

# Nationalism, Boundaries, and Violence

Daniele Conversi

In an age of transient sovereignties, collapsing state frontiers, expanding hybridisation, ethnic amalgamation, cultural mixing, and ever-increasing communication, a remarkable interest in boundaries has sprung up. 'Boundary' and related terms have been in use since the dawning of disciplines like geography and history, yet their conceptualisation is relatively novel in other social sciences. This article will focus only on a particular, and increasingly important, variety of boundaries: those which enclose, mark, and signal ethnic belonging or membership.

The concept of *ethnic boundary* was first formulated roughly 30 years ago by the Norwegian anthropologist Frederick Barth.<sup>1</sup> He maintained that ethnic identities do not derive from intrinsic features but emerge from, and are reasserted in, encounters, transactions, and oppositions between groups. In a nutshell, the crucible of ethnic identities are the boundaries which particular aggregates of people establish for different purposes, or simply as a consequence of interaction. Since Barth's milestone study, the concept has permeated anthropological research on the making and unmaking of ethnic identities. One of its key contributions was a focus on the subjective, self-experienced dimension, rather than on objective traits as perceived by outsiders.

The opposition between *ethnic boundaries* and *ethnic contents* is the central point of the Barthian approach. The former describe the perception of ethnic identity and its limits, the latter its substance or culture. As ethnic boundaries are directly related to subjective self-perception, they are more relevant to the study of identity formation than ethnic contents. This implies that culture can change while ethnic boundaries remain simultaneously unaltered. Thus, the boundary, rather than the content, forms a person's or group's identity. Historical records can testify to such discontinuity, i.e., that cultural elements (content) can vary considerably throughout the centuries, even in cases in which the homeland's name or the ethnonym have persisted.<sup>2</sup>

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1. Frederick Barth, introduction to *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organisation of Culture Difference*, ed. Frederick Barth (London: Allen and Unwin, 1969).

2. Nearly 25 years later, Barth himself acknowledged that 'the issue of cultural content *versus* boundary, as it was formulated, unintentionally served to mislead. Yes, it is a question of analysing boundary processes, not of enumerating the sum of content, as in an old-fashioned trait list'. See Frederick Barth, 'Enduring and Emerging Issues in the Analysis of Ethnicity', in *The Anthropology of Ethnicity: Beyond 'Ethnic Groups and Boundaries'*, eds. Hans Vermeulen and Cora Govers (Amsterdam: Het Spinhuis, 1994), 17-18. In his concluding remarks, Barth affirms: 'I remember a

Some post-Barthian studies share the assumption that cultural elements do not matter enough to warrant scholarly attention *per se*.<sup>3</sup> In extreme cases, this avoidance recalls the Marxist relegation of non-economic variables to the realm of 'super-structure' leading John Rex to maintain 'the whole notion of the flexibility of boundaries is based upon disagreement'.<sup>4</sup> Recently, however, the importance of ethnic contents has been brought back to scholarly attention. For instance, Stephen Cornell has noted that 'the nature of the contrast—the boundary that separates us from them—is variable depending on what it is that those within the boundary share'.<sup>5</sup> Richard Jenkins has also stressed the need to 'rethink' the role of culture in ethnicity studies.<sup>6</sup>

A more promising direction should try to determine how, and in what ways, cultural elements influence socio-political patterns, including the construction and maintenance of ethnic identities. In a departure from Barth's original emphasis, I argue that the role of the boundary should be analysed in relation to its content. 'Content' here is taken to mean whatever is enclosed in a boundary; whereas the boundary represents the subjective perception of ethnicity what separates in-group from out-group content is instead the objective repertoire, heritage, and treasure which can actually convey, emphasise, and enrich the cultural experience of belonging. To simplify, boundary relates to psychology, while content relates to culture; in some ways, the former is invisible, the latter visible.

This article will investigate the relationship between boundaries, content, and political violence. It locates the origins of the concept of ethnic boundary in anthropology and trace its expansion to other disciplines. Then the paper critically relates the term 'ethnic boundary' to the study of ethnogenesis and nationalism. Given the latter's interdisciplinarity (or, should we say, 'boundarylessness'?), it is in this field that the concept is destined to play a particularly beneficial role. It questions the relativist usage of boundaries and kindred concepts, which envisage them as infinitely malleable and situationally adaptable. The function of the ethnic boundary will then be related to the rise of ethnic violence, and the latter to cultural assimilation. This is followed by a section dedicated to boundary-building in the former Yugoslavia. The concluding remarks emphasise that a stress on boundaries,

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perceptive discussant who pointed out how my formulation of the problem made its solution logically impossible: one cannot handle something which changes boundaries *and* changes content at the same time', 30. See also Gunnar Haaland, 'Cultural Content and Ethnic Boundaries', in *The Ecology of Choice and Symbol: Essays in Honour of Frederick Barth*, eds. Reidar Gronhaug, Gunnar Haaland, and Georg Henriksen (Bergen: Alma Mater Forlag, 1991).

3. For an example of this reading, see Sandra Wallman, 'The Application of Anthropological Theory to the Study of Boundary Process', in *Theories of Race and Ethnic Relations*, eds. David Mason and John Rex (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

4. See John Rex, *Race and Ethnicity* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1986), 91-98, which contains a good critique of Wallman. Yet, Rex also views boundaries as 'infinitely flexible', defining them as situationally determined 'markers which might suit our interests in a particular context', 93-95.

5. Stephen Cornell, 'The Variable Ties That Bind: Content and Circumstance in Ethnic Processes', *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 19, no. 2 (1996): 265-89.

6. Richard Jenkins, *Rethinking Ethnicity: Arguments and Explorations* (London: Sage, 1997).

rather than content, is normally an indicator of deep feelings of threat and instability.

### *The Interdisciplinary Dimension*

The conceptual focus on boundaries has been addressed in distinct ways by different disciplines. Given the enormous amount of literature recently produced on the subject, this section does not attempt to draw a synopsis of such contributions.<sup>7</sup> It simply explores the various disciplines from which the study of ethnic boundaries has drawn or can draw.

In political science, notably in political sociology, the concept has been expanded to include within-state cleavages, after being for a long time exclusively associated with inter-state borders. For instance, Steve Rokkan and Derek Urwin have used the concept in their work on *peripheries*, which are characterised by a lack of control over the economic, cultural, and political boundaries that separate their communities from the central government.<sup>8</sup> The peripheries' awareness of

spatial distinctiveness is counteracted by the lack or weakness of established procedures for the defence and control of the boundaries separating them from the outside world. A lack of control over political, economic and cultural boundaries is hence a classical attribute of the peripheral condition.<sup>9</sup>

In the field of geography, the traditional realm of bounded entities, the linear fixedness of inter-state borders has begun to give way to an anti-essentialist vision of identities and boundedness as social processes, rather than as givens.<sup>10</sup> In Human Geography and Social History, a specific subfield of 'boundary studies' has produced a considerable output of research, particularly on the Mexican-US

7. For bibliographical references on the anthropology of boundaries, see Hastings Donnan and Thomas W. Wilson, 'An Anthropology of Frontiers', in *Border Approaches: Anthropological Perspectives on Frontiers*, eds. Hastings Donnan and Thomas W. Wilson (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1994). See also Thomas M. Wilson and Hastings Donnan, eds., *Border Identities: Nation and State at International Frontiers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998). For a review of border studies in linguistics and linguistic anthropology, see Bonnie Urciuoli, 'Language and Borders', *Annual Review of Anthropology* 24 (1995): 525-46. For boundaries in archaeological studies, see Kent G. Lightfoot and Antoinette Martinez, 'Frontiers and Boundaries in Archeological Perspective', *Annual Review of Anthropology* 24 (1995): 471-92.

8. See Stein Rokkan and Derek W. Urwin, *Economy, Territory, Identity: Politics of West European Peripheries* (London: Sage, 1983). Peripheries are defined as instances where at least one of the following conditions occur: distance, differences, and dependence. The periphery should be 'located at some distance from the dominant centre or centres, and its transactions with the latter are fraught with costs. A periphery is also different from the central areas on one or more scores. . . Finally, a periphery is dependent upon one or more centres in at least one of the three domains of behaviour. . . in political decision-making, in cultural standardization and in economic life', 3-4.

9. Rokkan and Urwin, *Economy, Territory, Identity*, 4.

10. John Agnew and Stuart Corbridge, *Mastering Space: Hegemony, Territory, and International Political Economy* (London: Routledge, 1995). See also several essays in *Political Geography: A Reader*, ed. John Agnew (London: Edward Arnold, 1997).

border.<sup>11</sup> Subsequently, the concept has been extended to the study of other regions where the term 'border area' is used to identify a cultural zone independent from the legal-spatial limitations of formal boundaries. It is

a liminal area where creative energies are released, creating signs and identities that are born outside the national projects of the two nations which presume to control identities in this zone.<sup>12</sup>

In recent human geography, the concept has hence been expanded from its original linear uni-dimensional sense to include the wider human-cultural factors inhabiting the area surrounding the border.<sup>13</sup> Yet, despite its heightened malleability and enlargement from linear to zonal, the concept of border area has remained fully territorial. And despite its renewed emphasis on culture, it is still highly tied to spatiality. This means that input from other social sciences is required in order to focus on the subjective dimension of the concept, on its full deterritorialisation.<sup>14</sup> Thus, the recent expansion of political and human geography towards ever wider interdisciplinary considerations has inevitably led to a reconceptualisation of boundaries.<sup>15</sup>

In sociology, the term 'boundary maintenance' has been used by structural-functionalists, particularly Talcott Parsons, in order to stress one of the crucial functions of the 'social system' which is 'boundary maintaining' whenever it preserves 'regularities of pattern' in relation to its environment, which is formed by other systems.<sup>16</sup> A system's external boundary is deeply related to its internal equilibrium. This is a step forward in the effort to deterritorialise 'boundary'. But the original structuralist formulation implied a predictable stress of fixedness. The boundary was envisaged as a limit, enclosing or bounding a social system seen in a nearly organic wholeness. In this sense, boundary analysis is affiliated with equilibrium approaches, following in particular Vilfredo Pareto's optimality.<sup>17</sup> Boundaries were seen as defence mechanism necessary for the preservation of internal equilibrium.

11. For a review of these studies, see Robert. R. Alvarez, Jr. 'The Mexican-US Border: The Making of an Anthropology of Borderlands', *Annual Review of Anthropology* 24 (1995): 447-70.

12. Michael Kerney, 'Borders and Boundaries of State and Self at the End of Empire', *Journal of Historical Sociology* 4, no. 1 (1991): 51-74.

13. See John Agnew, David N. Livingstone, and Alisdair Rogers, eds., *Human Geography: An Essential Anthology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996).

14. On the deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation of politics, see *Geopolitics* 3, no. 1 (1998). On the contribution of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, see Eleanor Kaufman and Kevin Jon Heller, *Deleuze and Guattari: New Mappings in Politics, Philosophy, and Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998).

15. For an overview and critique of geographical approaches to boundaries, see David Newman and Anssi Paasi, 'Fences and Neighbours in the Postmodern World: Boundary Narratives in Political Geography', *Progress in Human Geography* 22, no. 2 (1998): 186-207.

