

# History and national destiny: responses and clarifications

---

ANTHONY D. SMITH

*Department of Government, London School of Economics, Houghton Street,  
London WC2A 2AE*

I am conscious of the singular honour, not to mention pleasure, of receiving these stimulating and thoughtful contributions which, in their various ways, address some of the main problems with which I have been concerned in my studies of ethnicity and nationalism. Their depth and diversity has in turn set me rethinking and clarifying some of the problems that I encountered when I began my studies nearly forty years ago.

Broadly speaking, the 1960s saw the high watermark of the modernist paradigm of 'nation-building'. This model appeared to offer so much in an era of decolonisation and new states. Such an activist, sociological approach contrasted with the previously dominant paradigms of primordial and/or perennial nations, in which human intervention played a very limited role. But, as the path-breaking studies of Carlton Hayes, Hans Kohn, Elie Kedourie and Ernest Gellner demonstrated, the latter were so often infused with a misplaced retrospective nationalism. Modernism appeared to offer a radical, sceptical assessment, not just of nationalism, the ideology and movement, but of the nature and role of nations; for it tied these phenomena firmly to the new sociological and cultural conditions of modernity since the French and American revolutions. In the 1970s and 1980s, the modernist paradigm was further developed and refined, particularly in the influential works of Tom Nairn, John Breuilly, Eric Hobsbawm and Benedict Anderson.

But the optimism of the 'nation-building' era did not last, and critics like Walker Connor and Michael Hechter were not slow to point to some of its obvious weaknesses, even when they broadly accepted modernist historical periodisation. At the same time, some radically dissenting voices like Edward Shils, Clifford Geertz and Joshua Fishman were revealing the limitations of modernism's underlying rationalism and (in many cases) instrumentalism. These doubts were reinforced by the growing interest in the relatively new field of 'ethnicity' and its relationship to nationalism, notably in the work of John Armstrong, Pierre van den Berghe, and Donald Horowitz, and more recently in the sociological studies of Steven Grosby. There has also been a 'neo-perennialist' revival among some historians, for example, in the work of John Gillingham and the late Adrian Hastings, which traces the roots of at least some nations to the Middle Ages.

My own doubts about modernism crystallised at the end of the 1970s, when I began writing *The Ethnic Revival*. While I remain convinced that the ideology of nationalism was modern and novel, the revival (or was it survival?) of ethnicity in many parts of the modern world, and its use by nationalists, suggested the need to explore the pre-modern bases of nationhood in the earlier manifestations of ethnic community. This entailed a break with what John Peel termed the 'blocking presentism' of so many modernist and constructivist approaches focused on the agendas and activities of recent political elites, which had resulted in a certain historical foreshortening; as if to say, that nothing before the eighteenth century mattered, and therefore no account need to be taken, and no enquiry made, of conditions before that time. Not only did such a restricted view preclude the study of relations between present activities and past legacies and traditions; it also tended to obscure the vital popular dimension, namely, the relationship between elites and the pre-existing social and cultural traditions of 'the people' in whose name they entered the political fray.<sup>1</sup>

Increasingly, it appeared that the 'people' in question constituted, not only 'the people', i.e. the non-elites, but equally 'a people', a culturally and historically distinct population. Of such cultural collectivities, the most common was the type known as the *ethnie* or ethnic community. This led me to posit, in *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*, a strong relationship (but not an invariant one) between *ethnies* and nations, arguing that the latter are modelled on, and often develop from, earlier ethnic communities. Given the many economic and political ruptures between pre-modern and modern collective cultural identities in the same area, any continuity between *ethnie* and nation had to be located in the cultural and symbolic spheres. This in turn led to the adoption of the term 'ethno-symbolism' for an approach that sought to establish relations between the different kinds of collective cultural identity by focusing on elements of myth, memory, value, symbol and tradition that tended to change more slowly, and were more flexible in meaning, than the processes in other domains.

As I began to work out the implications of this shift in focus as a general approach and research programme for the study of ethnicity, nations and nationalism, it became clear that it involved a distinctive set of assumptions and hypotheses about the origins and development of nations. These can be summarised as follows:

1. *La longue duree*. The study of nations and nationalism requires a long-term approach, one that seeks to trace patterns of development and change over *la longue duree* in collective cultural identities. While this clearly challenges the exclusive emphasis on the modern period characteristic of modernism, it also differs radically from the perennialist assumption that nations are immemorial and ubiquitous. Instead, it requires comparative empirical study of the patterns of nation-formation across periods without any preconceptions, with special emphasis on the recurrence of identical forms of community in different periods of history and across continents,

continuity of specific communities across historical periods, and rediscovery of 'authentic' communal cultures by later generations.<sup>2</sup>

