxist inspired (Gellner)

3. Politico-ideological theories (Brennly, Giddens, Brass, Mann)

## **1. Social communication theories**

A pioneering study on the effects of modernization on nationalism was Karl Deutsch's *Nationalism and Social Communication* (1953). It deals with the growth of nations and nationalism in the context of the transition from traditional to modern societies. Deutsch emphasizes the centrality of communication in the making of national communities; a nation is a group of people who communicate more effectively and intensely with one another than with people outside the group. By using a variety of data from economic history and demography, Deutsch pinpointed the massive social mobilization which went along with the processes of commercialization, industrialization and urbanization, as well as with the growth of general literacy and mass communications.

The theory predicted that an accentuation of social mobilization would enhance the importance of language and culture and hence of nationalism. The issue at stake, however, is which unit will be affected. One of the implications of Deutsch's theory is that modern nation-states are likely to absorb or assimilate the languages and cultures of the subordinated ethnies or national minorities within their borders. Even allowing for some exceptions, it was clear for Deutsch that the general trend was for the disappearance of these entities.

We know at present that this prediction has been proven wrong. The intensification of the different processes of communication in recent years has not only consolidated cultural and linguistic differences, but has also produced autonomist and separatist movements in the West, the Third World and the ex-communist block.

Another author who has insisted on the connexion between modernization and nationalism is the American political scientist Dankwart Rustow. In his book *A World of Nations* (1969) he pointed out that "the essential link between modernization and nationhood consists of course in the need for an intensive division

of labour" (1969: 30). Other features such as equality and loyalty were also essential to the nation that emerged from the modernization process.

Rustow admitted that some traditional societies were possibly nations and that emerging modernization took place without a sentiment of nationhood. However, the historical process has shown that modernization and nationhood are closely related and that the most appropriate political structure to achieve advanced modernization is the nation-state. Furthermore, national identity is best fostered and preserved in the context of modernization.

Stein Rokkan, who followed in many respects Deutsch's ideas, presented a much more complex and comprehensive model of nation-states in Western Europe (Rokkan and Urwin 1983). His framework proposes a *longue durée* which places some important variables in the medieval and early modern periods. As to the modern situation he accounted for accelerated nation-building in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries by reference to six variables: two economic (the combination of rural and rural resources and the spread and localization of industrialization), two territorial (the pressures towards centralization and unification and the pull of imperialist tendencies) and two cultural ones (the tensions between centre and periphery during the course of ethnic/linguistic mobilization and the conflicts between state and Church).

Although Rokkan applied his model to Western Europe, there is reason why most of the variables could not be used in other parts of the world. Unfortunately, Rokkan is mostly concerned with the formation of nation-states in general and pays little attention to the specifics of nationalism.

Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* (1983) emphasizes also, among other things, the issue of social communication in the early modern period of the development of modernity. Anderson's definition of the nation as an «imagined political community -and imagined as both limited and sovereign» (1983: 15) has had an extraordinary appeal. His argument about the origins of nationalism lead him to focus on the tremendous impact of print capitalism. The book was, after all, the first commodity produced in a massive way. This was one area in which early capitalists, using the new technology of production available, were able to make great profits. Having exhausted the market in Latin, capitalists turned to the vernaculars.

The effect of print-language was felt on national consciousness by means of creation of a unified language which allowed a sizeable part of the population to read the same texts and identify with each other. Furthermore, by giving a fixity to language it was possible to develop the idea of the antiquity of one's nation. Anderson concluded that "what made the new communities imaginable was a half-conscious, but explosive interaction between a system of production and productive relations (capitalism), a technology of communications and the type of fatality of human linguistic diversity" (1983: 46). At a later stage in history state consolidation both at home and in the colonies created groups of people who felt politically and culturally excluded and by imagining themselves as communities were able to shake off alien rule.

## **2. Economistic theories**

The starting point of the economic conception of the nation is the assumption that national consciousness is fundamentally a type of false consciousness. In other words, that underneath the idea of the nation lie economic interests. The fact that by its own ambiguity the nationalist discourse can be used to justify or hide economic exploitation, as well as political power and cultural supremacy, is not a sufficient reason to reduce nationalism to the ideology of the ascending bourgeoisie. Economism is an extremely popular form of explanation and as such is favoured by Marxists and non-Marxists alike. In the modern literature this explanatory framework appears in different guises, but in final analysis their common denominator is that they deny the specific character of the national fact.

