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Ancient bond or invented tradition?

Neither the national self-conception nor the critical demythologization of it is quite to the point. The national is seldom unbroken continuity or totally artificial.

Øyvind Østerud

According to the culture-romantic nationalist portrait, nations are natural, ancient and eternal, existing from time immemorial to the end of time – though at times slumbering and in need of reawakening. Nations are depicted as extended families against a background of glorious pasts and golden ages, hard-fought battles and great victories, only interrupted by the occasional five-hundred-year-night of foreign oppression. In this picture, national movements are guardians of the nation and champions of liberation – and progressive forces in history.

Against this stands a would-be scholarly picture of nations as artificial, modern and temporary, recently invented by someone for their own purposes. In this picture, national movements are not the champions of an already existing nation, but the creators of nations. Nations are not reawakened and liberated, they are constructed. This picture has often been combined with a rejection of nationalism as a morally evil doctrine which "spells disaster" when taken to its logical consequence. Neither picture is, in my view, very accurate.

The purpose of this chapter is twofold: to provide a theoretical backdrop to the thesis through a brief outline of the scholarly debate(s) on nations and nationalism, and to clarify my own position. The theoretical literature is huge, so it goes without saying that it is not possible to give a comprehensive picture even of the contemporary debate in a few pages. I will concentrate on presenting the main lines of disagreement and the scholars that have inspired my own work. The scholarly debate consists of several intertwined debates. One concerns what nationalism "really" is. Another concerns the causes of nationalism, as understood by that particular scholar. A third debate concerns whether nationalism and nations are good or bad, which also depends on how nationalism is defined. I find the first two debates more interesting than the latter. In this chapter I begin by discussing the concept of nationalism; then I turn to theories of "nationalism", and finally I present my own approach.

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3 See e.g. the following readers from the past five years: G. Eley & R. G. Suny (eds.): Becoming national (1996); J. Hutchinson & A. D. Smith (eds.): Nationalism (1994) and Ethnicity (1996); S. Periwal (ed.): Notions of nationalism (1995); M. Ringrose & A. Lerner (eds.): Reimagining the nation (1993); S. J. Woolf (ed.): Nationalism in Europe: a reader (1995).
**What is nationalism?**

Much of the confusion, and even some of the disagreement, between scholars about what causes nationalism is due to the notorious ambiguity of the term "nationalism." According to Peter Alter, it first appeared in a work by the German philosopher Johann Gottfried Herder in 1774.\(^4\) In Germany at the end of the 18th century it meant national aspiration, even national fervor; it then was adopted into French meaning exaggerated devotion to one's own nation. Later it was also used in the meaning of a national movement. In English, it became associated with national individuality, national character and love of the fatherland, but the association with chauvinism was not originally a part of it. According to Aira Kemiläinen, it was not very frequently used before the end of the 19th century.\(^5\) In Continental Europe, the negative connotations were sharpened by the association with Nazism during the Second World War.

Today, the most common scholarly use is nationalism as ideology and/or as social or political movement, but it can also be encountered in the sense of national consciousness or national sentiment; growth and maintenance of nations; state-led assimilation policies; and patriotism on behalf of one's country. It is also sometimes associated with xenophobia, racism, nazism and fascism. Liah Greenfeld presents the widest contemporary concept of nationalism I have encountered. At the same time, curiously enough, she excludes some of the "normal" contents. She uses nationalism as an umbrella term denoting "the related phenomena of national identity (or nationality) and consciousness, and collectives based on them – nations; occasionally (...) the articulate ideology on which national identity and consciousness rest, though not (...) the politically activist, xenophobic variety of national patriotism, which it frequently designates."\(^6\)

It may be argued that labels are matters of convenience and that any definition will do, as long as it is explicit. However, I find it analytically unfruitful to mix causes and effects the way Greenfeld does. At the very least, we should keep national awareness, national identity, national sentiment and nations apart from national movements, nationalism qua ideology, nation-building and nation-forming. First, in most places nationalism (whether defined as an ideology, a national movement, or nation-building) existed prior to any national awareness or sentiment at mass level. Second, the diffusion of national consciousness is one of the primary aims of national movements and nation-building elites alike. Third, national identity (and the nation) was the outcome of the nation-forming process.

One option is to include national movements, nationalism as ideology and nation-building in the concept of nationalism. This is quite common, yet in my opinion not preferable. National movements are movements from below and have to win people for the national cause. They cannot rely on the coercive power of a state apparatus, and should thus be distinguished from state-led policies of "nation-building" or national integration.


\(^5\) Aira Kemiläinen: *Nationalism. Problems concerning the word, the concept and classification* (1964:48–52).

\(^6\) Liah Greenfeld: *Nationalism. Five roads to modernity* (1992:3).
Once national movements achieve power through the establishment of a "nation-state", they will have at their disposal entirely other means, and can embark on the task of completing (or consolidating) the nation-forming process. If there are national minorities in the new state, the political elite must decide whether to attempt to assimilate them, or accommodate them. Sometimes an assimilation or integration policy is termed "official nationalism." This is not entirely unwarranted, but should be avoided for the sake of clarity.

The suffix -ism normally brings to mind a system of thought, and it may thus be argued that the term nationalism should be reserved for the ideological contents. Yet, nationalism is not a consistent, well-elaborated system of ideas, an ideology in the strict sense, and in practice it is difficult to keep national movements and their programs apart. On the other hand, it is possible to find a core that is common to most movements that have been called national(ist): namely, the idea that the world is divided into individual and equal nations that should be free to develop and decide their own fate – ultimately, in their own state.

One set of phenomena should be treated as separate from "nationalism": racism, xenophobia, fascism and nazism. This is not because Nazi or fascist ideas cannot be combined with nationalism. On the contrary, such ideologies are not intelligible without it, although Nazism transcends nationalism by its emphasis on the Aryan race and Lebensraum. The difference is that national movements seek to regenerate the nation, they struggle for the political independence of this nation, and the relevant unit is the culturally defined nation, not a race.

The point is that the ideological flavor of nationalist movements varies. Nationalism defies categorization: Some forms are democratic in outlook, some are authoritarian. Some are traditionalist and strongly religious, some are modernist and skeptical to religion. Some are conservative or reactionary, some are radical and Marxist. This also illustrates the Janus-faced and multi-faceted character of "nationalism." On balance, however, nationalism has been liberating more often than repressing, and has been a radical force more often than a reactionary one.

The evaluation of nationalism as an evil doctrine often seems based on an implicit assumption that love for one's own nation, or a desire for national self-determination, inevitably must lead to the worst atrocities that have been committed in the name of the nation. Yet, there is no automatic link between loyalty to the nation and the idea that those who are not "one of us" should be chased out of "our country", subjugated, or killed. It is quite possible to be attached to one's own and still respect others. As moral individuals, we must condemn the atrocities, not the identity. As scholars, our primary task is to explain, not to condemn.

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9 See Chapter 3 ("Janusansiktene") in Østerud (1994).
10 See e.g. the introduction of Geoff Eley & Ronald Grigor Suny (eds.): *Becoming national* (1996:12).
Personally, I have chosen to avoid the word "nationalism" as far as possible, partly for the sake of clarity, partly because of its negative connotations in Czech and Slovak (see Chapter Seven). This is also the reason why I prefer the contemporary term "Slovak autonomists" to "Slovak nationalists." I prefer to use the term nation-forming process for the process during which national identities were formed and spread from an elite to the masses. I will use the term national movement for social and political movements that strive to spread the awareness of being a nation to the masses and to enhance the position of that nation culturally, economically and politically. National consciousness will be understood as an awareness of belonging to a nation, national sentiment as loyalty to or love for that nation. State-led assimilation policies are termed nation-building or national integration and treated as a nationality policy strategy. Finally, nationalism and nationalist will signify the ideology, when I am not referring directly to the theories of other scholars or quoting someone.

**Primordialist, modernist, post-modernist, or ethnicist?**

Depending on where the scholars stand on the question of the relative antiquity or modernity of nations, it is common to distinguish between three main positions: the primordialist, the modernist and the ethnicist position. Another important line of disagreement concerns whether nations are social constructions or are historically constituted. On the basis of this, Anthony D. Smith divides the second category in two: the modernist and the post-modernist position, where the latter is distinguished by its emphasis on cultural construction (or invention) as opposed to political and social determination. Smith at the same time accuses the post-modernists of having "abandoned the attempt to understand [nationalism] causally and substituted a series of descriptive metaphors."