2. *Symbolic elements*. In such enquiries, symbolic elements such as myths, memories, values, symbols and traditions play a crucial role, because they a) differentiate and particularise individual collectivities of the same type, b) compose patterns of reproduction and transmission of distinctive cultures, as the bases of ethnic and national identities c) sustain inter-generational continuity and recurrence in collective cultural identities, and d) can guide collective change through reinterpretation as a result of their in-built flexibility. Of these symbolic elements, the most important for ethnic and national formations and persistence are myths of ethnic origin and ethnic election, traditions of homeland attachment, myth-memories of golden ages, and myths of heroic sacrifice. In terms of ethnic survival and the persistence of national identities, myths of ethnic election, missionary and covenantal, have played a particularly vital energising role.
3. *Ethnie and nation*. Of the collective cultural identities whose symbolic patterns are most closely associated with those of nations, the ethnic community or *ethnie* is the most significant, because nations share with *ethnies* certain characteristics, notably named self-definitions, origin and other myths and symbols, as well as a link with particular territories. But in other respects the community of the nation differs from that of the *ethnie*, notably with regard to the occupation of a homeland, and the development of a distinctive public culture and standardised laws and customs with shared rights and duties for the members of a historic cultural community. However, the question of the historical relationship between *ethnies* and nations is an empirical one; we cannot, we should not, presume any one-to-one correspondence between anterior *ethnies* and subsequent nations, nor can we simply locate the former in pre-modern epochs, reserving the nation to the modern epoch.
4. *Dominant ethnies*. Nations have historically been formed mainly, but not invariably, around ethnic cores or dominant *ethnies*, which have provided the cultural and social basis of the nation, even when the nation has subsequently expanded to include individual members, or indeed whole fragments and parts, of other *ethnies*. The cultures of these dominant *ethnies* continue to provide the unifying elements (in terms of land, language, law and customs) of the modern nation, even after the addition of other ethnic and cultural elements; and they may be, and indeed often are, invoked in times of crisis, such as war and mass immigration, to reintegrate and purify contemporary polyethnic nations whose members experience the alienation of modernity.
5. *Routes of nation-formation*. There have been several routes in the creation of nations, which stem from differences in types of *ethnie*. Just as we can distinguish lateral-aristocratic from vertical-demotic and immigrant *ethnies*, so we can chart the development of nations through processes of a) bureaucratic incorporation of other classes and regions by an upper class

ethnic state, b) vernacular mobilisation by a returning intelligentsia intent on rediscovering its communal roots, c) pioneering settlement by an ethnic fragment wedded to a providentialist destiny. In each of these routes, we can trace the linkages and changes through analyses of the cultural and symbolic elements, notably in such modes of representation as art and architecture, literature and music, law and ceremonies, and in the responses of intellectuals – neo-traditionalist, assimilationist and reformist-revivalist – to the crisis of legitimation posed by the ‘scientific state’.

6. *Impact of nationalism.* These different kinds of representation and imagery become even more widespread and significant with the advent of nationalism, the ideology and movement. While elements of nationalism, as an ideological movement for attaining and maintaining autonomy, unity and identity on behalf of a human population deemed by some of its members to constitute an actual or potential ‘nation’, can be traced back to pre-modern religious and classical sources, its quest for authenticity and belief in popular sovereignty are products of modern Europe, whence they were spread to other parts of the world. As a movement that seeks a return to an idealised past in order to regenerate the community and assure its unique destiny, nationalism can be seen as a species of ‘political archaeology’ which helps to undermine tradition and ensure modernisation. As such it is particularly attractive to all kinds of intellectuals and professionals – artists and writers, educators and journalists, scholars and technicians, lawyers and doctors – and conversely, the movement and its ideal of the nation stands in need of the advocacy and dissemination skills of these strata.
7. *Types of nationalism.* Stemming from the different routes to nationhood, there have been systematic variations in the nationalism of modern nations. We can broadly distinguish a territorial version, focusing on residence, legal community, citizenship and civic culture; a more ethnic version, emphasizing genealogical ties, vernacular culture, nativist history and popular mobilisation; and a more plural version, a union of different immigrant *ethnies* under an overarching public culture of land, language, law and history. In practice, pure types are rare; in given cases, these types overlap considerably and often alternate over the course of nation-formation and subsequently.
8. *Supersession of nationalism.* Given the ethnic bases of nations, the various kinds of nationalism, the uneven distribution of ethno-history and the cultural and political pluralism of the inter-national order, the chances of an early supersession of nations and nationalisms appear to be slim. On the other hand, globalising trends of economic interdependence and mass communications are transforming, even as they reinforce, the various kinds of national community and nationalisms. The degree to which national identities have become ‘hybridised’ is debateable, but there is not doubt that globalising (and localising) trends have compelled the members of well-established national states to reexamine received national traditions and

identities, especially in the light of large-scale immigration and the encounter of different cultures within each national state. On the other hand, the movement to a genuinely cosmopolitan, global cultural identity remains the preserve of a small elite, as it was before the age of the national state.

