Culture, Community and Territory: The Politics of Ethnicity and Nationalism

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Social scientists and historians usually focus on the impact of politics on ethnicity and nationalism, and their political uses for elites. The impact of ethnicity and nationalism on politics is less commonly treated, because most analysts adhere to an instrumentalist and modernist view of ethnicity and nationalism. We need rather to explore the relationship between culture and politics, and between premodern ethnic ties and modern nations, through an examination of three major trends: the purification of culture through authentication, which can lead to cultural and social exclusion; the universalization of ethnic chosenness through nationalist ideology, which engenders national solidarity and self-assertion; and the territorialization of shared memory, which inspires historical claims to historic homelands and sacred sites. These processes can be found throughout history, but they are particularly marked and widespread in the modern epoch; and they underlie many current political conflicts.

In approaching the politics of ethnicity and nationalism, the first impression that comes to most people's minds is one of extremism and bitter conflict. Even where violence is absent, ethnic and nationalist politics is thought to be characterized by endemic instability, unpredictability and acute passions. At the same time, many people are aware of the obverse: the way in which ethnicity and nationalism create solidarity, their role in state-making, and the basis they provide for popular participation in politics. How can we explain this paradox? What are the sources of phenomena that produce, at one and the same time, solidarity and instability, passion and participation, unpredictable violence and the basis for our system of states?

There have been many studies of the relationships between ethnicity, nationalism and politics, but little systematic theory. What theory there is has been largely instrumentalist and modernist, whichever end of the causal chain we consider. On the one hand, the politics of ethnicity and nationalism can mean the impact of politics on ethnicity and national identity. This in turn can signify either the uses of ethnicity and nationalism in the power struggles of leaders and parties, leading to a micro-analysis of ethnic politics; or the processes by

which states create ethnic groups and nations and their conflicts, producing a macro-analysis of national formation.

On the other hand, one can analyse the impact of ethnicity and nationalism on politics. This in turn can signify either the ways in which ethnic groups and nationalist movements seek their political goals, again leading to a micro-analysis of the politics of ethnic nationalists; or the role of culture and ethnicity in creating states and influencing state systems, producing a macro-analysis of state and interstate formation.

Of these four types of analysis, the first pair is, from the standpoint of ethnicity and nationalism, largely instrumentalist and modernist. It assumes that ethnicity is plastic and malleable, an instrument for other ends, usually those of political elites; and that nations and nationalisms are both recent and the product of specifically modern conditions like the modern state, bureaucracy, secularism and capitalism.

The second pair is more primordialist and perennialist. It tends to assume that ethnies are primordial, givens of the human condition, and that nations are historical but immemorial. States, parties, bureaucracies and politics are regarded largely as the public expression of these pre-existing ethnic cleavages and cultural identities.

By themselves, none of these standpoints is plausible or adequate. Primordialism per se is untenable, since it assumes what is to be explained: why human beings are so widely differentiated by ethnic origin and culture. It fails to explain why particular ethnic communities emerge, change and dissolve, or why so many people choose to emigrate and assimilate to other ethnies. Nor can it explain why in some cases we witness a fierce xenophobic ethnic nationalism, and in others a more tolerant, multicultural national identity.

Perennialism, though more plausible, is also untenable if it means that particular nations are in fact immemorial (as opposed to appearing to their members to be so); very often these nations can be shown to be fairly recent *qua* nations. There is a more acceptable version of perennialism which holds that in most periods of history, nations are being continually formed and dissolved, on the basis of pre-existing ethnic ties, a proposition which, at least, could be tested.

Instrumentalism, on the other hand, fails to explain why ethnic conflicts are so often intense and unpredictable, and why the 'masses' should so readily respond to the call of ethnic origin and culture. It also fails to address the problem of why some ethnies are so durable and persistent, and why so many people may be ready to lay down their lives for their nations. Modernism suffers from a similar inadequacy because its account of nations and nationalism tells only one half, the recent half, of the story. The other half, the fact that so many modern nations have been built on the foundations of pre-existing ethnies and so many ethnic nationalisms can draw on ethnic sentiments and shared memories, myths, symbols and values, is omitted from the modernist accounts.