16. Talcott Parsons, *The Social System* (London: Routledge, 1991).

17. See Vilfredo Pareto, *The Mind and Society: A Treatise in General Sociology*, vol. 4 (New York: AMS Press, 1935), 1740, para. 2412.

As the boundary is the point or line in space where two entities touch each other, the focus is necessarily on contacts, in our case, interethnic contacts. By virtue of their connective nature, boundaries are permeable and operate as points of closure as well as points of ouverture.<sup>18</sup> Boundaries typically function as filters through which cultural items pass and are exchanged. These are inter-group transactions, that is, the interchange of ideological, material, or other cultural items across the boundary; sociological efforts to examine them are sometime referred to as transactionalist approaches.<sup>19</sup> The concept is more popular in psychoanalysis and psychotherapy, where 'transactional psychology' is firmly established in the study of perceptions.<sup>20</sup> In fact, Barth's social interaction model examines precisely the *perceptions* of group members, as opposed to the notion of a group's 'fixed character' or 'essence'. These perceptions are what distinguish a group from other groups and hence create the boundary separating them. In this sense, anthropology draws on psychology.<sup>21</sup> The focus on social interaction also points to interactional, situational, and environmental variables which shape the boundary.<sup>22</sup> As we have seen, the idea of exchange across boundaries is also central to the sociological school of functionalism. In order for the 'social system' to survive, the boundary must act as a filter through which exchanges with other systems are fostered and monitored.<sup>23</sup> In the final analysis, identities are formed and maintained as a result of a constant process of interaction.

If we step back to the territorial dimension, the relational vision of boundaries is also central to the geographical study of spatial borders. The system of nation-states may indeed be conceived as a planetary network of interrelationships between overlapping oppositional dynamics. Anthony Giddens agrees that nation-states do not exist in isolation, but 'in a complex of other nation-states'.<sup>24</sup> But how did this fixedness come to prevail over the fluidity of the pre-national world? And how far could the state erase pre-existing boundaries of communal loyalty compressing them in its larger framework?

In his book significantly entitled *Boundaries*, the historian Peter Sahlins considers the effect which the imposition of state boundaries had upon Catalans living on both sides of the French-Spanish border, after the Catalan-speaking region of Roussillon was ceded to France as a consequence of the Treaty of the

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18. On this, see Anya Peterson Royce, *Ethnic Identity: Strategies of Diversity* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1982).

19. Daniele Conversi, 'Reassessing Theories of Nationalism: Nationalism as Boundary Maintenance and Creation', *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics* I, no. 1 (1995): 73-85.

20. See Franklin P. Kilpatrick, ed., *Explorations in Transactional Psychology* (New York: New York University Press, 1961).

21. I am referring here to the vast field of analysis of *social categorisation* and similar concepts as used by Henri Tajfel and his disciples. For its possible application to the study of nationalism, see Conversi, 'Reassessing Theories'. This bypasses social psychology, which indeed has developed its own approach to the study of boundaries.

22. The term *situational* or *interactionist* approach is often used to refer to Barth's work.

23. Talcott Parsons, *The Social System*.

24. Anthony Giddens, *Social Theory and Modern Sociology* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987), 171.

Pyrenees in 1659.<sup>25</sup> Attempts to homogenise the local populations to bring them into a common French identity were pursued before and after the Revolution, but became systematic only in the post-Revolution years. Although most people opposed Paris and its oppressive armies, they nevertheless ended up accepting French national identity as it was imposed upon them.<sup>26</sup> For a while, the inhabitants of the French Cerdagne and the Roussillon claimed alternatively French and Spanish nationality, in order to evade taxes and military conscription. According to travellers' accounts, people from both sides of the border continued to share the same language and customs well into the mid-nineteenth century, while cross-border contacts remained conspicuous. However, French government officials succeeded in spreading at the popular level a contempt for both Spanish 'nationality' and those 'amphibious' characters who claimed alternate citizenship in order to gain more benefits. In the long term, a French identity gained ground despite the persisting cultural similarities which united both sides of the Pyrenees. Sahlins argues that the creation of a French national identity preceded cultural assimilation. The latter occurred as a result of social mobility and the desire to participate in a common body to which they already felt they belonged.<sup>27</sup>

How can this relate to the process of identity-building, particularly nationalism? Sahlins talks about the very beginning of the nation-state in a line of historical studies on national identity formation pioneered by Eugene Weber.<sup>28</sup> But a continuity of patterns of boundary building can be observed throughout history, both before and after the advent of the nation-state.

The most profound and comprehensive application of boundary theories to the study of nationalism, or better to the conditions that preceded it, comes from John Alexander Armstrong.<sup>29</sup> In his encyclopaedic comparative research on the 'preconditions' of nationalism, Armstrong follows Barth's approach by stressing that 'because ethnicity is defined by boundaries, both the cultural and the biological content of the group can alter as long as the boundary mechanisms are maintained' and that 'groups tend to define themselves. . . by exclusion, that is, by the comparison to strangers'.<sup>30</sup> Interestingly, he traces this attitude centuries back through the help of linguistics. Armstrong is particularly intrigued by the Indo-Europeanist approach of Emile Benveniste, who argued

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25. Peter Sahlins, *Boundaries: The Making of France and Spain in the Pyrenees* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1991); 'The Nation in the Village: State-Building and Communal Struggles in the Catalan Borderland during the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries', *Journal of Modern History* 60 (1991): 234-63; and, 'The Use and Abuse of the Nation: The French Cerdagne During the 18th and 19th Centuries', in *Family, Class and Nation in Catalonia*, ed. Josep R. Llobera (London: Mare Nostrum Editions, 1990).

26. Sahlins, 'The Use and Abuse of the Nation', 85.

27. *Ibid.*, 90.

28. Eugen J. Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France, 1870-1914* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1977).

29. John A. Armstrong, *Nations Before Nationalism* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1982).

30. *Ibid.*, 5.

Every name of an ethnic character, in ancient times, was differentiating and oppositional. There was present in the name which a people assumed the intention, manifest or not, of distinguishing itself from the neighboring peoples, of affirming this superiority, derived from a common, intelligible language.<sup>31</sup>

This differentiating role of ethnonyms, accompanied by positive self-appraisal, seems to be a long-lasting characteristic of human groups. Naming is among the most powerful boundaries-making practices. It is at the very heart of us-them distinctions. But is not this oppositional practice strictly related to ethnocentrism, a universal phenomenon, which prevailed independently from nationalism in all times and lands?<sup>32</sup> The essence of ethnocentrism is oppositional, although in a hierarchical, evaluative, ultimately negative, sense. Claude Levi-Strauss rightly diagnosed its relationship with racism, as it often implies a rejection of ethnic and cultural differences.<sup>33</sup> The ethnocentrist typically regards cultural and ethnic differences as imperfections, deviations, even anomalies. However, the us-them dichotomy is extendible to all kinds of groups. Every group sets 'us' off from 'them', as a basic attribute of groupness. Thus, boundaries created by a purely oppositional logic are not necessarily ethnic. Ethnic and national boundaries must have something distinctive: they always refer to a dimension of putative descent.<sup>34</sup>

### *Culture, Identity, and the Return of the Subject*

The reaction against objectivism and 'objectification' in anthropology was initially a mutiny against reification, the idea that it was at all possible, even natural, to identify the existence of ethnic groups independently from the perceptions of the individuals who made them up. In classical anthropology, it was quite normal to catalogue and itemise all sorts of groups from the viewpoint of the scholar, thus producing inventories, lists, indexes, charts, and, not least, ethno-linguistic maps. Groups were seen as readily identifiable by external clues, signs, symptoms, token attributes, characteristics, marks, peculiarities, properties, traits, or virtues. The focus on subjectivity is at odds with much of pre-Barthian anthropology which, as other social sciences, tended to focus on allegedly *objective* traits, assuming the importance of discrete cultural features as criteria for establishing group identity.<sup>35</sup>

31. Emile Benveniste, *Economie, parenté, société*, vol. 1, *Le vocabulaire des institutions Indo-Européennes* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1969), 368, cited in *Nations Before Nationalism*, 5.

32. Robert Alan Levine, *Ethnocentrism: Theories of Conflict, Ethnic Attitudes, and Group Behavior* (New York: Wiley, 1971).

33. Claude Levi-Strauss, *Race et Histoire* (Paris: Gonthier, 1967).

34. On the importance of myths of descent in the formation of ethnonational identities, see Anthony D. Smith, *Nations and Nationalism in a Global Era* (Cambridge: Polity, 1995), *National Identity* (London: Penguin, 1991), and *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986).

35. By all means, not all pre-Barthian anthropologists were essentialists. Most famously Edmund Leach focussed on social processes, rather than on cultural features, which he saw as merely arbitrary. See Edmund Ronald Leach, *Political Systems of Highland Burma: A Study of Kachin Social Structure* (London: Athlone Press, 1986). Max Gluckman also saw identity as relational and shifting; see his

Barth's 'subjectivist' approach reacted against this convention. It stressed, among other things, the fact that groups can maintain a sense of separateness while their observable markers or diachritica can change dramatically. Groups do not simply disappear because they become invisible. 'Invisibility' may on the contrary contain an heightened sense of 'us'-ness, and may conceal the seeds of aggravated ethnic assertiveness. As a corollary, cultural assimilation does not automatically lead to integration; the two may well be incompatible.

Nationalists are keen to point out that identity can be dormant and ready to be stirred and aroused by some national awakener, what Ernest Gellner defined as the 'dormission theory' of nationalism.<sup>36</sup> But despite Gellner's critique, ethnicity has resisted state and nation-building. As Walker Connor first demonstrated with unparalleled clarity, the failure to notice the persistence of ethnic identity has represented one of the major blunders in political science since the Second World War: mistaking appearance for essence.<sup>37</sup> Often, this oversight is at the root of most modernisation theories which held sway over American political science in the 1960s, particularly Karl Deutsch's 'social mobilisation' approach.<sup>38</sup>

In other words, these theories suffered from precisely the failure to see the persistence of ethnic boundaries despite all kinds of modernising and assimilationist efforts by state elites. Indeed, the study of the ethnic boundary may be interpreted as the study of ethnic persistence, rather than ethno-genesis.<sup>39</sup> The focus on persistence is essential not simply to Barthian approaches, but to theories of nationalism in general. We need to ask why ethnic boundaries are thoroughly maintained despite pervasive change, including cultural impoverishment and even total assimilation.

Of all these approaches, Anthony D. Smith's ethno-symbolism offers the most to understand the persistence of ethnicity and ethnic sentiments. He achieves this by first focussing on the importance of myths. Myths have a unique capacity of conveying a sense of belonging and continuity through successive generations. At the same time, myths powerfully carry and disseminate the distinction between in-groups and out-groups, which is the essential function of boundaries, even in the absence of promptly visible ethnic markers. Myths do not need ethnic diachritica per se, but need to be ritually revived by the use of symbols.<sup>40</sup> These symbols need

*Custom and Conflict in Africa* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1956). Finally, Evans-Pritchard also focussed on the self-perception of groupness. See E.E. Evans-Pritchard, *Kinship and Marriage Among the Nuer* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990). Leach's precedent is pointed out, for instance, by Katherine Verdery in 'Ethnicity, Nationalism and State-Making', in *The Anthropology of Ethnicity*, 35.

