

# The timelessness of nations

---

WALKER CONNOR

*Middlebury College, Munroe 213, Middlebury, VT 05753, USA*

**ABSTRACT.** Anthony Smith has criticized my conclusion that most of the peoples currently recognized as constituting nations acquired national consciousness only in the late nineteenth or early twentieth centuries. He traces our disagreement to fundamental differences concerning the essence of the nation. A comparison of our definitions confirms profound differences, and it is contended that Smith's definitions, by joining two quite dissimilar and often conflictual identities (civic and ethnic) preclude a dialogue concerning the nature and the history of 'the nation'. A rejoinder to Smith's specific criticisms is followed by a restatement of the factors that make calculating when a given nation emerged so difficult. Finally, it is noted that the issue of when a nation came into being is not of key significance: while in factual/chronological history a nation may be of recent vintage, in the popular perception of its members, it is 'eternal', 'beyond time', 'timeless'. And it is not facts but perceptions of facts that shape attitudes and behavior.

## Preamble

In 1989, I presented a paper entitled 'When is a nation?' at a conference in London.<sup>1</sup> Anthony Smith, who attended the conference, subsequently requested that I allow it to appear in *Ethnic and Racial Studies* (Connor 1990). The article appears to have elicited a surprising amount of interest in LSE circles. John Hutchinson and Anthony Smith were good enough to include it (in abbreviated form) in their Oxford collection on nationalism (Hutchinson and Smith 1995: 154–9). Smith, who (as any serious student of nationalism is aware) has written voluminously and eruditely on the evolution of national identity, graciously credited me with 'bringing [the issue of dating a nation] 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.' (Smith 2002: 68). The Fourteenth Annual Conference of the Association for the study of Ethnicity and Nationalism (ASEN) to be held at LSE during 2004 is entitled 'When is the nation?', and my participation was solicited, according to an ASEN officer, because it was I who had raised the issue.

Now this is all very flattering but, at the risk of impersonating Dickens' deceitfully self-deprecating Uriah Heep, my piece does not merit such attention. The article in question was a modest, ten-page effort, little more than a few ruminations omitted from a just completed piece entitled 'From tribe to nation?' (Connor 1991). The title of the earlier work, absent the

question mark, had been assigned; my addition was to indicate that the progression, assumed by some anthropologists, from family, to band, to clan, to tribe, to nation has certainly not proved to be an iron law of group evolution. Cases were offered of peoples who once appeared to many to be destined to form a nation (e.g., a Slavic 'nation') but which in fact produced several nations, as well as cases in which nations evolved from highly unlikely multiethnic materials (e.g., the English, French, or German nations). Toward its end, the article addressed the question of when did national consciousness become a reality among those European peoples – Dutch, English, German, Russian, Swedish, etc. – who have unquestionably evolved into nations. After acknowledging the inspiration for raising the question to Eugen Weber's *Peasants into Frenchmen: the Modernization of Rural France, 1870–1914* (Weber 1976) and examining other data, the article concluded that today's nations came into being much more recently than has been generally acknowledged.

As implied by its title, 'When is a nation?' focalized to a greater degree upon the issue of when did various nations emerge. Smith's piece in 2002, which was alluded to earlier, was essentially a critique of this article. His principal concern was that it was too modernistic, not permitting sufficient allowance for the possibility of nations existing prior to the nineteenth century. He attributed this to my insistence that nationalism is a mass – not an elite – phenomenon. This is indeed fundamental. If one person accepts as conclusive early historical references to the existence of a nation on the part of an aristocrat, cleric, or scribe, while another discounts such claims in the absence of evidence of national consciousness among the putative nation, sharp disagreement concerning the time of the nation's emergence is to be anticipated.

Smith also maintained that our disagreement was rooted in different perceptions or definitions of the nation, and, in the course of reviewing some of his work for this response, I was indeed surprised to learn that our perceptions of the nation are at far greater variance than I had realized. As will be noted below, my own definition of the nation is tied inextricably to ethnicity: a belief in or an intuitive conviction of common descent. In a very early work, Smith explicitly denied any significant role to ethnic considerations and emphasized common citizenship as an essential element (Smith 1971: 180, 171, 186, 187). However, after reading what I consider to be his magnum opus – *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (Smith 1986) – which contained statements such as 'not only must nations be founded upon ethnic cores if they are to endure' (p. 207) – I thought our perceptions were compatible.<sup>2</sup> However, as will be noted below, Smith's use of *nation* is far more inclusive than my own. Indeed, I fear so much more inclusive that intellectual dialogue may be impossible.