Marxist theories envisage nationalism as a modern phenomenon and posit a more or less explicit causal connexion between the development of capitalism and the appearance of nationalism. The founders of historical materialism were certainly well aware of the nationalist phenomenon. As politically committed young intellectuals, Marx and Engels lived through the troublesome 1840s -a period in which nationalist struggles ravaged the European arena. In their formative years then, they had to confront the nationalist demands of a variety of European peoples. To understand their attitude towards nationalism it is essential to know that they subordinated the survival of nations to the progressive march of history: some peoples were fossils from a long gone past and were therefore objectively counter-revolutionary. These reactionary nations had to be sacrificed to the altar of the mightier national states. In the articles written by Marx and Engels for the Neue Rheinische Zeitung (1848-1849), the national question was often present as part of the political scenario, but there was no attempt to explain the phenomenon except perhaps in terms of crude stereotypes of national character. It is obvious that for Marx and Engels the nation was not a central category of social existence, but rather a transitory institution created by the bourgeoisie, hence the passage in The Communist Manifesto to the effect that the "proletariat has no fatherland".

At the turn of the century the vindication of the rights of nations changed the political panorama to the extent that to the Marxists of the Second International the national question was central in their political agenda. However, it was only within the Austro-Marxian tradition that a serious attempt was made to come to terms with the theoretical problems of the nation. Otto Bauer's Die Nationalitätenfrage und die Sozialdemokratie (1907) presented a theory of nationalism based on the idea of national character and of national culture, though he also used the dubious idea that nations have an historical destiny to fulfil. A much better known and more influential contribution from this period is, of course, Stalin's Marxism and the National Question (1913). In his definition of the nation, Stalin required the simultaneous coalescence of four elements (language, territory, economic life and psychic formation) in an historically constituted community of culture. As for Lenin, he adopted a more flexible definition of the nation, and although he was in favour, like most Marxists, of the creation of large political units, he endorsed the principle of self-determination of oppressed nations, at least in theory.

In the 1970s a number of attempts were made to develop a theory of nationalism along modified Marxist lines. Among the most prominent approaches one should mention the following: internal colonialism, uneven development and world-systems.

Internal colonialism aimed originally at explaining ethnonational movements within a state. The theory is a variant of older, Marxist-inspired imperialist and dependency theories. Its most immediate antecedents, though, can be traced back to the Latin American literature of the 1960s. In a nutshell, the idea that states exhibit strong internal inequalities based on ethnic lines (indians in Latin America, blacks in the USA) was transplanted to Europe where it received a regional basis. In his classical study of the United Kingdom *Internal Colonialism*- Michael Hechter (1975) maintained that industrialization aggravated an already existing situation of economic dependency and inequality of the Celtic fringe (Scotland, Wales and Ireland) vis a vis England and this manifested itself first in differential political behaviour and later in ethnonational movements. Hechter emphasized as well the unequal development of industrialism within states. He suggested that in each country there is a region which is favoured by capitalist development, while the others are subordinated.

Furthermore, Hechter also defended the idea that instead of national culture, what we have is a core culture which dominates over the others by establishing ethnic boundaries. The key feature of Hechter's theory is the idea of a cultural division of labour existing between the core and the periphery, that is, there developed a system of stratification by means of which the dominant group at the core was in a position to monopolize social positions, which had high prestige in the society, while the members of the peripheral cultures were assigned social roles which were considered inferior. The further industrialization advanced in its uneven way, the internal differences became more accentuated; ethnonationalism emerged as a response to a situation of perceived dependence and exploitation.

Hechter's intention was to articulate a model valid not only for the UK, but for Europe as a whole. It is unclear whether he meant to give it a wider application, though some of his followers have used it to account for ethnonationalist movements in the newly formed states. The appeal of Hechter's ideas is hardly surprising given the eagerness with which social scientists and politicians alike embrace economic explanations. The model was convenient, although one must insist that Hechter's argument in relation to the UK was both scholarly and persuasive. Unfortunately, many of his followers translated the theory into an extremely simplistic equation in which ethnonationalism was seen as a direct response to an objective situation of economic dependence.

