

# History and National Destiny

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## Introduction

This volume celebrates Anthony D. Smith's path-breaking contribution to the study of nations and nationalism. Its objective is to assess and debate various issues concerning the ethno-symbolic approach propounded by him.

Ethnosymbolism stands in opposition to the modernist approach underpinning constructivist and instrumentalist theories of nations and nationalism. It argues that such theories fail 'to accord any weight to the pre-existing cultures and ethnic ties of the nations that emerged in the modern epoch' (Smith 1999: 9). In Smith's words: 'For ethno-symbolists, what gives nationalism its power are the myths, memories, traditions, and symbols of ethnic heritages and the ways in which a popular *living past* has been, and can be, rediscovered and reinterpreted by modern nationalist intelligentsias. It is from these elements of myth, memory, symbol and tradition that modern national identities are reconstituted in each generation, as the nation becomes more inclusive and as its members cope with new challenges' (Smith 1999: 9).

According to Anthony D. Smith, the basic themes or motifs derived from the claims made by ethno-symbolism are:

1. *La longue durée*. The origins and formation of nations as well as their possible future course should be traced over long periods of time, and we should not 'tie their existence and formation to a particular period of history or to the processes of modernization' (Smith 1999: 10). Nations are historical phenomena.
2. *National past, present, and future*. This is a major theme examined under three headings: recurrence, continuity, and reappropriation. Smith argues that the majority of nations and nationalism emerged in the modern world while admitting that some nations pre-dated modernity. In his view, 'the rubric of continuity points to the persistence of cultural components of particular nations' (Smith 1999: 11), while reappropriation represents a 'reaching back into the ethnic past to obtain the *authentic* materials, and ethos for a distinct modern nation' (Smith 1999: 12).
3. *The ethnic basis of nations*. Most nations, modern and pre-modern, were based on ethnic ties and sentiments and on popular ethnic traditions, which have provided the cultural sources for later nation-formation (Smith 1999: 13).

4. *The cultural components of ethnies*. The pre-existing components and long-term continuities of ethnic communities and nations are cultural and symbolic rather than demographic.
5. *Ethnic myths and symbols*. Myths of ethnic origin and election, and symbols of territory and community are key components of ethnicity.
6. *Ethno-history*. This denotes the ethnic members' memories and understanding of their communal past or pasts, rather than more *objective* and dispassionate analysis by professional historians (Smith 1999: 16).
7. *Routes to nationhood*. It refers to the various processes leading to the construction of modern nations.
8. *The longevity of nationalism*. It concerns the power and durability of nations and nationalism encompassing 'nationalism as a modern ideological movement, but also the expression of aspirations by various social groups to create, defend or maintain *nations* – their autonomy, unity and identity-by drawing on the cultural resources of pre-existing ethnic communities and categories' (Smith 1999: 18).

This volume aims to explore the implications of this framework by bringing together scholars from different perspectives to address some of the major issues in the field. Anthony Smith in setting out a prospectus for the contributors laid down a challenge which he framed in these terms:

Of the many issues that have engrossed, and divided, scholars in the study of nationalism, none has been so critical as the problem of the origins of nations. All other issues have in the end revolved around this question: should we regard nations as perennial in history, perhaps even primordial to the human condition, or are they a product of very specific, modern conditions, and hence qualitatively novel? Unlike the fashionable question as to whether nations are 'real' or 'constructed' (since in a sense all human categories and associations are 'constructed', but for the participants they are all too 'real'), this seems to me to be a genuine problem, and one which has a strong bearing on the persistence or erosion of a sense of national identity in a 'post-modern' world.

Of course, the question of the modernity or antiquity of nations depends in part on our definitions of the concept of 'nation'; but it also reflects a view about the relations between nations and 'nationalism'. Broadly speaking, those who believe that nationalism (the movement and ideology) was instrumental in creating nations also subscribe to a modernist belief in the post-Revolutionary advent of nations. Conversely, those who hold that the rise of a nationalism depends on the prior existence of a corresponding nation (or *ethnie*) tend to regard nations as neither so recent nor so novel, but rather as phenomena that reflect continuity and recurrence across the pre-modern/modern divide.

A further perspective argues that, even if nations and nationalism are temporally and qualitatively modern, they draw much of their content and strength from pre-existing *ethnies*. Though most nations have been created out of ethnically heterogeneous populations, those that can point to a dominant *ethnie* as the fulcrum of their community and state, have been historically among the most influential and sociologically among the most 'successful' in terms of longevity, consciousness and distinctiveness, if not always of power. Hence, the study of the components of *ethnies* (myths of descent and election, attachment to homelands, shared memories of

ethno-history, various symbols of identity, etc.) has become an important focus for illuminating the origins and persistence of nations.