Most of these ‘ethno-symbolic’ assumptions and arguments have been addressed by the gracious and thought-provoking contributions to this volume, and they have helped me to clarify, and in some cases amend, my own positions.

1. *La longue duree*. It was John Armstrong in his path-breaking *Nations before Nationalism* (1982) who introduced the significance of *la longue duree* for the study of nationalism, and who embedded it within a larger enquiry into the pre-modern bases of ethnicity. Here he has generously included my work in the long-term project of tracing linkages between collective identities, notably between *ethnies* and nations, over successive historical periods, while laying on me the daunting prospect of exploring distant cultures to enrich such enquiries. Certainly, this is the kind of work in comparative history and historical sociology over *la longue duree* that confronts the student of ethnicity and nationalism, with all its difficulties and pitfalls, not least the lack of adequate source materials and the thorny problems of definition.
2. *Symbolic elements*. Similarly, I owe to John Armstrong the concept of ‘myth-symbol complex’ to help account for the slowly changing cultural elements that form the boundaries between communities. In the present essay he underlines the need for deeper study of the relations between religious myths and symbols and nationalism – something that I and others have recently sought to explore in more depth. But, not only religious, also political, social and linguistic myths, memories and traditions require systematic exploration, if we are to grasp the individuality, as well as the continuity amid change, of ethnicity and nations.<sup>3</sup>

In this context, myths of ethnic election have played a vital role in both ethnic survival and national persistence. This is the subject of Bruce Caughen’s cogent analysis of my ethno-symbolic approach to the issue, and its application to the histories of a variety of peoples. His own contribution illuminates the role that myths of divine election have played throughout the history of the USA, and particularly in the later twentieth century. Far from receding with secularisation, as many predicted, such religiously based myths have experienced a revival, under Presidents Reagan and Bush and following the tragic events of 11 September 2001. He ends with the intriguing question of whether the present troubled Franco-American relationship may not also stem from a conflict of ‘chosen peoples’ and their respective missionary myths of election.

3. *Ethnie and nation*. The relationship between *ethnies* and nations is the nub of the challenge, and the problems, of Walker Connor's trenchant critique of my position. Of course, any such inquiry involves the problem of definitions; and here I am taken to task for supplying too wide and supple a definition of the 'nation', one that confuses it with loyalty to the state – a criticism also made by Montserrat Guibernau, when she cogently identifies the flaws in what she terms my 'classic definition' of the concept of the nation. For Walker Connor, the term 'nationalism' (or ethno-nationalism) should be confined to the largest group of people sharing a conviction of common ancestry, while the term 'patriotism' should be reserved for civic or state loyalty.

Now, I have always been indebted to Walker Connor for his clear and strong insistence on the centrality of ethnic identity in the explanation of nations and nationalism, at a time when very few wished to acknowledge this, or even mention ethnicity in this context (1994, Ch. 8). Nevertheless, though his definition has a persuasive logic, it fails, in my opinion, to do full justice to the historical and sociological complexity of nations. In a short rejoinder, it is impossible to discuss so large a question. At the most general level, try as we must to be rigorous, in this field of study conceptual precision can be bought at too great a sociological cost. What we need are concepts that delimit boundaries, not ones that seek to capture often elusive 'essences'. Now, while there is a crucial analytic distinction between the concepts of state and nation (and my later revised definition of the 'nation' in *Geopolitics* (2002) and my paper for the 2004 ASEN Conference acknowledges this), in practice there is also a good deal of overlap in many cases; and given the connotations of 'patriotism' with kinship (e.g. 'fatherland'), I doubt that we can draw any hard-and-fast line between it and nationalism. For example, I find it impossible to distinguish the 'patriotism' from the nationalism of the Swiss, but they are quite different from, say, Rhaetian or Ticinese ethnic sentiment; yet such a distinction cannot easily be made in Connor's terms. As he asserts, what counts is sentient history, not actual history: the Swiss as a whole feel they have been a nation for many generations and possess a common foundation myth, even though the original 'Alemannic' forest cantons were later joined by others from different ethnic groups – as, after all, were the English, the French, the Greeks or the Italians, only rather earlier.<sup>4</sup>

What I am arguing is that, while most nations are formed and crystallise on the basis of a dominant *ethnie*, they may, and often do, expand and 'develop away' from that original base and to some extent from its ancestry myth. Myths of descent are vital defining characteristics of *ethnies*, but much less so of nations. Other myths, memories, symbols and traditions (many of them admittedly pertaining to the dominant *ethnie*) become important, along with novel processes like residence in and attachment to the homeland, the dissemination of a distinctive public culture and the elaboration of rights and duties in standardised laws and customs. Incidentally, with regard to the latter

two processes, it is important to note that neither require a national state for their creation and dissemination: they can operate quite well in religious communities like the *millets* of the Ottoman empire.