Returning now to Hechter's theory it was obvious from the start that even as a regional -European- theory of ethnonationalism (and this was already an important limitation) it was plagued with glaring anomalies. A well-aimed criticism against Hechter's approach was that his theory was unable to account adequately for major ethnonationalist movements like the Scottish one, and even less for the Basque and Catalan variants which actually developed in the most industrialized areas of Spain. Hechter and Levi (1979) tried to counter some of these criticisms by putting forward a modified theory of internal colonialism which incorporated within it the notion of a cultural division of labour, the idea of a segmental division. In their own words: "the members interact wholly within the boundaries of their own group" (1979: 263) and an elite manages to monopolize the the key positions in the social structure. It is arguable how far this modified approach, which also gives more prominence to the role of the state, can be seen as a retreat from the original

idea that the uneven development of industrialism was the primary factor which accounted for the development of ethnonationalism.

While Anthony D. Smith (1983) seems to believe that in spite of the amendments Hechter's theory is still "flawed by its reductionist assumptions that cultural cleavages and ethnic sentiments can be wholly derived from purely economic and spatial characteristics" (1983: XVI), A.W. Orridge is less negative, accepting that "uneven development has played an important role in the genesis of many forms of nationalism" (1981: 189), though in other instances it was "at most a subsidiary factor" (ibid.). Ragin (1987) seem to concord with Orridge in suggesting that internal colonialism explains a good number, although not all, of ethnonationalist movements.

The contribution of Tom Nairn to a general theory of nationalism is essentially contained in chapter 9 of his *The Break Up of Britain* (1977). Stemming from a Marxist tradition, but acknowledging that Marxism had little to offer on nationalism, Nairn insisted that only by focusing on the ravages and contradictory effects of uneven development, could we hope to understand nationalism. Capitalism may have unified mankind, but at the price of great disequilibria and tremendous antagonisms which have triggered off a process of socio-political fragmentation, affecting even the Old Continent. Nationalism was the result of certain aspects of the world political economy in the modern era; it was a way that peripheral countries found to defend themselves against the core. This was done by interclass mobilization on the basis of a different identity from that of the alien dominating state (1977: 340). Nationalism had of necessity to express itself through the cultural peculiarities of each area. In conclusion, for Nairn nationalism was the socio-historical cost of the accelerated implantation of capitalism at a world level. It is arguable how reductionist Nairn's theory is, though in Anthony D. Smith's survey it is classified as "an economistic model of nationalism" (1983: XVI). Nairn maintains that nationalist phenomena cannot be reduced to economic trends, rather that the former are given real force by the latter.

In the wealth of writings that Wallerstein has dedicated to the world-system, he has occasionally touch upon the national question. However, in so far as a theory of nationalism presupposes a conceptualization of the nation, Wallerstein's theory is seriously defective. This is the result of his failure to elaborate the cultural aspect of the modern world-system. But if a theory of the nation assumes a theory of culture, the former is likely to be reductionist if we generalize on the basis of the clues that Wallerstein has offered in his work. In his *The Modern World-System II*, he defines cultures as "the ways in which people clothe their political interests and drives in order to express them in space and time, and preserve their meaning" (1980: 65). Like many other social scientists, Wallerstein does not make a clear-cut distinction between state and nation, although he is aware of the differences; for him the only possible relation is that of nation equalling nation-state.

An interesting development in Wallerstein's work is his attempt to graft into the world-system theory a modified conception of the Weberian distinction between class and 'status group' (*Stand*) to account for the existence of ethnicity/nationalism. According to Wallerstein, Weber's trinity of class, status group and party

should not be seen as different overlapping groups, but as three different existential forms of the same underlying reality. The problem is to determine when a stratum embodies itself as class, status or party.

The strong Wallersteinian theory of nationalism maintains that within the capitalist world-system 1) classes can be reduced to material interests and 2) status groups and parties are blurred, often incorrect, collective representations of classes. In situations of acute class conflict the status group lines tend to coincide with class lines. The weak Wallersteinian theory of nationalism maintains that ethnic consciousness is an assertion in the political arena to defend cultural and/or economic interests. And here culture is to be understood in terms of language, religion, history, life-style, etc. or a combination of these in so far as they are used to define the boundaries of a group. From these premises it follows that Wallerstein's failure to provide an explanation of nationalism is due, in the first place, to his economistic, or at best politico-economic, reductionism which pervades his conception of the capitalist world-system, and in the second place, to his inadequate conception of the nation.

