MYTH AND PROCESS:
TWO MEANINGS OF THE CONCEPT OF
THE NATION

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Contents

1.   <u>States before Nations</u>

A quotation to start with:

> ...ordinary people began to recognize and emphasize the difference in dialects, customs, religion, culture among the states...Pride in local distinctions and loyalty became more pronounced...The significance of this development was that ... princes could more easily organize peasant militia's and armies to fight their wars for them. In turn, peasants and townsmen believed they were fighting not just as a duty to a feudal lord but for the independence and honour of their own state (Walker, 1953, cited in Holsti, 1992, p.19).

To what period in European state formation does this description refer? Late Middle Ages, the Thirty Years war?

It is not about Europe at all. It describes the so-called period of Warring States in what became the Chinese Empire after the Ch'in state had conquered its four remaining competitors. If it would not have been so successful and if the centrifugal forces in the Chinese empire would not have been contained afterwards, a plurality of nation states could have developed in China in the same way as in Europe. On the other hand, if Louis XIV or even Napoleon's quest for hegemony in Europe would have been as successful as the Ch'in state, we would today not have to be puzzled by the development of such a plethora of nations and nationalist movements. Continental Europe could have become a single centralized nation state, with former dynastic states leaving their traces at best in regions or provinces like Sechuan or Yenan.

Implausible? Of course, but the counterfactual comparison shows that nations are not self-evident, not 'natural' or historically given entities. It also shows that certain features of what we now call nationalism developed - and that happened in Europe too (see Seton-Watson, 1977) - before the concept of nation received its modern meaning. In such cases of popular identification with a dynastic state, it is misleading to speak of proto-nationalism (Hobsbawm, 1990, Ch.2.) or rudimentary nationalism (Holsti, 1992, p.19). People identified with attack and defense units, whether tribes, city- or dynastic states, before the idea of the nation developed. Nationalism is a specific type of we-they identification that should not be treated anachronistically.

Identification with earlier attack and defense units does clarify the importance of existing states and of war for the later formation of 'nations' (See Kohn, 1961). The concept of 'nation' first emerged as a term of domestic political opposition in 18th century France, a dynastic state, which in linguistic and cultural terms was quite heterogeneous. It first received its modern form during the French revolution, mobilising people for war - and justifying war. The idea of the nation was taken up and popularized in Germany, where the memory of past unity and glory was still very much alive.

Divided the German territories were easily defeated and humiliated by revolutionary France. Nationalism in Germany became a tool of unification, though a dynastic state (Prussia) was still the main unifier, after having eliminated its main competitor, the Habsburg empire. Also in Germany, Herder developed the mould of 'folk' identity - including the significance of language - for nationalism. From that time on inventing a nation and national myths became possible not only for already established states but also for outsider groups, which could base a specific identity on a variety of selected and cultivated properties. Then the European invention of the nation was taken up all over the world, for better and worse.

2.   Questions

If nations are not objectively given entities, how and why did the concepts of nation and nation-state become so all pervasive? What exactly does 'nation' refer to? Those questions have been asked by many authors, but their answers still differ. Despite the voluminous literature the concepts nation and nationalism remain 'essentially contested' (Motyl, 1992).

Now a new question has come up. Can the concept of the nation be used at the level of 'Europe'? It is often asserted, that a European federation can not exist without a European nation as its foundation. But is that a precondition for or an outcome of political integration? It should also be remembered that as a 'nation' Europe only refers to Western Europe. Can one conceive of a 'nation' covering all the members of CSCE? How to demarcate the boundaries of a European 'nation?' Should Russia or Turkey be excluded, for example? The definition is political.

During the cold war in Western Europe the age of nationalism as a source of foreign policy was supposed to be past. Nation states were supposed to fade away, and losing their sovereign claws and fangs (but see Hoffmann, 1966 and van Benthem van den Bergh, 1966). But when nationalism returned with a vengeance in the Eastern half of Europe, it had in turn an influence on political attitudes in Western Europe - strengthening 'regional' nationalist and right wing movements, and creating much larger popular opposition against the Treaty of Maastricht then had been expected. Nationalist rhetoric seems infectious.

In recent years the adjective 'ethnic' has also become popular. The term 'ethnic nationalism' is now used as a self-evident category in both former Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union. It is unclear who

introduced the concept 'ethnic cleansing', which implies the desirability of 'ethnic purity', reminiscent of the idea of a pure Aryan race purified of jews. Similarly only groups are designated as 'ethnic minorities' that can be recognized on the basis of physiological characteristics, such as pigmentation and physiognomy, supplemented by accent (which can no longer be used with second generation immigrants). What then are the difference and similarities between 'nation' and ethnic group (or ethnicity)?