The problem of the relationship between *ethnie* and nation is also taken up by Thomas Eriksen in his generous appreciation of my work. It appears that, at a general, theoretical level, we are in broad agreement, though I have come round to his view that no real distinction can be made between (ancestry) myths and historical memories – and often now I speak of myth-memories, for example, of the golden age. On the other hand, Eriksen adds two dimensions – interpersonal networks and negative stereotyping – to my list of elements that define *ethnies*. They are undoubtedly vital to all group relations, but I wonder whether they are specific to *ethnic* communities, and should they therefore be included among the necessary dimensions of ethnicity?

Eriksen's article is particularly rewarding in its testing of the nature and extent of linkages between *ethnies* and nations. For, though I have always denied a simple correspondence view of their relations, I have also argued for the centrality of *ethnies* and ethnic cultures in the genesis and development of many, if not most, nations. For Eriksen, metaphoric kinship and metaphoric place are the 'prime movers' in collective identification, but, though ethnicity is the most important, it is not the only basis for nations. Now, it may be that a minority of present-day nations, or should we say 'nations-in-formation', do not have ethnic bases – Eriksen cites Eritrea and South Africa; but can we legitimately term these and other ethnically heterogeneous African (and some Asian) states 'nations', even when they display a vibrant nationalism? Can we not have nationalism without nations, as we can have nations without nationalism, and is there not much more to the concept of 'nation', on which Eriksen is silent?

4. *Dominant ethnies*. Ethnicity, this time dominant ethnicity and its relationship to different forms of nationhood, is also the focus of the cogently argued analysis and appreciation by Eric Kaufmann and Oliver Zimmer. For Kaufmann, the issue is to take the idea of contemporary dominant ethnicity further than I have done, and less equivocally, by showing how such *ethnies* delimit national boundaries as well as national cultures, even in 'civic' and 'plural' nationalisms like (respectively) the French and American. These points are well taken, though my main concern has been with the significance of dominant ethnicity for the development and persistence of nations and nationalism rather than as a topic in its own right (which it surely is). Oliver Zimmer, while agreeing with my strategy of detaching the civic-ethnic distinction from its normative moorings, is critical of a treatment of concepts of organic versus voluntarist nationalism in terms of ideas rather than as mechanisms or metaphors in the construction of nationalist arguments. This is a valid point, but there is also a danger here of sociological reductionism. Ideas, to paraphrase Durkheim, have a life of their own, and nationalists often operate with

received conceptual traditions. I hope at some point in the future to return to these issues. (I return to the issues of globalisation and ethnic-civic conceptions, below).

5. *Routes of nation-formation.* The articles by Joshua Fishman and Miroslav Hroch focus on aspects of the 'ethnic' route to nationhood. Fishman's elaborate taxonomy of language corpus planning highlights the tendencies for linguistic purity and uniqueness sought by many nationalist movements in their attempts to modernise and upgrade their linguistic heritage. Both are dimensions of the quest for national 'authenticity' which is such a central feature of modern nationalism. For Hroch, the shift from *ethnie* to nation, which he exemplifies by a detailed analysis of the Czech case, can be explained in terms of his well-known three-phase theory, especially the move from phase A of intellectual circles to phase B, that of the political agitation. Of course, nothing in this development was predetermined; its outcome, acceptance of the (ethno-) linguistic Czech nation, propounded by Josef Jungmann in 1806, was more an example of the influence of Enlightenment patriotism applied to the need for social and linguistic equality for the artisans and peasants of Bohemia by the intellectuals than of Herderian Romanticism (though Herder's arguments were influential and would become even more so as the century progressed).

John Hutchinson's rich and wide-ranging account of the ideas and strategies of national revivalism also builds on the idea of a returning intelligentsia imbued with revolutionary Romanticism to create 'ethnic' nations through a vernacular mobilisation of 'the people'. Pointing to the role of revivalists as moral innovators aiming to 'regenerate' their communities, Hutchinson provides many examples of the ways in which a revolutionary national Romanticism, through its new conceptions of history, homelands, vernacular culture and a political community of sacrifice, has offered a viable third way in place of neo-traditionalism and westernising assimilation for communities assailed by Western modernity. In fact, heroic sacrifice turns out to be the most potent of these conceptions, with the Easter Rebellion of 1916 in Dublin a vivid case in point. Yet, significantly, the new *national* myths of heroic sacrifice do not replace older ethno-religious myths; the national myth is an overlay of tradition, and is presented as a renovation when older myths fail.