These manifold debates have created several clearly discernible 'positions' on the basic issues in the field. Thus we can speak of a modernist, a primordialist, a perennialist and an ethnosymbolic approach – as well as a variety of less well defined 'post-modern' (not necessarily 'post-modernist') approaches. This is not to say that all scholars subscribe to one or other of these approaches; various combinations are possible, and have been effected. But as a heuristic tool (and pedagogic aid), these approaches serve as a useful point of departure for further research and analysis.

Out of these conflicting paradigmatic approaches, a number of more specific debates and issues have engaged, and divided, the scholarly community. They include:

1. Problems of definition and nomenclature: more specifically, how we are to distinguish 'nations' from ethnic communities (or *ethnies*) and national states, and how the phenomena described by these concepts are related, historically and sociologically;
2. The problem of 'pre-modern nations': in what sense, and to what degree, we may legitimately speak of 'nations' (if not 'nationalism') in pre-modern epochs in different parts of the world; and how far back in time we can trace the components of modern nations;
3. The problem of participation: whether we can speak of 'elite nations' and 'middle class nations', or only of nations that in which the majority of the population participates, i.e. 'mass nations'; and if the latter, what proportion of the designated population counts for this purpose;
4. The related problem of 'citizenship': whether nationhood always requires 'citizenship' in a polity, or how far non-political membership (e.g. of a religious community) may act as a functional equivalent; and hence whether the concepts of both 'nation' and 'nationalism' are predominantly political or mainly cultural;
5. The problem of 'ideology': to what extent we should regard 'nationalism' as a political ideology on a par with other such ideologies, or as a form of culture and a secular or political 'religion';
6. The question of 'typology': whether there can be a single 'core doctrine' of nationalism, or, whether the term 'nationalism' is a shorthand for a variety of discourses and ideologies, some of them more 'voluntarist' and others more 'organic';
7. The issue of 'chosenness': the relationship between earlier concepts of ethnic election and modern nationalism, and the degree to which a sense of national identity is continuous with, influenced by or radically different from religious beliefs in chosen people;
8. The problem of 'memory': how far ethnic history should be regarded as a construct of present (nationalist) elites or whether, as shared memories of 'golden ages', it can exert an inspirational influence on the creation of modern national cultures and a sense of national destiny;
9. The problem of 'homelands': how far popular attachments to 'historic homelands' are the product of modern states and elites strategies, or are grounded in primordial cultural beliefs, ethnic history and memories of wars and sacrifice;

10. The problem of popular ‘resonance’: how far elites can mobilise populations by creating and channelling mass sentiments through rituals and traditions, or are constrained by pre-existing popular myths, symbols and traditions;
11. The problem of ‘representation’: how far images of the nation disseminated in literature and art should be regarded as cultural artefacts of elites in the creation and diffusion of the national idea, or, whether they can be seen as expressions and crystallisations of a pre-existing ethnicity or sense of national identity, with artists and writers articulating the ‘voice’ of the nation, or its major myths, memories and symbols;
12. The problem of ‘passion’ or ‘mass sacrifice’: how far nationalist fervour and sacrifice can be understood as strategic choice and calculation, or more in terms of familial bond and religious commitment;
13. The problem of ‘ethnicity’: the extent to which modern nations and nationalism are still permeated by ethnic attachments and exclusiveness, and how far the ‘ethnic-civic’ dichotomy of nations and nationalisms is a valid distinction and a useful heuristic tool;
14. The problem of ‘transcendence’: how far nations, as well as nationalism, as products of modernity, are likely to be superseded by ‘post-modern’ continental networks or global associations, or whether nations and their members’ sense of national destiny, if not nationalism, are in a sense ‘transhistorical’, or are reinvigorated by globalism, and hence likely to persist.

### **Content and structure**

We asked the scholars represented here to engage with one or more of these questions in their contributions.

John Armstrong is with Anthony Smith the scholar most associated with the study of the nation in *la longue durée*. Here he considers the questions of definition and periodisation. He argues that viewing the nation as an ideal type has limited Smith’s nuanced conceptualization of historical development of identity communities; a feature which Smith has managed to overcome with his vigorous defence of the *ethnie* as a usual preparatory stage for the nation. He highlights Smith’s rejection of both rigid periodization and fixed ideology in defining the emergence of nations. A recurrent question concerning some scholars of nationalism refers to the difficulty in distinguishing between *ethnie* and nation chronologically. Armstrong states that greater research into regions outside Europe will probably support the conclusion that the *ethnie* is a highly appropriate term for the modern European heirs of Hellenism. In his view, however, this may not be appropriate for Far Eastern peoples or Africans who had to endure colonial struggles for self-determination. In addition, Armstrong emphasizes that the legacy of myths and symbols, crucial to Anthony D. Smith’s ethnosymbolic approach, has derived to a great extent from the Jewish and the Christian traditions. He stresses existing differences within these religions and moves on to consider the broader influence of religion on nations and nationalism. In particular he wonders whether a

consideration of how African religions with their novel, but far from unprecedented, pantheon may contribute to ethnic formation will revise our current understanding of the role of religious structures.