3.   Conceptual problems

The concept 'nation' remains puzzling and elusive. It defies generalization. But nationalists seem to know but to well what their own nation is - and is not. They have no difficulty in distinguishing between 'us' and 'them', between the superior and the lesser or threatening breed.

But why are they a nation and another people not? What properties are needed to make a nation of a group of people? Are there objective criteria for determining that this particular group of people is a nation and another one is not? A prominent historian of nationalism says: 'Thus I am driven to the conclusion that no "scientific definition" of a nation can be devised; yet the phenomenon has existed and exists' (Seton-Watson, 1977, p.5).

Objective criteria like language, religion, culture or common descent are neither necessary nor sufficient to demarcate nations. Particular combinations do not work either. There are always exceptions. Subjective definitions such as the will to pursue a common destiny or the expression of shared loyalty and solidarity are circular - any unit can then be a nation - and tautological (see further Hobsbawm, 1990, pp.5-9). If that is so, the claims of nationalists can not be based on generally valid criteria.

This has a curious implication. How can there be a right to national self-determination, if it does not have a subject, that can be objectively defined? That seems to be a good thing: if all population groups claiming nationhood on the basis of one criterion or another would be granted that right, the world would be divided into thousands of states, waging thousands of wars. This objection has often been raised against national self-determination, assuming the right can be applied to objectively definable subjects. If not, its application can only be the justification of a political struggle.

To make their case more objective nationalists usually attempt to project their own nation as far back into the past as possible. That is to demonstrate its historically - and perhaps biologically - given existence. But historical investigation has shown that the idea of the nation as the potentially solidary and united group of people on which states must be based dates from the late 18th century and the word nationalism only became widely used in the late 19th century (Anderson, 1991, p.4). As Anthony Giddens has written: 'The nation-state ... is a phenomenon of modernity, just as distinctive of the modern era as is the development of industrial capitalism' (Giddens, 1992, p.1).

Still, the recent appearance of 'nations' on the historical stage does not have to exclude that they have roots in a more distant past. Do nations have a prior ethnic origin (Smith, 1986)? That is implied in the concept of 'ethnic nationalism'. Or do we have to see them as political and cultural constructs, as 'imagined communities' needed to cope with the size and anonymity of modern state-societies (Anderson, 1991) and therefore requiring 'invented traditions' (Hobsbawm, 1990)? Is Ernest Gellner (1964, p.48.) right in observing: 'Nationalism is not the awakening of nations to self-consciousness: it invents nations where they do not exist'? Gellner provides a functional explanation for the invention and construction of nations: modern industrial societies need cultural homogeneity and have no use for local and regional forms of identification. But that explanation only covers the transition from already established dynastic into nation states, not the nations invented by separatist or independence movements.

If nations are not objectively existing entities with innate properties, they must indeed be invented, constructed, formed. One can then ask how much conscious design and how much unplanned process there has been in the development of nations? All nations must build their own we-they image based one or more boundary criteria, whether territorial, linguistic, religious or historical-cultural. But can nations be constructed at will, out of nothing prior in particular? Should there not be some historical and cultural basis for constructing national myths, for imagining large anonymous units as communities? That seems quite plausible, but what basis and what criteria can make a group of people pass for a nation has resisted all attempts at generalization, at 'scientific definition'. The same words are used in different historical and geographical contexts as if their meaning were clear. The concept of the nation is far from clear.

4.   Myths and Processes

If generalizing fails as well as confuses, a different approach has to be followed. Instead of searching for universal criteria to define nations as essentially unchanging entities, the focus should be on development processes. Why did the concept of the nation become so important in a particular period or phase in the development of societies and states? Why did some states develop into nation-states and others not? What kind of units became perceived as nations? Why were some attempts to assert nationhood successful and others not?

Such questions cannot be answered without a long term perspective on the development of societies, such as the process sociology developed by Norbert Elias (see Mennell, 1989; and specifically on state and nation formation, and nationalism, Elias, 1970, 1982, 1989).

If 'what is a nation?' is the wrong question, how then to clarify a concept that is so important in the contemporary world, for political processes as well as for political identification.

In ordinary language 'nation' is used in two combinations, first in 'nation state', as the entity seen as the universally legitimate foundation of states, and second in 'nationalism', as a political doctrine and/or movement. Ordinary language thus points to two different meanings of 'nation'.

In 'nation-state' the 'nation' refers to the kind of state-society that came into being after dynastic or colonial states were remove from the historical stage. Nation formation then is a phase in the process of state formation, which starts when the power and properties of the ruled instead of those of the rulers begin to determine the political structure of states. That is the process meaning of the concept of nation, to which I will return later.