One should add that a recent, fifth, position, the so-called 'post-modern' perspective, which seeks to show that ethnies and nations are simply cultural arte-

facts, constructs of cultural engineers or chefs who tailor pre-existing mytholo-
gies, symbols and history for their own ends, is even more seriously flawed. It
tends to exaggerate the ability of elites to manipulate the masses and fails to
explain why millions of people may be prepared to die for a cultural artefact;
and once again it disregards the premodern history of ethnicity.[1]

If we are to understand the relationship between politics, ethnicity and
nationalism, we need to clarify the concepts of 'ethnie' and 'nation' and to rec-
ognize the importance of a long history of ethnicity for the formation of
nations. Here I define an ethnic community (or 'ethnie') as a named human
population of alleged common ancestry, shared memories and elements of
common culture with a link to a specific territory and a measure of solidarity;
a 'nation' as a named human population sharing a historic territory, common
myths and historical memories, a mass, public culture, a common economy and
common legal rights and duties; and 'nationalism' as an ideological movement
for the attainment and maintenance of autonomy, unity and identity on behalf
of a population some of whose members deem themselves to constitute an
actual or potential 'nation'.

Given these definitions, we should recognize that:

1   most nations are modern, and so is nationalism as an ideology and movement,
2   ethnies have emerged in every era, and many have been durable;
3   many nations are formed on the basis of pre-existing, ethnies and the ethnic
    model of the nation remains extremely influential today;
4   would-be nations that lack a dominant ethnic base often have great prob-
    lems in forging national consciousness and cohesion.

In other words, the relationship between premodern ethnic ties and modern
nationalism is the key to a large segment of modern national and internation-
al politics. A great deal of the literature on this subject is flawed by its failure to
give due weight to this continuing relationship.

State-centred approaches

This shortcoming can be brought into sharper focus by examining the view
that the modern state and political action are responsible for forging ethnic
groups and nations, and for the direction and success of their nationalisms. We
might term this the political variant of modernism. To some degree, this view
is held by scholars like Charles Tilly, Anthony Giddens and Michael Mann, but
its purest expression is to be found in the theory of John Breuilly. He argues
that nationalism is a political argument with a fixed and limited role, which
only emerged in early modern Europe because of the growing chasm between

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[1]   Anthony D. Smith, 'Gastronomy or geology? The role of nationalism in the construction of nations',
      Nations and Nationalism 1: 1, 1995, pp. 3–23.

society and the modern state. By invoking the idea of 'the nation', nationalists are able to mobilize, unify and legitimate the goals of different sub-elites in their quest for power. They do so by appealing to the specious historicist idea of an organic nation, which offers a plausible solution to the alienation created by the growing gulf between state and society in the modern world. Politics is about capturing and holding power in the state—and nationalism is an argument for doing so. Nationalism is therefore a political movement, not a question of culture or identity. Nations are ultimately the product of a nationalism formed by and targeted on the modern state.[2]

These approaches recognize the role of culture and ethnicity in state-making, but treat them as secondary. It is political nationalism that holds centre stage. But can we distinguish a purely political nationalism in this way? Doesn't Breuilly's resort to Herderian arguments about historicism suggest that he is conscious that the appeal of nationalism resides, at least in part, elsewhere? And must we not agree with Hutchinson that we should distinguish cycles of cultural and political nationalisms, the one taking over when the other is temporarily exhausted, the one filling out what the other neglected?[3]

More generally, it seems too simple to endow the state, whether ancient or modern, with the primary role in creating ethnic communities or nations. Even to suggest, as Weber hesitatingly did, that ethnic community is largely the product of political action is simplistic. Certainly the state and political action play important roles in crystallizing ethnic sentiments and national identities, notably through protracted warfare and territorialization. But ethnic ties and national sentiments are created by a variety of factors—ecological, social and especially cultural and symbolic, such as religion, language and the arts.[4]

Besides, attempts by states in Africa and Asia to create unitary nations out of ethnically very heterogeneous populations have not met with great success up to now. One needs only to recall the cleavages and conflicts in such new states as Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Iraq, Somalia and Angola, and their relative failure to date to produce an overriding popular commitment to the civic, territorial 'nation' based on the post-colonial state and its boundaries.

We must therefore acknowledge the limitations of state-centred approaches, and turn to the other side of the coin: the influence of ethnic origin and culture on politics and state formation. I propose to explore this by analysing three major trends in history, which have been especially marked in the last few cen-

[2] John Breuilly, *Nationalism and the state* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1982), introduction and ch. 16; Charles Tilly, ed., *The formation of national states in Western Europe* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1975); Anthony Giddens, *The nation-state and violence* (Cambridge: Polity, 1985); Michael Mann, *The sources of social power. Vol. II, the rise of classes and nation states, 1760–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

[3] John Hutchinson, *The dynamics of cultural nationalism: the Gaelic revival and the creation of the Irish nation-state* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1987), ch. 1.

[4] Max Weber, *Economy and society*, ed., G. Roth and C. Wittich (New York: Bedminster Press, 1986), vol. 1, ch. 5; Josep Llobera, *The God of modernity: the development of nationalism in western Europe* (Oxford/Providence, RI: Berg, 1994), chs 2, 4.

turies: the purification of culture, the universalization of chosenness, and the territorialization of memory.