6. *Impact of nationalism.* The ideas of the nationalists themselves have had a deep and lasting impact on all areas of society and culture. In her article on national art, Athena Leoussi focuses on their impact on the subjects and forms of painting over the last two centuries, and more especially on the nationalisation of each nation's ethno-symbolic repertoire. Her rich and comprehensive survey reveals how, in each of the traditional genres, nationalism expanded the existing subject-matter and introduced new kinds, notably of ethno-history, peasants and ethnoscapes. One could, of course, go back further, to the Dutch golden age, perhaps even to the Renaissance; and one could also trace many national artistic motifs back to



their Christian and classical sources. But, as Leoussi demonstrates, just as the abstract nation stood in need of art and artists to make it accessible and palpable, so the artists readily responded to the historicist 'political archaeology' of modern nationalism and the aesthetic forms and ethno-symbolic contents of the national ideal.

7. *Types of nationalism.* The various kinds of nationalism resulting, I would argue, from different routes of nation-formation, are often summarised in the 'civic-ethnic' distinction. Though it has considerable analytical use, as in Oliver Zimmer's work on Switzerland, this distinction is sometimes overdrawn.<sup>5</sup> Most examples of nations and nationalism contain elements of both in varying proportions; and a given example will often, over time, oscillate between these two conceptions. The reason is that both relate to a community, not to a state or territory *per se* – with history and culture as pivotal links between the versions of community that they emphasize. (France, often upheld as an example of civic nationalism, presumes a commonality of culture and history – and the history and culture are mainly those of a dominant *ethnie*). What, then, of the 'plural' nations which for Walker Connor can only be states? Here, the importance of dominant ethnicity becomes apparent (and therefore it is as much a case of nationalism as of 'patriotism', in Connor's terms). In the USA and Australia, at least, there was a dominant settler *ethnie* (in Canada, two), whose history, culture, language and law became the basis of a subsequent nation with its own 'vernacular ancestralism'. This remained the case to a large degree even when the state began to admit great numbers of ethnically different migrants, which resulted in a union of *ethnies* under the hegemony of the British-originating *ethnie* and its culture (which remains in place even after the decline of the dominant *ethnie* itself). To this triple distinction, Tonnesson and Antlov (1996) added a fourth type, that of a 'class' route to nationhood. But I must confess that the Asian communist nationalisms which they cite appear remarkably close to the civic nationalism of France during the Revolution, which also directed its struggle against the social elite of its own *ethnie* (while denouncing it as alien 'Franks').<sup>6</sup>
8. *Supersession of nationalism.* Not surprisingly, my scepticism towards the modernist (and post-modern) approach to a 'post-national' globalisation has attracted some attention. The points made by Eric Kaufmann in this regard, notably the massive shift in middle classes values to a liberal non-ethnic individualism, are well taken, but they should be read in conjunction with the evidence of ethno-religious revival based on the Puritan traditions of the dominant *ethnie* in the USA presented by Bruce Cauten (see above). (I should add that, since my earlier foray into this vexed territory, I have moved back in time to consider problems of ethnic and national periodisation and of the religious sources of national identity). As far as I can see, the basic situation in the West has not changed that radically. Despite the impact of globalisation and its psychological concomitants on the 'hybridising' of national identities, we still see plenty of evidence of the

resilience of dominant ethnicity at the helm of national states which were supposed to have become obsolete, even in the heart of Europe, notably in France. One only has to recall periodic ethnic backlashes against immigration and asylum-seekers, or for that matter, against too close European integration, in several of the European states. Moreover, the inter-national system whose ideologues may seek the supersession of nationalism, has itself become one of the chief bulwarks of nations and catalysts of nationalisms in a multipolar world – in the West, and not just in Africa and Asia.