Wallerstein insists, like E. Hobsbawm and T. Ranger (eds.) (1983), on the invented or constructed character of the nation. In his own words: "the nation hinges around one of the basic structural features of the world economy", that is, "the political superstructure of this historical system, the sovereign states that form and derive from the interstate system" (Wallerstein 1987: 381). A nation for Wallerstein "derives from the the political structuring of the world-system" (ibid.: 383), in other words, "statehood preceded nationhood" (ibid.: 384). In the end, though, Wallerstein will insist that the nation is "in no sense a primordial stable social reality, but a complex clay-like historical product of the capitalist world-economy" (ibid.: 387).

An original Marxist approach is that of Miroslav Hroch. In his seminal book *Social Preconditions of National Revival in Europe* (1968) (1985) proposes a class analysis of the origin of the modern nation, although he also considers the role of cultural developments. The book is based on the comparative study of the social and territorial composition of the early nationalist movements of seven stateless nations (Czechia, Lithuania, Estonia, Finland, Norway, Flanders and Slovakia).

Hroch distinguishes three main stages in the development of modern society: an early period in which the transition from feudalism to capitalism takes place. This stage also comprises the fight against absolute monarchies and the unfurling of revolutions of bourgeois type. The second stage coincides with the victory and consolidation of capitalism as well as the appearance of an organized working class movement. Finally, during the twentieth century there is a process of world-wide integration and an unprecedented development of mass communications. At the cultural level each nationalist movement runs through three phases: Phase A (the period of scholarly interest), Phase B (the period of patriotic agitation) and Phase C (the rise of a mass national movement).

The Marxist tradition has been, on the whole, extremely suspicious of nationalism, though for tactical reasons they often have made use of national sentiments to achieve socialist objectives. In any case, within the Marxist theory the nation is not a significant concept that can help to explain the dynamics of modern history. In effect one must agree with Tom Nairn's sweeping statement that the "theory of



nationalism represents Marxism's great historical failure" (1977: 329), a point which has been disputed by Benner (1997). The developments of the 1960s and 1970s in which socialist countries fought bitterly against each other along nationalist lines opened the eyes of some Marxists (Davis 1978) to the reality that national interests were, in the final instance, more important than socialist internationalism. With the collapse of the Soviet block in 1989 and the desintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991-92, these issues have come to the forefront. At present few believe that Marxism can provide a genuine theory of nationalism.

At first sight it may be surprising to include Ernst Gellner among the proponents of a theory of nationalism anchored on the uneven development of (industrial) capitalism, that is, on an economic approach. For one thing, Gellner avoids the expression "capitalism" (he prefers "industrial society" or industrialism) and more importantly his theory has been labelled culturalist or linguistic (Smith 1983). While Gellner is in no way a Marxist, he maintains that nationalism is the unavoidable outcome of an industrial society which requires a spatially ductile labour force (Stokes 1986: 594). In this sense he qualifies for an economic vision of nationalism, though this statement will have to be nuanced below.

Gellner's first major and influential statement on nationalism came in chapter seven of his *Thought and Change* (1964). There he emphasized that nationalism could only be understood in the context of the impact of industrialization, of the competition between classes in the newly created industrial stratification and of the integrating effects of language and education. The processes of industrialization undermined the traditional social structures and gave primacy to cultural elements (essentially communication). The identity of an individual was no longer defined in terms of his social relations but in terms of his culture. And culture and nationality are closely related. Only the state could provide through the educational system and the official language the kind of "cultured" persons required by the process of industrialization. The fact that modernization and industrialization spread in an uneven fashion created a new system of social stratification - a class system - which was felt to be unacceptable because of its illegitimacy. If this overlaps with cultural differences, an uneasy alliance between a culturally displaced intelligentsia and an overexploited proletariat may lead to national secession.