'Nationalism' is first a general doctrine about the proper political ordering of the world. In Elie Kedourie's succinct description:

> It (the nation) pretends to supply a criterion for the determination of the unit of population proper to enjoy a government exclusively its own, for the legitimate exercise of power in the state, and for the right organization of a society of states. Briefly, the doctrine holds that humanity is naturally divided into nations, that nations are known by certain characteristics which can be ascertained, and that the only legitimate type of government is national self-government. (Kedourie, 1960, p.9).

The weakness of this doctrine is that nations - as we have seen - cannot be 'known by certain characteristics which can be ascertained'. Nations are not natural and given entities. Their characteristics have to be specified and they have to be asserted as such by political movements. To

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say that nations have to be invented is not a bad metaphor, because technical inventions can only be new combinations of existing materials and components. So all nationalisms need to develop their own national myth, justifying their claim to a nation. National myths have to draw the profile of a nation in terms of selective history and culture, including language, religion or other identity establishing criteria. It are not such criteria that establish nations, but nationalist movements establishing their own criteria of demarcation, especially from neighbouring competitors or rivals. National myth-making aims at forging unity, loyalty and solidarity of the people claimed for the nation and therefore has to stress a common profile. To assure political cohesion and to prepare its members for the sacrifice of their life a national myth often exaggerates the threat from enemies or oppressors, whether external or internal. It tends to cultivate memories of glory and humiliation, of victory and defeat. And it postulates a common destiny and promises a better future. The myth is kept alive by national symbols, such as flag and anthem, monuments and museums, and commemorative feasts, parades and celebrations.

Such myths are the common ingredient of all national ideologies. But these ideologies differ widely in content and criteria used. They can also be ranged on a continuum leading from 'ambitious and aggressive' to 'satisfied, status quo oriented'. In that way 'extreme' or 'virulent' nationalism can be distinguished from 'patriotism' as a mild - and positively valued - form of nationalism. But though their political aims and degree of belligerence may differ, extreme and mild nationalism share most of their premises. So they can also move from one extreme to the other, especially during and after wars.

Historically, the myth and process meanings of 'nation' are connected through the development of the idea of popular sovereignty. That explains the timing of the spread of the concept of the nation.

The notion of popular sovereignty implied a problem. How should the units for its application be demarcated? In terms of the existing dynastic states, after the kings had been deposed? On what principle of legitimacy should such heterogeneous peoples exercise sovereignty? Humanity as a whole was not a practical alternative. That made the concept of the nation as legitimate unit for popular sovereignty so invaluable. In the 18th century 'nation' stood for a political community, the people of the state, which the King had to serve and be responsible to. The concept of the state originally had the same meaning (Skinner, 1978). But Louis XIV's response to that claim 'l'Etat? C'est moi' (whether apocryphal or not) shows that 'state' also came to mean dynastic possession. Probably for that reason not 'state' but 'nation' could afterwards come to both embody and demarcate the

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legitimate political community. The 'nation' became the necessary intermediary between state and people, as it could replace the divine right legitimacy of the King. The concept of the nation became indispensable to legitimize the boundaries of democratizing states. That is the reason why all states now claim to be nation states.

Politically, the concept of the nation therefore had to become Janusfaced: it could legitimize established states as well as political movements representing outsider groups claiming to be entitled to their own state.

The legitimizing and mobilizing functions of the 'nation' may explain why the doctrines of nationalism spread first from Western to Eastern Europe and later to the European colonies (and remaining independent states) in Asia and Africa. Most colonial nationalist movements were forced to make their 'nation' coincide with a unit of colonial administration. Within these units the transport and communications network had developed through which people could be mobilised, even though they were culturally and linguistically quite heterogeneous. That is not to say that these new states were completely 'arbitrary', as is often asserted. They were not much more arbitrary than nation states like France, Spain or Italy that developed out of dynastic states. 'Arbitrary' presumes 'natural' or 'objective' nations that do not exist.

5.   An Ethnic Origin of Nations?

The conceptual confusion about the meaning of 'nation' is compounded in the concept 'ethnic nationalism', currently used as self-evident with respect to former Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union? Why did 'ethnic' have to be added there? Before the fall of Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union one spoke of nationalities and the 'nationalities' problem (cf Furtado and Huttenbach, 1992). Why are these claims to nationhood now justified by the ethnic criterion? What does 'ethnic' mean in this context?

If 'ethnic' - as in ordinary language - refers to common descent, that can only refer to all South Slavs as descendants of a tribe, that arrived in the Balkan in the 4th century. (Singleton, 1985, p.13). Serbo-Croat is still one language, with different dialects as usual, also spoken in Bosnia-Herzegovina. To mark itself off Serbia has now introduced cyrillic script (See Glenny, 1992). As religion was not acceptable as a distinguishing criterion in communist Yugoslavia, muslims in Bosnia had to identify

themselves in the Yugoslav census as an ethnic group, though it was clearly religious descent that distinguished them from other inhabitants of Bosnia Herzegowina.