36. Ernest Gellner, *Nationalism* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1997), 9, 22.

37. Walker Connor, *Ethnonationalism: The Quest for Understanding* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994). See especially chap. 4, 'Terminological Chaos', 89-117.

38. Karl W. Deutsch, *Nationalism and Social Communication: An Inquiry into the Foundations of Nationality* (New York: Wiley, 1953).

39. This is the scholarly path undertaken in particular by John Armstrong.

40. On the relationship between symbols and boundaries, see Anthony P. Cohen, ed., *Symbolising Boundaries: Identity and Diversity in British Cultures* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986) and Anthony P. Cohen, *The Symbolic Construction of Community* (London: Routledge, 1985).

not be particularly distinctive; modern ultra-nationalist myths are often mere replicas of each other.

Many flags, for instance, are derived from the French *tricolore*, and most armies and paramilitaries wear the same uniforms with minimal identifying details. Even one of the most 'distinctive' national anthems, the American *Star Spangled Banner*, is a foreign import (originally, a British drinking song). However, none of these objects would make any sense without a mythical framework sustaining them and assuring the solidarity of the members towards the group. Donald Horowitz seems to agree with this assessment by stressing that 'group boundaries must be underpinned by a suitable apparatus of myth and legend, which cannot be generated spontaneously'.<sup>41</sup> The ethno-symbolic approach postulates a continuity between ethnic and national identity: common myths, historical memories, and common culture (or mass public culture in the case of the nation) are shared by both types of community. The difference between ethnic and national identity, then, lies in the nation's association with a different political organisation—the state—based on territorial legality and the fact that myths should be distinguished from the wider and more complex cultural heritage carried across generations by ethnic or national groups.<sup>42</sup>

But why has this confusion between appearance and substance plagued scholarly endeavours for so long? I argue that at the root of much of this disarray lies a pervasive confusion between culture and ethnicity. Barth's distinction between ethnic boundaries and ethnic contents can indeed be simplified by considering the parallel distinction between ethnicity and culture, between a subjective and an objective dimension. Ethnic contents are related to culture, ethnic boundaries to identity. Culture can in turn be considered as the common pool and repository from which groups can draw on to maintain, root, and embed their identity. Hence, we need to appraise and evaluate the relation between the two and its possible different configurations as it relates to different levels, degrees, and quantities of 'content' (from rich cultural production, to simple maintenance, and finally to virtual assimilation into the dominant culture).

In the social sciences, but especially in the literature on nationalism, the terms ethnicity and culture are often confused. By ethnicity, we normally refer to a belief in putative descent (that is, a belief in something which may or may not be real). Ethnicity thus is a perception of commonality and belonging supported by a myth of common ancestry. As Walker Connor has stressed, what matters here is the subjective and psychological quality of this perception, rather than its objective and

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41. Donald L. Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1985), 70.

42. On the relationship between boundaries and myth, see Milton Takei, 'Collective Memory as the Key to National and Ethnic Identity: The Case of Cambodia', *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics* 4, no. 3 (1998): 59-78.

hardly testable 'substance'.<sup>43</sup> Connor argues that 'identity does not draw its sustenance from facts but from perceptions, perceptions are as important or more than reality when it comes to ethnic issues'.<sup>44</sup> Richard Schermerhorn accordingly defines an ethnic group as 'a collectivity within a larger society having real or putative common ancestry, memories of a shared historical past, and a cultural focus on one or more symbolic elements defined as the epitome of their peoplehood'.<sup>45</sup> Elizabeth Tonkin concurs: 'Ethnic group' is a collocation often used in covert synonymy for another term, 'race', which has been morally and politically disallowed in many areas. 'Ethnicity' is a term that only makes sense in a context of relatives, of process of identification, and that nevertheless aspires to a concrete and positive status both as an attribute and as an analytical 'concept'.<sup>46</sup>

Culture on the other hand is an open project. You can become a member of a culture by learning its norms, traditions and codes, then sharing what you have learned by participating in cultural events. Even though the contractual element is not conspicuous (one often needs to be raised in a particular culture in order to be fully familiar with it), there is an implicit give-and-take inference: 'I belong to this culture insofar as I can share its benefits while contributing to its maintenance and development'. Since culture is necessarily based on tradition and continuity, and hence passed through generations, it is often confused with ethnicity. But its exclusive association with a single ethnic group is a relatively modern one.

The confusion between ethnicity and culture is furthered by the fact that the former's usage is quite new: in fact, in English the term 'ethnicity' only appeared in the 1950s.<sup>47</sup> Yet a more important reason for this confusion may be that cultural continuity tends to be stressed at the expense of cultural innovation. The conservative dimension of culture is emphasised by sacrificing its creative power, as well as its capacity of expansion beyond rigid ethnic parameters. (That is, you really don't need to be of 'pure' Hungarian lineage or pedigree to learn impeccably how to dance a *csarda*, although you may need a good dose of native-like linguistic proficiency if you wish to sing one of them). All cultures must have an

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43. Connor, *Ethnonationalism*. In particular, see chap. 8, 'Man is a R/National Animal', 195-209, also published as 'Beyond Reason: The Nature of the Ethnonational Bond', *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 16, no. 3 (1993): 374-89.

44. Walker Connor, 'Ethnic Identity: Primordial or Modern?' in *Separatism*, eds. Trude Andresson, Beate Bull, and Kjetil Duvold (Bergen: University of Bergen Press, 1997), 33.

45. Richard Schermerhorn, 'Ethnicity and Minority Groups', in *Ethnicity*, eds. John Hutchinson and Anthony D. Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 17, emphasis added. Schermerhorn identifies some of these *symbolic elements*: kinship patterns, physical contiguity, religious affiliation, nationality, language or dialect forms, tribal affiliation, phenotypical features, or any combination of these.

46. Elisabeth Tonkin et al., 'History and Ethnicity', in *Ethnicity*, 19-24. The authors concede here that the term ethnicity is 'still obscure to the great majority of ordinary native-speakers of English', inviting 'endless and fruitless definitional argument among those professional intellectuals who think that they know, or ought to know, what it means'.

47. Hutchinson and Smith, preface to *Ethnicity*, 4. The editors argue that 'the meaning of the term is equally uncertain. It can mean 'the essence of an ethnic group' or the quality of belonging to an ethnic community or group', or 'what it is you have if you are in an 'ethnic group'.

assimilative core to survive. Assimilation means precisely that a member from another cultural group is allowed to become an in-member by simply adopting and sharing its basic elements. Assimilation is not an exclusive prerequisite of dominant cultures. Small cultures need to assimilate newcomers as well if they wish to survive.<sup>48</sup>

Culture and ethnicity should be kept firmly distinct particularly when we are dealing with political issues. Yet, in the modern world this has not usually been the case. Why so? The main answer can be found in the advent of nationalism as the key legitimising principle of the modern state.<sup>49</sup> In Gellner's view, nationalism is a political precept which holds that 'nation and political power should be congruent', that is, the rulers should belong to the same ethnic (i.e., national) group as the ruled.<sup>50</sup> In my understanding, this means that *the state must become ethnicised*. Indeed, the prototypical modern nation-state is the exclusive domain or appanage of a single dominant ethnic group. The doctrine of ethnic exclusivism is thus built into the national principle. In the premodern era, it did not matter whether the monarch or any other authority holding sway shared the same origin, culture, and language of their subjects. The advent of the national principle implies instead that a new convergence between the state and the masses would be sought. If this congruence was not already available, then existing elites would put their effort into creating it by means of nation-building, nationalism, and cultural homogenisation.<sup>51</sup>

Hence, the modern state tended to become ethnically, culturally, and linguistically 'purified'.<sup>52</sup> Yet, Gellner failed to appreciate that, although the modern state cannot be linguistically neutral (perhaps no institution can ever be so), it can at least be ethnically neutral. Indeed, by his very definition of nationalism, Gellner argued precisely the contrary, namely that mass mobilisation created by modernity, industrialisation, and urbanisation demands that the state becomes ethnicised. Moreover, to say that all education has to be conducted in a common language does not mean that it cannot allow for a certain flexibility in cultural forms and possibilities. Gellner seems instead to conflate language and culture as if they were nearly synonymous.

This section has elaborated on the important distinctions between language, culture, and ethnicity, after stating that such distinctions must be related to the

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48. Scattered, pre-industrial communities were not totally isolated and normally allowed a limited numbers of 'outsiders' to join in and share their fruits on the implicit (or explicit) basic covenant that cardinal traditions, core values, and key symbols had to be treasured and enhanced.

49. For a Weberian reading of the concept of 'legitimacy' as applied to nationalism and for the essential relationship between the two, see Walker Connor, 'Nationalism and Political Illegitimacy', *Canadian Review of Studies in Nationalism* 7 (1980): 201-28.

50. Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983), 1.

51. According to Anthony D. Smith, elites have limited power of manoeuvring. If their manipulation is to be successful at all, it *has* to be based on an 'ethnic core'. See his *National Identity and Nations and Nationalism in a Global Era* (Cambridge: Polity, 1995).

52. On the purification of space during processes of boundary-building, see David Sibley, *Geographies of Exclusion: Society and Difference in the West* (London: Routledge, 1995).

study of the subjectivity and persistence of national feelings. The next step will be to relate the content of ethnicity to nationalism in general and to different types of ethnic mobilisation as paramount processes of boundary-building. The usage of the term 'boundary' will hence be critically evaluated by studying its conceptual shift from territoriality to non-territoriality, mostly as a consequence of technological change.

### **Nationalism as Boundary: From the Bounded Power Container to the Deterritorialised Self**

Nationalism can be identified as a process of boundary creation or maintenance propounded by political leaders who wish to promote an ideology of egalitarian, yet exclusive, legitimacy, according to which each self-defined 'nation' has the right to its own state and to be governed by in-group members.<sup>53</sup> We shall start by noting that such a goal is impossible to achieve until the leaders are able to establish who is a member and what differentiates an in-group from an out-group. In other words, the elites' preemptive task is to decide which are the criteria of membership. In order for their project to succeed, they have to draw a sharp distinction between *us* and *them*. This is prerequisite, not only for nations, but also for cohesive groups in general.

It follows that the study of nationalism is the study of how elites strive to defend, strengthen, or even construct this sense of distinctiveness, hence 'nationalism as boundary'. Since distinctiveness is unattainable without some distinguished 'other(s)', oppositional dynamics are what give tenor and appearance to groupness, particularly to ethnic and national identities. The point of contact between different others, the domain—imaginary or real—where in-group and out-group meet and face each other is called boundary. The main question remains: who needs to use, raise, or safeguard the boundary?