Is this largely a ‘spectacle nationalism’, as Mary Kaldor argues? Apart from the everyday, banal nationalism in the West proposed by Michael Billig (1995), the huge outlay in military hardware, the endless diplomatic conflicts, the majority backlash against immigration, often racist in character, the spirited defence of national culture and institutions, and the continuing controls exercised by national states in the West over their populations, can hardly be dismissed as ‘spectacle nationalism’. Nor, in another, profounder sense, can the great national remembrance ceremonies, for all their undoubted ‘spectacle’. But the main point of Kaldor’s vigorous defence of the modernist cosmopolitan critique of nationalism against its critics (including myself), is to highlight the constructed, political nature of nationalism and the closed, violent, homogenising and exclusive character of the ‘new nationalism’ to be found from Bosnia and Croatia, Nagorno-Karabagh and Chechnya, to India and Pakistan, Algeria, Iran, Turkey and America (Christian fundamentalism and Zionism in the Republican Party), not to mention the Lord’s Resistance Army in Uganda, and Bin Laden’s ideology of global Islam. But, in the absence of a clear definition, it becomes impossible to relate all these disparate religious and political groups to ‘nationalism’, or indeed the latter to the consequences of the structural needs of the modern state and industrialism. Besides, every ideology is politically constructed; the point is to account for its wide appeal. The use of a simple, normative ‘forward-looking/backward-looking’ dichotomy centred on cultural diversity and homogeneity, with some small European nationalisms in Scotland, Catalonia and Transylvania in the cosmopolitan progressive camp, alongside Europeanism and globalism, while the rest are consigned to an extremist, closed and dark past, can hardly enlighten us on the nature and goals of such a wide array of religious and political groups and movements. Mary Kaldor sees nationalism’s return to the past, to a ‘golden age’, as a case of ‘blocking pastism’. But this is to misunderstand the aims of nationalists, which are not to recreate the past in the present, but to use its example as an inspiration and means for renewing decayed or fragmented societies, so as to make them viable and confident in the face of the pressures of modernity. Besides, can we be so sure that a world of purely future-oriented men and women would lack passion and violence?<sup>7</sup>

Surely, matters are not that black and white. As Stein Tonnesson argues, the effects of globalisation, understood as rapidly expanding trade, investments,

financial flows, travel, information and other forms of worldwide communication, have been ambiguous, especially for the national quality of states. I would agree with him that the shift in the powers and functions of the state from the economic and military to the social and cultural spheres, represents a major transformation, but I cannot see it seriously weakening the national state; indeed, with every year the state's intrusive powers are more keenly felt by all sectors of society – not least in the universities!

In the foreign policy field, as recent international events demonstrate, and as Tonnesson rightly underlines, national states are proving to be quite independent-minded. His discussion of the relative chances of different kinds of national state to adapt to market-oriented globalisation is lucid and instructive, including his interesting defence of the 'nation-building' model in many areas of the world. His recipe of 'nationalist globalisation' (my term), i.e. open, flexible adaptation to the emerging global economy, *but* as a consciously *national* collectivity, one with a clear national identity and shared national ideals, has much to commend it.

Finally, I return to the vexed but crucial issue of the nature and dating of nations.

This is a subject of intense scholarly discussion. Montserrat Guibernau, concentrating on the case of nations without states, demonstrates the confusion between 'state' and 'nation' in my earlier ('classic') definition of the nation. This is aptly illustrated by the case of Catalonia, which reveals the ability of nations to survive without a state over long periods, even if its culture is repressed and hence no longer 'public' (though still shared and intensely prized). Yet, at the end of her incisive and stimulating contribution, Guibernau appears to bring the two concepts together again in a somewhat puzzling manner, when she discusses the 'political' dimension of national identity and its relationship to the concept of the 'nation-state' – a term I try to avoid using. (Incidentally, I *have* provided a revised ethno-symbolic definition of the concept of 'national identity').<sup>8</sup>

Montserrat Guibernau's main point is close to Connor's; indeed, she appears to accept his psychological definition of the nation as a sociocultural community (namely, a collective belief in ancestral relatedness), and correctly analyses my own move away from my earlier more modernist ('classic') definition, and the reasons behind it. Yet, it is only fair to point out that the earlier definition was more 'political' in orientation, and more tied to my political definition of the modern ideology and movement of nationalism than the later and broader revised version, of which she seems to be somewhat more approving.

There is a more basic point here. The 'nation' is not an essence or fixed state that is either present or absent, or that one either possesses or lacks, as Guibernau and Connor appear at times to imply. It is a precipitate of a set of processes which are variable in extent and intensity, and which may combine to produce a type of community that approximates, more or less, to the ideal-type of the nation. Hence, we can trace the appearance and degree of the relevant

processes of nation-formation; the fact that the extent or intensity of one or other of them is diminished (perhaps as a result of external *force majeure*, as with Catalonia under Franco) serves only to distance the community from approximating to the ideal-type to some (small or large) degree, not to extinguish it as a nation. For this reason, we can speak of cultural collectivity X or Y being closer to or more distant from the ideal-type in a given period – with the specific cultural content being relatively open and subject to revision, though always within the limits of a particular cultural tradition.