Bruce Caughen explores the theme of 'Chosen peoples', the subject of Anthony Smith's most recent book. He focuses on the relevance attributed by Smith to the myth of divine election for modern nationalist movements. Caughen, as well as Armstrong and Smith, highlights the significance of religion for the study of nations and nationalism and signals its recent political resurgence after 9/11. He analyses Smith's account of the ways in which myths of ethnic election serve as a mechanism for socio-cultural survival and a stimulus for ethno-political mobilization, paying particular attention to how the concept of chosen people intensifies the identification of a community with its homeland. He argues, following Smith, that religious chosenness continues to inspire the United States of America's sense of national mission and has exerted an enduring influence in its foreign policy even throughout the 1980s. He considers how such a sense of mission inspired the USA in its struggle against communism, the Vietnam War and the end of the Cold War. In his view, after 9/11, Americans have seemed to rediscover a sense of national mission against insidious threats seeking to undermine its democracy and prosperity.

Anthony Smith is frequently criticised (see Eriksen contribution) for overstressing the ethnic component of nations. In Walker Connor's essay, part of a long running debate with Anthony Smith concerning the antiquity of nations, he is taken to task for his confusion of state and nation, and for his attempt to deny that nations must be mass social formations. He questions Smith's assertion that some nations existed in pre-modern times. In Connor's view, the nation is the largest group that can command a person's loyalty because of felt kinship ties; it is, from this perspective, the fully extended family. However, the sense of unique descent need not and, in nearly all cases, will not accord with factual history, since nearly all nations originate from the mixing of peoples from various ethnic origins. For this reason, what matters is not chronological or factual history but sentient or felt history. Connor maintains that elites have made general claims about the existence of national consciousness within their countries when until quite recent times it is doubtful whether ostensibly nationalistic elites even considered the masses to be part of their nation.

Thomas Hylland Eriksen seeks to overcome the divide between constructivism and primordialism. He agrees with the latter in claiming that community and shared memories are crucial for the formation of national sentiment, while he accepts the former's emphasis on creativity in conjuring nations into existence since, in his view, national solidarity can emerge from diverse seedlings. It is his contention that there is no logical reason why the mythomoteur often referred to by Smith should necessarily generate an ethnic group rather than another kind of corporate entity based on ascription. Following this line of argument, Eriksen wonders whether one is a member of a

nation by virtue of a shared ethnic identity/origin, or by virtue of living in the same place. Eriksen considers territorial and kinship forms of identification and concludes that the crucial question to be answered is: under which circumstances do metaphoric kinship and metaphoric place of the national kind function? In his view, there are some empirically functioning alternatives to the ethnic nation, which are limited by both human experience and human nature.

Eric Kaufman and Oliver Zimmer consider Smith's contribution to the study of the role of dominant ethnicity within contemporary nations. They argue that Smith acknowledges the current interplay between dominant ethnies and the nation. In their view, while Smith offers an accurate analysis of how dominant ethnic come to form the core of modern nations, he fails to consider evidence questioning the tenacity of dominant ethnies within post-industrial Western nations. Kaufman and Zimmer argue that Smith partly evades discussing the future of dominant ethnicity because his primary concern is to consider the viability of nations in relation to supranationalism and globalization as new forms of cultural-political organization which are currently being developed. It is their contention that greater emphasis should be given to the possibility of trans-national 'life-style' enclaves and subcultures usurping ethnic-national identity.

Joshua A. Fishman has long been associated with a primordialist approach to the role of language in national identifications. Here he examines the relationship between corpus planning (how the language morphologies are constructed) and status planning (the domains, public and private, in which languages are used) as two necessarily co-present aspects of any total language planning effort. One-post Klossian assumption to which he subscribes is that (successful) status planning is the real stimulus to subsequent corpus planning. In the light of data collected by the author he constructs a more complex model in contrast with the unidirectional nature of his earlier theory. He argues that regardless of where our account of language planning begins, one state feeds into the next in an ongoing feedback sequence. He identifies four dimensions of corpus planning: purity versus vernacularism, uniqueness versus internationalization, classicization versus *Sprachbund* dimension and *Ausbau* versus *Einbau* as directions of corpus planning. He stresses that various novel additional factors possess the potential to bring about a redirection and re-balancing of previous emphases in corpus planning. It is his contention that changes in the ethnocultural and political orientation of particular societies impact upon corpus planning in order to adjust it to the objectives of the new authorities leading their respective speech-and-writing communities.