In former Yugoslavia Serbs and Croats were not just the inhabitants of the Republics of Serbia and Croatia. In the census they were also counted as ethnic groups in other republics. That could then become the justification for Serbian and Croatian claims to Bosnian territory and 'ethnic cleansing'.

This makes the meaning of 'ethnic' nationalism clearer. Though religious and possibly cultural differences were of some importance for the relations between population groups, the differences between especially Serbia and Croatia were primarily historical and political. But in the struggle between the two great powers of former Yugoslavia the ethnic criterion became most useful for territorial expansion and projecting power (Greater Serbia - and Croatia as well). In practice, however, churches often were used to identify villages to be 'cleansed' rather than ethnicity (or language) as those were not immediately recognizable in 'mixed' territories. The ethnic criterion is neither natural nor inevitable: but for historical enmities and Tito's reduction of the territory of the Serbian republic in Yugoslavia, the Serbian 'nation' could have been seen to coincide with that republic. Its identity could then have been based on historical continuity, culture and citizenship, instead of on a criterion claimed to be objective and for that reason useful to justify 'cleansing'. The problem is that such a criterion is self-confirming and epidemic, as it defines also the identity of enemies, victims and is easily imitated. That it is not the only possibility is demonstrated by the example of the town of Sarajevo, which developed during the civil war the equivalent of a 'national' identity, based on the long term intermingling of different population groups elsewhere separated and on a special 'cosmopolitan' way of urban life. 'Ethnic' ties are irrelevant in the fight for Sarajevo's survival and identity. Many 'ethnic' Serbs identified with and fought for Sarajevo. But the 'ethnic' criterion as used by Serbia and Croatia to justify their expansionism has been accepted by the United nations as 'realistic' and as the underlying principle of the Vance-Owen plan for Bosnia-Herzegowina. But bowing to the realities of power does not require acceptance of the legitimation of 'ethnic' nationalism.

Former Yugoslavia may be a special case. Because 'ethnic' remained an important census category, it also remained a source of identification for people as individuals, even if they lived in other republics for generations. Yugoslav identity was less clear. Religious, historical and family ties, fed by historical enmities, reproduced separate identities even in modern cities, where different population groups could nevertheless live peacefully together - until the federation broke up. History gave

nationalism based on the 'ethnic' criterion its plausibility, especially in Croatia and Serbia.

'Ethnic' nationalism is therefore historically contingent in Yugoslavia. But how important is the 'ethnic' criterion for the determination of 'nations' elsewhere? What is the meaning of 'ethnic' and 'ethnicity' in relation to the development of 'nations'?

In his wide ranging study the Ethnic Origins of Nations (1986) Anthony Smith argues that nations as we now know them have always been preceded by what he calls in French 'ethnies'. He defines these not in terms of biological common descent but as: 'historical communities built up on shared memories' (p.25) and more extensively as 'named human populations with shared ancestry myths, histories and cultures, having an association with a specific territory and a sense of solidarity' (p.32). But are nations not often described in the same way? In emphasizing myth-making, memories, symbols and culture Smith implies that he sees 'ethnies' as imagined communities, though perhaps less so then nations.

This use of private words for public purposes is confusing. The term 'ethnic' in ordinary usage implies that population groups (such as 'ethnic' minorities) are distinguished from each other by physiological characteristics and to a genetically common origin with particular properties. Even when ethnicities are distinguished on the basis of culture the supposition of common descent is implied. Earlier societies often required the myth of a common founder-ancestor.

'Ethnos' in ancient Greece first referred to 'band' and then came to mean 'people'. It could also more specifically mean subjugated peoples or heathens. 'Ethnikos' referred to the particular properties of a people. Though my Greek dictionary does not say this explicitly, these meanings imply that the concepts ethnos and ethnikos were used to describe outsider groups rather than the Greek people itself.

Do genetically distinct 'ethnic' groups exist? In most parts of the world frequent movements of tribes (or peoples in the sense of the Greeks), migration and forced integration of disparate groups in different kinds of attack and defense units have led to continuous melting of population groups. In Europe that process has been particularly marked. That 'melting' is biologically possible is in itself a strong argument against the idea of homogeneous races or 'ethnicities'in the past. Because of the political and cultural power of empires and states, historians have payed much more attention to their distinctive characteristics than to 'melting' processes. 'National' history writing has only reinforced

this tendency.