What follows, nonetheless, is essentially a response to Smith's concerns beginning with the matter of definitions. Perhaps it is worth noting that this is the first time that I have ever responded to a critique of my work. I do so in acknowledgment of my respect for Smith's scholarship.

### What is a nation?

Smith finds my definition of the nation inadequate in that it amounts to a purely psychological explanation at the expense of more objective components. Here is my definition and a corollary:

*Definition:* The nation is the largest group that shares a sense of common ancestry.

*Corollary:* The nation is the largest group that can be influenced/aroused/motivated/mobilized by appeals to common kinship.

Each of these definitions differentiates the nation from all other groups. Is there a Basque, Polish, or Welsh nation? Yes. Is there an American, British, or Indian nation? No.

Each of these definitions is complete in itself. Are there elements that contribute to the feeling of common ancestry? Of course! The major students of nationalism before World War II customarily investigated factors that often accompany national consciousness: common language, religion, and the like. But as stated 30 years ago, when investigation is concentrated on the essence of the nation, such tangibles are 'significant only to the degree that they contribute to the sense of uniqueness' (Connor 1972: 337). They are the commonly encountered accompaniment, the accoutrement, of the nation, and their impact upon national identity should be studied through a comparative lens.<sup>3</sup> That impact will vary both among nations and over time.

The definition employed by Smith in his 'Dating the nation' is quite different. The nation, he wrote, is 'a named human population occupying an historic territory, and sharing myths, memories, a single public culture and common rights and duties for all members' (Smith 2002: 65). This is not a definition that succeeds in categorizing nations according to their essence. It would not, for example, differentiate the notion of British from that of Welsh. Or Belgian from Fleming. Or Spanish from Basque.

It is evident that Smith's 'nation' is much more supple than my own. A very succinct yet comprehensive statement of his overall approach to the nation attests to this (Smith 2001: 86–87):

[T]here have emerged two symbolic conceptions of the modern nation. On the one hand, there is a more 'civic-territorial' ideal of the nation, one which emphasizes the importance of long-term residence in a clearly demarcated territory, of the part played by unified law codes and legal institutions over the whole territory, of the equal and common rights and duties of citizenship in the territorial nation, and of the central role of a public, civic culture for all citizens which embodies the myths, memories and symbols of the nation. On the other hand, there is a more 'ethnic-genealogical' conception of the nation, which stresses the importance of presumed ancestry ties and kin relatedness for citizenship, the crucial role of popular mobilization and a participant populace, the centrality of vernacular language, customs and culture, and the binding force of authentic, native historical memories of and in the homeland. ... [T]here is

considerable overlap between these two conceptions of the nation. Actual instances of the nation have both civic and ethnic components, and there is a constant oscillation and flux between the preponderance of civic or ethnic myths and symbols. The notions of a unified national identity, a homeland and citizenship play vital roles in both conceptions, and both insist on the importance of possessing a common and distinctive mass culture.

Smith's first 'nation' is therefore synonymous with citizenship in a state regardless of that state's ethnic composition. Although Smith's second conception of 'the nation' is concerned more with kinship and ancestry, it also ties the nation solidly to citizenry in a state. This association with the state is also evident in his earlier cited definition with its references to 'a single public culture and common rights and duties'.<sup>4</sup> And in a still earlier definition (Smith 1991: 14), Smith included as essential 'a common economy', which, of course, could be experienced (if at all) only within a single state. According to Smith's criteria, then, the Germans of West and East Germany were not a single nation between 1945 and the reunification of 1990, nor currently are the Basques, Catalans, and the many other national peoples divided by state borders.

The use of the word nation to refer to a state or to the citizenry of the state regardless of its ethnic composition, as well as the corresponding tendency to use nationalism to refer to loyalty to the state (which should be termed patriotism) rather than to the nation as I have defined it, is very common in the literature,<sup>5</sup> and has been the principal cause of the ambiguity and confusion plaguing the study of nationalism (Connor 1978).<sup>6</sup>

The current vogue among writers on nationalism is to refer to loyalty to the state as civic nationalism and loyalty to the nation as ethnic nationalism. But this only tends to propagate the misconception that we are dealing with two variants of the same phenomenon. If Smith and others prefer to use civic identity or civic loyalty in preference to patriotism – fine. But the fundamental dissimilarities between state loyalty and nationalism should not be glossed over by employing the noun nationalism to refer to two quite different phenomena.