In English, the terms boundary and border are often used interchangeably. The latter may simply refer to a line drawn between two spaces, whereas the former may be used to stress the binding quality of what, and who, is included on this side of the fence. A third alternative term, frontier, can be discarded for its one-sidedness and inability to focus on the other side. Its use is pervaded by the idea that something valuable exists beyond the frontier, but only in terms of expansion, conquest, and colonisation. Moreover, the concept of frontier negates the encounter-character of the boundary, since it is seen as perpetually expanding around a core at the expense of the periphery. The word conveys the idea of a shifting outpost of civilisation and originates from the Latin *frons* via the Old French *front*, where *frontiere* was associated with the corporeal metaphor of a forehead, that is, an advanced and outward-looking part of an organic whole perceived as a body. From its original military usage, the concept gradually became associated with a cumulative, quite linear, view of space and knowledge.

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53. Conversi, 'Reassessing Theories of Nationalism'.

Metaphorically applied to the development of science, it conveyed a classical positivist picture of universal supremacy in the advancement of 'mankind'.<sup>54</sup>

'Frontier' has also a more vague, diffused, and broad scope than 'boundary'. John Coakley reminds us that

political geographers conventionally distinguish between *boundaries*, which have a precise, linear quality, and *frontiers*, which have more diffuse, zonal connotations. The concept of frontier has a broader social significance than the more restrictive legal concept of boundary.<sup>55</sup>

This vision is shared by other scholars.<sup>56</sup> Yet, boundary is preferable as it does not simply refer to the outward-looking practice of delimitation, but also to the inward-looking process of self-definition.<sup>57</sup> A boundary can encircle, enclose, contour, and outline, as well as frame, fix, set, assign, and establish. In other words, boundaries are made to bind, and, in fact, the two terms are etymologically related.<sup>58</sup> And, although a boundary may be an hindrance or a barrier, it is also a tie and a connective liaison, its metaphorical next of kin being the bridge. Boundaries circumscribe separate realms, as well as delimit and mark out distinct values, behaviours, and laws. Their restrictive and exclusive power is compensated by their inclusive character vis-à-vis what and who lies within the boundary. Boundaries are normative insofar as they have the power to restrict, prescribe, and proscribe. The sacred-legal concept of trespass, enshrined in all religious and national myths, is hence associated with crossing boundaries between an area where one is allowed and an area where one is not.

Despite their permeable character, ethnic boundaries have acquired a newly fixed essence with the advent of the nation-state.<sup>59</sup> In nationalist mythology, the

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54. For a different focus on the changing meaning of frontier, see Lucien Febvre, 'Frontière: le mot et la notion', in *Pour une histoire à part entière* (Paris: Editions de l'Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, 1982), 11-24. For a diverse approach to the relation between boundaries and frontiers, see Thomas W. Wilson, 'Frontiers Go But Boundaries Remain: The Irish border as a Cultural Divide', in *Cultural Change and the New Europe: Perspectives on the European Community*, eds. Thomas M. Wilson and M. Estelle Smith (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1993).

55. John Coakley, 'Political Territories and Cultural Frontiers: Conflicts of Principle in the Formation of States in Europe', *West European Politics* 5, no. 4 (1982): 36.

56. See, for instance, Malcolm Anderson 'Political Problems of Frontier Regions', *West European Politics* 5, no. 4 (1982): 1-17.

57. This is by no means an universally accepted definition. For instance, Prescott sees the boundary as a line and the border (or borderland) as an area. See J.R.V. Prescott, *Political Frontiers and Boundaries* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1987).

58. Boundary comes from the dialectical *bounder*, an agent noun derived from the verb *bound* ('form the edge of'). *Bound* (limit) meant 'landmark', and comes from Old French *bodne*, via Anglo-Norman *bounde*.

59. On this shift from the jurisdictional character of the boundary in feudal times to their inviolability and sacredness with the advent of centralised kingdoms, see Bernard Guernée, 'Des limites fê odales aux frontiè res politiques', in *Les Lieux de Mémoire*, vol. 2, *La Nation*, ed. Pierre Nora (Paris: Gallimard, 1984-86). On the subsequent shift to the purely territorial concepts of the indivisible nation-

nation is by definition a bounded entity, finite and limited. Anthony Giddens has identified boundedness as one of the two key components of the modern homogenising nation-state, the other being the Weberian monopoly of the means of legitimate violence. The nation-state is hence defined as 'a bordered power-container. . . the pre-eminent border-container of the modern era', an era characterised by an unprecedented relationship between power and territory.<sup>60</sup> Previously, power was established more through personal liaisons or extra-territorial institutions, such as the church. With modernity, political power becomes exercised not only upon a strictly defined and bounded space, but only and exclusively upon that space. The new relationship between power and territory is unmitigated: the state exercises power over its entire territorial extent and over every single individual who lives or transits therein regardless even of the individual's actual citizenship. The very concept of sovereignty is based on this preclusive relationship. Sovereignty, territoriality, and the rise of the modern nation-state are all intrinsically related to the establishment of boundaries and frontiers.<sup>61</sup> Some political geographers, notably John Agnew, have stressed the emergence of this 'territorial trap' in both International Relations (IR) and Geography.<sup>62</sup>

Yet, recent trends have combined to temper the modern territorial vision of power; an extra-territorial notion has instead emerged as a hallmark of postmodernity. Perhaps the most crucial facet of this change is the role of culture and information. A key power of the state lay in its control of the flow of information through compulsory education, universities, and the media. By selecting and sieving information, it was then possible to 'build-up' nations, a project which entailed homogenising peoples, or at least coveting such a goal. Information is power. Wherever the state could control the flow of information, it could justify its exclusive, unchallenged monopoly over the means of violence, hence its legitimacy.

Ongoing technological revolution produced dramatic mutations. In Benedict Anderson's classical statement, the spread of the printing press worked as a bounding contraption preparing for the advent of modern nationalism through the creation of 'empty homogeneous time'.<sup>63</sup> The key role of the press was associated with the spread of literacy, which in turn received the greatest support with the advent of the modern state and its 'sustained effort of mass public instruction'.<sup>64</sup> This kind of monopoly began to be infringed upon with the advent of non-literacy

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state, see Daniel Nordman, 'Des limites d'état aux frontières nationales', in *Realms of Memory: Rethinking the French Past*, ed. Pierre Nora (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996).

60. Anthony Giddens, *The Nation-State and Violence* (Cambridge: Polity, 1985), 120.

61. See Malcolm Anderson, *Frontiers: Territory and State Formation in the Modern World* (Cambridge: Polity, 1997). Here, Anderson also discusses ethnic boundaries.

62. John Agnew, 'The Territorial Trap: The Geographical Assumptions of International Relations Theory', *Review of International Political Economy* 1, no. 1 (1994): 53-80.

63. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983).

64. Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*.

related mass media, namely radio and TV. Their boundless character could still be kept in check through the combined alliance of language incomprehensibility and power (state regulation and control of the media).

Even before World War II it was possible to listen to foreign radio waves across borders. But this had a minor impact upon the homogenising trend of the nation-state and rarely infringed upon the territorial concept of power. Given its one-way character, traditional mass-media were readily controlled by the state and foreign broadcasts easily branded as 'enemy propaganda'. However, a colossal leap forward occurred with the popular spread of two-way communication tools, first the telephone, then the fax. It is significant that in former Communist Europe, the use of the telephone was limited to a selected few. Only with the advent of 'democracy' did its use consistently expand. After the expansion of phone and fax, the Internet revolution has allowed written information to be instantly spread throughout the globe in potentially infinite directions. Most importantly, the new technological revolution is extra-territorial, not bound to any particular space, and conceivably limitless.

These leaps forward in the technological realm have produced a belated shift of emphasis in the social sciences. As for the concept of boundary, its meaning has been slowly enlarged to encompass such non-geographical factors which are destabilising fixed nationalism and states. This I define the *detritorialisation* of the concept, as applied to the study of nationalism.<sup>65</sup> This detritorialisation concept is also useful in examining the adaptability and ductility of ethnic boundaries critical to nationalism which involve a subjective dimension not easily objectified or 'put on the map'. They are not easily perceived from the outside despite the use of markers and symbols to signal them. For this reason, boundaries as a concept have gained ground among postmodernists who view the very vessel of modernisation, the nation-state, 'collapsing' before their eyes. Ethnic boundaries have become a popular item of study also because their fixedness is never absolute, and probably never has been.<sup>66</sup>

### Boundaries and Violence: The Legacy of Cultural Assimilation

External factors can prompt the raising of higher-than-ever ethnic barriers. The most powerful of these factors may be violent aggression. When cultural distinctiveness is reduced to a minimum or virtually extinct, violence can override

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65. In IR, the concept of detritorialisation is especially identified in the works of Bertrand Badie. See *La fin des territoires: Essai sur le desordre international et sur l'utilite sociale du respect* (Paris: Fayard, 1995). See also Saskia Sassen, *Losing Control? Sovereignty in an Age of Globalization* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996) and R.B.J. Walker, *Inside/Outside: International Relations as Political Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

66. Deterritorialisation is not always accepted as the inevitable mark of postmodern societies. For instance, Steven Grosby conceives territorially bound identities as long-lasting, perennial, and universal, rather than as products of post-Cartesian modernity. See Steven Grosby, 'Territoriality: The Transcendental Primordial Feature of Modern Societies', *Nations and Nationalism* 1, no. 2 (1995): 143-62.

culture in its power of mass mobilisation. Rigid identities have often been moulded in continuing or periodic conflict. Violence may either find its way through sudden and intense war, as occurred in Rwanda, East Timor, and pre-independence Eritrea, or through ritual repetitive acts of collective aggression. The result of the conflict is thus to heighten walls between groups where boundaries were hitherto tenuous, rarefied, or non-existing. Where other elements of differentiation are clearly lacking, identities are maintained, often deliberately, through conflict. This strategic use of violence is discernible and observable in several ethnic conflicts, such as in Bosnia, Kurdistan, and Rwanda.<sup>67</sup>

In 1906, William Graham Sumner observed that

the relationship of comradeship and peace in the we-group and that of hostility and war towards the others-group are correlated. The exigency of war with outsiders are what make peace inside, lest internal discord should weaken the we-group for war.<sup>68</sup>

This may well have been the conceptual blueprint guiding tyrants like Slobodan Milosevic and Saddam Hussein (and before them, Hitler and Mussolini). Dictators customarily appeal to the 'externalisation' of tensions or 'diversionary war' with foreign others, to invoke discipline and suppress internal dissent.<sup>69</sup> Externalisation occasionally becomes the load-bearing pillar of all sorts of violent groups, from mafias to street gangs, from guerrilla fighters to state agencies, from fundamentalist zealots to football fans. Sumner's statement was more understandable in the years which led to World War I, and indeed it was representative of a kind of reasoning which eventually ushered the tragedy. Yet, it also identified a central logic which is customarily applied by many terrorist movements as well as states in their purely binding and boundary-enforcing aims. Sumner and other diversionary strategists never mention that an alternative to war can be a stress on the *positive* effects of internal and external differences; such a remark would in fact be unlikely and incongruous under homogenising nationalist regimes.