After 1945 UNESCO commissioned a number of scientists to provide an objective and scientific definition of 'race'. Their conclusion was that race had no biological meaning for humanity: the distribution of physical characteristics is a statistical category and can not be correlated with psychological or behavioral characteristics (Rex, 1986, pp.18-19). This conclusion applies a fortiori to 'ethnic' groups. Innate physical traits, such as skin colour and physiognomy, are selectively used by established groups to justify discrimination and stigmatization of outsider groups (Elias and Scotson, 1965).

Humanity has one species specific genetic potential, though with a much wider spectrum of individual variation than any other species. Individual, not group variation. The latter is cultural-historical. But to recognize this undermines we-they images and ethnic stereotyping.

The conclusion is clear. Like race, ethnicity is attributed, whether to others or to self. Ethnic groups are not given, immutable entities. Distinct identities of groups of people can develop in many different ways. Often overlooked is the relation to attack and defense (or survival) units: many peoples lost their names and identity either because of having been destroyed or because of being assimilated into the ruling establishment population and the culture of such units, others were treated as outsiders and kept or developed separate, often oppositional identities and cultures. Whether they will use the 'ethnic' criterion - or rather language, culture, memories of past political entities or religion - as the basis of nationalism is dependent on their specific development.

Nations do not have ethnic origins in the sense that common genetic descent (or any other general and vague property like culture to be qualified as 'ethnic') determined which units later became 'nations'.

The problem with the term 'ethnic' is that its meaning is vague enough to keep the association with population groups having innate (genetically determined) inferior or harmful properties, that require measures to protect one's own nation and people. That is clear in former Yugoslavia, but also with respect to 'ethnic minorities'. As homogeneous, objectively existing entities 'ethnic' groups are as mythical as 'nations'. Because of its vagueness, value judgments usually determine its meaning. In Africa 'ethnicity' replaced 'tribe', which was considered to be a colonial invention or to pejorative ('tribalism') and referring to primitive, less civilized societies. More recently 'ethnic' is used to describe small entities, seen as more cohesive and in touch with nature than large bureaucratic state

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societies. Their own special culture, it is argued, should be preserved against the onslaught of the homogenizing global industrial culture, on the analogy with animal and plant species becoming extinct through modern agriculture and pollution. Here 'ethnicities' are not supposed to become nations as the basis of states. They should stay as they are.

The concepts of nation and ethnic show that words can beautify but kill as well. They should be handled with care.

6. Real Origins: From Dynastic to Nation States

To support the invention of 'nations', their spokesmen have to postulate a past in which people were firmly embedded in clearly demarcated and supposedly homogeneous units. Hence the appeal of 'ethnic origin'.

But in Europe migration movements, urbanization and the expansion and contraction of states and empires, had already far before the industrial revolution destroyed homogeneous tribal and/or linguistic groups. With the spread of sedentary agriculture tribal identification was gradually replaced by kinship ties (shrinking over time to the nuclear family), attachment to village communities and later to different kinds of 'territorial' affiliations, in the formation of which both markets and units of rule played a role. This development of attack and defense units, including manners of identification is to my knowledge as yet not systematically investigated.

Later phases are better known. Dynastic states developed after elimination struggles between different houses in a larger territory defined by the respective possessions of the competitors without any regard for cultural or linguistic considerations (Elias, 1982).

In dynastic states the ruled were not of common descent, language or culture. On the contrary, they had quite heterogeneous backgrounds. Princes carried long lists of titles referring to territorial possessions, not to 'ethnic' communities they ruled. The people were subjects of a King, not members of a 'nation' and could only in the 18th or the 19th century begin to see themselves as citizens of a state with which they could identify. The central monopolies of states - violence and taxation - were administered and perceived as the property of the monarch: there only gradually grew a distinction between his private household and the state budget. Subjects could fulfil functions for the King, but

not vice versa: the King did not see himself as having a 'public' function, to serve the public interest, as in later constitutional monarchies.

As we have seen, the development of the concepts of both state and nation was the beginning of a democratization process. The power balances between rulers and ruled gradually became less uneven, a process speeded up by -in shorthand- the industrial revolution. The increasing political relevance of the idea of the nation is one of the aspects of the great transformation that started in Western Europe and now encompasses the world as a whole.

Nation originally did mean place of birth or origin, which could be a village, a city, a region or an identifiable group of people (including an aristocracy as the Natio Hungarica, or the Schlachta as the embodiment of Poland). The 'droit divin' gave rights to the King, it did not imply anything about the characteristics of the people under his jurisdiction. In the 19th century 'nationalism' was 'progressive', closely connected to ideas about liberal democracy. For Marx the nation was a function of the rise of the bourgeoisie, used to grasp power away from the nobility and the clergy, classes that identified with members of their own class across borders rather than with their own state. The success of the 'levee en masse' during the Jacobin wars contributed to the spread of the concept of the 'nation' all over dynastic Europe. It became a model to be emulated.