The picture of nations as ancient, eternal and natural is referred to as primordialist in the literature. History was interpreted as the story of nations engaged in self-realization, and nations were objectively identifiable primordial entities. What needed to be explained was the rise and decline of nations, not the fact that they existed. In line with the general ideological view of the past, decline was often explained by moral decay or by weak national character. Because of the close link between the rise of modern historiography and the emergence of national movements, this position was quite common in the historiography of the 19th century and well into this century. National historians were not only scholars, they themselves were often involved in the task of "reawakening" the nation. The primordial position has now long since been abandoned by most scholars of nationalism. I have included it in this chapter mainly to provide a contrast to the modernist position, and will thus leave it here.

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11 The term ethnicist is borrowed from John Hutchinson: Modern nationalism (1994:3), while the other two terms are quite common. Anthony D. Smith prefers the label "Ethno-symbolic theory" or "Ethno-symbolism." See A. D. Smith: 'Nations and their pasts', in Nations and Nationalism 3, (1996a:362), and the introduction to Hutchinson & Smith (eds.) (1996:10).


13 One post-war "primordialist" is Clifford Geertz. Excerpts from his work may be found in Hutchinson & Smith (eds.) (1994; 1996). See Miroslav Hroch: Europeisk nasjonalhistorie (1998) on the link between history and national movements.
The early modernist theories (often called diffusion theories) centered on nationalism as an ideology. Later theories were oriented towards nation-building as a way of integrating a state population across divides, of which Stein Rokkan's theory is a good example, while recent theories are more concerned with nationalism as a social and political movement and with national identity. What more recent modernist and post-modernist theories have in common is the idea that nations and nationalism are novel, distinctly modern phenomena. Compared to the primordialist position, they reverse the time-sequence between nations and nationalism, since all sides agree that nationalism appeared around the French Revolution. In Ernest Gellner's words: "It is nationalism which engenders nations, and not the other way around."  

The focus on nations as artificial or invented is more typical of "post-modernist" than of modernist theories, but also the latter often see nations as constructed by nationalism (cf. Gellner's statement above). This is sometimes, but not always, combined with the idea that nations are temporary phenomena. What needs explanation in this scheme is the relationship between modernization and the rise of nations and nationalism. Labels can be misleading. There are, for example, clear differences between the theories of Eric Hobsbawm and Benedict Anderson (which Anthony D. Smith labels post-modernist), and the more extreme constructivist view of nations as discursive practices or texts. Although Anderson conceive nations as "imagined communities", and Hobsbawm as based on "invented traditions", neither denies that nations are real, substantial entities.

The ethnicist or ethno-symbolic approach transcends the dichotomies above. In this picture, nations are neither ancient, primordial entities nor novelties that suddenly appeared at the threshold of modernity. They are modern, but they have roots in pre-modern ethnic communities. To paraphrase a discussion between Ernest Gellner and Anthony D. Smith, nations have navels and these navels matter. The nation represents neither a clean break with the past, nor unbroken continuity; pre-modern identities are often radically transformed when ethnic groups become nations. This approach emphasizes that nation-forming is a process, where success is by no means guaranteed. The ethnicist position thus confronts both the modernist and the post-modernist position, but the front against the latter is clearer, perhaps because the two leading figures on the modernist and ethnicist side (Gellner and Smith) were once teacher and student.

In the following I will first turn briefly to early diffusionist and modernization theories. Then I will present some of the contemporary theories – modernist, "post-modernist" and ethnicist.

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16 See e.g. Anthony D. Smith (1995b; 1996a).
19 This has not changed after Gellner died on November 5th, 1995.
A plague goes over the world

Early historically oriented studies tended to concentrate on nationalism as an ideology of European origin, which gradually spread to the rest of the world, more or less like waves (or a disease!). These scholars, who may be labeled diffusionist, tended to see nations as belonging to a modern age, and as created by nationalists.\textsuperscript{20} Classic works here are Carlton Hayes' \textit{The historical evolution of modern nationalism} (1931), Hans Kohn's \textit{The idea of nationalism} (1944), and Elie Kedourie's \textit{Nationalism} (1960).

Kedourie explained the origins of nationalism in terms of certain ideas that prevailed in Europe towards the end of the 18th century, and later spread to the rest of the world, as native elites "imported" them. This was also the first attempt at critical de-masking of nationalism.\textsuperscript{21} Kedourie emphasized the philosophy of Kant, Herder and Fichte, while Rousseau was strangely absent. He linked the revolt in European philosophy to the changing social conditions, and especially to a break in the transmission of social and political customs between generations. The old ways seemed outdated in light of the technical revolution and the reduced impact of religion, which left the young generations estranged. The young were receptive to the nationalist ideas because of their situation; the movements simply met a deep-felt urgency to belong. Once the ideas existed, they started living their own life, spreading almost like magic.

Needless to say, the mere existence of certain ideas among European intellectuals cannot explain why they were taken up by other elites, or why Czech or German or French peasants started to adhere to them. Ideas may nevertheless shape the appearance of national movements and help define their goals. For example, the idea of language as the "soul of the nation" obviously did have a strong and lasting impact, even to the extent that zealots revived almost dead languages. Cleansing the language, ridding it of foreign words and influences, creating new words (or even languages) based on the vernacular and past literary sources are familiar aspects of national ventures everywhere. The diffusion of nationalist ideas is thus a fact that should not be overlooked; the crucial question Kedourie failed to answer is \textit{why}.

Let us take a closer look at these ideas. According to the German philosopher Johann Gottfried Herder, diversity (and struggle) were fundamental characteristics of the universe, and such diversity was the design of God. Diversity meant that every culture possessed a unique incomparable value and that every people had a duty to cultivate their own peculiar qualities: only then could the world progress. The perfect world is one in which harmony between varieties prevails. The idea of God-given diversity was certainly no invention of German Romanticism, but the idea of a duty to cultivate one's own qualities was. In the German tradition a nation became a natural division of the human race, each nation possessing its own character, which its members must keep pure and inviolable. The best political arrangement was a state of its own, or else the nation would risk losing its identity.

\textsuperscript{20} Nigel Harris: \textit{National liberation} (1992) is an example of a modern variety of diffusionist theories that explain the diffusion of the nation-state model by its economic and military efficiency.

\textsuperscript{21} See the introduction to Eley & Suny (1996:6).
Of special importance is Herder's view of the pre-eminence of language. For him, language was the main criterion of nationhood, and thus, for a man to speak a foreign language was to live an artificial life, to be estranged from the spontaneous, instinctive sources of his personality. Fichte went even further, arguing that the mere presence of foreign vocables within a language can contaminate the very springs of political morality (!). The purer the language, the more natural it is, and the easier it becomes for the nation to realize itself, and to increase its freedom. In order to preserve the language and thereby the nation, the nation must get a state of its own, or else it is bound to give up its language and coalesce with its conquerors.

The impact of these ideas was revolutionary when combined with the legacy of the French Revolution: To the principle of the sovereign people, German Romanticism added the idea that (legitimate) boundaries of states are natural, and should correspond to linguistic divides.

**A side effect of modernization**

*Modernization* theories focus on the links between the existence of nations, national movements and nation-building and different aspects of modernization, like uneven development, industrialization, the role of the modern state, print capitalism and the like. Nations and nationalism appear in different parts of the world because of certain *structural similarities* (various aspects of modernization) – not primarily because some ideas have spread. Nations and nationalism are European in origin only in the sense that Europe was the region where these phenomena first appeared. These scholars also see nations and nationalism as distinctly modern phenomena, while they vary in their emphasis on the "invented-ness" of nations.

The older theories of modernization did not really offer much of an explanation. Functionalist theories tended to postulate a link between modernization and the rise of nations and nationalism, invoking "needs" on part of societies, rather than explaining why and how. Anti-colonialist and Marxist theories reduced nationalism to economic oppression or economic deprivation of some kind. Communication theories presented certain means of communication as crucial to the emergence of nations and nationalism. Yet, the main problem was that they fit reality badly, as "nationalism" in most meanings of the word preceded "modernization" many places. As for the *communication* theories, it is obvious that certain means of mass communication are necessary for nation-forming to succeed, but they are hardly sufficient.