The rise of violence, in fact, has often been associated with a sense of threat and lack of security concerning the future and self-preservation of a group, sometimes

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67. For a comparison between the Basque, Kurdish and Croatian cases, see Daniele Conversi, 'Violence as Ethnic Boundary: The Consequence of a Lack of Distinctive Elements in Croatian, Kurdish, and Basque Nationalism', in *Nationalism in Europe: Past and Present*, eds. Justo G. Beramendi, Ramón Máiz, Xosé M. Núñez (Santiago de Compostela: Santiago de Compostela University Press, 1994).

68. William Graham Sumner, *Folkways and Mores* (New York: Schocken Books, 1979), 12.

69. Recently, this idea of deliberately rising inter-ethnic tensions has been the driving force propelling the war effort of the Serbian *nomenklatura* against Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia, Kosovo and non-Serbs in general. Possibly, 'externalisation' has been the most important strategy pursued by the Serbian leadership vis-à-vis both internal (ethnic) and external (international) 'enemies'. On the role and function of war and conflict on ethnonational consciousness, see Anthony D. Smith, 'War and Ethnicity: The Role of Warfare in the Formation, Self-image and Cohesion of Ethnic Communities', *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 4, no. 4 (1981): 375-97.

independent of the actual threat.<sup>70</sup> A sense of impending menace, vulnerability, and defencelessness is connected with cultural assimilation in at least one powerful way: increased de-differentiation is perceived as the ultimate threat to a group's or a culture's very existence. The response to the menace can either be a reassertion of cultural values, or, failing the cultural option, a path of confrontation and heightened conflict. This has occurred, for instance, in periods of decolonisation and empire break-up, precisely when boundaries have been reshuffled, superimposed or weakened. Donald Horowitz supports this contention, maintaining that

a common source of cultural movements is concern about potential shifts in group boundaries. The colonial period was filled with such movements. The form they took was largely a response to the direction of boundary change underway, to growing differentiation and assimilation. An ethnic group fragmented into subgroups that threatened to overtake the larger group identity might react by reinforcing elements of common culture and common ancestry, suppressing, for example, differences in dialect or stressing descent from a single ancestor.<sup>71</sup>

A stress on uniformity, common ancestry, and homogenisation is also one of the root causes of the rise of fascism in many countries, like Italy and Germany, which endeavoured to build unified nation-states upon a patchwork of formerly independent states, linguistic isoglosses, economic systems, and cultural lifestyles. The more fragmented the territory to be transformed into a single common nation, the more the stress on unity was necessary. Indeed, the entire unitarian rhetoric of fascist movements served precisely the purpose of concealing the internal fragmentation of their constituencies. This reasoning can also be applied to the emergence of radical nationalism in areas strongly assimilated into the dominant culture and hence internally fragmented, such as in the Basque Country.<sup>72</sup> Although extreme nationalism is a common mechanism to superimpose uniformity on differentiation, it need not be formalised in explicitly aggressive forms. In Malaysia, for example, an initial fragmentation was superseded by a stress on a common Malay origin as a reaction to Chinese immigration.<sup>73</sup>

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70. On the centrality of this feeling of threat in the rise of mutually exclusive nationalisms in East-Central Europe, see István Bibó, 'The Distress of Small European Nations', in *Democracy, Revolution, Self-Determination: Selected Writings*, ed. Károly Nagy (Highland Lakes, NJ: Atlantic Research Publications, 1991).

71. Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*, 70.

72. See Daniele Conversi, *The Basques, The Catalans, and Spain: Alternative Routes to Nationalist Mobilisation* (London: Hurst, 1997) particularly chap. 9, 'The Roots of Violence'. See also Cynthia L. Irvin, *Militant Nationalism: Between Movement and Party in Ireland and the Basque Country* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).

73. Judith Nagata, 'In Defense of Ethnic Boundaries: The Changing Myths and Characters of Malay Identity', in *Ethnic Change*, ed. Charles F. Keyes (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1981).

It is, however, the common background of threat perceived by minorities which elicits new boundary reinforcement through either violence or culture:

The cultural revivals that emerged in response reflected an awareness of the danger of a fading group identity. They tended to emphasise the history of separateness and even hostility between the groups. Memories of insult were recalled. Languages were 'purified' of words that derived from the language of the neighbouring group. Religious practices were cleansed in the name of returning to some former state of orthodoxy that may or may not have existed. Group identity was thus infused with a new or revived cultural content that served to demarcate the lines between groups more clearly, thereby reducing the ease with which individuals could cross group boundaries. . . Movements that went furthest in asserting the distinctiveness of groups believed to be in danger of assimilation ultimately became strongly separatist.<sup>74</sup>

It is important to note that violence as a boundary-reinforcing factor normally results in eminently subjective behaviour. It does not result in an increase of cultural differentiae per se, nor in a upsurge of creative endeavours (although in Thomas Eriksen's interpretation, Barth has argued that 'cultural variation may be an *effect* and not a *cause* of boundaries').<sup>75</sup> It is the direct and shared experience of (state-led) violence against the individual as a member of a group, or follower of a belief, that has enormous ethnogenetic impact. But, born out of aggression, this rise of ethnic awareness is not often matched by a parallel rise in cultural-maintaining activities. Despite claims to the contrary, culture and violence remain normally divorced and, ultimately, incompatible.

Finally, boundary theories in anthropology address 'that which is socially effective in interethnic relations'; they conceive ethnic group mostly 'in terms of social organization'.<sup>76</sup> What matters here is the effect of (external) violence and (internal) experience upon social organisation, particularly the organisation of space and identity.

#### *Violence and the Rise of Post-Yugoslav Identities*

The paramount case of the systematic use of violence as a separating, dichotomising tool can be found in the events which led to the break-up of Yugoslavia. This process can be better comprehended by stressing that, contrary to most nation-states, Yugoslavia's break-up developed from within the centre (Belgrade), before it reached the periphery.<sup>77</sup> The Serbs were indeed a minority in former Yugoslavia (35 per cent according to the 1981 census). Through media

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74. Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*, 72.

75. Thomas Hylland Eriksen, *Ethnicity and Nationalism: Anthropological Perspectives* (London: Pluto Press, 1993), 39. Emphasis in original.

76. *Ibid.*, 37.

77. Daniele Conversi, 'Secession by the Centre: The Case of Former Yugoslavia', *East European Politics and Societies* (forthcoming).

control, the regime easily spread a sense of threat among Serbian communities scattered in mixed areas, particularly in Croatia and Bosnia.<sup>78</sup>

The first effects of state violence had to be found in a dramatic change of self-definition (the ethnonym) and hence in the name of languages used: until 1989 Croatia, Serbia, Bosnia and Montenegro shared a common language, Serbo-Croat, as defined by both international linguists and political leaders.<sup>79</sup> With the help of copious data and the skilful recourse to grammars and dictionaries, it was argued that the differential elements between the regional variants of the language were too few to grant them separate status, and that the shared elements were far more relevant. This official vision had been challenged since the 1960s by both Croats and Serbian 'dialectologists' and linguists, yet this challenge did not achieve legitimacy until the outbreak of war. By the mid-1990s though, after years of war, very few people living in Croatia, Bosnia, and Serbia still claimed to speak Serbo-Croat. For many Bosnians, who within their circle of family and friends have experienced murder, rape, abduction, dislocation, and the destruction of their belonging in the name of Serbian and Croatian ethnic purity, it may be quite disturbing to refer to their language as Serbo-Croat.

This externally-induced drive towards separation has led, not only to the divergence of Croatian from Serbian, but also to the formation of a new language, Bosniak, or Bosnian. New grammars, dictionaries, and literary books have sprung up in Bosniak, with a new terminology, distinguished, for instance, by the preference for Turkic loan-words instead of what are currently seen as 'Serbianisms' and 'Croatianisms'.<sup>80</sup> Although a Bosnian-English dictionary has been available since 1996, it was initially classed in Western library shelves under the 'Serbo-Croatian dictionaries' section, since the terms Bosnian and Bosniak was still relatively unheard-of.<sup>81</sup> The war led to a capillary search of linguistic distinctiveness in villages controlled by opposing armies. Tone Bringa notes the local philologists' rediscovery of an 'old Bosnian vocabulary which was common currency in villages and among older Muslims, but, before the war, was perceived as archaic by the urban, educated elites'.<sup>82</sup> The process is so subliminally

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78 On the role of the Serbia media and, in particular, Belgrade TV, see Mark Thompson, *Forging War: The Media in Serbia, Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina* (London: Article 19, 1994).

79. See, for instance, George L. Campbell, *Compendium of the World's Languages*, vol. 2 (London: Routledge, 1991), 1220; Bernard Comrie, ed., *The World's Major Languages* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987); Merritt Ruhlen, *A Guide to the World's Languages*, vol. 1, *Classification* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991); Joseph E. Grimes and Barbara F. Grimes, *Ethnologue: Languages of the World*, 12th ed. (Dallas: Summer Institute of Linguistics, 1992); and Joseph E. Grimes and Barbara F. Grimes, *Ethnologue: Language Family Index* (Dallas: Summer Institute of Linguistics, 1993).

80. See Alija Isakovic, *Rjecnik bosanskoga jezika: karakteristicna leksika* (Dictionary of the Bosnian Language: Characteristic Words), 2d ed. (Sarajevo: Bosanska knjiga, 1995).

81. Nikolina S. Uzicanin, *Bosnian-English, English-Bosnian Dictionary* (New York: Hippocrene Books, 1996).

82. Tone Bringa, *Being Muslim the Bosnian Way: Identity and Community in a Central Bosnian Village* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), xviii. Bringa herself uses the term 'Bosnian language' when referring to the protagonists of her anthropological fieldwork.

widespread that one does not have to be a nationalist—and make a stand of ‘Bosnianness’—in order to speak Bosniak. Today, it is a rampant trend, even though the average Bosnian has never been a nationalist, and until 1989 most were happy to belong to Yugoslavia.

In a similar fashion, great efforts have been devoted to the creation of a standard Montenegrin language, as a result of the desire of some Montenegrins both not to be identified with Serbia, but also for historical reasons, as most inhabitants of Montenegro (*Crna Gora*) proudly maintain a memory of independent statehood.<sup>83</sup> Those who have invested their time in learning Serbo-Croat, will now kill four birds with one stone and be rewarded by the acquisition of four languages: Serbian, Croatian, Bosniak, and Montenegrin, as the differences between these languages remain minimal. But for a long while it will be difficult to cross boundaries, as the utterance of a wrong expression, the murmur of an old-fashioned vocable, may turn potential friends into instant outsiders, immediately to be located beyond the borders of one or another community. On the Serbian side, attempts to purify the language of the Bosnian Serbs by replacing it with the Belgrade norm predated similar Bosnian and Montenegrin attempts.<sup>84</sup>

Thus, externally imposed violence on peaceful co-existing groups has in many cases led to unprecedented impenetrability of borders. In practice, this is ultimately reflected in a new stress on endogamy.<sup>85</sup> In Bosnia’s erstwhile ethnically mixed areas, including Sarajevo, a dramatic drop of inter-ethnic marriages testifies to this. The collapse of mutual trust as a direct consequence of violence and boundary-rising has led to a sudden decline of exogamy.<sup>86</sup>

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83. Since at least the fifteenth century, under the Crnojevic dynasty, ‘the foundation of a separate Montenegrin nation, with its own forms of government and its own culture, began to crystallise’. See Fred Singleton, *A Short History of the Yugoslav Peoples* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 30. The Kingdom of Montenegro was incorporated into Serbia in 1918. This prompted a so-called Christmas Uprising on 7 January 1919, date of the Orthodox Christmas, which was crushed in a lengthy and bloody military campaign. The Montenegrin Autocephalous Orthodox Church was abolished in 1920 and its property transferred to the Serbian Orthodox Church. Since then, and until recently, Montenegro’s pertinence to Yugoslavia has remained relatively undisputed. Given the restricted freedom of speech prevailing within the Serbian-Montenegrin federation, much of the ‘literary’ effort has been carried out among diaspora groups, such as the Montenegrin Association of America.