Three kinds of political use made of the concept of the nation in the 19th century can be distinguished.

First, in established, continuous states in Western Europe, and especially in great powers, nations were ideologically and actively promoted. 'Official nationalism' (Anderson, 1991, Ch.6) served to strengthen especially the great powers in their mutual economic and political-strategic competition. It was also of use to defend the state establishment against domestic opposition or class based revolt. The development of conscript armies, requiring identification with the state for which soldiers were forced to fight, made the use of national symbols more necessary.

Second, in fragmented, weak, but in the past - at least in name -united conglomerates of political units the nation - put back far into the past - came to serve as a means for political unification. This happened in what became Germany and Italy. But ideology did not cover what actually occurred. Both new states were political - and military - creations, and they were not justified by former 'nations' but by former empires, though in their national myths 'ethnic' and linguistic criteria were used. The

dynastic state of Prussia was even transformed into a German empire. The German state can not be said to have naturally emerged from a preexisting German nation. To unify 'Germany' Prussia first had to eliminate the Habsburg part of what it was before 1871. Nor were German speaking Swiss ever included in the German 'nation'.

Third, outsider groups within states or empires, as oppressed or discriminated population groups with a name going back to a past state or living in a specific administrative unit (or 'republic') of state or empire, invented a 'nation' to resist the centre and to mobilise people into claiming their own state. That happened in the Ottoman and Habsburg empires, and also explains Polish and Baltic nationalism, as well as the weaker nationalisms in the Tsarist empire. In a somewhat different form, it is what has happened in the former Soviet Union - as the heir to the Tsarist empire. But in all three empires centrifugal forces were more political than national or ethnic. (Motyl, 1992)

Here we encounter a very important difference between state and nation formation in, roughly, the Western and Eastern halves of Europe. In Western Europe it was largely a continuous process, with most nation states developing out of dynastic states, which had already begun to be drawn together by the development of standard vernacular languages (replacing first Latin and then French), state-wide obligatory education and infrastructure policies. In Eastern Europe state and nation formation was discontinuous due to the disintegration of dynastic states that were ruled like empires and could for that reason not be kept together in the face of latent democratization and/or were defeated in war. The 'sick man of Europe' disintegrated first, leaving the Balkan to show that nations are more easily invented than formed when peoples are no longer kept together by force. The victors of the first World War imposed the principle of the nation on the states to be formed out of the defeated Habsburg empire, with the same lesson. And finally, the unexpected fate of the Soviet empire showed that class ideology, even if applied in one state as a form of national socialism, was insufficient to integrate a people's democracy. Disintegration of the Soviet Union was probably caused less by national awakening than by the lack of political incorporation of regional elites (Laitin, 1991). After the failure of the Coup in 1991 national and democratic claims came together in breaking the power monopoly of the centre as well as the unity of the Nomenklatura, though it largely survived in most republics by a change of clothes.

The differences in level of development of nations, of national integration, may make clear why one cannot expect postcommunist societies to quickly follow the same path as Western Europe.

7.   Nations as Processes

All entities seen as nations are historically contingent. They need myths, selectively based on history, real or imagined, to justify their existence. Nations do not go far back into the past, even though all nationalists believe and want everybody to believe this. History teaching at elementary schools still innocently presents the own nation as if it existed already when the first settlers arrived thousands of years ago or when it was inhabited by a people which later migrated or disappeared as such (for a recent illuminating example of projecting the Ukraine into the distant past, see Subtelny, 1988). Nation states do have an objective existence, not as static entities, but as having become over time increasingly different from dynastic states. Criteria used in national ideologies to demarcate their nation, such as the standard language and culture, are the product of state policies rather than inherent properties.

What did the transformation from dynastic into nation states imply? Norbert Elias (1970) has provided a first answer:

> We can begin to speak of a nation if the functional interdependence between its regions and its social strata as well as its hierarchical levels of authority becomes sufficiently great and sufficiently reciprocal for none of them to be able to disregard completely what the other think, feel or wish.

'We can begin'. But any beginning implies an end, or at least a direction: the ideal image of a completed nation is an egalitarian, harmonious and democratic state society, all the members of which take each other's wishes, feelings and thought as much as is possible into account. The development of nations leads towards that ideal image, as found in the writings of nationalist intellectuals.

According to Elias' definition the Soviet Union was a fledgling nation. Indeed, the second World War (the 'great patriotic war') demonstrated that Soviet citizens were prepared to fight for the Union. But was it for Russia or for the Soviet Union? The Soviet nation did in any case not develop far enough to prevent disintegration. The process of nation formation had not yet become irreversible, had not advanced far enough. We might have to say about Great Britain too, if the Scottish nationalists have their way, that its level of national integration was to low. That they - as yet - have not, shows the opposite.