As examples of contemporary theories I have chosen the theories of Eric Hobsbawm, Ernest Gellner, Benedict Anderson and Michael Mann, partly because these scholars are so central to the debate, partly because they focus on different aspects of modernization.

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23 As Coakley points out, these were not really theories of nationalism but more general theories of society or social change. See John Coakley (ed.): *The social origins of nationalist movements* (1992:2).

24 See e.g. Karl W. Deutsch: *Nationalism and Social Communication* (1966), and *Tides among nations* (1979).

25 See A. D. Smith: *Theories of nationalism* (1983) for a critical presentation of these theories.
ERIC HOBSBAWM: THE INVENTION OF TRADITION

Of the contemporary (post-)modernist theories presented here, the theory of Eric Hobsbawm is closest to the conception of nations as modern, invented and temporary. His emphasis is on how national movements create or invent nations by inventing the traditions that are allegedly shared by the nation, and how national movements make use of existing social conflicts in order to further their aims. His emphasis on the "invented-ness" of nations is stronger in his earlier writings than in his latest works. Yet he maintains that although "proto-nationalism, where it existed, made the task of nationalism easier, insofar as existing symbols and sentiments of proto-national community could be mobilized behind a modern cause or a modern state", it was in no way "enough to form nationalities, nations, let alone states."n

Hobsbawm and his school are of course right in noting that many of the rituals and symbols that we today treasure as national traditions are actually of recent date, deliberately created during the "national awakening." There are numerous examples, from flags and national anthems to celebrations, festivals and folk costumes. On the other hand, some of these "invented traditions" are in fact more genuine. Folk costumes were based on old models found tucked away in attics and closets, folk songs were collected and written down in their existing oral form, some old festivals were revived along with the new ones that were created, etc. Besides, how "genuine" a tradition is, is probably irrelevant: what really matters is how it makes people feel in terms of identity.

The social and political conditions that in Hobsbawm's scheme allow national elites to invent nations are tied to economic and political modernization. The significant social conditions are twofold. On the one hand traditional groups resisted the pressure of modernization, on the other hand new groups without local ties arose as a consequence of migration processes, causing new mixtures of people with different culture within the same area. This created tensions that could be used by the nationalists to mobilize people behind their cause.

The political conditions are also twofold. First, the growth of the modern state led to a larger administration and an expansion of education, which required the choice of a language of administration and education other than Latin. When the vernacular of one group became the official language, others became disadvantaged. This was mainly a problem for the middle class, since the great masses of people were illiterate and the nobility was cosmopolitan and bi- or trilingual. Linguistic nationalism was the arena of people with low, but sufficient education to have white-collar jobs. In Hobsbawm's words: "The battle-lines of linguistic nationalism were manned by provincial journalists, schoolteachers and aspiring subaltern officials."n

26 A. D. Smith repeatedly refers to Hobsbawm's theory as post-modernist, but Hobsbawm may not approve of this label himself. An alternative label would be Marxist.
27 See e.g. Chapters 1 and 7 in Eric Hobsbawm & Terence Ranger (eds.) The invention of traditions [written 1983] (1992).
Second, there is the democratization of politics. Participation in politics was extended to an increasing number of new groups in the period following the French Revolution. Hobsbawm's main point is that social and national demands went hand in hand. The struggle for national emancipation became a struggle for better social conditions as the national movement reached the mass phase. This combination of social and national demands, says Hobsbawm, was necessary for the national movements to succeed, because the national cause itself (language etc.) had limited appeal outside the middle class.

**ERNEST GELLNER: A NEW HORIZON**

With Ernest Gellner, the main focus is on culture, yet industrialism is the driving force behind the rise of nations and nationalism in his theory. His main argument concerns the formation of nations. Nations are products of industrial society; they appear in the transition from agrarian to industrial society. In agrarian society, people have the same jobs all their lives, vocational skills are mostly transmitted from father to son, the literate strata are small and clearly separated from the peasant masses, and education outside the household is for the few. Consequently, loyalties, conflicts and horizons are local; a shared, codified culture is not necessary.

In an industrial society all this changes. This is a mobile society, where people change jobs during their lifetime as well as from one generation to next, where the divide between elite and ordinary people is obscure, where most people are specialists and work operations require cooperation. Here, the ability to context free communication is a must, as are a standardized written code, literacy and compulsory education outside the household for all. Mobile society in other words requires a shared, codified culture.

In this society, your worth is not tied to what you are, but to what you know and what you do (merit). Since competence and participation is limited by the "high culture", your skills are valid only in the area where the codified culture is valid. This is the new, expanded horizon of industrial man. It replaces the local loyalties that are dissolved by an increasingly mobile society. Culture replaces structure as the foundation for identity, and a new, national identity is born. Because the modern state is the only entity large enough to sustain the necessary system for transmitting this high culture, a state is not an option, but a necessity.

Nationalism is a reaction to the cultural-standardization efforts of industrial society by groups who are either not able to assimilate because of entropy resistant features, or who are politically and/or economically deprived, while still sufficiently culturally different from their oppressors to be able to identify them as alien. In industrial society, inequality becomes intolerable. The modernization process is uneven, leading to increasing levels of inequality and conflict, as some groups benefit from industrialization while others do not. If those who benefit are culturally different from the others, national movements emerge.

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31 See Ernest Gellner: *Nations and Nationalism* (1983), and 'Do nations have navels?' in *Nations and Nationalism* 3, 1996.

32 These are features that cannot be erased, like blue skin color (Gellner's own example). See Gellner (1983: pp. 61 ff.)
This theory is compelling, but not very specific. The major drawback of Gellner's theory is its high level of abstraction, which means that it cannot easily be applied to specific cases. The many ambiguities are caused partly by his failure to distinguish between different phases of the nation-forming process, partly by his conspicuous lack of agents, and partly by his failure to make explicit what he means by words like "nations" and "nationalism." It is for instance hard to know whether he means that national movements start because of the uneven industrialization, or whether they succeed because of it. The former is contrary to evidence; several national movements started way before industrialization and some of these even succeeded.

Another weakness in Gellner's theory is that nationalism in many cases preceded compulsory education and a codified high culture; both were often the result of national ventures rather than the other way around, especially in Eastern Europe. Again, it is possible that compulsory education and mass literacy are necessary conditions for an awareness of belonging to a nation to pervade all social classes, but such awareness existed in smaller or larger groups before this happened. The description of agrarian society as a society where all loyalties and identities were local or also religious is simply false. "Traditional society" was never entirely void of social and geographic mobility, there have always been groups on the move. Conversely, local identities and loyalties are still salient in industrial society – they have not been wholly replaced. Third, Gellner's strong emphasis on language is, if not totally unwarranted, at least not always to the point. Language is not the only feature that nations can have in common. In many cases, a shared history probably plays a more important role.

Gellner's theory may not be a good explanation of why national movements first started, but it still may provide insight into why national movements succeed in mobilizing people behind their cause. What may be drawn from it, is that people were receptive to nationalist ideas because they lived in a society where political and economic oppression corresponded to ethnic or cultural divisions. National movements succeeded in mobilizing people because they were able to identify their oppressors as culturally different, and hence not "one of us."

**BENEDICT ANDERSON: AN IMAGINED COMMUNITY**

In the theory of Benedict Anderson, "print capitalism" is the central aspect of modernization that explains the rise of nations and nationalism. Anderson defines the nation as an imagined political community – imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign. He argues that all communities larger than villages of face-to-face contact are imagined – not that this implies they are imaginary, fabricated, or false. In Anderson's own words, "what, in a positive sense, made the new communities imagineable was a half-fortuitous, but explosive, interaction between a system of production and productive relations (capitalism), a technology of communications (print), and the fatality of human linguistic diversity."  

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33 See A. D. Smith (1996a:361) for more criticism of modernist theories in general.

