

3 Dating the nation

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To what period, if any, should we properly assign the origins and reproduction of nations? This is the subject of one of the most searching debates in the study of ethnicity and nationalism. The importance of this question is twofold. In the first place, the answer is likely to determine whether nations are phenomena specific to a particular historical period; and in the second place, it will reveal how deeply embedded nations are and to what extent they are likely to persist or give way to new kinds of human association. In the current debates about ‘post-modernity’, ‘globalisation’ and ‘cultural imperialism’, the problem of ‘dating the nation’ becomes a matter of fundamental significance.

Modernism and ‘nation-building’

There was a time when such issues hardly troubled scholars. It was generally assumed that most nations were ‘old’, that is to say, they could be traced back to antiquity or the early Middle Ages, and that the modern epoch was witnessing their renewal after centuries of passivity and invisibility. This is a perspective which we can term ‘continuous perennialism’. In this view, the nation is perennial and immemorial, in the sense that its modern expressions and manifestations are continuous with its early forms and expressions some centuries ago. Thus, it was held that, despite considerable changes, the modern Greeks and Egyptians could trace their origins *as nations* back to classical Greece and ancient Egypt; even though both countries had over the centuries suffered invasions, migrations and large-scale cultural transformations, their national identities were largely intact, and recognisably so.¹ This perspective was, of course, heavily influenced by an organic nationalism which posited the ‘rebirth’ of nations after centuries of somnolence, amnesia and silent invisibility.

Somehow, despite the forgetfulness of their members, the nation persisted in its state of ‘slumber’, to use Gellner’s term, and like the Sleeping Beauty was at length awoken by the kiss of so many nationalist Prince Charmings. Nationalist imagery of renewal, reawakening and regeneration, soon found its way into the sober accounts of many pre-War historians, and helped to organise the historical discipline itself, as well as world history, along preordained national lines (Pearson 1993).

All this changed after 1945. The horrors of the Second World War, the evils wrought by racism and anti-Semitism, and the ways in which the dictators had used, and perverted, nationalism for their own ends, helped to undermine the hold of the accepted 'perennialist' paradigm of nations and nationalism. Moreover, the ongoing process of decolonisation in Asia and Africa turned the attention of scholars to the mass-mobilising, active and creative processes in the formation of nations, which came to be known as 'nation-building'. But, if it was possible to create nations 'under our very eyes', then perhaps even the nations of Europe, whose antiquity had for so long been assumed, were not really as old and venerable as had been supposed. Perhaps, after all, every nation was socially 'constructed', and should therefore be understood as a modern cultural artefact of relatively recent provenance? (see Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983).

Today, such 'modernism' is the dominant orthodoxy in the field. For the modernists, the nation, as well as nationalism, is both recent and novel. Theirs is a sociological, as well as a chronological, modernism. The nation is an innovation, a creation of the modern epoch, a response to, as well as a product of the equally novel historical processes of 'modernisation' – capitalism and industrialism, rapid urbanisation, the bureaucratic state, mass democracy, public education and secularisation. From the eighteenth century onwards, these processes came to dominate the life of Western societies, mobilising the middle classes and inspiring an activist and participant ethos of 'nation-building' and a desire to seize control of the state in the name of the nation. It therefore comes as no surprise that the first mass nations and nationalist ideologies and movements appeared at the end of that century.² To which the critics of modernism retort: it comes as no surprise, because the nation has been defined in modernist terms, as a 'mass' nation and as a modern social 'creation'.

The argument is circular. It presumes the modernity of a phenomenon which it then declares to be the product of modernisation, and hence to fit the modernist thesis of its modernity, both temporally and sociologically. But, suppose that we define the concept of the nation in terms of sentiments and ideas unrelated to any concept of modernity or to any particular historical period or process. The thesis that nations are modern and the product of 'modernisation' would then have to be established independently of its modernist definition, and especially of its presumed 'mass' and 'created' nature. If, for example, we defined the nation as a named group of human beings who occupy an historic territory and share common myths, memories and culture, and we could demonstrate that such groups could only be found in the 'modern world', only then could the modernist thesis be upheld.³

The difficulty, of course, with this procedure is that, to date, no such neutral definition has secured wide scholarly agreement, and that even if it could, it would hardly lend itself to modernist ends. It would be unlikely to support the thesis that nations were temporally and sociologically modern, and were the product of nationalist 'nation-building'. A wider, more neutral type of definition would most probably suggest that nations were to be found in all historical epochs, forming in response to a variety of social processes, and hence that the concept of the nation was neither historically recent nor sociologically novel.

Ethnonationalism

One of the first, and most acute, critics to point to this weakness at the heart of modernism was Walker Connor. In a series of seminal and penetrating articles, he addressed the major problems that had vexed scholars in this baffling field with compelling logic and vigour. In particular, Connor focussed on the then fashionable, but problematic ideas of 'nation-building' and cultural assimilation, as these had been developed by Karl Deutsch and the communications theorists. Deutsch had argued that the growth of nations could be charted through the clustering in given populations of various socio-demographic factors such as social and geographical mobility, trade, education, mass media and voting patterns. And he went on to claim that the processes of social mobilisation and mass communications tended to absorb different linguistic groups into co-cultural participant communities or nations, with the culture of the dominant group assimilating those of smaller ethnic groups (Deutsch 1966).