In its recent form, the issue of ‘dating the nation’ was initiated by Walker Connor.<sup>9</sup> His argument, which would regard with suspicion any date for the nation earlier than the late nineteenth century, hinges on his characterisation of the nation and nationalism as ‘mass’ phenomena. I share his view that the ideology and movement of nationalism are modern, including their mobilising appeal to ‘the masses’, as indeed are most present-day nations – though I think some of them emerged earlier than he allows. But this consensus conceals a hornet’s nest of problems. For Walker Connor, the key to the question of dating the nation is evidence of national consciousness across a broad spectrum of the putative nation, since for Connor ‘mass’ signifies the whole population, including the elites, and not just the ‘masses’ or lower classes. But, how does one elucidate the sentiments and consciousness of the majority of any population, particularly in pre-modern periods? Connor is acutely aware of the problems here. He contends that, unless one has other evidence to support documentary statements which in pre-modern epochs are inevitably elite records, the peasants being largely isolated, illiterate and mute, one cannot make any claims about the existence of a given nation. For contemporary nations, this means that we cannot give credence to assertions of their existence prior to the late nineteenth century.

But, this is largely an argument from silence. For Connor sweepingly dismisses the sources used by ancient or medieval historians as simply ‘assertions’. But I see no reason to do so. We, at this distance of time, cannot *know* whether the elites of that period (who by virtue of living in that earlier period surely knew more than we) had a clear notion of sentiments lower down the social scale. So why should we assume that the peasants and artisans did *not* possess any such sentiments? (They often did have them in the case of religion) It would certainly help to have other supporting evidence – of mass mobilisation in war, or large-scale ethnic protests or riots or persecutions, or of great popular festivals – and in some cases this evidence is available. But to argue that, without such evidence, we cannot say anything at all about the possibility of nations existing before the late nineteenth century is to leap too far in the opposite direction.

Walker Connor twice avers that he never said that nations might not exist in pre-modern times. But, in point of fact, his test for the presence of nations appears to rule out this possibility. It is, after all, only from the late nineteenth century that evidence of the (mainly head-counting) kind that he would credit becomes sufficiently abundant to enable a judgment to be made one way or the

other. This is surely too restrictive a criterion. For how can we, at this distance in time, *know* that ‘... very often the elites’ conceptions of the nation did not even extend to the masses’?

I should add that the same criterion of evidence would have to be applied to ethnic identity which, Walker Connor tells us, has been a ‘fixture’ throughout history. For ethnic identity, too, is, presumably, a phenomenon of ‘mass consciousness’, and one where we are also reliant upon the records left us by ethnic elites.

All this, to my mind, conflicts with Walker Connor’s repeated insistence on the evolutionary character of the nation (‘nation-formation is a process’), whose stages in a long process cannot be easily dated. Notwithstanding, Connor goes on to assert that it is only almost at the end of the process, when the majority of the population are aware that they belong to the nation, that a nation can be said to exist. (This does not take into account the shifting/expanding borders of the ‘nation’, and hence the nature and size of the population, the consciousness of the majority of whose members is being sought). But, allowing for the teleology of this framework, why only at the end of the process? Why not at the beginning, or in the middle, of the trajectory of nation-formation? Because, for Walker Connor, it is only at that point when the nation mobilises large numbers of people that it becomes a ‘major force in history’ – and this is, after all, what really interests the students of nations and nationalism. (This, too, is a rather restrictive criterion of significance). But we could just as well argue that the nation was a major force in history when elites led the populace to victory (or defeat) in sixteenth century Europe, at the time of the Armada or the Dutch revolt, or even earlier, with the Swiss peasants at Sempach, or Wallace’s mass army at Stirling Bridge – or indeed with the Israelites under Saul and Jonathan on Mount Gilboa when the ‘mighty were fallen in battle’! Whether all the peasants who fought in these armies possessed national consciousness, we may never know. We can only judge the actions and the results.

The nation, in Connor’s words, implies a single group consciousness that transcends the appeal of all lesser divisions within the group – though not all the time, as recent history reminds us (the Russian Civil War or Vichy France, for example). Even in these cases, the nation continued to exist, though its nationalism was temporarily eclipsed or fragmented. My point is that we cannot know that such a single group consciousness did not exist in some states or *ethnies* in the sixteenth century or even earlier, simply because we don’t have the right kind of evidence of mass activity or consciousness.