In many contexts, particularly the stateless nations of Central and Eastern Europe, national identities arise first among tiny groups of intellectuals, and one of Smith's enduring interests is in what he calls vernacular mobilisation, namely the construction of the nation via communitarian rather than state-led strategies. Miroslav Hroch's work on the phases of nationalism has made a deep impact on the field. Here, he considers the origins of the Czech nation (Bohemian nation): in particular he analyses the processes leading to the

transition from Phase A dominated by nationally 'neutral' scholars to Phase B defined by their national engagement. He describes the political and cultural environment within which nationalism arose and explains the reasons that convinced some intellectuals to construct a new Bohemian national identity which managed to permeate the masses. Hroch mentions the influence of the secularization of higher education together with the liberalization of intellectual and scientific life in the emergence of a new intelligentsia of professional individuals partially independent from state and religious control. He stresses the impact of the French revolution, the military billeting during the Napoleonic wars, and the various civic celebrations, which took place in the 1790s, in fostering a sense of community. He then considers various factors and events resulting in the construction of a distinctive national identity around 1800.

Montserrat Guibernau argues that Anthony D. Smith's classical theory of nations and national identity fails to establish a clear-cut distinction between the concepts of nation and state. In her view, by including 'legal rights and duties for all members' Smith is attributing to the nation one of the fundamental characteristics of the state. Guibernau offers a critique of Smith's classical definition of the nation and moves on to consider Smith's recent changes to it while considering the reasons which might have motivated them. Drawing on some key aspects of Smith's theory she advances an alternative definition of national identity in the twenty-first century. She considers some new challenges posed by globalization to classical strategies in national identity construction and, in particular, she examines the political dimension of national identity. Guibernau locates the emergence of the nation-state, nationalism and national identity in late eighteenth century Europe.

The question of the transition between premodern ethnic and modern national identities remains underexplored. John Hutchinson examines how an emphasis on the persistence of ethnic identities is compatible with the innovative, even revolutionary, character of nationalism and the rise of the territorially extensive, socially mobile, and mass political units that we call nations. He considers the impact of neo-classical and romantic ideas upon the national revivalists' construction of a dynamic view of the role of ethnic communities in history. He refers to romantic revivalists as moral innovators, providing novel directions at times of social crisis and able to generate change by a 'regeneration' rather than an eradication of collective traditions. Hutchinson stands against theories, which portray the nation as invented, instead he speaks of an *overlaying* of tradition.

Athena S. Leoussi considers the problem of the representation of the nation in the visual arts. Drawing on Anthony D. Smith's work, Leoussi examines how from the eighteenth-century onwards, demotic, historical and ethno-cultural themes became a constant source of inspiration for artists both inside and outside Europe. She illustrates her assertion by specific references to the presence of national art in a wide range of countries. She argues that the participation of artists in the formulation, crystallization and celebration of

ethno-cultural roots and identities succeeded in transforming modern societies. In her view, the development of national art has been closely connected with the rise of modern art. It is her contention that visual arts have acted as crucial vehicles of cultural nationalism, have been accepted as 'national' and have become totemic symbols of the nation.

Stein Tonnesson examines the future of national states in a global world. He challenges classical assumptions about how to measure the 'success' of states. In his view, at present, the success of states is measured by their ability to adapt to regional and global trends, promote exports, attract investments and skilled labour, promote research, wield political influence at a regional and global level and 'brand' the nation culturally. He examines Anthony D. Smith's typology of routes to nationhood and argues that a further route based on the idea of 'class', emerging within some Asian countries, should be included. He examines China, Singapore, Russia and Vietnam as case studies. Tonnesson moves on to consider which of the four types of state (ethnic, civic, plural and class) are better equipped to survive and flourish in the global age. He concludes that the most successful national states may be those whose populations engage not just individually, but nationally, in global issues.

Mary Kaldor considers nationalism to be a political process, a subjective affirmation and re-affirmation that will not necessarily disappear in an era of globalization. In contrast with Smith, she argues that nationalism is a modern phenomenon, inextricably linked to the rise of the modern state and to industrialization. She establishes a distinction between 'spectacle nationalism', as an evolution from the more militant nationalism of the first half of the twentieth century employed to legitimize existing states, and what she refers to as 'new nationalism'. The latter is anti-modern, exclusive, backward looking, bred in conditions of insecurity and violence, and has much in common with religious fundamentalism. She examines the role of violence within new nationalisms and illustrates it with references to various recent conflicts emerging in various parts of the world. Kaldor considers the role of war in generating nationalism and analyses the ideology of global Islam promulgated by Osama Bin Laden and Al Qaeda as a new variant of the new nationalism which emerged in the late 1990s. She stands for cosmopolitanism as an ideology combining humanism with a celebration of human diversity.

## Reference

Smith, Anthony D. (1999). *Myths and Memories of the Nation*. Oxford University Press: Oxford.