For Connor, this model of 'nation-building' was both misleading and erroneous. It was misleading because, despite Deutsch's own caveats in particular cases, it omitted the growing evidence of widespread ethnic separatism and the failure of cultural assimilation to keep pace with social mobilisation. It was erroneous because its definition of the nation omitted the crucial psychological element of ethnicity, and saw the development of nations and nationalism in terms of the trajectories of the dominant Western 'nation-states'. Now these national states appeared to conform (albeit imperfectly) to Deutsch's idea of a dominant cultural nationality assimilating smaller, peripheral ethnic groups and their languages through the agencies of the modern state. Moreover, the level of economic and cultural development of Western national states suggested that theirs was the universal trajectory of nation-building, one in which the dominant nationality used the power of the state to back its claims to pre-eminence, and thereby become a 'nation'. For Connor, such 'nation-building' inevitably implied a large measure of correlative 'nation-destroying'. For, to create and build up the great dominant nations, it was necessary to assimilate, more or less violently, a great many other smaller ethnic groups and nationalities, quash their aspirations to become nations in their own right, and destroy the ethnic bases of their nationhood.⁴

Theoretically, the upshot of this critique was the need to return to the root of nations, which for Connor is a psychological bond that unites their members. This can only be found by making a clear distinction between state and nation, and between patriotism, the love of the territorial state, and nationalism, the love of the ethnic nation. Thus, we may speak of British patriotism, but only of English (or Scottish or Welsh or Irish) nationalism. The nation in its pristine sense, Connor defines as 'a group of people who *believe* they are ancestrally related. It is the largest grouping that shares such a belief' (Connor 1994: 212, italics in original). For Connor, the 'essence of a nation is intangible. This essence is a psychological bond that joins a people and differentiates it, in the subconscious conviction of its members, from all other people in a most vital way' (ibid.: 92).

Connor went on to argue that, unlike many scholars, most nationalist leaders

'have understood that at the core of ethnopsychology is the sense of shared blood, and they have not hesitated to appeal to it' (ibid.: 197). The nation is, therefore, 'the largest group that can command a person's loyalty because of felt kinship ties; it is, from this perspective, the fully extended family' (ibid.: 202).

On the other hand, this *sense* or conviction of kinship ties and unique descent on the part of the individual members need not, and usually does not, accord with the factual history of the designated nation. For Connor, the myth of ethnic descent should not be confused with real biological descent. Most nations are the product of many ethnic strains.⁵

It is not chronological or factual history that is the key to the nation, but sentient or felt history. All that is irreducibly required for the existence of a nation is that the members share an intuitive conviction of the group's separate origin and evolution. To aver that one is a member of the Japanese, German or Thai nation is not merely to identify oneself with the Japanese, German, or Thai people of today, but with that people throughout time. Or rather – given the intuitive conviction that one's nation is unique in its origin – perhaps we should not say *throughout time* but *beyond time*.

(ibid.: 202, italics in original)

This conviction, says Connor, is based on a powerful and non-rational (but not *irrational*) feeling of the members. It can be analysed by studying its appeals and stimuli; but it cannot be rationally explained. To attempt to do so, is inevitably to miss the depth and power of national conviction, and its ability to override even a strong loyalty to the state and its institutions.

It is this crucial distinction between state and nation, and between patriotism and nationalism, that leads Connor to coin a term for the original, pristine sense of nationalism, namely, *ethnonationalism*. The use of this term cuts across the fashionable contemporary dichotomy of 'civic' and 'ethnic' nationalism. Connor is claiming that there is only one kind of nationalism, ethnic nationalism; and this is what reanimated the minority ethnic groups of Western Europe and Canada, and would later do the same in the former Soviet Union. What is called 'civic' nationalism is really only patriotism; this is indeed a 'rational' kind of loyalty and, unlike ethnonationalism, it can be rationally explained (Connor 1994: Chapter 8).

From ethnic group to nation

But, why 'ethnonationalism'? For Connor, the use of this term underlines the ethnic, and kinship, basis of the nation. In fact, nations are really only self-aware ethnic groups. An ethnic group, on the other hand, though its members 'must know ethnically what they *are not* before they know what they *are*', need not be self-aware:

An ethnic group may be readily discerned by an anthropologist or other outside observer, but until the members are themselves aware of the group's

uniqueness, it is merely an ethnic group and not a nation. While an ethnic group *may*, therefore, be other-defined, a nation *must* be self-defined.

(*ibid.*: 103, italics in original)

For Connor, members of ethnic groups constitute ‘peoples not yet cognisant of belonging to a larger ethnic element’ (*ibid.*: 102). ‘In such cases, meaningful identity of a positive nature remains limited to locale, region, clan, or tribe. Thus, members need not be conscious of belonging to the ethnic group’ (*ibid.*: 103). These are essentially ‘pre-national peoples’ or ‘potential nations’, peoples for whom nationhood and national identity lie in the future (*ibid.*: 79–80 and 102).