The purification of culture

Although Gellner is right to highlight the often fluid, overlapping and interwoven nature of cultures, there have been times and places where we find a hardening of the boundaries of culture and a movement to purify its contents. This is certainly a process characteristic of some forms of nationalism, but it is found elsewhere, even in premodern times.

In fact, the harking back to earlier cultures, or earlier phases of the same broad culture, which are deemed to be in some ways superior to present cultures, can be found already in the Middle and New Kingdoms of ancient Egypt and the Third Dynasty of Ur, which is often labelled for that reason 'neo-Sumerian'. In both periods there was a quite conscious archaism, a desire to model elements of both culture and society on earlier patterns and motifs which were venerated by later generations. A similar pattern can be found throughout Chinese history, as later dynasties and intellectuals preach the need to conserve the past and venerate the ways of the ancestors.[5]

Nostalgia, however, is only one element of this process. A more didactic note is also struck, for example, in late republican Rome, where an earlier age of austere virtue and harsh discipline was extolled, the age of Cato and Scipio; and, even earlier, that of Cincinnatus, Scaevola and the consul Brutus who condemned his own sons to death for consorting with Tarquin, the traitor. For Cicero, Livy and Virgil, the present age was corrupt by comparison with earlier, more heroic epochs, in which a simple and austere life produced the valour and wisdom that made Rome what it was. The implication was clear: Romans must always eschew orgiastic foreign rites and lax morals, and cleave to the stern precepts and true paths of their ancestors. In similar vein, Tacitus' admiration for the free and heroic Germans is a clear condemnation of what he saw as the contemporary Roman decline from the pure and wholesome ways of their forefathers.[6]

Implicit in this approach is a concept of authenticity. We find it, already, not just among the Romans, but also among Ptolemaic Egyptians and their Jewish contemporaries. The multiculturalism of the hellenistic world produced not only the nativist rebellions of Egyptians subjected to a Greek-speaking Macedonian dynasty ruling over them from Alexandria, but also perhaps the first religious war, the revolt of the Judean Maccabees against the enforced hellenization of the Near East by the Seleucid monarch, Antiochus Epiphanes.

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[5] Georges Roux, *Ancient Iraq* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1964), ch. 10; J. Meskill, *An introduction to Chinese civilisation* (Lexington, MA: D. C. Heath, 1973); B. G. Trigger, B. J. Kemp, D. O'Connor and A. B. Lloyd, *Ancient Egypt: a social history* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), part III.

[6] J. V. P. Balsdon, *Romans and aliens* (London: Duckworth, 1979); Erich Gruen, *Culture and national identity in Republican Rome* (London: Duckworth, 1994).

What is striking about these responses is their reversion to older cultural models in the name of 'the true way'. Here we find some of the many meanings that will attach themselves to the ideal of 'genuineness': the 'genuine' is mine, but it is also distinctive, original and valid. For Jews and Egyptians of this period, confronted by the cosmopolitan assimilation of a dominant culture, the preservation of their identity required an effort to define what was original and distinctive in their culture, religion and history.[7]

During the medieval era, cultural purification was seen in religious terms: as a need to be rid of heterodoxy and heresy, whether in the Church Councils, the movement of iconoclasm in Byzantium, or the Crusades against the Bogomils and Albigensians. Similar purificatory movements swept through Islamic territories, culminating in the Wahhabite movement in eighteenth-century Saudi Arabia. What was at stake here was the validity or otherwise of religious beliefs and practices.[8]

These two traditions, that of ancient didacticism and that of medieval religious conformism, came together in the early modern era to produce those processes of cultural purification which have had such a profound impact upon political life in the modern world. In the Dutch and English revolutions, and even more during the French and American revolutions, movements to purify national culture came to the fore. These were at first modelled on Old Testament prototypes; but later classical models predominated. Religious beliefs and practices were cleansed, or proscribed; languages were elevated and purified; and political action came to be judged increasingly in terms of religious or secular visions of national authenticity. Thus, ideals of Saxon liberty, vernacular American ancestralism and heroic Roman (and Gallic) fraternity began to influence political conceptions and came increasingly to underpin notions of national identity. The culture that was to guide the process of purification was identified with the earliest, usually medieval, phases of a community's documented history; the ethnic past or pasts served as repositories of cultural exemplars to be emulated.[9]

What are the major components and consequences of the process of cultural purification? The first is the rediscovery of an ethnic past, and especially of a golden age that can act as an inspiration for contemporary problems and needs. These pasts then become standards against which to measure the alleged failings of the present generation and contemporary community. Along with ethno-history, ver-

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[7] Pierre Grimal, *Hellenism and the rise of Rome* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1968); Victor Tcherikover, *Hellenistic civilisation and the Jews* (New York: Athenaeum, 1970); Doron Mendels, *The rise and fall of Jewish nationalism* (New York: Doubleday, 1992).