Secondly, I cannot agree that nations are only consequential when their appeal ‘has extended to all major segments of the people bearing the nation’s appellation’. It may be enough, as Adrian Hastings remarked, for a significant section of the population outside the ruling class to feel that they belong to the nation, for us to speak of this population as a ‘nation’, and for it to be an effective force in history – though I would add that other processes of nation-formation would have to be well-developed. (Hastings 1997: 26) Of course, this

is not the secular 'modern Western nation' with its clearcut borders, its status as a legal-political community, its mass consciousness and its nationalist legitimation (see Smith 2004). It is, if you like, an elite or a middle-class nation, with a distinct public culture, a sense of historic homeland, shared myths and memories, a clear self-definition, and standardised laws and customs (though not usually political rights). And even if we cannot know, as Walker Connor himself contends, exactly how many members of a people must internalise a national identity to make appeals to it an effective force, this earlier kind of nation is just as effective for mobilising large numbers of people as the 'mass nation' of modernity.

But it would take another book to support these claims.

## Notes

1 See Peel (1989: 198–215). For the debate about 'navel-less' nations between Ernest Gellner and myself, see Ernest Gellner (1996, 366–70).

2 For a fuller statement of 'ethno-symbolism', see Smith (1999, Introduction).

3 See the work of Hastings (1997 and 2003), Van der Veer and Lehmann (1999), and Smith (2003).

4 For Swiss history and myth, see Im Hof (1991) and Kreis (1991). For my earlier ('classic') definition of the concept of the nation, see Smith (1991: ch. 1); for the revised definition, see Smith (2002).

5 For which, see Zimmer (2003). For popular usages, see Ignatieff (1993).

6 On these nationalisms, see Tonnesson and Antlov (1996).

7 Similar problems beset Mark Juergensmeyer's (1993) account of 'religious nationalisms', on which see Greenfeld (1996).

8 For my later ethno-symbolic definition of 'national identity', as 'the continuous reproduction and reinterpretation of the pattern of values, symbols, memories, myths and traditions that compose the distinctive heritage of nations, and the identification of individuals with that pattern and heritage and with its cultural elements', see Smith (2001: 18).

9 See Connor (1990). For recent discussion and applications, see the essays devoted to the issue in *Geopolitics* 7(2): 2002. As must be clear, I do not share Connor's emphasis on the 'mass' nature of nations. This is an attribute of the modern Western variant of the nation, but not necessarily of the 'nation' as such. Besides, other processes are more important for the formation of nations; on which, see Smith (2002) and (2004).

## References

- Armstrong, John. 1982. *Nations before Nationalism*. Chapel/Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press.
- Billig, Michael. 1995. *Banal Nationalism*. London: Sage.
- Connor, Walker. 1990. 'When is a nation?', *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 13(1): 92–103.
- Connor, Walker. 1994. *Ethno-nationalism: the Quest for Understanding*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Gellner, Ernest. 1996. 'Do nations have navels?', *Nations and Nationalism* 2(3): 366–70.
- Greenfeld, Liah. 1996. 'The modern religion?', *Critical Review* 10(2): 169–91.
- Hastings, Adrian. 1997. *The Construction of Nationhood*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hastings, Adrian. 2003. 'Holy lands and their political consequences', *Nations and Nationalism* 9(1): 29–54.

- Ignatieff, Michael. 1993. *Blood and Belonging: Journeys into the New Nationalism*. London: Chatto and Windus.
- Im Hof, Ulrich. 1991. *Mythos Schweiz: Nation-Identität-Geschichte, 1291–1991*. Zurich: Neue Zürcher.
- Juergensmeyer, Mark. 1993. *The New Cold War? Religious Nationalism Confronts the Secular State*. Berkeley CA: University of California Press.
- Kreis, Georg. 1991. *Der Mythos von 1291: Zur Entstehung der Schweizerischen Nationalfeiertags*. Basel: Friedrich Reinhardt.
- Peel, John. 1989. 'The cultural work of Yoruba ethno-genesis', in Elisabeth Tonkin, Maryon McDonald and Malcolm Chapman (eds.), *History and Ethnicity*. London: Routledge.
- Smith, Anthony D. 1991. *National Identity*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Smith, Anthony D. 1999. *Myths and Memories of the Nation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Smith, Anthony D. 2001. *Nationalism: Theory, Ideology, History*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Smith, Anthony D. 2002. 'When is a nation?', *Geopolitics* 7(2): 5–32.
- Smith, Anthony D. 2003. *Chosen Peoples: Sacred Sources of National Identity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Smith, Anthony D. 2004. 'Genealogies of the nation', Paper presented to ASEN Conference, LSE, April 2004.
- Tonnesson, Stein and Hans Antlov (eds.). 1996. *Asian Forms of the Nation*. Richmond, Surrey: Curzon.
- Van der Veer, Peter and Hartmut Lehmann (eds.). 1999. *Nation and Religion*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Zimmer, Oliver. 2003. *A Contested Nation: History, Memory and Nationalism in Switzerland, 1761–1891*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.