When, then, is a nation? This is a subject of considerable contention among historians, and Connor cites a number of opinions that tend to place the origins of nations in the earlier or later Middle Ages. Now, it might be thought from the preceding discussion that Connor would share their view, since the nation is simply a self-aware ethnic group, and ethnic groups have abounded in all periods and places. Instead, he opts for the formulations of Carlton Hayes and Hans Kohn to the effect that people’s loyalties before the epoch of modernity were religious and dynastic rather than national. Indeed, Connor’s own version of modernism is even more radical. Citing the great study of Eugene Weber which dates the transformation of peasants in rural France into a nation of Frenchmen and women to a period as late as the Third Republic, and making use of census data that reveal how little national feeling European immigrants to the United States possessed at the turn of the twentieth century, Connor concludes that ‘claims that a nation existed prior to the late nineteenth century should be treated with caution’ (*ibid.*: 224; cf. Weber 1979).⁶

Theoretically, Connor’s argument is based on the assertion that nations and nationalism are mass phenomena and that therefore only when the great majority of a designated population has become nationally aware, can we legitimately speak of it as a nation. In authoritarian states like Nazi Germany and fascist Japan, we can ascertain their nation-formation after the event, because the population could clearly be mobilised along national lines. But in democracies, mass participation as measured in elections provides the best indicator of nation-formation, because in a democracy, ‘the refusal to permit large sections of the populace to participate in the political process may be viewed as tantamount to declaring that those who are disenfranchised are not members of the nation’ (Connor 1990: 99). Thus, the English could hardly begin to be described as a nation before the 1867 Reform Act, which gave the vote to some 80 per cent of the adult male population, and certainly not a fully-fledged nation until 1918, when the remaining 20 per cent of men and all women over thirty years of age secured the vote. This raises the question, ‘At what point did a sufficient number/percentage of a given people acquire national consciousness so that the group merited the title of nation?’ When can we say that ‘a quantitative addition in the number sharing a sense of common nationhood has triggered the qualitative transformation into a nation?’ (*ibid.*: 99).

When indeed? For Connor, there is no simple answer, no single formula. The formation of nations is a process, not an event. ‘Events are easily dated; stages in

a process are not' (ibid.: 99). There is a further problem. Nationalism is a mass phenomenon, and the masses have, for the most part, been mute about their group identities throughout recorded history. Connor's view of the pre-modern masses is similar to Gellner's. Till recently, they have lived in isolated rural pockets, usually in a state of dependance (if not serfdom) to the gentry and other élites; Connor cites the case of the Polish serfs siding against their Polish landlords when the latter rose up and fought for their national (élite) liberation. Moreover, the masses tended to be illiterate; so, our records of group identity are confined to members of the élite. How misleading these can be is demonstrated by the case of Arab nationalism. While a large proportion of Arab intellectuals have believed in a pan-Arab nation and have sought to inculcate their conviction in the Arab masses, 'after more than a half-century of such efforts, Arab nationalism remains anomalistically weak' (Connor 1994: 79–80; cf. Gellner 1983: Chapter 2).

Nevertheless, in state after state, ethnonationalism has triumphed in the modern epoch; and this is because 'Since 1789, the dogma that "alien rule is illegitimate rule" has been infecting ethnically aware peoples in an ever-broadening pattern' (Connor 1994: 169). The marriage of popular sovereignty with ethnicity, which produced the doctrine of national self-determination from 1789 onwards, was catalysed (but not caused) by modernisation, and specifically by the instruments of mass communications, which have increasingly brought peoples into contact, especially after the Second World War. Whereas in a pre-nationalist epoch, contact and empire often led to the cultural assimilation of the less self-conscious and developed peoples, in the era of nationalism modernisation has paradoxically separated peoples by bringing them into contact and amplifying their demands for self-government and independence. Hence the rise of ethnic autonomy movements in the West, and of ethnonationalisms in the East, with the result that over twenty new states have been added to the existing number. In each case, modernisation and communications have increased the intensity of ethnic group contacts and the perception thereof, to the point where such contacts were seen as a threat to group identity, and an ethnonationalist response ensued (ibid.: 170–74; and Connor 1973).

Nations and modernity

Here, perhaps, lies the answer to Connor's question: when is a nation? When a sufficient number of people feel threatened by intergroup contact and become aware of their ethnic identity, and when they seek to participate in national politics to redress the situation. If modernisation cannot explain *why* the nation came into being, it can certainly tell us when it did so (ibid.: 170–171).

This conclusion is puzzling, for it is at one and the same time logical and paradoxical. Logically, it flows from Connor's premises that (a) the nation is a self-aware ethnic group and (b) nationalism is a mass phenomenon. 'Self-awareness' is an attribute of the individuals who compose the nation, and the quality of being a nation, or 'nation-ness', is one that attaches, not to groups as such, but to individuals – the members of the group. It is the members of a nation who are aware that

they belong to a nation; and only when a sufficient number feel they belong, can we say that an aggregate of individual members constitutes a nation.

But there is also something paradoxical in combining a perennial ethnicity with a radical national modernism. Connor, after all, insists on the ethnic nature of nations, thereby linking nationhood closely to an ubiquitous and perennial ethnicity. But, if the nation is simply a self-aware ethnic group, and ethnic groups (or 'pre-national peoples') can be found throughout history, why must we wait for the modern epoch for nations to form? On Connor's premisses, we would expect them to appear whenever large numbers of the members of ethnic groups felt they constituted a nation, that is, whenever they came to feel that their group was unique and to believe that they were ancestrally related; and such feelings, according to Connor, are likely to emerge whenever groups come into contact and their members feel a threat to their identity.