34 Confirmation of this may be found in documents that date back to the Middle Ages and even further. See also Part Two.

From the outset, the market of print capitalism was a broad, but thin layer of those who could read Latin. Gradually, it turned to the great potential markets that could only be reached through vernacular languages. Three parallel developments facilitated the expansion of print capitalism: (1) Vernacular languages were slowly and geographically unevenly turned into languages of administration in the new centralized, bureaucratic states. (2) Latin developed in an aesthetic direction, making access harder. (3) The Reformation reduced the position of Latin as a holy language, because Luther's bible was translated into a vernacular tongue.

Print capitalism shaped a common sphere of communication exchange under Latin and over the local dialects, leading to imagined communities of readers of the same newspapers, books and journals. Print capitalism froze the vernacular languages, codified them, and made them look continuous and stable. At the same time it created power languages, as some dialects were closer to the literary languages than others. These dialects became the languages of the elites: high status languages. A shared language was important for the creation of the first nations, but once the model existed, it could be copied, and imagined communities became possible without a common language. In Latin America, the Atlantic marked the borders of the imagined communities; in Europe, language borders had the same effect.

The time sequence between the alleged driving force and the rise of nations and nationalism is more fitting here, since print capitalism dates back to the 16th century. Yet, while print capitalism and the development of vernacular languages are important, especially in order to explain how national identities could spread, they do not explain why these imagined communities should be sovereign, or why people would want to risk their lives to achieve this.

Anderson stresses the New World origins of nationalism, specifically the Creole origins.36 While Creole movements may have been the first to seek political liberation, the "nations" they were acting on behalf of were nations in the pre-Revolutionary sense of the word, i.e. political elites. The culturally heterogeneous population was hardly counted at all, or independence was sought in order to preserve the society the way it was. Moreover, Anderson ignores the fact that the nation concept and the notion of national character are European in origin. The models of the "Creole pioneers" were clearly their European mother countries.

**MICHAEL MANN: THE PRIMACY OF THE MODERN STATE**

Michael Mann's main argument is that nations and nationalism developed primarily in response to the development of the modern state.37 However, prior to this, Mann asserts, there was a religious phase, where Protestantism and the Counter-Reformation expanded literacy in vernacular languages, and a commercial/statist phase, where commercial capitalism and military state modernization took over much of the expansion of literacy.

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36 Anderson accuses European scholars of being "accustomed to the conceit that everything important in the modern world originated in Europe." (1991:xiii.)

Against Anderson's emphasis on print capitalism, Mann argues that, although the ascent of print capitalism made it technically possible to do so, "the nation still did not mobilize society." Likewise, he argues that in the initial period there was little in capitalism that could encourage a distinctively national civil society; markets remained fairly transnational in the 18th and 19th centuries and industrialization spread faster in the peripheral and frontier regions than in state cores. Instead the key lies in the state, Mann claims.

His main line of argument is that, prior to the 18th century, states did not penetrate society to any great extent; their involvement in warfare did not require it. However, because of the military revolution and the many wars in the 18th century, the state began to absorb a much larger share of GNP; in addition, the armies called in a larger share of the population. In a situation where the state intruded in people's lives to a much larger extent, taxing and conscripting them, it also became necessary to mobilize their enthusiasm for its goals. At the same time, increased state extraction increased the pressure against the subjects, especially those that could least afford it, resulting in demands for political citizenship for the "people" and the "nation." Self-conscious nations, Mann argues, emerged from the struggle for representative government, and were initially born of the pressures of state militarism.

Mann also emphasizes that this struggle had different consequences in different settings. In the case of state-reinforcing nations like Britain and France, where the linguistic community was securely located in the state's territorial and class core, the endeavors to make the state more representative only served to strengthen the salience and the centralization of that state. In multi-cultural empires like the Austrian, the Ottoman and Russian, fiscal and conscription pressures produced other outcomes. Here reformers mobilized in favor of their province rather than the whole empire, and these nations thus became state-subverting. National revolts were associated with "powerful provincial political organization", not with the industrial level, Mann argues. He does, however, admit that the cores of these "province-nations" were usually reinforced by language, religion, a distinct economic market or all of the above. (A third category is the (temporary) state-creating nations – the Germans and Italians.)

**The ethnic origins of nations**

While conceding that the nation is a modern phenomenon and nationalism even more so, (dating from the late 18th century), Anthony D. Smith emphasizes the pre-national roots of nations. In this scheme, nationalism succeeded because it was sociologically fertile, and the role of modernization was more that of a catalyst than of an initiating or driving force behind the rise of nations and nationalism. This also implies that it is not possible to invent just any identity, or weld together any heterogeneous population. Nations are not invented, but historically constituted and are as such no more artificial than any other cultural phenomena.39

38 By 1810, 5 % of the population manned the army. See Mann (1995:47).
Smith distinguishes between two types of pre-modern entities; *ethnic categories*, where the awareness of being a separate collectivity was lacking, and *ethnic communities* or *ethnie*, where at least an elite possessed such awareness. It is ethnie that were most easily turned into nations. The main attributes of *ethnie* are as follows, according to Smith: a collective proper name, a myth of common ancestry, shared historical memories, one or more differentiating elements of common culture, an association with a specific homeland and a sense of solidarity for significant sectors of the population. According to this terminology, the Slovaks were an ethnic category prior to the 18th century, while the Czechs were an ethnie by the Middle Ages.

The ethnic configuration formed through *amalgamation* of separate units and *splitting up* of units, because of schisms or migration. State formation, military mobilization (war) and organized religion were crucial, according to Smith. The most important contribution of *war* was to mobilize ethnic sentiment, to serve as a centralizing force and to provide myths and memories for future generations. *Religion* often contributed to the creation of myths of ethnic origins and to the preservation of memories of saints and heroes, customs and rituals, myths and legends. The myth-symbol complex (or also *mythomoteur*) was important for the diffusion and preservation of ethnic (and later national) identity.

The ethnic identities that crystallized through such processes were sustained through mechanisms like religious reform, selective cultural borrowing, popular participation and myths of ethnic election (the chosen people). Location, autonomy, trading (and other) skills, and organized religion also played a role. The bearers were the priests, the scribes and bards. Such ethnie formed cores on which modern nations were built, but not all ethnie were turned into nations. Since ethnie were associated with a certain territory, the presumed boundaries of the nation were largely determined by the myths and memories of the dominant ethnie, which included a founding charter, a myth of the golden age and associated territorial claims.

Smith's analysis of the processes that led to the formation of nations is based on a distinction between two (ideal) types of ethnie – lateral ethnie and vertical ethnie. Lateral ethnie were composed of aristocrats and higher clergy, and sometimes bureaucrats, high military officers and wealthy merchants. Smith terms them "lateral" because they were socially confined to the upper strata while being geographically extended, and they often had close links to neighboring lateral ethnie. Lateral ethnie typically had "ragged" borders and lacked social depth.

Vertical ethnie were more compact and popular. Their culture tended to be diffused to other social strata and classes. Social divisions were not underpinned by cultural differences; instead, a distinctive historical culture helped to unite different classes around a common heritage and common traditions, especially in times of war. Many of the vertical ethnie were based on religion, which in turn became a problem in the transformation to nations. Combinations are possible, and ethnie may change, from vertical to lateral, and back again.

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According to Smith, there were two alternative routes to nationhood, each based on a distinct type of ethnic cores. The lateral route to nationhood was the route of England, France, Spain, Sweden, and to some extent Poland and Russia. The dominant lateral ethnie, which formed the ethnic core of the states, were gradually able to incorporate middle strata and outlying regions into the dominant ethnic culture. The primary force in this incorporation was the new, bureaucratic state. Through military, administrative, fiscal and judicial means it transmitted the values, myths, traditions and memories of the dominant aristocratic ethnic core to new groups. The result was a new and broader cultural identity for the population. In most cases, however, this process also involved some reciprocity.

Insofar as the state "created" nations, according to Smith, it did so in conjunction with (and in the context of) other processes, chiefly the development of a market economy, and the cultural and educational developments following the decline of ecclesiastical authority after the Reformation. Ultimately, nations were the outcome of a vigorous program of political socialization through the public mass education system.