[8] Steven Runciman, *The medieval Manichee* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1947); John Armstrong, *Nations before nationalism* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1982).

[9] Robert Herbert, *David, Voltaire, Brutus and the French Revolution* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1972); E. G. Burrows, 'Bold forefathers and the cruel step-mother: ideologies of descent in the American Revolution', paper presented to conference on 'Legitimation by Descent', Paris, Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, 1982; Liah Greenfield, *Nationalism: five roads to modernity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), ch. 2.

nacular symbolic codes and indigenous artifacts and achievements were redis-
covered. Historians, archaeologists, philologists, folklorists and others scoured the
documentary and material records of the community to reconstruct a picture of
collective native life in earlier times, from which the present-day community
could derive a sense of continuity and dignity. In doing so, they drew up the
boundaries of a community on the basis of shared codes, often a vernacular lan-
guage, to produce a strong sense of cultural identity and difference.[10]

After rediscovery comes authentication. This brings together a number of
recurrent dimensions: possession through filiation, mine because of my ancestry;
representativeness of period and place, the distinctiveness of the ethnic past; orig-
ination in the community, the clear, unmixed, non-derivative character of com-
munal achievements; and validation of lifestyle, the truth-content and clarity of
communal ways. This is the phase of sifting: determining what is and what is not
distinctive, what is and what is not indigenous, and what therefore can be deemed
to be 'truly ours'. In the process, what is universal becomes particular. Luther
translates the Bible into German, to be followed by other translations, and Latin
is displaced by vernacular languages; genius is increasingly seen through a nation-
al lens; native, national schools of art, architecture, music and literature are
encouraged, all of which increase the range of objects to be authenticated.[11]

What is authenticated must then be reappropriated. The people must be
encouraged to take possession of their authentic vernacular heritage and their
genuine ethno-history. The history of several east European nationalisms reveals
the ways in which intellectuals defined the cultural profile of 'their' peoples
through the reappropriation of an authenticated vernacular language and cul-
ture, even where elements of that linguistic culture long pre-existed the activ-
ities of nationalist intellectuals.[12]

In this way, the culture of a designated population is purified of allegedly
extraneous elements and created anew in a strictly vernacular mould.
Individuals and movements which set great store by cultural purification and
the creation of a vernacular type often turn against those whom they hold
responsible for cultural assimilation and corruption. In this respect, Herder is
atypical, with his vision of the worth of each popular culture in the face of cos-
mopolitan assimilation. In the modern world, at least, Wagner, Maurras and
Dostoevsky symbolize the close links between culture and community, and the
tendency to exclude from the community the alien as a corrupting influence
and a representative of the inauthentic.[13]

[10] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined communities: reflections on the origins and spread of nationalism* (London: Verso/
 New Left Books, 1983), chs 3, 5; John Edwards, *Language, society and identity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1985), ch. 2.
[11] Anderson, *Imagined communities*, ch. 5.
[12] Miroslav Hroch, *Social preconditions of national revival in Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,
 1985); cf. Peter Sugar, ed., *Ethnic conflict and diversity in eastern Europe* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-Clio, 1980).
[13] See Edward Thaden, *Conservative nationalism in nineteenth century Russia* (Seattle: University of Washington
 Press, 1964); Hans Kohn, *The mind of Germany* (London: Macmillan, 1965), ch. 9; Ernest Nolte, *Three faces
 of Fascism*, trans. L. Vennewitz (New York/Toronto: Mentor Books, 1969), part I; Isaiah Berlin, *Vico and
 Herder* (London: Hogarth, 1976).

The universalization of chosenness

Of equal antiquity and import is the concept of a chosen people. Originally, this had a strictly religious connotation, signifying the sense of sacred mission entrusted to a community by its god. Myths of ethnic election were common in the ancient world: Sumerians and Babylonians, Egyptians and Assyrians, Israelites and Persians, as well as Greeks and Romans, saw their communities as sanctified and their role as providential; and much the same ideas could be found in China, at least from the Han dynasty. It was not simply that their communities and kingdoms were the centre of the civilized world, and the repository of value; theirs was a sacred mission to bring their culture, if not their rule, to less fortunate neighbours. So, from the first, chosenness implied both expansion and exclusion, cultural if not directly political.