Now, while the modern epoch has certainly helped to bring different peoples into frequent contact, it is by no means unique in this respect. We may cite such well-known cases as the Roman empire, or the late medieval period, when large numbers of members of different peoples came into regular contact through travel, trade, warfare, colonisation and religious movements; and when empires and states extended their sway, posing threats to the identities of many peoples. The historical record of these encounters is full of ethnic rivalry and conflict, as well as of ethnic self-awareness. It is quite clear from such accounts as Doron Mendels' of the Hellenistic and Roman worlds, and Adrian Hastings' of the later medieval world, that ethnicity and the politics of self-aware cultural identity were widespread and fundamental, not just for élites, but for the mobilisation of large numbers of people, usually in wars or through religious rituals. Why, then, if nations are simply self-aware ethnic groups, insist on the modernity, indeed the very recent date, of nations? (Mendels 1992; Hastings 1997).

One answer might be that nationalism, as an ideology and movement, is modern; and nationalism has been important in providing a blueprint of the nation-to-be and of a world of nations. But this would not account for Connor's insistence on a twentieth-century dating for most nations, since nationalism was a doctrine that became politically dominant in the early nineteenth century, at least in Europe and the Americas. Nor would it address the argument, advanced by Hastings and Armstrong, that several nations have antedated the ideology of nationalism by some centuries and have displayed strong national sentiments well before the advent of a formal theory of nationalism (Armstrong 1982; Hastings 1997: Chapters 1–2).

The 'mass nation'

I think this insistence on the radical modernity of nations comes from deeper sources in Connor's work, namely, from the excessive importance he gives to psychological variables, as well as to the individual, and hence to quantitative methods of research.

To take the latter issue first. Throughout, Connor insists on the primacy of the

individual, and sees the nation as the sum of its individual members. We can really only grasp the 'essence' of the nation through an understanding of the beliefs and sentiments of its members. Not just of some of its (privileged) members, but of all of its members. Hence the quest for sources of evidence that will throw light on the attitudes of the common people (the masses) towards the idea of the nation. Hence, too, the insistence on the mass nature of nations and nationalism.

There is, of course, a long and fruitful tradition of applying quantitative and survey methods to social and political issues, both historical and contemporary. In one sense, Connor's work fits well into this tradition, with its empirical orientation and its assumption of methodological individualism. At the same time, Connor is aware of the limitations of such methods. He reminds us of the paucity of hard data in pre-modern epochs relating to the beliefs and feelings of non-élites; even in the modern period, we know very little about how peasants and artisans felt and thought about wider loyalties than the family and neighbourhood. This suggests that quantitative surveys (or 'head-counting') in this field should be treated with caution.

It also makes Connor's assertion of the absence of nations before late modernity all the more puzzling: How can we assume that the silence of the peasant masses is evidence of their lack of ethnic awareness, and hence of their nationhood? After all, pre-modern peasants were often equally silent about their religion or locality; but historians tend to argue that they were usually quite conscious of these ties. Perhaps the problem is not their silence, but their localism, which may impede a wider ethnic awareness? But this conventional picture of peasant households separated from each other and lacking wider links (Marx's 'sack of potatoes') needs to be qualified in view of the evidence of regional trade, of involvement in religious ceremonies and movements, of mobilisation for war, and of the influence of central ('Great') traditions. *How much* such wider ties meant to the peasant masses, we shall probably never know; but it is not unreasonable to suppose at least some measure of ethnic and religious awareness on their part.⁷

But there is a wider issue here. Must our understanding, indeed our definition, of the concept of the nation be so closely tied to 'the masses'? Is it really that helpful to research and understanding to assume that the nation is a 'mass phenomenon'? Is this not to link our concept of the nation too closely to the ideals and rhetoric of nationalism?

In many ways, this is the crux of the matter, the boundary that divides the basic paradigms of understanding in this field. For modernists, and on this issue we must include Walker Connor (albeit with some qualification), nationalism, the ideology, defines the meaning of the concept of 'nation', as well as being largely responsible for bringing historical nations into being. For their opponents, the perennialists (and the primordialists), nations antedated nationalism, and the concept of the nation provided the basis for the ideology of nationalism.

Now, the ideology of nationalism includes the modern belief in popular sovereignty, the political primacy of *all* the people. It is the marriage of popular sovereignty with ethnicity that, for Connor, forms the doctrine of national self-determination which is the very heart of nationalism. This appeal to all the people

as the sole legitimate source of power has been the basic and recurrent political motif since 1789, and the implication is that this idea was unknown, or at least of no account, before the French Revolution. This is why there were no nationalisms prior to modernity, and hence no nations. For, only when all the people become aware of, and are involved in, the community, as the ideology of nationalism prescribes, can we speak of them as truly constituting a 'nation' (see Kedourie 1960).

There are a number of questions here. While it is true that the ideology of nationalism proclaims the sovereignty of 'the people' and preaches their brotherhood (and latterly their sisterhood), in practice the nation has often been deemed to be constituted well in advance of the realisation of such *fraternité* and *sororité*. Massimo d'Azeglio's celebrated statement, that 'We have made Italy, now we must make Italians', actually attests to the (physical) existence of the nation (and not just as an élite idea) prior to the nationalisation of all of its members. In other words, it is not really necessary in practice for a nation to be a 'mass' nation at the point of its inception. In this sense, might not the nation constitute a duality – both an existing reality of cultural geography and a future project of social inclusion? Conversely, is it useful to declare a population a nation, only at the conclusion of an often long process of 'nation-formation'? The classical picture of the growth of nations from tiny élite nuclei in the early modern (or late medieval) period to the mass nation of late modernity may not, after all, prove a universal model. Perhaps we should rather see in this model an important part of the ideology of nationalism and its self-presentation, and hence its case for forming the nation? (see Hroch 1985).