In 1983 came the publication of Gellner's definitive statement on nationalism in the form of a slender volume entitled *Nations and Nationalism*. The book does not represent a major theoretical shift, though he has tried to account for the more disruptive aspects of nationalism (separatism, violence) which he had neglected in the past. The major thrust of his theory is still very much that "it was social chasms (doubled with cultural differences) created by early industrialism, and by the unevenness of its diffusion, which made it [nationalist conflict] acute" (1983: 121). And he has no qualms in stating once again that "the specific roots of nationalism are found in the distinctive structural requirements of industrial society" (ibid.: 31).

The Gellnerian model of nationalist development strongly emphasizes that nationalism has its roots in the new industrial order, and that nothing before this period -Gellner's agrarian society- can be equated to nationalism because political units were not defined in terms of cultural boundaries. Since for Gellner nations can only be defined in terms of the age of nationalism, he cannot conceive of the nation as an imaginative vision created by intellectuals in order to legitimize the medieval (agrarian) state (monarchy) in Western

Europe. Besides industrialization, Gellner's second emphasis is on modernisation (population explosion, rapid urbanization, labour migration, penetration of local economies by a global economy). Following Weber, he admits that the Protestant Reformation must have had an impact on nationalism; so did colonialism and imperialism.

It is essential in Gellner's conception that nations should be invented; the idea of ethno-national potential is for him that of a raw material of limited if any importance. I believe that industrial society only served to reinforce an existing phenomena; Gellner's theory fails completely to account for the nationalist developments in Western Europe, which were largely present prior to industrialization and in any case followed a different pattern from his predictions. In the final resort, his approach cannot escape the constraints of its economic scaffolding, and this is why Gellner cannot understand what motivates nationalists, what makes them vibrate emotionally, except may be socio-economic mobility. Without looking into the antecedents of nationalism it is difficult to account for the passions that it generates.

In his more recent statements (1994; 1997) there are no major theoretical changes, although Gellner has refined his typology of nationalism. He distinguishes five stages in the evolution of nationalism (beginnings, nationalist irredentism, nationalism triumphant, totalitarian nationalism and tamed nationalism) and four European time zones (Atlantic sea-coast, Holy Roman Empire area, Mitteleuropa and the ex-Soviet Union). Both evolutionary and geographic ideal-types are rather rigid, and although they account for some cases, they leave out a lot of anomalies. For example, the Atlantic sea-coast covers Portugal, Spain, France, the United Kingdom and Scandinavia. According to Gellner it is an area mostly bereft of 'ethnographic nationalism'. This is true concerning Portugal, but it is hardly applicable to Spain and the UK; even the French case is not so clear-cut as Gellner makes it.

Gellner has repeatedly rejected the accusation that he is an economic determinist, although in the *Festschrift* in his honour (Hall and Jarvie 1996) a number of authors (Anderson, Smith, O'Leary) still insist in using this label. Furthermore, Anthony Smith (1986) has shown the ethnic antecedents of modern nationalism. Smith does not deny the modern character of nations and nationalism, but he remarks that "we find in pre-modern eras, even in the ancient world, striking parallels to the 'modern' idea of national identity (...) and we find movements that appear to resemble modern nationalism" (1986: 11). An interesting and challenging turn to Gellner's theory that modernization creates nations is Liah Greenfeld detailed defence of the opposite thesis: it is modernity that is defined by nationalism (1992: 11).

### **3. Politico-ideological theories**

The final section deals with politico-ideological theories of modernization. We will consider four authors: John Breuilly, Anthony Giddens, Paul Brass and Michael Mann. A common feature to all these authors is the prominent role they give to the state in the development of nationalism in modernity.

In his *Nationalism and the State* (1982)(1993), John Breuilly accepts the existence of nations and national sentiments in medieval Europe, but he restricts nationalism to the modern period and envisages it as a

consequence of the development of the modern state and of the international state system. Ashe puts it: "nationalism should be understood as a form of politics that arises in close association with the development of the modern state" (1993: xii). Although well-aware that in some cases economic interests play a role in nationalism, a class-reductionist or an economistic explanation of nationalism is ruled out precisely because of the diversity of nationalist movements.

The advent of nationalism is related to the first wave of modernization which started in the sixteenth century. Breuilly's attention is focused on the formation of the Western European states and at the level of the religious and political struggles that characterized the early modern period. In all its history, the modern state has shaped nationalist politics and has been central to the making of nationalism.