In Elias' perspective on nation formation three aspects, interdependencies, power balances and identification, can be distinguished. I will discuss each one briefly.

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The first is often described as the development of a 'national' economy, of a network of interdependencies coterminous with the state rather than with local or regional units. Such a stable network of interdependencies could only develop after the territory of dynastic states had been pacified, making it safe for trade and transport over the whole territory of the state. In other words, a national economy presupposes an effective central monopoly of the means and use of violence, as a global economy does at present. The industrial revolution vastly increased the differentiation of social functions and occupations and thereby state wide functional interdependencies.

The second aspect of nation formation can be called latent democratization, power balances between rulers and ruled, social classes and central and peripheral regions becoming less unequal than they were in the rigidly stratified dynastic states. The nature of their interdependencies forced all social strata to take each other more into account - instead of only the weak the strong, with but very limited reciprocity. A good example of latent democratization was the simultaneous abolition of serfdom and introduction of conscription by the Tsar in 1861. He decided on that important reform after Russia had been defeated by England and France in the Crimean war. This shows how much interstate competition can have an influence the power relations within states. In complex societies wars tend to democratize, in simpler societies to strengthen authoritarian rule.

The development of what in Western Europe can perhaps better be called state-nations than nation states was pushed forward in the 19th century for both economic and military reasons by a conscious government policy of creating a state wide infrastructure and communication network, both in material (roads, canals, harbours, railways) and in human terms (especially compulsory primary education, and later social insurance arrangements). That nation-building policy unintentionally made peasants living in isolation into conscious members of a nation. This went slowly, however, as Eugen Weber has shown for France, always considered the most highly integrated nation state in Europe. But in France peasants only began to see themselves as Frenchmen after 1870 (Weber, 1976).

The third aspect of nation formation is a shift in identification patterns, between rulers and ruled, and also between social strata and between most regions. Before the end of the 18th century King and aristocracy did not identify at all with the common people. They tended to see them as chattel or tools, not as human beings like themselves. Members of the aristocracy had no qualms about undressing or taking a bath in front of servants of the other sex (Elias, 1978). The inalienable rights of man, as defended by Enlightenment thinkers, did not apply to servants or the common people in general (de Swaan, 1989). Aristocracies did not identify with the state in which they lived, but with

the King they served and with their own family members abroad. They had no qualms in serving 'foreign' monarchs as diplomats, ministers or generals. When Bismarck as Ambassador of Prussia was leaving St Petersburg, the Tsar asked him to join his own foreign service. In twentieth century nation states that has become unthinkable.

In dynastic states the mass of the people saw themselves as subjects of a King rather than as members of a state, let alone a nation. For members of the bourgeoisie national identification could distinguish them from the aristocracy (for an analysis of the transformation of class images into national ones see Elias, 1978, Ch.1, part 1.). Such changes in identification patterns were part of an unplanned process, rather than the consequence of the functional need for industrializing states to create national cultures, as Gellner (1983) has it. But nationalism did tend to become more intense in late or failing industrializing states (Barrington Moore, 1966).

In their Communist Manifesto Marx and Engels (1839) could still write: 'workers have no fatherland, one cannot take away from them what they do not have.' That they used the term fatherland, not nation, shows that the latter concept had not yet become as self-evident as it is today. At the time Marx and Engels were right. Workers were in no way represented in politics and tended to identify the state primarily with the police. Their having nothing to lose - as well as their disorientation as recent migrants from the countryside - brought Marx and Engels to their thesis of the historically inevitable 'internationalism' of the proletariat, including the expectation that working class solidarity would prevent war. In 1914 it became clear it did not. The national identification of socialist parties proved to be much stronger than class solidarity across borders. (Waltz, 1965, Ch.5)

Why did the workers begin to identify with their nation state, contrary to their 'internationalist' ideology? Bismarck's social insurance legislation (soon followed in most other states in Western Europe), intended to break the power of the socialist movement, in fact strengthened it, because trade unionists manned the administrative institutions needed to implement the laws (de Swaan, 1989, pp.192-197). In most West European states, organised labour and socialist parties were slowly but surely incorporated in the national political systems. Workers began to acquire a stake in their own 'nation' and state. In the first World War socialist parties participated in government for the first time. Full integration of social-democratic parties in Western European nation-states came with the welfare state, as a spurt of national integration again largely the consequence of war. It can well be argued that Western European states are further advanced in nation formation than any other states in the world, much further than the United States, for example. But that level is now going down

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again, because 'ethnic minorities' are remaining outside what is seen as the proper nation.