In fact, it may be more useful for research and understanding to view the 'process' of nation-formation in more fluid and less evolutionary (and teleological) terms. After all, several 'processes' go into the making of nations, including the selection and codification of myths, symbols and traditions; the standardisation of language and culture; the rediscovery of ethno-history and the crystallisation of collective memories; the establishment of rites and ceremonies of the nation as a sacred communion of the faithful; the territorialisation of ethnic memories and of their political expressions; and the public inculcation of values, sentiments and traditions of the community. These processes may progress *pari passu*; alternatively, some may form and become widespread, while others hardly appear; and each process may be subject to 'reversals' and 'diversions'. Nor can we discern any determinate order, sequence or timing among these processes. There are many ways to make a nation, or for a nation to form. Hence the complexity and difficulty of 'dating the nation'.

Moreover, even if we could provide rough periods for each process, this still leaves open the question of 'dating', since the choice of the point in the process when it suffices to constitute a nation, is entirely arbitrary. Was 'Italy', for example, created in 1800 or 1870, or is it still being created? Or is it a recreation of Roman *Italia*?⁸

My point is that popular identification 'doth not a nation make'. At least, not alone. Connor is right to highlight the inadequacy of defining nations solely in terms of the attitudes and activities of élites, as many modernists continue to do;

and he has performed an invaluable service in reminding us of the need to give the majority of the designated population a much more central definitional and explanatory role. But, it does not advance matters to tie the definition of the concept of the nation so intimately to the number or proportion of individuals identifying with it, especially if this is something which, for pre-modern periods, we shall never be able to establish with any degree of certainty.

Moreover, to attempt to do so, is to rule out some historians' usage of the term 'nation' to fit their period of study, or to invite historians of different periods to use the same term in different ways, ones not necessarily in tune with modern nationalism's ideal of the 'mass nation'. Thus, medievalists like Adrian Hastings and John Gillingham are quite happy to use the term 'nation' (and, indeed, 'nationalism') in the absence of mass participation. Hastings, indeed, is quite explicit:

one cannot say that for a nation to exist it is necessary that everyone within it should want it to exist or have full consciousness that it does exist, only that many people beyond government circles or a small ruling class should consistently believe in it.

(Hastings 1997: 26; see also Gillingham 1992)

Hastings adds that, unless a society was composed exclusively of nobles and peasants, the fact that many of the peasantry had little sense of being part of it, does not of itself invalidate the existence of nations in early modern Europe. And he makes the crucial point that, in a France which was originally centred around the Paris region long before most of the peasants of what later became 'France' spoke French or felt themselves to be 'French', the early French nation must not be judged in terms of its later or present-day population and boundaries.⁹

The result of applying this quantitative methodology and its individualist underpinning would rule out, in advance, any relationship between, say, ancient and modern 'Armenia', or ancient and modern 'Israel'; the same proper name would be designating quite different referents, because the majority of the population of ancient Armenia and Israel *may* have felt little or no identification with the concept of an Armenian or Israelite 'nation'. Perhaps; but, again, perhaps not. We cannot know. Steven Grosby has argued, for example, that on a number of criteria – attachment to an historic translocal but bounded territory, common language, belief in a single deity and law with territorial jurisdiction, a belief on the part of many in the existence of the whole named people – we are entitled to term ancient Israel and Armenia 'nations', without incurring the guilt of a 'retrospective nationalism' (though this does not tell us whether there is any continuity between ancient and modern Armenia or Israel); after all, the fit between the sociological category of 'nationality' (as he terms it) and the modern national state is as problematic as it was in antiquity. In other words, in defining the concept of the nation we need to consider a number of different criteria and weigh the balance of probabilities in this elusive field, rather than rely on a largely quantitative approach (Grosby 1991 and 1997).

Psychology and structure

The other main problem with Connor's approach is its heavy reliance on psychological variables, and its psychological definition of the nation. For Connor, the essence of the nation is a psychological bond, based on kinship ties. Connor defines the nation in subjective terms, in terms of the beliefs and sentiments of individuals about their ancestry. The nation is, as we saw, the largest group of people 'who *believe* they are ancestrally related' (Connor 1994: 212, italics in original), 'the largest group of people that can command a person's loyalty through felt kinship ties' (ibid.: 202). Connor is not interested in real kinship ties or genuine ancestry; indeed, he makes the vital point that it is not what is, but what people *feel* is, that is significant for ethnicity and nationhood, and that, for the most part, what is felt to be ancestral and kin related does not correspond to any historical ancestry or actual kinship.

But does this mean that we are debarred from attempting to explain the intangible feelings and intuitive convictions of the members of nations? Does it follow that, because the nation may be defined in psychological terms, it cannot be *explained* in rational terms? On the contrary: we regularly attempt to explain social psychological phenomena in cultural and structural terms. Nor need we claim that ethno-psychological phenomena are inherently 'non-rational'; one could equally well argue that, in many circumstances, the drive for independence and national identity are quite rational (see Hechter 1992 and 2000). Nevertheless, Connor has a point. Modernist explanations (in terms of rational choice, relative deprivation, the modern state, industrial culture or invented tradition) generally pay little attention to psychological factors, and are often blind to the powerful sentiments and beliefs that constitute a sense of ethnicity and an ideal of nationhood. But that does not mean that we have to embrace a largely psychological position in seeking to define and explain nations and nationalism.