Anthony Giddens has tried to tackle the nationalist phenomenon in his two volume *A Contemporary Critique of Historical Materialism* (1981; 1985). He defines nationalism as "the existence of symbols and beliefs which are either propagated by elite groups, or held by many of the members of regional, ethnic, or linguistic categories of a population and which imply a community between them" (Giddens 1981: 190-191). Giddens regards nationalism as a basically modern phenomenon stemming from the aftermath of the French Revolution. Its association "in time and in fact with the convergent rise of capitalism and the nation-state" (ibid.: 191), is not sufficient ground, he says, for assuming that it is an excrescence of the nation-state and that the latter is a subproduct of capitalism.

Giddens also insists that European nationalism is a world of its own and that it should not be generalized to other areas without reference to what he calls "world-time". Interestingly enough, though, the connection between capitalism and nationalism, which is rejected at the economistic level, is re-introduced at the psychological level. Nationalism is seen, in this context, as a response to certain "needs and dispositions" which would appear at a time when, as a result of the commodification of time and space, the individual has lost his ontological security (ibid.: 193-194). Now, to be sure, Giddens does not deny that nationalism is connected with class domination, and that the uneven development of capitalism strongly influenced the "origins of oppositional nationalism" (1985: 220).

Paul Brass is critical of perennialism and insists that ethnicity and nationalism are the products of modernity; furthermore, he emphasizes its constructed character. Cultures are fabricated by elites who use raw materials from different groups to create ethnies and nations. By using these representations, elites aim at ensuring their economic or political advantages for themselves. Brass's theory states that ethnic identity and modern nationalism arise out of specific types of interactions between the leadership of centralizing states and the elites from non-dominant ethnic groups, especially but not exclusively on the peripheries of those states (Brass 1991: 9).

Michael Mann sees himself as a modernist, although he accepts the existence of more or less conscious ethnies and proto-nations before modern times. To account for the development of nationalism it is necessary to refer to all four sources of social power (economic, political, ideological and military). In the

first phase, which began in the sixteenth century, ideological power dominated; it was in the shape of religion and it gave form to protonations like Protestant England. The second phase commenced in 1700 and it can be defined as a 'commercial-statist' phase; it was characterized by further diffusion of protonational identities. It roughly corresponds to Anderson's idea of print capitalism. In the third phase, military power dominates and it propels nationhood. By the beginning of the nineteenth century most Western nations were already in full sight. Finally, "the industrialist phase of the nation encouraged three types of nation: state reinforcing, state creating and state subverting" (Mann 1993: 731).

For Mann it is obvious that nationalism appeared heavily mediated by the role of the state. In his contribution to a *Festschrift* in Gellner's honour he concludes that "industrialisation was not the principal cause" of nationalism; in fact, "it arrived too late". And he adds: "There were two principal causes: on the one hand, the emergence of commercial capitalism and its universal social classes: on the other, the emergence of the modern state and its professional armed forces and administrators. Conjoined by the fiscal-military pressures exerted by geopolitical rivalry, they produced the politics of popular representation and these formed several varieties of modern nationalism" (1992: 162).

It seems to be well-established that mass nationalism is a modern phenomenon. However, the assumption that it is the (uneven) development of industrialism that causes the appearance of nationalism and of nations cannot be accepted as a general proposition. Two counter arguments support this statement. Firstly, nations precede nationalism, and the modern development of at least some of the former is the result of a long historical period which finds its roots in the Middle Ages. Secondly, techno-economic or economic explanations of nationalism may account for some aspects of nationalism or some nationalist cases, but they do not make for a general, or even a regional (European), theory of nationalism.

### III. EVOLUTIONARY THEORIES

Between the generalities of universalism and the limitations of modernism, there is room for a third type of theory which could be called evolutionary. It is true that as a mass phenomenon nationalism is a product of modern times, but in Europe the roots of nation as an 'imagined community' (Anderson), of national identity and even of incipient patriotic nationalism are firmly anchored in the medieval period (Llobera 1994).