Some communities evolved a stricter covenantal form of ethnic election myths. The commandment to be a holy people, a nation of priests, so decisively enunciated in the Old Testament, implied a conditional election: the Israelites were to be left unmolested in the promised land, only on condition that they fulfilled the various statutes and commandments ordained in the Mosaic Law. Any backsliding would be punished by expulsion from the land and termination of their status as a holy people. The Israelite covenantal form of election myth proved contagious: Armenians, Georgians and Copts, Monophysite Amhara and Greek Orthodox, Russian Orthodox and Irish Catholics, Afrikaner Calvinists, Scottish Presbyterians, Protestant Irish and American Protestants all felt themselves to be God's people, His instrument in the world, destined to fulfil His commandments so as to bring salvation for the world.[14]

In the medieval epoch, concepts of chosenness were widespread. Thus the Frankish kings, and their Capetian successors, saw themselves, and were seen by successive Popes, as latter-day King Davids, their kingdom a sacred realm and their subjects a holy people. This was the tradition on which Jeanne d'Arc built in equating the sacred land and realm of France with God's people and king. In Russia, too, the Tsar became a father and protector of a sacred land and a holy people, basing the myth of Russian ethnic election on ideas of Orthodox religious authenticity; and in Elizabethan England we find a growing sense of national identity and exaltation, fired by a belief in providential mission in the aftermath of the defeat of the Armada.[15]

We can trace the growing importance of the ideal of chosenness, and of myths of ethnic election into the modern world, in the Dutch resistance to Spain, in the American colonists' revolt against Britain, in the French belief in the superiority of their civilization and realm, in the Victorian British assump-

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[14] Donald Akenson, *God's peoples* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992); Anthony D. Smith, 'Chosen peoples: why ethnic groups survive', *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 15: 3, 1992, pp. 436–56.

[15] Michael Cherniavsky, 'Russia', in Orest Ranum, ed., *National consciousness, history and political culture in early modern Europe* (Baltimore/London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975); Richard Pipes, *Russia under the old regime* (London: Peregrine Books, 1977); Armstrong, *Nations before nationalism*, ch. 6; Greenfield, *Nationalism*, ch. 2.

tion of an imperial role, and in the Meiji Japanese belief in their innate superiority. We can also find the sense of chosenness and unique identity among smaller, often subject peoples such as Czechs and Poles, Greeks and Serbs, Finns and Norwegians, Armenians and Georgians, Maronites, Druse, Sikhs and Tamils. In all these cases, beliefs and myths inspired political actions.

In the modern world the old religious ideal of chosenness has been universalized through the specific doctrines of nationalism, which claim that every nation must possess an authentic identity, that is, have its own distinctive and original ethnic culture. A nation must possess its individuality, its peculiar history and destiny, and thereby reveal its unique contribution, its 'irreplaceable culture values', to the world. In emphasizing the unique features of the ethnie or nation, nationalism encourages the belief that the people who are to form the nation are also unique and incommensurable. In that sense, they come to see themselves as 'chosen', that is, as having a special cultural task in the world's moral economy, one that no other human group can perform. This is, of course, rather different from the older religious conception of chosenness with its sense of a sacred mission to fulfil God's commands. Yet the modern counterpart of this religious conception, the sense of uniqueness and superiority encouraged by nationalism, may easily be combined with older ideas of election, as we can witness in Ireland and Serbia, Iran and Sri Lanka. As religious nationalism flourishes in many parts of Latin America, Asia and Africa, and even in the West, this confluence of older religious ideals of election with more recent doctrines of ethnic nationalism has generated a marked increase in communal strife and violence. The dangers for global accommodation have become all too evident; the bitterest and most protracted conflicts, those that reach deepest into their respective populations, are those that combine the processes of cultural purification with the sanctification and election of an ethnically defined nation. While not all such fusions result in collective violence—Poland is a case where a Catholic-inspired linguistic nationalism sought restraint in more recent years—the general tendency is for ideals of collective sanctification and ethnic chosenness to generate, or amplify, ethnic or national conflicts.[16]

The territorialization of memory

Since the time of Ernest Renan, collective memories have always been recognized as a vital element in the construction of the nation and the self-understanding of its nationalism. What is less often appreciated is that, to become national, shared memories must attach themselves to specific places and definite territories. The process by which certain kinds of shared memories are attached to particular territories so that the former become ethnic

[16] See Max Weber, *From Max Weber: essays in sociology*, eds, Hans Gerth and C. Wright Mills (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1947), p. 176; Mark Juergensmeyer, *The new Cold War? Religious nationalism confronts the secular state* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), part II.

landscapes (or ethnoscapes) and the latter become historic homelands, can be called the 'territorialization of memory'.[17]