Let us agree with Connor that there are powerful subjective components of both ethnic groups and nations; and that our definition of the concept of the nation should reflect them. Thus, myths of origin will figure in any useful definition, as will shared memories and an attachment to an historic territory, or 'homeland'. But, while these subjective components may define the sense of common *ethnicity*, they cannot suffice for the more complex concept of nationhood. Here, we need to add other elements like a single public culture and common rights and duties for members; both are often taken to be components of the ideal-type of a nation, and figure prominently in nationalist ideology (see Smith 1986: Chapter 2 and 1991: Chapter 1).

In other words, the undoubted subjective components of the concept of nationhood need to be supplemented by more 'objective' components. This is true for both modernist definitions which delineate the concept of the nation in terms of the ideologies of nationalism; and for perennialist definitions which seek to establish the concept of the nation, independently of and prior to the ideas of the nationalists. As we saw, Connor's own definition is strictly psychological, and though he seeks to tie it to the ideology of nationalism and hence to modernity, it

would more plausibly lend itself to a transhistorical perspective, given the ubiquity of kinship ties and sentiments. In this connection, it is an interesting thought that, contrary to the assertions of most classical historians, Connor's approach and definition would almost certainly imply the existence of not only ancient Armenian and Israelite nations, but also of an ancient Greek nation. In all three, we find evidence of considerable collective awareness on the part of a large portion of, at least, the male population (again, we have hardly any evidence of the feelings of women in the ancient world). In the Greek case, this is in spite of the lack of Greek political unity, the fierce loyalty of citizens to their *polis*, and the deep ethnic subdivisions of Ionian, Dorian, Aeolian and Boeotian tribes and dialects. Notwithstanding, most ancient Greeks possessed a clear sense of the distinction between 'Greek' and 'non-Greek' or 'barbarian', at least since the Persian Wars. This intense Greek belief in their cultural superiority was, in turn, based on a sense of ancestral relatedness, recounted in their genealogical myths; hence, on Connor's psychological definition, the ancient Greeks constituted a 'nation' *par excellence*, long before the advent of nationalism (Hall 1992; but cf. Alty 1982; Finley 1986: Chapter 7).

National symbols and institutions

These contradictions in the dating of nations flow from the problems of an overly psychological approach to nations and nationalism, and from an insistence that nationalism and nations are necessarily mass phenomena. But, if purely subjective elements – attitudes, sentiments and beliefs – are insufficient to define a nation, what other types of component need to be included? There are, I think, two kinds of component, the symbolic and the institutional. I shall treat each briefly.

The first refers, not just to specific symbols (anthems, flags, coinage, etc.), but to the gamut of symbolic elements, including memories, traditions, codes, myths and values. These 'ethno-symbolic' elements, and especially codes, memories and myths, form vital components in the definition of *ethnies* and nations. Without them, a national community would lose its distinctive character and *raison d'être*. This has become once again an issue in an age of cultural imperialism and the 'flooding' of indigenous symbolism by standardised Western mass communications. In pre-modern epochs, the existence of distinctive symbolic repertoires in different populations indicated the presence of separate *ethnies*, whose members might be more or less self-aware. Even if our records are the product of specialist élites, they often reflect a much wider constituency. More important, the longer a symbolic heritage persists, the greater the likelihood that we are in the presence of a vibrant and distinctive ethnic tradition and community. Moreover, a focus on symbolism allows one to trace, through extant documents, codes and artefacts, the durability of ethnic cultural heritages, and their relationship with the modern nations that claim them, rather than having to rely on more or less informed guesses about the numbers who, in any period, may be aware of their ethnic or national identity (see Smith 1999: Introduction).

Equally important for the definition, but even more for the explanation of

nations, are the institutional elements. I have in mind such institutions as codes of law, educational practices, customs, rituals and liturgies (particularly of churches), artistic styles, specialist lore, and centres and institutions of prestige (especially dynastic). Some of these institutions overlap with those of the polity, where one is present, but their purpose is different. Where the institutions of the polity are directed towards the maximisation of power and physical resources, those of nations are concerned with the prestige and the distinctive culture of the community. Unlike John Breuilly, who discerns only churches and dynasties as possible institutional carriers of ethnicity in pre-modern epochs, I would argue that, along with the language code, each of the institutions listed above may serve as long-term vehicles for the reproduction of the distinctive heritage and character of ethnic communities and nations in each generation. Given the centrality of a public culture and common membership in the concept of the nation, the definition of the latter needs to include institutional, as well as symbolic and psychological, components.¹⁰

None of this should be understood as gainsaying the significance of the psychological elements that Walker Connor has so aptly highlighted and elucidated in his definition of the concept of the nation, nor its basis in ethnic, and ultimately kinship, sentiments, however fictive their actual historical origins. But, vital as they are, psychological elements do not exhaust the range of components that compose the ideal-type of the nation. A fuller, more rounded definition of the concept requires the mingling of 'subjective' and 'objective' components, and this suggests a definition of the nation as *a named human population occupying an historic territory, and sharing myths, memories, a single public culture and common right and duties for all members* – a definition flexible enough to fit various historical periods, from those where membership of the nation was fairly restricted and the public culture and rights and duties did not extend to everyone within the boundaries designated *at that time*, to the modern 'mass nation' where practically everyone within the designated boundaries partakes of membership, the public culture and common rights and duties (see Smith 1991: Chapter 1).

'Ancient' nations?