8.   Europe as a Nation, Nations in Europe

In the prosperous and satisfied nations of Western Europe explicit nationalism seemed on the way out - which was one of the conditions for European integration and a modest dose of supranationalism. But European political integration was not a self-propelling process, as already became clear when General de Gaulle came to power in France. Building 'Europe' is still subject to the rivalry between member-states, and especially the former great powers France, England and Germany. A European 'nation' is still far away, even if it would coincide with the present European Community. A two or three speed 'Europe' does not lend itself well to developing a persuasive equivalent to a national myth.

Analyzing the development of nations in Europe requires making a rough distinction between its Western and Eastern half. A first illustration of the difference is the often observed absence or weakness of 'civil society' in Eastern Europe. That concept used in juxtaposition to the 'state', could refer before to the monopolization of all power resources, including the arts and social sciences, as well as public debate, by the tentacles of the communist party and state institutions. After the demise of communism the soil for democratic political debate is still barren. Is this no more than a weakness of 'civil society', as a leftover of communist totalitarianism? What if we substitute for 'civil society' a lower level of nation formation? Then long term factors must also be taken into account, such as the persistence of serfdom in Russia until the 19th century; the lateness of industrialisation; the larger percentage of the agrarian population, exploited and kept backward by the so-called second feudalism; the slower penetration of democratic ideas, and the preservation of a large number of outsider population groups. In a cultural sense the Habsburg empire had probably more in common with Western than with Eastern Europe.

But except Russia, and to a lesser extent Poland and Hungary, all states in Eastern Europe were formed recently, after disintegration of states ruled as empires, and therefore unable to forge 'nations' out of heterogeneous populations in the same way as the continuous states in Western Europe.

In the 19th century the myth of the nation as a sleeping beauty spread all over Europe, which provided the possibility to population groups treated as second class citizens to invent their own

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'nations', engaging in active myth-making, using language, religion, culture and history.

There are significant differences in levels of national integration between and within the Western and Eastern halves of Europe. Virulent nationalism does not necessarily imply a high level of national integration, the more so because it tends to discriminate and thereby activate minority population groups with historically distinct identities. The break up of the Soviet Union does not mean that the process of disintegration has come to an end. Russia still faces the inheritance of empire, and the danger of conflicting ethnically defined nationalisms.

The continuous or state-nations in Western Europe have come under some pressure from the new European level of integration. But in that sense the Maastricht treaty backfired. Instead of strengthening European identity it rekindled in most member states a preoccupation with their own national or cultural identity.

At the same time scapegoat myths about domestic and immigrant 'ethnic' minorities spread. The uncritical use of the word 'ethnic' helps to legitimate the rebirth of racism, not only in Germany. Welfare state arrangements that are supposed not to discriminate are now believed to favour 'ethnic' immigrants, whereas they should be reserved only for members of the proper nation. Out with...

National myths fulfil a necessary function of providing the basis for the we-identification and collective self-respect all people need. But there is no we without a they. If based to much on conspiracy theories and blaming an enemy national myths can lead to violence and war. But without positive popular identification, nation states in the long run can not survive. The idea of the nation is two faced.

That the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia disintegrated, does not mean that there is a generalized crisis of the nation state. Only when the level of national integration is to low, states may break down.

There is therefore no need to advocate territorial decentralization and cultural autonomy as to remedy a supposed general crisis of the nation state. That cure based on the mistaken and potentially dangerous supposition of the existence of 'natural' nations within all established nation states. It can become a self-fulfilling prophecy, whetting the appetite for power of regional movements and their leaders. It is part of the disease not of the therapy.

A different perspective is called for. To improve national integration elite incorporation (Laitin, 1991) and regional infrastructure and development policies are much to preferred over territorial decentralization, if done for the wrong reasons. But even worse, it leaves out the immigrant population groups, which certainly in Western Europe are the most pronounced outsiders groups, which will have to be better integrated too. The new racist movements also consist of - frustrated and spiteful - outsiders, but they can find some self-respect and compensation by seeing themselves as part of the national establishment, as the real embodiment of and loyal fighters for the nation. Their symbols and songs clearly express such sentiments.

The problem for governments is thus very complicated. They have to deal with two kinds of outsider groups, 'indigenous' ones, claiming the nation for themselves, while threatening the new 'ethnic' outsider groups, and in using symbols from the past also jews. A spiral of violence can well result if governments will not prevent and strongly repress violent conduct of all outsider groups. But if perceived in terms of relations between 'ethnic' groups with innate characteristics it will be self-perpetuating. It has to be seen in terms of how to improve established-outsiders relations and of the need for melting (not assimilation) processes.

These dilemma's of national identity and cultural heterogeneity will have to be faced if European states are to preserve or improve their present level of national integration. That is at the same time a condition for the integration of Europe as a whole.

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