The other route to nationhood is based on vertical ethnie. Vertical ethnie were usually subject communities, and the bureaucratic state only had indirect influence on the nation-forming process. This is the "nationalist" route to nationhood, where the main role was played by intellectual elites, who formed the nation by way of vernacular mobilization. National movements were movements from below, but they were often led by an intellectual elite. Smith interprets the national quest of the ethnic intelligentsia as a response to modernization. Modernization meant a larger state bureaucracy, as well as putting aside Latin in favor of languages based on the vernacular of the dominant elite, which put the elites of the subject peoples at disadvantage. At the same time, a larger bureaucracy implied broader strata of educated people. Secular education and new ways of organizing economic life meant that traditional values and ways came under attack. And the French Revolution and German Romanticism opened up new opportunities through the spread of revolutionary ideas.

National mobilization proceeded by way of several interrelated processes, which often had the character of protest against the ancient regime. National mobilization tended to be a quest for political and economic rights as well as for cultural rights – it was a quest for a homeland; for economic, civic and social rights; for education and administration in the vernacular language. The start has always been the revival of the past, as expressed through the search for poetic spaces and the cult of the golden age. In order to succeed, the national awokeners must return to a living past, one people can identify with. If the reconstructed past becomes too obscure, the national project may fail and the nation might never come into being.

This makes sense as a description of the role of pre-modern ethnic identities in the growth of nations. Yet, Smith's theory is not specific enough when it comes to answering why ethnie became nations at that particular point of time. The missing link is the mechanism by which the masses become convinced that "we" are a nation that should stick together against "the others."
Phases of the nation-forming process

The approach of Miroslav Hroch forms a bridge between a modernist and an ethnicist position. He sees nations as historically constituted: the outcomes of long-term integration- and disintegration processes, during which members of certain groups and inhabitants of certain territories gradually formed a unit, and also came to see themselves as a unit. The first part of the nation-forming process was often completed in pre-modern time (e.g. the Middle Ages), but nations reached the mass phase only in conjunction with the transition from a feudal to a capitalist society. Hroch is closer to A. D. Smith than to Hobsbawm or Gellner in his view of the starting point of the nation-forming process, but he is more oriented towards the material foundations for the success of national movements than Smith, which is also a reflection of his Marxist heritage. Timing and relevance are seen as important factors determining whether national agitation will succeed or not. Emphasizing the importance of the density of communication networks, Hroch explicitly acknowledges his indebtedness to Deutsch.

Hroch distinguishes between two historical situations at the threshold of nationhood in Europe: (1) The situation of the "ruling" ("great") nation, where a new class, the "third estate", set itself up against the old feudal ruling class and proclaimed itself the representative of the whole nation, and (2) The situation of the small "oppressed" nation, where the transition to nationhood was made more complex by the fact that the national movement had to fight both the ancient regime (and its feudal features) and the new ruling nation. Hroch confines his theory to the small nation.

Characteristic of the situation of the oppressed "small" nation was that it had no native ruling class; it admittedly formed an ethnic (sometimes also a historical) unit, but not an independent political unit; and it lacked a continuous tradition of cultural production in a literary language of its own. Some were "nations without history": they had never had a state of their own. Some had constituted political entities in the Middle Ages, but were later subjugated under the dominating empires of Europe. Intermediate cases between the "small" and the "large" nation, in Hroch's scheme, are Italy, Germany (which had other attributes of a great nation, but lacked a state) and Poland (which lost statehood in the late 18th century).

Hroch distinguishes between three phases in the nation-forming process: phase A (scholarly interest), phase B (patriotic agitation,) and phase C (the rise of a mass national movement). Initially, a small group of intellectuals would show a passionate concern for the study of the language, the culture, the history of the nation-to-be. These activities were scholarly rather than national ventures. The intellectual forefathers of the national movement remained without any widespread social influence, and often did not even make an attempt at national agitation.

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The second phase was marked by a shift from scholarly interest to active agitation for the national cause. A group of "patriots" took upon them the task of "reawakening" the nation, their aim being the diffusion of national awareness to the masses or the lower classes. This was the time of the national literary societies (the Matica Srpska, established in Budapest in 1826 was the model of such societies), of the journals and newspapers in vernacular languages. In this phase, demands for political as well as cultural autonomy came to the front, and nationalist political parties were often formed. The second phase was crucial to the formation of the small nations. Without the peasants and the workers, the nation could simply not come into being.

The third phase was the mass phase, when the nation-forming process was successfully completed. All social classes now reacted to national impulses – national consciousness had become the concern of the broad masses, and the national movement had a firm organizational structure extending over the whole territory. Small nations were fully formed when they displayed a class structure typical of the stage of development (industrial society), and their national movement had taken on a mass character, according to Hroch. Independence sometimes came before the nation was fully formed, sometimes after, sometimes not at all.

Hroch stresses that national agitation was never guaranteed success. The nation-to-be might never pass into phase C, thus leaving the national development incomplete. Agitation is not enough to explain the successful formation of nations. According to Hroch's study, "identical forms of agitation, identical patriotic manifestations, led to very different results, and nowhere were they sufficient by themselves to bring the national movement successfully into its mass phase." Implicit in his reasoning is a polemic against the idea that nations were invented by frustrated intellectuals, but also against the idea that material conflicts are irrelevant.

A crucial point is that nations are not homogeneous classes or social groups, with the same fundamental interests. What emerges as the "national interest" is in Hroch's words "the transformed and sublimated image of the material interests of concrete classes and groups, whose members took an active part in the national movement (or had to be won over to participate in it)." This is also the key to success: The national movement failed where it in Phase B was not able to take the interests of the specific classes and groups that constituted the small nation, introduce these interests into national agitation, and articulate them in national terms.

In Hroch's terms, this was a matter of articulating the existing nationally relevant conflicts, such as those between the old guild handicraftsmen (and the small traders), and the large-scale industrial producers (and big merchants). Where the former belonged to the "oppressed" nation and the latter to the "ruling" nation, this conflict of interest could be transformed into a national conflict. The extent to which this happened and how strong it was, would depend on whether the coming of the industrial revolution coincided with phase B.

A second nationally relevant conflict may be found within the intelligentsia. When the division of society into estates was dissolved as a part of the industrialization process, members of the non-noble strata gained access to secondary and higher education. While their numbers were increasing, they found their upward mobility into the higher and better paid professions blocked, as these were still monopolized by the old elite, who were traditionally self-recruiting. Where this elite belonged predominantly to the ruling nation, and the newly educated strata to the oppressed nation, membership in the small nation began to be interpreted as a group handicap, and thus social antagonism became converted into a national question.

A third nationally relevant conflict concerns the transition from feudal to industrial society. This is a conflict between the principle of civic equality and a society divided into estates. The growing hostility of the popular strata to feudal privileges and to the barriers between estates took on a national character in the case of oppressed nations, since the privileged strata generally belonged to the ruling nation. Equality for all citizens came to mean equality irrespective of nationality: thus equality between nations and equality between the members of each nation amounted to the same, and national and democratic demands went hand in hand.

Hobsbawm, Gellner, Hroch and partly Mann point out that, at the threshold of modernity, certain groups felt politically and/or economically oppressed or disadvantaged, as well as being culturally different from their oppressors – and they see a link between this and the rise of national movements. In my view, Hroch provides a better explanation of the mechanisms that give rise to national movements in these situations than the others, Gellner in particular. An important difference is that where Gellner is macro-oriented and abstract, Hroch’s approach is much more agency-oriented and more open.

Hroch's emphasis on the dynamics between nationally relevant conflicts and national agitation seems especially fruitful, for at least two reasons. First, because it accentuates that agitation on behalf of the nation was not in itself enough to complete the nation-forming process successfully. Hroch’s three-phase scheme is of course most useful in situations where a national cultural revival preceded a political movement – as in the Czech and Slovak cases. Second, his term "nationally relevant conflict" is well suited for studying national conflict also between fully formed nations in multi-national states – as I intend to do. The main advantage of Hroch's theory is thus that it provides a good point of departure for empirical research.