What are the implications of this analysis for the problem of the 'dating of nations'? We have already seen how arbitrary it must be to assign a date or even period for particular nations, or indeed to choose between the 'inception' and the 'completion' of the process of forming the nation. Besides being evolutionist and teleological, such a view assumes what is to be demonstrated, namely, that nation-formation is a 'process' with a recognisable beginning and end, one that accords with the self-image of nationalism. Since the ideology of nationalism is undoubtedly a modern phenomenon, and nationalism so often designates nations, should we not expect to find that the process of nation-formation is modern and that most nations are therefore modern?

Most nations, perhaps, but certainly not all. There is enough evidence to demonstrate that, on most of the criteria used to define the concept of the nation, nations

can be found in various periods of history, if only intermittently and temporarily. Of course, this concept of the nation is not identical with that of the 'mass nation' which Connor and the modernists embrace; but nor is it so different as to require another type-name. Thus, we might distinguish 'ancient' from 'modern' nations, not just in chronological terms, but also sociologically – the main difference being the extent to which the members are deemed to be equal citizens (if not always treated as such). In the ancient world, 'citizenship' was often understood in religious terms, as membership of and participation in the congregation, and 'culture' was often segmented by class, rather than being a standardised, public attribute of the community (see Breuilly 1993; cf. Grosby 1997).

Nevertheless, with these provisos, I think we can demonstrate the existence and vitality of nations in ancient Judea and Armenia, and possibly Sassanid Persia, as well as in medieval Japan, Korea and England. In all these examples, we find a named human population occupying an historic territory, or 'homeland', sharing myths, symbols and memories, possessing a distinctive public culture (albeit unstandardised), and common rights and duties for many, if not all, of the (usually male) members, though this is often understood in religious terms. These examples, I would contend, suffice to undermine the more radical forms of 'modernism'.

On Connor's own assumptions, this is hardly an unexpected conclusion. If we drop the assertion that nations (not nationalism) must be 'mass phenomena', then we would expect that a phenomenon rooted in ethnicity (and ultimately in presumed kinship ties) would not be confined to any particular period of history.¹¹ We would expect to find the type of community and identity which we term 'nation', wherever ethnic communities were strongly rooted and their members became aware of their cultural distinctiveness. That is often the case with 'chosen peoples', *ethnies* who possess powerful myths of origin and divine election. Such myths have been much more widespread and influential than is commonly supposed; and we should not be surprised if the strength of this conviction (along with other ethno-symbolic resources), contributed to the creation of nations out of often heterogeneous elements. Even in the ancient world, this was an active, purposive enterprise; it required a Moses, a St. Gregory, a Muhammad, and their followers, or some powerful rulers and their ministers, to give it shape (see Smith 1999: Chapter 3).

The same is true of nations in later, medieval, periods. Particular rulers and nobles, or various missionaries and clerics, schooled in distinct religious traditions, helped to forge ethnic communities out of unself-aware 'ethnic categories', often by providing rituals and liturgies, scripts and written vernaculars for the transmission of ethnic memories, myths and symbols; the classic instance is that of the missionary saints Cyril and Methodius in the Balkans (Petrovich 1980).

Then, in a further development, other élites enabled these communities to become nations by claiming on their behalf an historic territory and creating a common public culture and equal rights and duties for their members; these were often nationalist intellectuals and professionals, though in some early cases like England, Scotland, France and Holland, various rulers, nobles and clerics took the lead. This suggests that we can infer the development of particular nations from

evidence of common myths of ancestry and shared memories, claims to historic territories, and the creation of public cultures and law codes granting members of the community at that time equal rights and duties. Given the many processes involved, it would prove well nigh impossible to specify a period for the formation of the nation; all we could say is that, on the available evidence, several of these processes were converging to turn an ethnic community into a nation over several generations.

This progression, from an ethnic *category* to an ethnic *community* to a nation, follows the logic of the definition we have given, and it undoubtedly represents the most common pattern of historical development. But, and here I depart from Connor, we do find some instances of a different, even reversed pattern: from state to nation and ethnic community. For example, in Eritrea, the sense of a distinctive Eritrean identity was formed not only by a measure of geographical separation, but also by its separate colonial (Italian and British) administration, and by prolonged warfare. So the sense of common nationhood has been nurtured by the myths, symbols, memories and public culture of colonialism and a common struggle, and by claims to an historic territory, though, in the future, these political symbols of 'patriotism' (in Connor's terminology) may be combined with ethnic symbolic components, drawn from one or other of the ethnic communities that inhabit the Eritrean homeland (see Cliffe 1989).

Either way, dating the nation proves to be no simple matter. It cannot be ascertained simply by questioning the population of the designated nation as to the degree of their collective self-awareness. This is only one element in the ensemble of components of national identity, and an often uncertain one. Besides, this procedure assumes what needs to be shown; the population in question has been selected because it, and only it, comprises an already designated nation – a nation, in other words, named and differentiated on other and *prior* grounds, such as language or culture, history or territory, or a combination of these – grounds which are assumed by both members and outsiders.

This brings us to a final point: that nations exist in a world of nations, or at least, in a region of nations, and in relation to other nations. Even in antiquity and even among the most solipsist and chosen of peoples, it was assumed that the world consisted of analogous communities – inferior, no doubt, but still commensurable. The Hymn of Akhnaton specifically includes the nations of the world in the worship of the Sun-disk, the Aton; the sculptures on the staircase of the Apadana in Xerxes' palace in Persepolis portray the offerings of all the peoples of the ancient Near East; while the Old Testament is scathing in its denunciations of the idolatry of the heathen nations round about. The point is that nations are formed in relation to other nations, whether in alliance or enmity, through migration, conquest, trade, the flow of ideas and techniques, and so on. Their boundaries, as Fredrik Barth has shown, are crystallised and sustained through such contacts; and this has been the case, in varying degrees, across the centuries, not just in the modern world (see Barth 1969: Introduction; cf. Wiseman 1973).