There are serious problems in explaining the transition from ethnic to national identity, but they are partly due to the lack of in depth historical studies on how the transformation occurred and the failure to see the implications of ethnicity for modern nationhood. Russian scholars have introduced an intermediary stage between tribe and nation, that of narodnost, but this only compounds the problem. J. Armstrong's pathbreaking *Nations before Nationalism* (1982) considers modern nationalism as part of a long cycle of ethnic consciousness; only the longue durée will allow us to find a way out of the blind alley in which our

obsession with the modernity of nationalism has placed us. There is no miraculous appearance of the nation at the time of the French Revolution, but a long process of evolution.

There is, however, a conceptual gap between the medieval and the modern ideas of the nation; and that is why national identities had to be 're-created' or 're-invented' in modernity. However, the crucial think is how to account for the transition from the classical ethnies into modern nations (Smith 1981; 1983; 1986; 1991), and why this process took place originally in Western civilisation. Only a theoretical framework which incorporates a variety of factors, not only economic (industrial capitalism), social (classes) or political (modern state), but also ideological (nationalist ideas), is likely to approximate the explanation needed given the complexities of the phenomenon (Llobera 1994).

There is no need to argue against the modernist conception of nationalism provided that it is clearly accepted that what we are referring to is **modern** nationalism, that is, an ideology which found its first manifestation at the turn of the nineteenth century. The roots of the nation, of national identity and even of an incipient patriotic nationalism are firmly anchored in the medieval period and in some cases much earlier. There is no contradiction between these two statements. However, there is no way in which medieval sentiments of national identity can be compared properly with modern ones. This is why national identities had to be 'invented', or as I prefer it, recreated. What matters is that past history should provide a plausible scenario for the recreation of national identity; if not, it can only be maintained with the help of the state.

The effects of industrial capitalism in the development of nationalism in Western Europe are much more difficult to ascertain with precision than many theoreticians would like us to believe. We have seen that there is no elective affinity between capitalism and nationalism. If we take the connection between capitalism and nationalism as a proposition concerning the development of nationalism in Western Europe, the evidence suggests that the process of industrialization made its appearance at a time when national identities were already there.

Two caveats should be entered here. First, there is still a question left unanswered: in which way did the logic of industrialism and the concomitant process of modernization further contribute to the development of nationalism? Most authors, and Gellner in particular, would tend to agree with the idea that there is causality here, namely that industrialism accelerated the existing nationalist tendencies. It is not clear whether the decisive factor is the process of industrialization or rather the modernising elements with which it was associated in Western Europe. Second, I would refrain from generalising to other areas outside Western Europe (and particularly the Third World), though I note not only that national identities were rare elsewhere, but also that industrialization, if it existed at all, was both late and superficial.

The two major processes of 'national' independence outside Europe took place in the aftermath of two specific political events which were 'nationally' charged: the American and the French Revolutions and the two World Wars. The former proclaimed that government should be based on the will of the people and that by people was meant, at least in theory, the totality of the citizens of the nation; the latter saw the

beginning of the end of colonialism. What we can observe in both historical periods is that a specific form of anticolonial 'nationalism' -if this is the appropriate term- makes its appearance.

The modern system of Western European states is an historically given **datum**, a precipitate from the past; a resilient, though not permanent reality, which in the late eighteenth century would start suffering the ravages of nationalist ideology in its midst. State and nation obey different logics; the state is expansionist, that is, it aims at enlarging its territory for a variety reasons (economic, political, military, strategic, prestige, etc.). This surge can only be checked by the presence of other states that oppose the move. War, or at least the threat of force, is the instrument historically used by the state to achieve its end. The nationality principle asserts that people with the same culture and language form a nation, and should live together, and manage their own affairs, that is, ideally they should constitute an independent state. It is not difficult to see why the appearance of the nationality principle created an additional element of conflictivity in the midst of modernity.

There is no better way of conceiving of nationalist ideology than as an *idée-force*, i.e. as a thought that leads to action. But two questions arise immediately: why did the idea of political and cultural nationalism flourish in the second half of the eighteenth century? And why did it take-off so rapidly and become an essential part of the repertoire of modernity? The nation can only be understood as a product of the *longue durée*; what we see in the eighteenth century is the culmination of an uneven process which had lasted for centuries (including the absolutist period in which the idea of nation was eclipsed by the might of the expanding state) and which built on the classical notion of *patria* and the medieval idea of the nation as an *imaginaire* (to use Duby's term).