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So far, I have focused on the differences between the various approaches, but the discussion has also revealed several similarities. First, most scholars distinguish between two main routes to nationhood in Europe, with the Germans, the Italians and partly the Poles (Mann, Hroch) sometimes presented as a third category. Along the "civic path", originally culturally heterogeneous populations were welded into nations; along the "nationalist path", culturally more homogeneous populations were mobilized against a foreign ruling elite. The labels differ – small nations versus ruling nations, nations based on vertical versus lateral ethnie, state-subverting versus state-reinforcing nations, etc., but the same cases are included.
Second, most scholars today agree that nations are modern, and virtually all agree that nationalism (qua ideology and movement) is a modern phenomenon. In the words of A. D. Smith, "nations are modern, as is nationalism, even when their members think they are very old and even when they are in part created out of pre-modern cultures and memories." The disagreement on the modernity–antiquity axis thus concerns causes: What were the primary factors behind the advent of nations and nationalism? Within the (post-)modernist camp, there is disagreement concerning what aspect of modernization was most important; and between the modernists and the ethnicists, there is disagreement about how important modernization was compared to pre-modern cultural elements. Even on this point, the differences between scholars are a matter of emphasis; most scholars accord a role to modernization, whether as a primary force or a catalyst. Likewise, most scholars attribute some role to pre-modern cultural factors, whether as differentiating features, building blocks, or ethnie.

The sharpest scholarly dispute seems to concern whether nations are the result of concerted and conscious efforts by certain individuals to "invent" traditions, or the results of historical processes. This is partly a matter of continuity or change, partly a matter of agency. According to Eley and Suny, "the fundamental insight of the 'constructionists' is that nationality is not a natural consequence or outgrowth of common culture or long antiquity; nations are not so much discovered or awakened, as they are created or invented by the labors of intellectuals." Against this, A. D. Smith argues first, that it is almost impossible to disentangle the elements of pure invention from the rediscovery, revival, or reconstruction of pre-existing elements. He polemizes against the view that the pre-national past can be used freely as raw materials or building blocks; he points out that it is always the past of that particular nation that is reformulated, and argues that this acts as a restraint on invention. Yet, he admits that nation-forming processes do involve some degree of "invention", in the sense that existing elements are often recombined in new ways. Second, Smith argues that it is one thing to establish traditions, while it is quite another to ensure their lasting success and popular acceptance. Hroch makes some of the same points, arguing that also scholarly principles worked against invention.

Whether they regard nations as entirely modern or based on pre-national ties, as invented or historically constituted, most scholars agree that nations are real, substantial entities. Recently, however, constructivist oriented scholars like Rogers Brubaker have argued that this means taking "a conception inherent in the practice of nationalism [...] – namely the realist, reifying conception of nations as real communities – and [making] this conception central to the theory of nationalism." Brubaker proposes the concept "nationness" instead of "nation."

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45 See the introduction to Eley & Suny (1996:23).
**Where do I stand?**

My point of departure is that theories are not representations of the world, but tools of understanding, and as such they can be more useful, or less so. I tend to prefer specific theories that are conducive to empirical research, rather than general and more abstract theories. Likewise, I prefer approaches that combine agency with structure. While agreeing that nations were, to a greater or lesser degree, the results of "hard, continuous, repeated, creative labor" on the part of intellectuals and nationalist leaderships, I do not think that the advent of nations can be explained by the conscious actions of individuals alone. We also need to explain the effects of those actions causally: What were the conditions that made them fail or succeed?

The failure to answer why and how nations and nationalism came about is the reason why I find unsatisfactory the recent constructivist tendency to focus exclusively on nationalism as "discourse" or "practice." To state that nations are constituted by a nationalist discourse where the conception of nations as real, substantial entities is central, is just a more complicated way of saying that nations exist by virtue of a collective awareness of belonging together. I do not believe that nations will go away if we as scholars stop using the concept "nation", nor can I see what difference it would make if we use a different term like Brubaker's "nationness."

There are actually two analytically different, yet historically intertwined processes that need to be explained. On the one hand, we need to explain how the awareness of being a collectivity united by certain shared cultural features formed, how this awareness spread from an elite to the masses, and how it is perpetuated. This is a matter of what makes national identity form and of what factors facilitate its diffusion and continued existence – in other words, of explaining the nation-forming process and the salience of national identity.

On the other hand, we need to explain how national identities became politically relevant. This is, first, a matter of explaining the rise of certain ideas; chiefly the notion that a community of people believing themselves to be a nation, united by certain shared elements of culture and a feeling of belonging together, should have the right to rule itself. Second, it is a matter of explaining why this program was taken up by an elite, and why it was subsequently accepted (or not accepted) by a majority of those deemed to belong to the nation(-to-be).

**From ethnie to national identity**

Collective identities form through contacts within a group, but also in contrast to the others: This means that membership in the group is defined by the things that unite the group and at the same time distinguish it from the (important) others. In practice not all features will be equally relevant, of course; some cultural features are used as emblems of differences, others are ignored, and in some cases radical differences are played down and denied.

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The awareness of belonging to a cultural community (or an *ethnie* in A. D. Smith's term) thus probably formed through various contacts with the culturally different others. On the one hand, conquest and wars between ethnically different groups served to unite people across families, clans and tribes against the (more) alien others. On the other hand, trade put at least the people of market towns and the surrounding areas in touch with traveling foreigners. In Europe, Christianity brought with it missionaries, pilgrimages and crusades; in the Middle Ages universities (and educational "pilgrimages") were added.\(^2\)

Political-geographical borders may have played a role in two ways: By delimiting the possible common denominators that could function as criteria of inclusion and exclusion for the "we-group", and by serving as frameworks for and stops in communication and contact. Diets were assembled of members of the political class (nobility, gentry, higher clergy and burghers of free and royal towns) in the unit (kingdom, principality, duchy, etc.). Trade across borders was impeded by levied tax; and certain goods could not be exported at all (e.g. gold and other precious metals). This contact pattern would also explain why an awareness of being a culturally unique group formed first among the political elite and urban populations.

By the end of the Middle Ages, some awareness of belonging to over-local communities based on some cultural sameness was common among elites and urban populations many places in Europe, including the Czech lands. Starting in the latter half of the 18th century, such diffuse and socially limited *ethnic* identities were turned into more explicit and widespread *national* identities. The transition was not completed until around the middle of the 19th century at the earliest. What happened during this transition was twofold:

First, a nation-forming elite more or less consciously formulated what it meant to be a nation, by defining the features that the nation-to-be shared, which in turn functioned as criteria of inclusion and exclusion. These features varied from case to case, depending on the historical circumstances. Yet, the choice of features that were deemed constituting depended not only on what the nation(-to-be) had in common as opposed to the important others. "Imported" ideas of what it meant to be a nation also played a role in many cases. The Herderian idea of language as the soul of the nation was especially influential, also where language was not originally an important part of the pre-modern identity – as in the Serbian case.\(^3\)

Second, nation-forming was about spreading the new national identity (certain features, the awareness of sharing these features, and the solidarity this implied) from an elite to all strata of the nation-to-be. These were frequently interconnected processes: The defined contents of national identity changed simultaneously with the inclusion of more and more groups in the nation. The contents of national identity are not fixed, but often change also after the nation is fully formed. There may be competing opinions of what it means to be a nation – or different *national ideologies*, whose advocates are trying to win "more souls" for their concept.

\(^2\) "Nation" was used about students from roughly the same geographical or linguistic region. See Greenfeld (1992:4).

\(^3\) See e.g. Ivo Banac: *The national question in Yugoslavia* (1988).
The contents of national identity seem to vary according to the route to nationhood. Generally, the contents of national identity seem culturally "thicker" in the cases that followed the nationalist route to nationhood, while the original contents of national identity in the "first-born" nations were more voluntary and political in character. However, these differences should not be over-emphasized. Also the "civic" nations were clearly based on a certain cultural heritage, namely the heritage of the dominating elite; or, in A. D. Smith's term, the ethnic core. Conversely, the contents of identity in the "cultural" nations were not linked exclusively to cultural features, but also to some extent associated with a territory, a homeland.

While ethnie crystallized over a long period of time through interaction within culture groups and between culture groups, without anyone's active planning or promotion, there was at least some element of conscious planning or "invention" in the case of the nation. However, the nation-building metaphor that has been used to describe nation-forming in Western Europe implies a larger degree of construction by the elite than what was generally the case – at least initially. The incorporation of new groups and outlying regions in the dominant ethnie was at first largely an unplanned side effect of other processes. Yet, even in France national consciousness permeated the masses only after the idea of belonging to the French nation could be advanced through a compulsory education system, and that was not until the late 19th century. In the "nationalist" case, the planned element is even clearer; the national "awakeners" actively promoted the formation as well as the diffusion of the new national identity.