84. See Robert D. Greenberg, ‘The Politics of Dialects Among Serbs, Croats and Muslims in the Former Yugoslavia’, *East European Politics and Society* 10, no. 3 (1996): 393-415.

85. Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*, 74.

86. On the role of violence in the destruction of entire communities and their replacement by ethnically pure ones, see David Campbell, *National Deconstruction: Violence, Identity, and Justice in Bosnia* (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1998) 249. Campbell’s original interpretation of the West’s failure to respond to ethnic cleansing diagnoses the belated, overdue Western intervention as an expediency to ‘shore up the nationalist imaginary’ at home in order to contain the bogey of multiculturalism. In other words, Belgrade’s violence was effortlessly tolerated so that Western TV audiences could grumble about the dangers of multi-cultural societies in general and the impossibility of human coexistence. This approach is credible in view of the fact that the entire war was envisaged by the ex-Communist *nomenklatura* as a massive campaign versus ethnic tolerance and cultural difference. On the other hand, Western failure was induced by a lethal, all-pervasive poverty of thought on the possibility and practice of human coexistence in heterogeneous societies.

The Yugoslav case illustrates the mechanisms which made it possible, though immensely costly in human terms, to create impenetrable barriers where none existed before. Indeed, this example reflects the distinction between ethnic content and ethnic boundaries in its stress on the relational and oppositional nature of ethnic identities. In Bosnia, Rwanda, Turkey, Guatemala, and elsewhere, ethnic consciousness has been related to state violence rather than culture. This is not intended to propose that a sense of identity did not exist before the eruption of violence, but simply that fence-raising may be a quite independent process from existing, objective, cultural differentiae.<sup>87</sup>

Without necessarily partaking in what Gellner defined as the 'dormission theory' of nationalism, ethnic identities have the power to survive over long periods of time at a latent, dormant stage only to be 're-awakened' by the dark prince of nationalist violence. This violence superimposes new boundaries on a situation of previous fluidity, characterised by a lack of core values, elite assimilation and secularisation, and widespread insecurity over a group's survival. A focus on violence as a deliberate boundary-imposing mechanism is, thus, a powerful indictment against commonplace 'ancient hatred' interpretations of current wars, as well as an antidote to the 'clash of civilisations' paradigm which Samuel Huntington extrapolated from the Bosnian quagmire.<sup>88</sup>

### Elite Assimilation and Violence

The above focus on the centrally-imposed character of boundaries, rather than on their mere 'construction', served to clarify the connection between modernity's deepening cycle of homogenisation and the spread of war and ethnic cleansing. Hitherto porous and permeable boundaries were transformed into insurmountable barriers. The latter are not simply constructed, but imposed by human agents and by a chain of events related to their decisions and actions, as throughout the twentieth century, central elites have repeatedly embarked on serial waves of nationalisation and homogenisation. Yet, the resulting mass homogeneity and assimilation in turn created the condition for new dilemmas when culturally assimilated elites found their predicament unacceptable and reacted by generating new identities and separateness with the scarce human 'material' they could find.

Many studies of nationalism have focused on the initial assimilation of the proto-nationalist leadership.<sup>89</sup> 'Ethnic' leaders, in particular, are most often reared in

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87. On the role of violence in identity formation, see Michael J. Shapiro, *Violent Cartographies: Mapping Cultures of War* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997).

88. Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of the World Order* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1997).

89. See, for instance, Miroslav Hroch, *Social Preconditions of National Revival in Europe: A Comparative Analysis of the Social Composition of Patriotic Groups among the Smaller European Nations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985). For the Basque case, see Conversi, *The Basques, The Catalans, and Spain*. For Finland, see Risto Alapuro, 'The Intelligentsia, The State and The Nation' in *Finland: People, Nation, State*, eds. Max Engman and David Kirby (London: Hurst & Company 1987), 148-51.

highly assimilated milieu. Donald Horowitz stresses that contrary movements of 'dissimilation' are 'often begun by group members who are furthest along in the individual assimilation process', a fact that push them in the direction of 'an explosive and violent assertion of group separateness'.<sup>90</sup> The relationship between assimilation and violence is captured in a few examples quoted by Horowitz himself: the Bakonjo, the Kurds, the Basques and the Sikh. As he argues:

In each case, the boundary between them and a group in close proximity was porous. Acculturation to the norms of the neighbouring group was common. This might include abandonment of one's language or religious practices. . . In this way, elites were lost to the group, and the language and culture of the group were frequently disparaged. Bakonjo borrowed Batoro rites and language, Kurds in Iraqi cities underwent Arabization, Basques became Castilianized, and the line between Sikhs and Hindus was uncertain.<sup>91</sup>

Most of these movements ended up by stressing violent confrontation, rather than cultural revival. We have seen the same mechanism at work and dramatically amplified in former Yugoslavia, where the war pitted against each other elites who originally shared virtually everything, from language to secularism, even to atheism. Present-day distinctions are eminently *post facto* developments.

More generally, the role of assimilative pressures has left a tragic legacy in human history. It is commonly known that many autocrats came from fringe or even outlying areas: Hitler from Austria, Atatürk from Thessaloniki (Greece), Napoleon from Corsica, and Stalin from Georgia. Social psychologists have stressed that such a liminal condition exerted on their personality a drive to become *primus inter pares*.<sup>92</sup>

A further development of this argument is related to the role of diasporas. In his most recent theorisation of 'long-distance nationalism', Benedict Anderson has stressed how most nationalist movements emanated from elites who were either lost to their original ethnic culture, or lived dispersed in diaspora communities and even in isolation from their mother country; Mazzini, Garibaldi, Kossuth, and Herzen are just a few examples.<sup>93</sup> The trend has been dramatically amplified at the turn of the millennium, with the growth of transportation and two-way communications. Despite their high degree of (even total) assimilation in the culture of the host country, immigrant and diaspora communities are still prone to engage in some form of radical allegiance to their primordial 'mother countries'. Involvement with extremist politics is indeed seen as a sort of counterbalance to

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90. Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*, 72.

91. *Ibid.*, 72.

92. The French social psychologist Jean-Paul Codol used the term PIP (*primus inter pares*) to indicate this perception of the individual faced with a deep-ranging identity crisis. See Jean-Paul Codol and Jacques-Philippe Leyens, eds., *Cognitive Analysis of Social Behavior* (The Hague: M. Nijhoff, 1982).

93. Benedict Anderson, *Long-Distance Nationalism: World Capitalism and the Rise of Identity Politics* (Berkeley, CA: Center for German and European Studies, University of California, 1992).

assimilation: one resuscitates or revivifies his or her own identity through an emphasis on radical commitment, rather than through the maintenance of a distinct culture in a strongly assimilationist environment. It is rationally more expedient and less costly to engage in radical politics overseas by sending cash, as well as weapons, than to struggle to preserve one's ethnic identity with more cultural and hence more persistent, efforts. This is particularly true in a strong homogenising environment, such as in the United States and other immigrant societies.

Liah Greenfeld notes that nationalism as an ideology often arises as a response to inter-ethnic contacts, which set the basis for the *resentment* of intellectuals suffering dislocation while their cultural markets undergo decline and stagnation. Borrowing the concept from Friedrich Nietzsche, Hans Kohn first identified this sense of frustration as a result of pressures for assimilation and conformity accompanying cross-cultural contact, particularly while facing a powerful outspreading West.<sup>94</sup> Greenfeld points out, for example, resentment emerged among eighteenth century Russian elites as a result of the increasing contacts with a wealthier, technologically superior West. The frustration outcropping from such a contact, the fear of losing the indigenous culture, and the resulting feeling of inferiority and humiliation, were among the major sources for the onset of Russian nationalism.<sup>95</sup>

Other 'ideological diffusionists', such as Elie Kedourie, claimed that once the model of the nation-state was created, it was promptly adopted by other 'awakening' proto-national elites in an imitation effort.<sup>96</sup> These elites admired and wanted to emulate the foreign model of national development, but copying and imitation resulted in debasement and humiliation as continually striving to prove that one's own group was not less capable than its rivals in conforming to the ideal model. Nationalist intellectuals were, and are, typically obsessed with their self-image and the image of their country. At any possible encounter, the propensity is to heighten one's Western credentials, while tending to 'Orientalise' one's most immediate neighbours. This has historically resulted in an inner dilemma between striving for assimilation into the wider West and avoiding the humiliation connected with it.<sup>97</sup> Nationalism's implicit Janus-faced schizophrenia is what made it into a *Gesellschaft* enterprise speaking in the name of *Gemeinschaft*.<sup>98</sup>

The relationship between assimilation and the making and remaking of boundaries may thus be analysed in terms of its long-term influence, repercussion,

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94. For the notion of *resentment* see Hans Kohn, *Nationalism: Its Meaning and History* (Princeton, NJ: Van Nostrand, 1965).

95. See Liah Greenfeld, *Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992).

96. Elie Kedourie, *Nationalism* (London: Hutchinson, 1993)

97. On the opposition between assimilationist, traditionalist and reformist intellectuals, see Smith, *National Identity*.

98. In *Conditions of Liberty*, Ernest Gellner indeed argued that 'the rhetoric of nationalism is inversely related to its social reality: it speaks of *Gemeinschaft*, and is rooted in a semantically and often phonetically standardized *Gesellschaft*'. See *Conditions of Liberty: Civil Society and Its Rivals* (New York: Allen Lane/Penguin Press, 1994), 107.

and imprint on ethnic identity, especially among elites. A help in this direction may come from immigration studies and related social science literature. Yet we shall also have to maintain that cultural loss in non-immigrant contexts often results in a rekindled stress on boundaries as a surrogate of contents.