Once again, this is a process that can be found in many countries and periods. It is often associated with miraculous or sacred sites: mountains that are 'homes of the gods' or possess wondrous power like Olympus, Sinai, Meru or Fuji; sacred rivers such as the Ganges and the Nile; or special shrines like Nippur, Yazilikaya, Delphi and Mecca—sites that have attracted awe and veneration from large numbers of people. To these religious sites we may add the various tombs and monuments which mark the exploits and resting-places of heroes, sages, artists and statesmen honoured by the community. But perhaps the most important of the sites of territorialized memory are the various fields of battle which marked critical turning-points in the fortunes of the community, be they victories like Marathon, Lake Peipius, Bannockburn or Blood River or defeats like Kosovo, Avarayr, Karbala or the fall of Jerusalem or Constantinople.[18]

At the same time, sacred mountains and rivers, shrines, tombs, monuments and fields of battle could not and did not demarcate the extent of the historic homeland. In fact, the boundaries of even the most sacred of ancestral homelands fluctuated considerably in premodern times: witness the radical shifts in the boundaries of 'Armenia' or 'Russia', 'Spain' (Hispania) or 'Germany' (Germania). Very few ethnies enjoyed the geographical advantages of island peoples like the Japanese or Icelanders, or the clear scriptural promises of the Jews.[19]

It was only in the late medieval and early modern periods that the territorialization of memory began to influence the ways in which some states became increasingly congruent with their dominant ethnies. While factors like diplomacy, inheritance, marriage alliances and conquest determined the boundaries of most states, the memories that attached to turning-points and heroic figures became the ground for subsequent claims in popular memory, because they were crucial for the development of the community; any subsequent demarcations of the historic homeland would have to include the sites and territories associated in popular consciousness with these events. This is what makes the province of Kosovo so important to present-day Serbs, Ulster to many Irish, Macedonia to many Greeks and Judea and Samaria to many Israelis, turning them into contested zones where rival ethnic title-deeds have resulted in protracted conflicts.

We can go further. The boundaries of nations and national states may be determined by military, economic and political factors, but their significance for their inhabitants derives from the joys and sufferings associated with a particu-

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[17] Ernest Renan, *Qu'est-ce qu'une nation?* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1882).

[18] Anthony D. Smith, *The ethnic origins of nations* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), ch. 8.

[19] Pipes, *Russia under the old regime*, chs 1, 2; David Lang, *Armenia, cradle of civilisation* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1980), ch. 6; Jean-Pierre Lehmann, *The roots of modern Japan* (London/Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1982), ch. 1; Steven Grosby, 'Religion and nationality in antiquity', *European Journal of Sociology* 32, 1991, pp. 229–65; Llobera, *The God of modernity*, ch. 2.

lar ethnoscape. Nationalist regimes have subsequently made use of a mass pub-
lic education system to inculcate the sense that the homeland has been 'ours'
for generations, even where it was ruled by foreigners, through a picture of
poetic landscapes filled with the resonances of great events and exploits in the
ethnic past. This is the picture that nationalist regimes are particularly con-
cerned to purvey: a homeland of all the citizens, with natural frontiers, ancient
sites, unique monuments (both natural and man-made) and a multitude of pop-
ular ethnic associations.[20]

Switzerland affords an interesting example of the territorialization of shared
memories. The novel attitude to mountains in general, and the Alps in partic-
ular, that made its appearance in the eighteenth century helped to redefine the
territory of the Swiss *Eidgenossenschaft* as a special homeland of liberty in con-
trast to surrounding territories and peoples. Conversely, the political claims and
aspirations of the Helvetic Republic were given historical depth and commu-
nal potency by filling out and hardening its territory with ethnic memories
associated with and dependent upon particular Swiss sites and features of
nature. The meadow of the Oath of the Rütli, the narrow cleft of Küssnacht,
the storms of the Vierwaldstätter See, the passes and valleys around Morgarten,
Nafels and Sempach became inseparable not only from the economic, political
and military development of the Swiss *Eidgenossenschaft*, but, equally important,
from the development of the collective memories of the Swiss cantons, their
myths and legends, customs and traditions, symbols and values. These, as much
as the economic opportunities afforded by the opening of the St Gotthard Pass
or the commercial policies of the ruling oligarchies of Zurich, Berne and
Lucerne, made Switzerland the distinctive society and polity that it ultimately
became. It was in no small measure due to the extraordinary geopolitical and
social impact of a distinctive ethnic geography and terrain, which shaped the
collective mentality and shared memories of Swiss peasants and burghers, that
the spirit of Swiss liberty and independence flourished.[21]