The two routes to nationhood also differed greatly in terms of the power of the agents of nation-forming. Ruling elites had superior coercive power through the control of the secret police, the judiciary and the military, as well as having superior control of incentives and means of promoting their national project, through the education system, the administration, the political system and the mass media. By contrast, national movements had to mobilize support for their cause mainly through agitation, rallies, newspapers (if allowed), clubs and meetings. People might or might not listen to them, and there was often a risk associated with joining the national movement.

The elements in this description should be familiar. Regardless of all other variations, some elite played an important role in all nation-forming processes, performing the dual task of formulating the contents of nationhood and of diffusing national consciousness to the masses. In order to do so, it had to have certain means at its disposal: a way of transmitting the message (the awareness of being a nation, predicated upon certain shared features) to the masses. In most places in Europe, mass literacy, mass media and compulsory education seem to have been preconditions for the mass diffusion of national identity. Many scholars, also some not been presented here, have emphasized these modern conditions. On the other hand, Hroch suggests that mass diffusion was possible before this in cases where a national church was the bearer of identity, chiefly in the Balkans. Here the church could provide the institutional means of diffusing a national awareness orally, through the retelling of national legends.

Finally, and perhaps less obvious, the completion of the nation-forming process rested on certain ideas that matured during the French Revolution and in its aftermath, ideas through which national identity became politically relevant.

How did those ideas emerge? Why did those particular elites take upon themselves the task of formulating the contents of nationhood, of diffusing national consciousness to the masses, and/or defending the rights of the nation(-to-be) against the ruling elite? And why were this national identity, and the national program that often accompanied it, accepted and even enthusiastically supported by the masses? If a message, an elite and the means to diffuse it were all that was needed, then all nation-forming processes would succeed, sooner or later. Since this is not the case, we need to explain what it takes.

**Changing ideas of nation and legitimacy**

Ethnic communities have existed for a long time, yet before the French Revolution it did not occur to anyone that this should have political consequences. The relevant divides were between members of the Estates and the plebs and between people of different religious denominations. The nation was conceived in terms of a political elite (those enjoying political rights) up to the French Revolution. Principles of legitimacy were linked to divine sanction and heritage, although the Estates often had the formal right to elect the king. Free election of kings normally only occurred when the male line of the former ruling house became extinct. Lands were added (and lost) to kingdoms and empires through marriage and wars.

What happened in the course of the French Revolution and its aftermath, was a fusion between a community of culture and a political principle of legitimacy. First, the nation came to be conceived as the whole people, and not only a political elite. This is important in explaining why someone should try to convince the masses that they were a nation, and how groups without any ruling class could begin to see themselves as nations, as was the case with the Slovaks. Second, the nation (the whole people) became the new basis for legitimate rule. The principle of national self-determination, first expressed through the French Revolution, rested on new ideas of the natural rights of man, originating in the Enlightenment. Through the ideas of Rousseau, self-determination was accorded not only to individuals, but also to groups – namely nations. In Rousseau's scheme, the nation was more of a political than a cultural unit, although he did imply certain common rules and institutions.

Combined with the ideas of Herder, who saw the nation as an organic whole and the native language as the soul of the nation, this new principle of legitimacy was revolutionary in impact. In the West, national self-determination was primarily a democratic program, stating that legitimate rule is rule by the people for the people. In Eastern Europe, it became a program for national political liberation on cultural ground. In some cases, national self-determination of the cultural brand meant national and democratic rule. Where the nation was politically underprivileged, democratic and national demands amounted to the same. In other cases, national was divorced from democratic, and national self-determination was compatible with limited or non-existent democracy. The Hungarian case after 1867 is an example of this.
Why did elites (and later masses) take up the national program?

Why then did certain elites\(^{55}\) embark on the task of forming a nation on the basis of a diffuse feeling of belonging together in a community of culture? This is a difficult question indeed. A first problem is whether we can really assume that a nation was an intended outcome, and not just an accidental side effect of actions that had other motives. \textit{If} we assume intention, we need to explain what motivated the action on part of the elite.

Let us first turn to the question of intention. Intention is loud and clear in the latter part of nation-forming processes, whether the elite in question worked through a national movement from below (the agitators of Hroch's phase B) or used the means of a ruling elite in power ("nation-building" elites in Western Europe). On the other hand, it is not necessarily obvious that the intention of the scholars of phase A in Hroch's scheme was to provide the foundations for national identity, even though that was clearly the result. Initially, the various national cultural revivals were spurred by Enlightenment ideals of scholarship and education. The idea that scholarship should serve the nation made a breakthrough only after the turn of the 19th century, under the influence of German Romanticism and the ideas of the French Revolution. As for the "first-born" nations of the West, the initial incorporation of new classes and groups in the culture of the dominating elite was even less planned, let alone intended.

One possible explanation is the self-interest or manipulation theory, which is based on the assumption that an elite wanted the masses to believe that they were a part of the nation, in order to serve their own (material) interests. Gains that might be achieved through the manipulation of the masses could include peace and order (for the ruling class), access to power (for an elite in opposition), or also job opportunities (for an intellectual elite).

This seems to fit the Western cases best. It would clearly be in the interest of a ruling elite to keep the masses quiet, and if the elite believed that this could be done by propagandizing that "we all belong together", it would seem reasonable to try to do so. Likewise, if access to power could be achieved by claiming to represent the people (the nation) against the feudal ruling class, it would be stupid not to try this. On the other hand, if the nation-forming elite did not believe in its own message, why then should the elite believe in the ability of the symbolism linked to "nation" to keep people quiet, or to mobilize them?

One argument against manipulation as a motive in the case of national movements is that it is hard to see what the scholars of phase A would stand to gain from studying the language and history of their nation-to-be, apart from the derision of the ruling nation. The individual agitators in phase B in many cases risked their careers, years in prison, perhaps even their lives – and for what? – an insecure gain in the distant future, and not necessarily even in their own lifetime. This does not seem a rational thing to do if narrow self-interest was the motivation.

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\(^{55}\) I here use the term elite in a loose sense. There is of course a big difference in terms of power between a ruling elite in a more or less multi-ethnic state, and the leaders of national movements, who were sometimes an intellectual and educational elite, but generally not a political elite. The gap between the "elite" and the masses becomes more blurred in this case.
Alternatively, we may assume that these people actually believed in their message – which means that they believed in the existence of their nation, and that this nation should have the same rights and possibilities as every other nation. What then, was their motivation, if not the prospect of personal material gain? The strength of the ideas of nationalism? Hardly. For one thing, people do not normally adhere to ideas because of the pure strength of the ideas themselves; and if so, the broader success of national movements would be very puzzling indeed.

What we often fail to recognize is that national movements are not the mere sum of individual actions: they are collective in nature, and so is their motivation. It is the well being and the interests of the nation (conceived as those that are like "us" in essential ways) that informs action. The nation as a source of self-respect and pride in what is "ours" is in my view more important to understand the emotional power of "nationalism" than individual prospects of material gain. When people are willing to die for their nation, they do so for people like themselves, people they identify with, people who are bound together in an "extended family", a community of shared ancestry\(^{56}\) – not for some vague idea or career opportunity.

Thus, the decay of the nation has to be stopped, its cultural heritage must be preserved and cultivated, and the people must again be proud of being a part of the nation. Once a certain measure of cultural consolidation is achieved, the national awakeners start their campaign on behalf of the nation, claiming equal cultural, political and socio-economic rights. This is a continuation of the quest for identity: We, the nation, are being treated unfairly. Wrongs committed to the nation are also seen as an attack on the worth and the pride of the individual members. Part of what informed the actions of the national awakeners was a genuine feeling of belonging together in a community of fate, a community that was not being respected the way it should by the others, the members of the ruling nation. Emotion played a part that is not recognized by the "invention" school. On the other hand, we should not fall in the opposite trap of claiming that material interests or conflicts had nothing whatsoever to do with this.