There is also the matter of the diffusion of ideas: print capitalism, as Benedict Anderson has shown, made it possible to enlarge the circle of readers to limits previously difficult to conceive. In one respect nationalist ideology can be pictured as a reaction against the cosmopolitanism of the Enlightenment. Mankind was perhaps too aloof a concept to serve the emotive and political needs of the people of the eighteenth century; the concept of nation was more apposite to their actual or potential realities. Organicism also played a role in this state of affairs by giving the nation a natural character.

Even if one can show that during the second half eighteenth century there were quantitative and qualitative changes in the concept of the nation, it is difficult to imagine what its future would have been without the French Revolution and its aftermaths. It is true that the American Revolution of 1776 was a prelude to political nationalism, but it was the combination of the French Revolution and the reactions against the Napoleonic invasions that shaped the future of nationalism. The series of events known as the French Revolution triggered off radical transformations in the political map of Western Europe and elsewhere. It was not only the internal structure of the *ancien régime* that came under fire by the emergence of the concept of popular sovereignty; with the spread of cultural nationalism the existing organization of Western European states was also profoundly undermined. But the most extraordinary thing is the speed with which the

nationalist ideology spread all over Western Europe, affecting old and new states, small and not so small ethnations.

The more we advance into the nineteenth century the more we can observe a progressive fusion between political and cultural nationalism, and an attempt by the state to consolidate itself along uniform ethnolinguistic parameters, a sense of shared history, a panoply of myths and rituals, an often exaggerated sense of national pride and a project of future *grandeur* (in which the possession of colonies was paramount). The nationalist phase of the state, if not totally opportunistic, exhibits a major contradiction, namely the incompatibility between continuous territorial expansion and cultural and linguistic homogeneity. It is not that the contradiction is totally insoluble, but it requires, in the medium term, the constant use of force and a non-humanitarian ideology involving a sense of racial and/or cultural superiority.

There can never be a totally satisfactory answer to the question of why modernity values national identity so highly. At best we can map out the different elements or forces that have produced this state of things. In the context of modernity the problem is not so much to explain the salience of cultural nationalism across the board as a solid refuge for the individual at a time of accelerated secularisation and of disintegration of traditional allegiances, but why the modern state did not tolerate polyethnic structures in its midst and aimed at creating, with varied success, a homogeneous space within which to project a single culture, an official language and a uniform conception of history both by persuasion and by coercion. My answer is that part of the explanation lies in the force of ideology, and particularly the deification of the unitary state which was characteristic of the French Revolution. Once the idea that national cultures were worth identifying, preserving and fighting for had gathered momentum, as it did in the first half of the nineteenth century, it then followed that any *ethnie* that could make a bid for nationhood cum statehood tried its luck and multinational states tried to homogenize its territory.

## CONCLUSION

A comprehensive theory of nationalism should provide us with the following answers:

- 1) An account of the genesis and evolution of the idea of nation in Western Europe, as well as of its diffusion world-wide.
- 2) A spatio-temporal explanation of the varying structures, ideologies and movements of nationalism in the modern period.
- 3) An understanding of the collective feelings or sentiments of national identity along with the concomitant elements of consciousness.

How do the different theories surveyed above approximate these lofty objectives? Perhaps the best served area is 2), although as we have seen none of the theories presented is comprehensive or convincing enough. Gellner's theory is by far the most accepted, but it not free from glaring anomalies. As to point 1) only Smith and Llobera, and to an extent Armstrong, have tackled the first part of the topic theoretically.

Little to no work has been done on the diffusion of the idea of nation outside Europe. As to point 3) it is practically **terra incognita**. Generally speaking, most studies of nationalism are more or less superficial historical or ethnographic descriptions of concrete cases; comparisons tend to be scarce, limited to two or three cases and methodologically flawed.

On the whole, neither classic nor contemporary social science have considered nationalism a central phenomenon of modern societies, but rather a passing ideology; only recently some authors seem to have realized its endemic character. Not surprisingly, the scientific efforts to account for nationalism have been rather limited. Today there appears to be an array of people writing on nationalism; unfortunately, they do it mostly from a normative or moralistic perspective. Nationalism is and will continue to be for the time being a theoretical challenge; whether the present generation of social scientists can do better than the previous ones is still to be seen.

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