The politicization of ethno–national communities

Swiss culture and politics were also shaped by the growth of a sense of Swiss
individuality as a people devoted to the spirit of liberty through self-help and
courageous resistance. This became particularly marked in the late eighteenth
century, but had clear harbingers in the early heroic or golden age of the
Eidgenossenschaft. William Tell came to symbolize this free spirit, which in
Johann Ludwig am Buhl's *Schweizer Freiheitsgesang* was fused with the Swiss
dream of liberty. The very simplicity of the Swiss shepherd marked him out as

[20] See Anthony D. Smith, 'States and homelands: the social and geopolitical implications of national territo-
ry', *Millennium* 10, 1981, pp. 187–202; David Hooson, ed., *Geography and national identity* (Oxford:
Blackwell, 1994).
[21] Jonathan Steinberg, *Why Switzerland?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), ch. 2; Ulrich Im
Hof, *Mythos Schweiz: Nation—Identität—Geschichte* (Zurich: Verlag Neue Zürcher Zeitung, 1991).

a man of independence; if only the Swiss would unite, claimed Johannes
Müller, they would be invincible. Müller went on to draw a parallel with the
prototype of chosen peoples: 'It is strange how the Bible seems to fit no other
people better than you. What was originally a community of free shepherds
grew into a Confederation of as many cantons as there were tribes in Biblical
times.'[22]

Given the multilingual and religiously divided nature of Swiss society, move-
ments to purify the culture were perhaps more muted here than elsewhere.
Though the Enlightenment in Switzerland also saw a return to the myths of
the Swiss heroic age, the spirit of regeneration was open and outward-looking.
Nevertheless, at various moments there were attempts to highlight the special
nature and virtues of an Alpine culture and of Schwyzerdeutsch, particularly in
the face of the Nazi threat. This desire to preserve a vernacular culture and dis-
tinctive way of life intact could also promote exclusionary trends with regard
to foreigners and immigrant workers, though many refugees were admitted,
particularly in the First World War. Swiss armed neutrality owes something to
this desire to preserve an indigenous culture, as did the agitation against foreign
workers in the 1970s. If now there is a growing relaxation in attitudes to for-
eigners, despite the rejection of membership of the European Union, it is sure-
ly due to a partial waning both of the older sense of uniqueness and election,
and of the need to keep that indigenous culture and way of life pure and uncor-
rupted by outside influences.[23]

The Swiss experience suggests something of the ambivalence and ambiguity
of the cultural politicization of ethno-nationalism. It highlights the dualism
which we find in so many other examples of a civic and political community
historically based on ethnic ties and mythologies. For, despite the accession of
French, Italian and Romansch-speaking cantons, the ethnic core of the Swiss
federal state remains the German-speaking cantons of Berne and central
Switzerland, in whose territories the major episodes of early protest and con-
flict took place around which the heroic Swiss myths and symbols of founda-
tion and development arose. Hence the modern civic national identity of
Switzerland is interpenetrated with the traditions and memories of an older,
narrower but still vivid ethnic nation.[24]

The strength and solidarity of an ethnic culture and a wider lifestyle is often
matched by an exclusive, sometimes fanatical, attachment to that culture which
leaves little room for cultural borrowings and outside influences. It may also, as

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[22] Cited in Hans Kohn, *Nationalism and liberty: the Swiss example* (New York: Macmillan, 1957), pp. 24–5,
28–33.

[23] Steinberg, *Why Switzerland?*; Dieter Fahrni, *An outline history of Switzerland* (Zurich: Pro Helvetia, Arts
Council of Switzerland, 1983); Georg Kreis, *Der Mythos von 1291: Zur Entstehung des Schweizerischen
Nationalfeiertags* (Basel: Friedrich Reinhardt Verlag, 1991).

[24] T. Rennie Warburton, 'Nationalism and language in Switzerland and Canada', in Anthony D. Smith, ed.,
Nationalist movements (London: Macmillan; New York: St Martin's Press, 1976); Im Hof, *Mythos Schweiz*;
cf. Michael Ignatieff, *Blood and belonging: journeys into the new nationalism* (London: Chatto and Windus,
1993).

we saw, breed a sharp reaction to those influences and to their foreign purveyors. Quite apart from ethnic competition in a tight labour market or over social facilities, the sheer strength of commitment by members of the nation to a traditional way of life may lead to communal resentment and spill over into overt ethnic conflict. This is fertile ground for movements of cultural purification and national regeneration; the populist movements at the turn of the century in France (Maurras' Action Française), in Romania (Codreanu's Legion of the Archangel Michael) and in India (Tilak and Aurobindo's appeal to the Aryan past) are good examples of this trend and its political consequences.[25]