The question is what made the nation-forming elite feel so strongly for the nation, what made national identities salient. This is where material interests come in. I think what Hroch calls \textit{nationally relevant conflicts} are important: first, for explaining what motivated an elite to take up a national program and try to convince the rest of the people that they were a nation that should decide its own fate. Second, such conflicts are important for explaining why the masses rallied behind the national cause. One nationally relevant conflict that concerned the intellectuals was the introduction of a vernacular language other than their own in the administration, which left them disadvantaged and strengthened the feeling of belonging together with other members of the disadvantaged culture. The choice of another language was also a devaluation of the native language and thus of those who used it. This is a nationally relevant conflict linked to the rise of the modern state.

\(^{56}\) This is of course a myth, insofar as most nations are not genetically related in any real sense, and genetically, there are no sharp dividing lines between nations, because of migration and assimilation processes.
In the case of the masses, various political and economic conflicts occurring during the transition from feudalism to a capitalist, industrialized society concurred with cultural divides, converting social antagonisms into national ones. National movements succeeded because they were able to unite national, social and sometimes also democratic demands. Once national identity encompassed everyone, it could be perpetuated through institutional means, with the mass media, national organizations of different kinds (from publishing houses via theaters to political parties) and the educational system as the most important.

This can be used as a point of departure also for addressing national conflicts in multi-national states. If the concurrence of cultural, political and economic divides could help form national identities in conjunction with nationalist agitation during the transition from feudal to modern society, it is likely that this will have similar effects in multi-national states today. In other words, if there are great and systematic differences in political power, cultural opportunities and economic means between the national communities of a multi-national state, the national conflict level between the groups is likely to be high. Here it will probably be difficult to build a new, overarching identity, because nationally relevant conflicts will perpetuate the existing identification processes and sharpen the boundaries between the communities.

**How "voluntary" is national identity?**

A paradox is that while it was to a certain degree possible to weld together culturally heterogeneous populations into nations in France and Britain, the very same project failed in the Habsburg empire and in Russia. Why? Part of the answer is of course that the image of the successful welding together of culturally heterogeneous groups in West European nation-states is inaccurate, if not entirely false. The result turned out not to be nation-states after all; national revivals in Catalonia, among the Basques, the Scots, the Welsh, the Flemish attest to that – although they are of course referred to as regions rather than nations.

Yet, there are also plenty of examples that people have changed their identity – historically during the amalgamation of various peoples into nations in Western Europe, and more recently involving immigrants to settler societies. This suggests that identities can to a certain extent be chosen, and that it is in principle possible to make groups that were (at least originally) culturally heterogeneous into nations. On the other hand, the fact that national opposition movements were able to advance their national projects against the larger projects of the ruling elites in Russia and the Habsburg empire indicates that nations are not *easily* invented or constructed. If that were the case, the ruling elites, with all their resources, would surely have an advantage over the, relatively speaking, powerless and disorganized national movements?

First, it is probably easier to identify with someone if you have something tangible in common with him or her. This may be part of the reason why it was easier for a Czech "awakener" to convince a fellow Czech-speaking peasant that they were both Czech, than for a French civil servant to convince an Alsatian German-speaking peasant that they were both French.
Second, national identity is probably more "voluntary" during a nation-forming process, than after national consciousness has become common. Once there, national identity becomes more or less inescapable, because it is reproduced through the institutions of society, including the family, the school system, the mass media, even sports. This does not mean that all individuals, even in modern nations, necessarily have a professed subjective national identity.

Third, national identity (or any collective identity) is never exclusively a matter of choice on the part of the individual. In order to become a member of a nation (or any other group) you must also be accepted by the rest of the group. Change of identity thus not only requires re-identification on part of the individual, but also recognition from the others. If someone's individual features are not compatible with the core constituting features of a collective identity, he or she will not be accepted. National identity may be exclusive, based on inheritance and blood, limiting, based on a language (which may be learned) or inclusive, based on self-definition and adherence to certain political institutions. The latter is more open to outsiders, but it is also less tangible, and thus probably less competitive in terms of being a source of identification.

It may thus seem that the chances of welding a culturally heterogeneous population together will be best in cases where (1) there are no, or weak, alternative (cultural) foundations for identification, i.e. where the groups in question are ethnic categories rather than ethnie; (2) where there are no, or few, nationally relevant conflicts, i.e. conflicts that coincide with recognizable cultural divides; and (3) where there is no "nationally" aware elite.

It may be argued that to the extent it was possible to weld culturally heterogeneous populations together in the West European cases, timing was crucial: The slow process of bureaucratic incorporation of the original ethnic groups in France started at a time when the rapid changes and new conflicts accompanying the transition to a mobile, modern society were not yet under way. Moreover, this happened before the emergence of the idea that culture should be politically relevant. By the time Germanization was attempted in the Habsburg empire, the national revivals were already in progress, and the national movements had the conflict structure of early modern society and a more tangible "sameness" on their side.

Concluding remarks

Let me summarize the argument. Nations are historically constituted, dynamic and in constant change, which also helps explain the great variations in the contents of identity, how and when they were formed. The formation of ethnie or ethnic categories, the cores on which many modern nations were built, was not possible without contact and conceivably also conflict with culturally different others. Conflicts between groups that are culturally different from each other serve to reinforce identity and strengthen internal solidarity. National conflicts occur when conflicts of interest or value coincide with national cultural divides.

57 French was declared the official language as early as in 1539, according to Douglas Johnson: 'The making of the French nation', in Mikuláš Teich & Roy Porter (eds.): The national question in Europe in historical context (1993:41).
A transition from pre-national to national entities required, first, the existence of an elite who took upon itself the dual task of defining the contents of national identity, if necessary through the revival of a literary language and by spelling out and rewriting history; and of diffusing that national identity to the masses. Second, the elite had to have the necessary means to achieve this, in terms of mass literacy, mass media, compulsory education, etc. There were enormous differences in resources between the ruling elite of the "first-born" nations and the national movements from below of the "nationalist" route, yet neither route to nationhood was guaranteed success – "nation-building" least of all. Third, people were receptive to nationalist ideas because they lived in a society where political and economic disadvantages corresponded to ethnic or cultural divisions. National movements succeeded in mobilizing people because they were able to identify their oppressors as culturally different. The problem was not only that national identity coincided with social class (in terms of social and/or political positions) and that class divisions thus reinforced national divisions, but also that the culture and language of the subordinate group(s) tended to be undervalued, considered as folksy and the like.

The assertion that nationalism creates nations "where they do not exist" is thus at best inaccurate. At the very least the awareness among the elite of being a culturally unique group must precede political demands on behalf of the nation-to-be. On the other hand, the idea that the nation should rule itself does not follow automatically from the fact that people feel themselves to be a culturally unique group. People have lived in multi-ethnic empires for centuries without ever doubting the right of a culturally foreign ruler or even ruling class to decide over them. This core idea of nationalism qua ideology is a truly modern phenomenon, caused by the merging of Enlightenment ideas of sovereignty and legitimacy with a new conception of nation on the one hand, and certain ideas of German Romanticism on the other.

A national movement fills two tasks: On the one hand its activities are directed inwards, striving to consolidate the objective foundations of nationhood and at the same time diffusing the awareness of being a nation to the masses. Then, if the nation does not possess a state of its own, these inwardly oriented activities are paralleled by an external struggle for national cultural and political autonomy (or ultimately: secession) directed against the rulers. National movements arise in opposition to the modern centralizing state, specifically to the political elite of the modern state, and they define the identity of their nation in opposition to the ruling nation that they feel oppressed by.

The two nations that are the focus of this study, the Czechs and the Slovaks, both followed the "nationalist" route to nationhood. National movements formulated the contents of national identity, spread this identity to the masses and finally achieved independence from the former ruling nations, the Germans and the Magyars. Czechoslovakia was anything but the nation-state the new ruling elite proclaimed it to be, and the elite had to decide how to cope with this circumstance. The Czechoslovak nation project was an attempt at forming a nation from above, but, unlike the "state-nations" of Western Europe, this nation project comprised only some two-thirds of the citizens, the Czechs and Slovaks, while excluding the rest. In summation, then, it should be fairly clear that the approach applied in this thesis owes most to the theories of Anthony D. Smith and Miroslav Hroch.