*Assimilation, Core Values, and Empty Shells*

To a large extent, all ethnic groups exchange, lose, modify, or create cultural elements. In this process of unceasing innovation, elements are selected which have a paramount significance for the group's sense of self-preservation as a distinctive community. Jerzy J. Smolicz uses the concept of *core values* to indicate those

pivots around which the whole social and identificational system of the group is organized. . . Removal of such pivots, through enforced 'modernization' or dominant assimilation, would result in the entire edifice crumbling to pieces.<sup>99</sup>

This may contrast when compared to previous arguments here about the relative autonomy of ethnic boundaries from ethnic contents. However, it is the focus on the particular *elements* of a culture as they relate to the construction of the boundary (we-ness), which sheds light onto the process of boundary creation. Smolicz employs the term in his studies of immigrant groups in Australia, but the concept can be applied to the comparative study of nationalist movements as well. We can extrapolate the plausibility of different forms of national mobilisation depending on which core values are selected and under which circumstances.<sup>100</sup> Among the latter, we should include the form of the state, and the relation between state elites and ethnonationalist elites.

The selection of particular core values by state elites has often led to distinctive paths of national mobilisation.<sup>101</sup> Given its arbitrariness and whimsicalness, the selection process is also connected to a lust for the elaboration of what Eric Hobsbawm calls 'invented traditions'.<sup>102</sup> But invented traditions are merely one of the possible ways of building on core values as a central aspect of the boundary-building process. However, as we have seen, core values cannot be arbitrarily

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99. See Jerzy J. Smolicz, 'Tradition, Core Values and Intercultural Development in Plural Societies', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 11, no. 4 (1988): 394 and 'Minority Languages and the Core Values of Culture: Changing Policies and Ethnic Response in Australia', *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development* 5, no. 1 (1984): 23-24.

100. Daniele Conversi, 'Language or Race? The Choice of Core Values in the Development of Catalan and Basque Nationalisms', *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 13, no. 1 (1990): 50-70 and 'The Influence of Culture on Political Choices: Language Maintenance and its Implications for the Basque and Catalan Nationalist Movements', *History of European Ideas* 16, nos. 1-3 (1993): 189-200.

101. Conversi, *The Basques, The Catalans, and Spain*.

102. Eric J. Hobsbawm, introduction to *The Invention of Tradition*, eds. Eric J. Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

chosen by ethnic leaders, and it is unlikely that they can be invented *ex nihilo*.<sup>103</sup> In order to be credible and lend credibility to the nationalists' goals, core values must be part of a vital heritage, of a cultural patrimony transmitted and celebrated by succeeding generations.<sup>104</sup>

Donald Horowitz seems to agree with Barth on the preference of boundaries over content:

[I]t makes no sense to ask abstractly whether groups based on language are more cohesive or more separatist or more prone to conflict than, say, groups based on religion. For. . . it is not the particular differentiating characteristic that matters for such questions. That is largely an accident of context and contact. . . It is, in the end, ascriptive affinity and disparity, and not some particular inventory of cultural attributes, that found the group.<sup>105</sup>

Assimilation is an important variable in this respect: assimilated groups often display a highly symbolic and cost-free use of cultural items. By 'cost-free', I mean that the individual does not have to pay a tribute or spend too much time, energy, and money in order to use them. The concept of symbolic ethnicity, adopted by Herbert J. Gans is of use here. He employs it to define those instances of group identity largely emptied of cultural content, that is, among highly assimilated groups which nevertheless show different degrees of allegiance to their ethnic background, including the use of ethnic symbols, participation in ethnic festivals or militancy in ethnic causes.<sup>106</sup> This implies identification with the ethnic background, without the commitment derived from participating in formal or informal ethnic organisations and without practising the ethnic culture, particularly language. In other words, it is an example where ethnic boundaries remain while ethnic contents have largely disappeared. We should again note here that highly assimilated diaspora groups of the 'symbolic ethnicity' type are often behind the financing of extreme nationalist groups where the use of violence against historical enemies is largely justified.<sup>107</sup>

Symbolic ethnicity can also be profitably 'exported' to the study of ethnonational conflicts between highly assimilated groups. When combined with symbolic religiosity, which refers to 'the consumption of religious symbols, apart from regular participation in a religious culture and in religious affiliations—other

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103. For a critique of the concept of invented traditions as applied to nationalism and ethnic identity, see Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations and National Identity*.

104. On the importance of inter-generational communication and primary socialisation to the persistence of ethnic identity, see Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*.

105. Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*, 69. For a different approach, see Conversi, 'Language or Race?'

106. Herbert J. Gans, 'Symbolic Ethnicity: The Future of Ethnic Groups and Cultures in America', *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 2, no. 1 (1979): 1-20.

107. Some known cases are Serbian, Greek, and Croatian lobbies, Palestinian radicals and the Zionist far-right, as well as various Basque, Armenian, Tamil, Sikh, and Irish liberation fronts, and many other diaspora-sponsored organisations. See Anderson, *Long-Distance Nationalism*.

than for purely secular purposes' this is likely to occur in instances of high degrees of secularisation.<sup>108</sup> A panoramic overview of the main occurrences of ethnonational violence around the world reveals that most hot points of attrition occur in situations of cultural convergence, assimilation, and even secularisation. Through the conceptual lenses of symbolic ethnicity and religiosity, the Tutsi-Hutu conflict in Rwanda and Burundi, for example, may be identified as ethnic in the sense that both groups claim to descend from different ancestors, but is not a cultural clash, since there are barely any cultural differences dividing the two (notably, language, customs, traditions, and religion are shared).<sup>109</sup> This is irrespective of the fact that, mostly as a result of war, the two groups may in the future claim to have sharply distinctive cultures magnifying mutual gaps. Moreover, like in most contemporary ethnic wars, anti-Tutsi pogroms have occurred in the wake of rampant Westernisation, where highly 'Westernised' leaders and intellectuals deliberately planned the massacres sheltered by modern institutions and helped by modern technologies, even though the media have inundated the world with images of machete decapitations and references to age-old 'tribal vengeance'. As a *post facto* explanation, the assumption of persisting, ancient hatred has replaced analysis of events, assisted by the abusive confusion between culture and ethnicity which we have mentioned.

The idea that apparently trivial elements may often command emotional attachment has been observed since the emergence of nationalism. It is a phenomenon identified by both psychologists and social psychologists. Sigmund Freud used the term 'narcissism of small differences', remarking that 'it is precisely communities with adjoining territories, and related to each other in other ways as well, who are engaged in constant feuds and in ridiculing each other'.<sup>110</sup> The concept has been recently adapted by Michael Ignatieff to various ethnic conflicts, such as the former Yugoslavia and Kurdistan.<sup>111</sup> However, as we have seen with the 'creation' of the Bosnian language, the process that led to its constitution and redefinition as an autonomous language was something more than petty narcissism. It was rather a struggle of a hapless people for its very physical survival. If any narcissism could be inferred from such an experience, it was the result, rather than the cause, of the conflict.<sup>112</sup>

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108. Herbert J. Gans, 'Symbolic Ethnicity and Symbolic Religiosity: Towards a Comparison of Ethnic and Religious Acculturation', *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 17, no. 4 (1994): 577-92.

109. On the Tutsis, see Rene Lemarchand, *Burundi: Ethnocide as Discourse and Practice* (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 1994).

110. Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents* (New York: J. Cape & H. Smith, 1930), reprinted as *Civilization, Society and Religion* (London: Penguin, 1991), 305. Freud also applied the concept to the study of anti-semitism, in his *Moses and Monotheism*, vol. 13 (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1939), 335. See also his *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* (London/Vienna: The International Psychoanalytical Press, 1922), 131.

111. Michael Ignatieff, *Nationalism and the Narcissism of Minor Differences*, paper presented at the Centre for Sociological and Social Anthropological Studies, The Open University, Milton Keynes, October 1994.

112. Ignatieff refers principally to Serbian and Croatian identities during, as well as before, the war.

Yet, Freud's approach reminds us that nationalism is based on a principle of inclusion and exclusion, rather than on objective differences. Thus, 'it is always possible to bind together a considerable number of people in love, so long as there are other people left over to receive manifestation of their aggressiveness'.<sup>113</sup> Can Freud be described as a Barthian *ante litteram*? Certainly, he intuitively identified the difference between subjective perceptions of groupness and objective cultural features, something that would form the backbone of Barth's disciples' effort to distinguish between perceived and tangible distinctions.<sup>114</sup>

The subjective dimension of immigrant identities on the verge of assimilation has been described as a change from *being* into *feeling*. For instance, Anny Bakalian has identified the shift 'from being to feeling Armenian' as a passage from substantial to symbolic ethnicity. In other words, the focus of group activity and identity has shifted from ethnic content to ethnic boundaries, partially devoid of content.<sup>115</sup> Religion ultimately proves to provide the most resilient organisational factor for the cultural preservation of ethnic groups. As Gans pointed out: '*Ethnic groups* are poorly organized, most of the organisation being informal groups. Conversely, *religious groups* are usually dominated by formally organized denominations in which informal groups play interstitial roles'.<sup>116</sup> He applies his definitions to the study of Judaism in the United States. With the only exception of Orthodox Judaism, 'temples and synagogues have taken on Protestantism's democratic and communitarian trappings'.<sup>117</sup> Moreover, services are conducted often in English, rather than Hebrew. Gans himself used the concept of symbolic Judaism in earlier writings.<sup>118</sup> This assimilation process has prompted many to believe that the only place in the world where Judaism could be professed in its pristine form is the state of Israel, thereby reinforcing nationalist myths and trends.

However, Gans is no deconstructionist insofar as he rejects the belief that everything can be constructed or invented:

over time, people have less and less of an ethnic repertoire on which to draw for that behaviour, and while 'micro-invention' goes on all the time, most are incapable of 'macro-invention': unlikely either to invent deliberately whole new ethnic patterns or carefully to reconstruct old ones which they have never experienced personally.<sup>119</sup>

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113. Freud, *Civilization, Society and Religion*, 305.

114. Probably the most articulated subjectivist approach to ethnonationalism is in Connor's collection of essays, *Ethnonationalism: The Quest for Understanding*.

115. Anny P. Bakalian, *Armenian-Americans: From Being To Feeling Armenian* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1993).

116. Gans, 'Symbolic Ethnicity and Symbolic Religiosity', 581.

117. *Ibid.*, 582.

118. *Ibid.*

119. *Ibid.*, 579-80.

Often co-occurring and overlapping, these mutations and fluctuations from content to boundaries, from structure to process, from essence to situation, from maintenance to assimilation, from culture to identity, and from religiosity to secularism, can be eventually reduced to a single far-reaching global trend from objectivity to subjectivity, from the need of preservation to a more limited demand for recognition.<sup>120</sup> Yet none of this is really new, and this kind of shift has indeed triumphed in the nationalist era. The distinction between objective and subjective characteristics had its classical precursors in nationalist ideology and practice: Johann Gottfried Herder's 'organicism' and Ernest Renan's 'voluntarism' respectively. The opposition is between the nation as an objective, predestined entity, and the nation as a subjective, ongoing process.

Significantly, Herder's legacy influenced one of the most 'objectivist' currents in modern American anthropology: Franz Boas' concept of culture seen as clearly bounded and identifiable, presumably because culture and language were seen as nearly coterminous.<sup>121</sup> Certainly, one of the problems in the current emphasis on boundaries over content is the outright abandonment of that Boasian vision of bounded culture and the simultaneous envisioning of boundaries as socially constructed. Yet, on the other hand, the nationalist use of culture as highly bounded, unified and homogeneous, has been deeply shattered by the boundaries-content distinction.