Other peoples, too, have sought to purify their cultures, adapt a sense of ancient uniqueness and territorialize their shared memories. Among Norwegians and Finns, for example, the romantic spirit of authentic culture and territorialized memories combined with a new sense of ethnic uniqueness which drew on ancient myths—Viking and ancient Finnish—embodied in epics and sagas like the *Kalevala*. These in turn spurred movements of vernacular cultural purification, including the revival of Norse and Finnish in opposition to Danish and Swedish, the languages of formerly dominant states.[26]

Outside Europe, too, the new politics of ethno-nationalism was fuelled by the triple processes of vernacular purification, universalization of chosenness and territorialization of memory. In India, among Sikhs and Muslims as well as Hindus, the revival of ancient ethnic memories and myths associated with particular sites and territories, together with the nationalist ideal of collective individuality, has brought these communities to a new state of consciousness and self-assertion. The result has been fierce conflict where, as in the Punjab or Ayodhya, ethnic title-deeds and ethnoscapes overlap to form rival historical interpretations of the ethno-religious past. Similarly, in Sri Lanka, the spread of nationalist ideologies has helped to bring the ancient communities of Tamils and Sinhalese into protracted conflict over rival claims to historical pre-eminence and territory in the island. With the advent of the modern state, there has been a drive for cultural homogeneity and the universalization of ideals of chosenness in rival communities, and a growing attachment of shared memories to demarcated homelands and ethnic landscapes. Little wonder that an exclusive religious nationalism has emerged to challenge the older secular versions of the ruling elites.[27]

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[25] See Eugene Weber, 'The men of the archangel', *Journal of Contemporary History* 1: 1, 1966, pp. 101–26; Nolte, *Three faces of fascism;* Elie Kedourie, ed., *Nationalism in Asia and Africa* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1971), introduction.

[26] Rosalind Mitchison, *The roots of nationalism: studies in northern Europe* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1980); Michael Branch, ed., *Kalevala: the land of heroes*, trans. W. F. Kirby (London: Athlone Press; New Hampshire: Dover, 1985); and see Anthony D. Smith, *National identity* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991), ch. 4.

[27] See K. M. da Silva, *A history of Sri Lanka* (London: Hurst; Berkeley/Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1981); Bruce Kapferer, *Legends of people, myths of state: violence, intolerance and political culture in Sri Lanka and Australia* (Washington, DC/London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1988); Conor Cruise O'Brien, *God-land: reflections on religion and nationalism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988); Michael Roberts, 'Nationalism, the past and the present: the case of Sri Lanka', *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 16: 1, 1993, pp. 133–66; Juergensmeyer, *The new Cold War?*.

Conclusion

We can now see why the politics of ethnicity and nationalism is shot through with paradox, and how this springs ineluctably from the deeper sources of these phenomena and the processes which they have undergone.

The sources of the endemic instability of ethnic and national politics can be found in the ambivalence over alien cultures. On the one hand, the community seeks to compete with its neighbours by borrowing techniques and ideas; on the other hand, it clings to its received traditions and lifestyles and seeks to purify its culture of alien elements. This ambivalence lies at the heart of the debates about national identity in so many national states today. Similarly, the unpredictability of ethnic and nationalist politics, so often commented upon, results from the political consequences of nationalism, with its constant iteration of the uniqueness of peoples, and its universalization of the ancient idea of chosenness. The passion that we so often witness accompanying ethnic and nationalist activities and demonstrations can likewise be traced back, both to the sense of election generated by nationalism and to the strong attachment to specific homelands which the growing territorialization of shared memories around sacred sites produces.

On the other side of the picture, just these same processes are integral to the solidarity of nations, to their role in state-making and to the basis they provide for popular participation. Social solidarity requires a sense of cultural unity based on a myth of common ethnic descent and shared vernacular codes; hence the continual urge to purify indigenous cultures in order to enhance communal solidarity. State-making requires, among many other things, a secure base in an ethnic core from which elites can be drawn; in the modern world, certainly, if not earlier, this is provided by highlighting the individuality of the nation and the irreplaceability of its cultural values. It is the myth of the unique nation that legitimates the state and unites its (often diverse) population. Finally, the inclusion of the 'people' as a regular and decisive participant in the political life of the nation derives both from its sense of chosenness and from its attachment to a particular territory, by binding its popular memories to a homeland and its sacred sites and by providing a bounded constituency for political participation.

It is my contention that these long-term processes are still at work across the globe, and that we may therefore expect that the world which they have created, a world of ethnic conflict and national competition, will continue to provide the environment and much of the substance of national and international politics well into the next century. The problem before us is how to control the violent consequences while fostering the peaceful and creative aspects of ethnic and national politics. Failure to recognize the continuing power of these long-term processes will only impede our efforts to contain their volatile after-effects and control the conflicts they so often generate.