This means that an additional factor in the dating of nations is some kind of 'recognition' by other nations and/or polities in the area, at least implicitly through

relationships and interactions, from which we can infer the existence of particular nations in history. But here, again, we need to exercise caution; the presence of such relationships does not, of itself, tell us whether the community in question is a 'nation', only that this is one of several possibilities.

Conclusion

The problem of dating the nation has haunted the study of nationalism, and Walker Connor has performed an invaluable service both in bringing it into the open as an issue in its own right and in revealing its importance for an understanding of the place of the nation in history and in the contemporary world. But the question of when is a nation is bound up with the prior question of what is a nation, and this problem will not be solved by spiriting it out of existence and substituting concepts like 'nationness' and 'national practices', as Rogers Brubaker recommends (1996: Introduction). Connor himself has been quite clear on this point, and has provided a compact and incisive definition of the nation, which he has then applied with clarity and rigour to the historical processes of nation-formation. It is a definition that offers a powerful corrective to the fashionable 'constructionist' approaches and definitions of the last two decades. In differing from his psychological approach and quantitative methodology in this area of study, and arguing for the inclusion of symbolic and institutional components in the definition – and hence the 'dating' – of nations, I do not mean in any way to diminish the significance of Walker Connor's achievement. On the contrary: without his powerfully argued and thought-provoking articles, the study of nationalism would still be mired in the confusions of terminology and imprecision of concepts which characterised earlier generations of scholars in this field.

But there is more to Walker Connor's achievement. He has consistently addressed the deep passion and wide resonance that the ideal of the nation evokes across the world and this has led him to uncover the powerful psychological well-springs of both its homely beauties and its volcanic terror. It is a measure of that achievement that, even where we may dissent from some of his conclusions, we can continue to draw inspiration and wisdom from his clear-sighted and penetrating analyses of nations and nationalism.

Notes

- 1 For advocacy of Greek continuity over the millennia, see Carras (1983); but cf. Kitromilides (1989). On the Pharaonic movement of the 1920s, see Gershoni and Jankowski (1987: chapters 6–8). For a general discussion of 'continuous perennialism', see Smith (2000: Chapter 2).
- 2 The main proponents of the classical modernist paradigm of nations and nationalism are Elie Kedourie (1960), Karl Deutsch (1966), Ernest Gellner (1983), Eric Hobsbawm (1990), Benedict Anderson (1991) and John Breuilly (1993). For an analysis of this paradigm, see Smith (1998: Chapters 1–6).
- 3 Besides being 'mass' and 'created', the modernists' nation is also 'territorial', 'legal-political', 'nationalist' and 'inter-nationalist'. That is to say, the modern nation is also a territorially bounded, self-governing political community whose members possess the

- legal status of citizens, legitimated by the universal ideology of nationalism, and part of an inter-national order; on which, see Smith (1995, 53–57).
- 4 For studies of ‘nation-building’, see the essays in Deutsch and Foltz (1963); and for Connor’s early and best-known onslaught on this position, see Connor (1972).
 - 5 This emphasis on *myths* of origin, as opposed to actual biological descent, differentiates Connor’s position sharply from Van den Berghe’s (1979) sociobiological account.
 - 6 See Carlton Hayes (1931) and Hans Kohn ([1944]1967). Connor’s argument involves three assumptions: nations are necessarily mass phenomena; national awareness is tantamount to participation; and, in democracies, participation is measured by voting. Here I concentrate on the first assumption.
 - 7 As Hobsbawm (1990: chapter 2) concedes. For the development of wider regional-local ethnicities in Europe during the Middle Ages, see Reynolds (1984: Chapter 8) and Lydon (1995).
 - 8 Perhaps a survey of national feeling in Horace’s and Virgil’s Italy would have revealed a high level of *amor Italiae*. But would that make Roman Italy a ‘nation’ and modern Italy its ‘Mark II’ revival? On ancient Roman and Italian sentiment, and Roman attitudes to ‘barbarian’ *nationes*, see Balsdon (1979); for modern Italian sentiment, or *italianité*, see Hearder (1983: Chapters. 6–7, 11) and Riall (1994: 70–74).
 - 9 This point is important in highlighting the ‘blocking presentism’ (Peel 1989) of modernism: if the nationalists (and some perennialists) are guilty of a ‘retrospective nationalism’, the modernists are equally culpable of applying a canon of the ‘modern nation’ (territorial, populous, culturally homogeneous, cross-class, created and nationalist) to pre-modern populations in the same area and bearing the same name and a cognate culture, in order to demonstrate that they cannot, and must not, be regarded as ‘nations’. Such *a priori* reasoning leaves little scope for exceptions or for ethnic formations.
 - 10 On this issue, see Breuilly’s (1996) critique of my view, and my reply in Smith (1998: 196–198).
 - 11 In fact, nationalism, whatever its rhetoric and aspirations, is very often a minority phenomenon (though not necessarily an élite one), as in some familiar Eastern European cases from the last century; see Argyle (1976) and Hroch (1985).

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