Despite its benefits, we should note as with other terminology in the social sciences, a reductive use of the concepts of symbolic ethnicity and symbolic religiosity disregarding cultural factors risks trivialising the study of ethnic mobilisations. In particular, it risks obfuscating the dynamic relationship between ethnic identities, cultural contents, and boundaries maintenance.

## Conclusions

In current language, borders and boundaries are spatially identifiable, strictly referring to place or locality. However, there are less visible boundaries which have been the subject of much anthropological research during recent years.<sup>122</sup> Despite their physical invisibility, these boundaries are perceptible by subjects who experience and, simultaneously, enforce them. They are all-pervasive and cross-

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120. Charles Taylor argues that most contemporary social movements, including nationalism and multiculturalism, are shaped by a need for collective recognition. See Charles Taylor, *Multiculturalism and 'The Politics of Recognition': An Essay* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992).

121. Boas' work as a linguist was copious and included grammars of Dakota and Kwakiutl, texts of the Tsimshian, Kathlamet, and Bella Bella Indians, as well as a famous handbook of American Indian languages. See Franz Boas, *Handbook of American Indian Languages*, 2 vols. (St. Clair Shores, MI: Scholarly Press, 1976). See also Regna Darnell, *And Along Came Boas: Continuity and Revolution in Americanist Anthropology* (Amsterdam: J. Benjamins, 1998).

122. For a reassessment of Barth's theory, see Hans Vermeulen and Cora Govers, eds., *The Anthropology of Ethnicity: Beyond 'Ethnic Groups and Boundaries'* (Amsterdam: Het Spinhuis, 1994).

cutting, orientating behaviour and action, while manifesting themselves in the life of every individual.<sup>123</sup>

The notion of boundary, originally defined in terms of geographical space, has assumed new meanings since its conceptualisation in anthropology by Frederick Barth and his disciples. This implied a *deterritorialisation* of the concept through a critique of its fixedness and immutableness. Conservative scholars saw boundaries, notably state boundaries, as static and forever given. In contrast, post-Barthian analysis sees boundaries as permeable, shifting, and malleable according to circumstances and the choice of individual actors. Among other things, this means that ethnic boundaries have become more difficult to identify empirically, and more arduous to analyse theoretically.

The idea of the permeability of boundaries, particularly ethnic boundaries, has spread to most social sciences, including IR. Classical (both realist and neoliberal) IR thought has customarily taken boundaries as given, though occasionally problematic. Yet, since the 1990s, the concept's utility to the discipline has been reconsidered as part of a new interest in 'identity formation'.<sup>124</sup> This trend has been especially pronounced in the Danish School of International Relations.<sup>125</sup> A Barthian-derived approach has begun to materialise in other Scandinavian countries, including Barth's birthplace, Norway.<sup>126</sup> The territoriality of IR has also been challenged from within and without the discipline, particularly from Political Geography.<sup>127</sup>

Quite independently, a more general field of nationalism studies had already emerged since the early 1980s, as theories proliferated to explain *post facto* the unexpected rebellion and revival of national sentiments. Since such failure concerned an undeniable incapacity to detect the persistence of ethnicity, work analysing the roots of this *persistence* display a more robust explanatory power. This was partially a reaction to the classical modernisation theorists' incapacity to detect the embers of ethnonational vitality under the ashes of modernisation.

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123. Some highly symbolic boundaries can be visible to members of one community, but not to non-members. For instance, amongst Orthodox Jewish communities in major Western and Israeli cities, the *eruv* is mostly marked by existing boundaries such as roads and highways, although the circle has to be completed normally by strands of nylon fishing line often struck between telegraph pole-sized posts dotted along the *eruv*. The highly symbolic and ritual meaning of this boundary is meant to extend the concept of *home* to the immediate neighbourhood, henceforth extending the sense of community and easing some of the Sabbath restrictions which, without the *eruv*, would interdict 'carrying' outside one's home (restrictions include the use of wheelchairs and pushing baby carriages on a Saturday).

124. See Friedrich Kratochwil, 'Of Systems, Boundaries, and Territoriality: An Inquiry into the Formation of the State System', *World Politics* 39, no. 1 (1986): 27-52 and several contributions in *The Return of Culture and Identity in International Relations Theory*, eds. Yosef Lapid and Friedrich Kratochwil (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1996). See also Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

125. See Iver B. Neumann, *Uses of the Other: 'The East' in European Identity Formation* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998).

126. See Iver B. Neumann, *Collective Identity Formation: Self and Other in International Relations*, (Florence: European University Institute/ Working Papers of the Robert Schuman Centre, 1995).

127. For a critique from Political Geography, see Agnew, 'The Territorial Trap'.

Assimilation indeed made enormous strides and ethnic contents were often diluted to the point of annihilation as part of nation-building's 'massification'. But the fact that culture and content were increasingly less visible, more rarefied, and fast disappearing did not mean that their political and symbolic (as opposed to strictly cultural) significance was also vanishing. On the contrary, renewed emphasis on the political symbolism of nationhood implied the persistence, indeed the regeneration, of ethnic boundaries, often in a more fierce, intensified, and aggravated way than ever before.

I have argued that a more comprehensive understanding of such ethnic conflicts can be reached by considering the role played by internal variables, rather than internal variables per se (ethnic contents, culture, specifically core values, which are directly related to how the in-group is defined). I have also suggested this focus should be accompanied by an attention to the role of external agents (such as the state and political violence) on the formation of ethnic boundaries. In particular, a scrutiny of the mutual relationship between internal variables and external agents may help to formulate a typology of ethnic conflicts, depending on the role of what lies on both sides of the boundary; content and culture can be identified as internal variables, not directly related to the dynamics of ethnic conflict. Similarly, boundaries and identity can be identified as external variables, directly correlated to the rise of violence. While external agents are directly involved in this process, it is the relation between boundaries and this content which needs to be stressed in the study of nationalism.

One of the main problems with the study of ethnic boundaries as opposed to geopolitical borders is, however, the very concept of boundaries' malleability. But this relativist-constructivist vision of infinite ductility betrays its limits by evoking that very sense of insecurity which inevitably results in the strengthening of old boundaries (and even the rise of new ones). Kathryn Manzo has indeed pointed out that 'precisely because national boundaries are constructed and always contestable, the reproduction of the national and the alien requires constant practice'.<sup>128</sup> This quotidian, reiterating, nearly ritual character of nationhood has been defined by Michael Billig as the practice of 'banal nationalism'.<sup>129</sup>

A related problem is the boundaries' difficult empirical grounding. The only way to 'measure' their weight and endurance would be to focus on the intensity of identities and 'us-them' feelings. This can be done in several ways: synchronically, with the use of surveys, large-scale questionnaires, voting patterns and other statistical data, as well as with qualitative data or more belatedly with the recourse to media reporting on the magnitude of ethnic conflicts once they have started. Diachronically and on a more *longue durée* basis, this might be accomplished by studying the evolution of shifting identities in political practice.

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128. Kathryn A. Manzo, *Creating Boundaries: The Politics of Race and Nation* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1996), 38.

129. Michael Billig, *Banal Nationalism* (London: Sage, 1995).

The most suitable way of empirically grounding boundaries on practice is to relate them to content. By emphasising their relationship with cultural content, one can more easily estimate the boundaries' salience and shifting importance without falling into the trap of reification. The subjective character of boundaries is precisely implicated by referring to their inner relationships with what they enclose and contain. It is this relationship which provides evidence of something which would otherwise remain obscure to the external observer or analyst.

Ethnic violence often occurs when there are few cultural markers accessible to differentiate between groups. When groups in conflict share too many elements of the same culture, difficulties in their self-definition may emerge. The leaders of the subordinated group have then to create other contexts and fabricate new options in order to emphasise group identity and redefine ethnic boundaries. One of these options, the use of violence as a means of boundary-building, has been chosen by leaders in the cases analysed in this article. The main rationale of many threatened groups is the defence of a boundary, particularly an ethnic boundary, from what is subjectively perceived as external aggression. The boundary, accordingly, is reinforced by focusing negatively on what lies 'outside' and opposing it positively to what is 'inside'.<sup>130</sup> If this interpretation is further validated and corroborated, as Horowitz points out, 'the violent character of these responses to the feared loss of group distinctiveness is a powerful point in the case against assimilationist policies of nation-building'.<sup>131</sup> In general, multiculturalism and federalism, the promotion of all forms of cultural pluralism, have great healing powers for building civic peace, by assuaging the sense of mutual threat which is at the core of violent strife.

In our examples, groups in contact share the ethnic boundary while ethnic contents span the boundary. The boundary created by violence replaces the missing boundary which was, or could have been, created by culture. Emptied, cleared, devoided boundaries are somehow more insecure than boundaries which protect a rich cultural content. Empty boundaries can easily be filled by violence to replace the cultural hiatus. Hence, paradoxically, communities where ethnic borders entirely circumscribe the diffusion of cultural contents are deemed to be safer places for an ethnic group to exist. This, of course, does not insinuate a rejection of multiculturalism; quite the contrary, it makes it all the more vital and imperative. When boundaries are culturally defined (rather than merely identificationally so), culture can work as an intergenerational bridge, restraining violent deviations, keeping radical fringes at bay, reassuring members of the group's continuity, lessening inter-generational gaps, filling the life of cultural communities with

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130. For instance, in international relations, the oppositional nature of US foreign policy has been theorised by David Campbell, who argues that, while the Cold War discourse was based on a narrative of the American self as constructed in opposition to the 'other', such a narrative did not change despite the end of the Soviet Union immediately identifying new targets of enmity, primarily political Islam or specific pariah states. Indeed the perception of the 'other' as a danger and a threat is central to United States identity. See David Campbell, *Writing Security: United States Foreign Policy and the Politics of Identity* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998).

131. Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*, 73.

everyday meaning and, finally, contributing to their mutual contacts, coexistence, and persistence. In short, it is not the permanence of ethnic boundaries as such which matters, but rather the need to fill them with significant cultural content.

As global homogenisation amalgamates, blends, and intermingles cultures, behaviours, tastes, and appearances in a world-wide melting pot, and as contents tend to evaporate and disappear, boundaries become unprecedentedly reinforced.<sup>132</sup> The sweeping spread of reactive nationalism, etatism, ethnic cleansing, and separatism testifies to the prevalence of this drift. This trend can only be rectified by restoring attention to the importance of culture and content, of creativity and continuity.

In general, a stress on boundaries, rather than content, always indicates some deep insecurity. The need to raise boundaries, while forgetting the content they are supposed to defend, should be enough to alarm us about the rise of some deeply seated sense of vulnerability and fear. Violence may well be an inescapable logical finale of this parallel stress on boundaries and abdication of culture. This may be particularly true when all efforts to reinforce cultural specificity are discarded, often in the name of culture's inefficacy in terms of granting a group's identity and survival.

*Daniele Conversi is Senior Lecturer at the University of Lincoln*

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132. A similar thesis on a global scale has been put forward in Benjamin R. Barber in *Jihad vs. McWorld* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1996), 88-99, 169-83.