There is much more involved here than mere semantics. The two loyalties are of two different orders of things (kinship versus civic), and while in the case of a people clearly dominant within a state (for example, the ethnically Turkish or Castilian peoples) the two may reinforce one another, in the case of minorities (such as the Kurds of Turkey or the Basques of Spain) the two identities may clash. Indeed, the political history of the world since the Napoleonic Wars has been largely a tale of tension between the two identities, each possessing its own irrefragable and exclusive claim to political legitimacy. I therefore recommend the following glossary:

### **Glossary**

*Ethnic* – derived from *ethnos*, the ancient Greek word for a nation in the latter's pristine sense of a group characterized by common descent; the prefix *ethno* therefore means national.

*Ethnonationalism* – a redundancy, coined in response to the general tendency to *misuse* the word nationalism to convey loyalty to the state rather than to one's national group; it is designed to leave no doubt in the reader's mind that the author is discussing loyalty to the nation.

*Ethnocracy* – an ethnically homogeneous political unit; it can vary in size from a small village to a modern state.

*Gemeinschaft* – an association resting upon a sense of kinship, real or imagined; gemeinschaft groupings include the family, band, tribe, and nation.

*Gessellschaft* – an association of individuals resting upon the conviction that their personal self-interest can be best promoted through membership in the group; whereas a gemeinschaft society is based upon sentiment, the gessellschaft society is in large part a product of rational self-interest (in political philosophy, the case for the political legitimacy of the gessellschaft state has been closely tied to the notion of the social contract).

*Nation* – a group of people sharing a myth of common ancestry; it is the largest grouping that can be mobilized by appeals to common blood (nation is often *improperly* employed as a synonym for state, as in the League of Nations or the United Nations, or as a synonym for the citizenry of a state regardless of its ethnic complexity, as in references to 'the American nation').

*Nationalism* – identity with and loyalty to one's nation in the pristine sense of that word (see above); nationalism is often *incorrectly* used to refer to loyalty to the state.

*Nation-state* – that relatively rare situation in which the borders of a state and a nation closely coincide; a state with an ethnically homogeneous population.

*Patriotism* – devotion to one's state and its institutions (*civic nationalism* is the currently fashionable, but confusing, substitute for patriotism; *civic loyalty* or *civic identity* would better convey this type of devotion, without misrepresenting it as a form of nationalism).

*State* – the major political unit in world politics; country.

### **The dating of nations**

Some of Smith's criticisms of 'When is a nation?' appear to be due to a misunderstanding. The article did not rule out the possibility of ancient and/or medieval nations. It did not address the issue. What it did address, as noted at its outset, was the time of the emergence of national consciousness among those European peoples who are 'currently recognized nations'. Moreover, the article did not deny historical roots to nations (the existence of which Ernest Gellner and Smith once debated under the rubric of whether nations have navels). Again, it did not address the issue, but it did acknowledge the evolutionary character of the nation in the opening sentence of the abstract: 'Although numerous authorities have addressed the question, "What is a nation?", far less attention has been paid to the question, "At what point *in its development* does a nation come into being?"' (Emphasis added.)

Ethnic identity and ethnic conflict have been fixtures throughout history, but today's special foci of ethnic identity, which we call (or should call) nations, are relatively recent creations, very few antedating the late nineteenth century. As noted, Eugen Weber deserves credit as the pathfinder. He documented that most people within France in 1870 lived in culturally isolated rural villages and were devoid of French consciousness. Awareness of being French expanded in subsequent decades as more intensive communication and transportation networks developed and centralized administration (particularly over the schools) improved, but the process was still incomplete by World War I. A survey of group identities on the part of European migrants to the USA during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries confirmed that the French example was not unique. Concepts of Croatian, Italian, Norwegian, Polish, Lithuanian and the like were largely absent. People regularly identified themselves in terms of village, clan, district, region, or a local ethnic identity such as Kashube. Settlement patterns in the host country, as well as the names and membership of social organizations, reflected these divisions. Relations between small collectivities who ostensibly formed a single national group were often conflictual, and intermarriage was extremely rare.

The Dutch who came to the USA in the 1840s and 50s represent a particularly fascinating case because (1) they came from a small country that posed no barriers to transportation and communication and (2) had long been treated by historians as a people sharing a common identity. But upon arrival in the USA, they proved to be a remarkably diverse people whose local identities obscured any common Dutch consciousness.

Immigrants carried this localism to America and frequently tried to create segregated enclaves within larger Dutch communities. The pattern was particularly evident in the colony of Holland, Michigan. The central town, called simply *de stad*, was founded in 1847 largely by people from Geldeland and Overijssel provinces. Within two years, new arrivals founded villages within a 10-mile radius bearing the provincial names of Zeeland, Vriesland, Groningen, Overisel, North Holland, Drenthe, and Geldersche Buurt (Gelderland Neighborhood), or the municipal names Zutphen, Nordeloos, Hellendoorn, Harderwijk, and Staphorst. There was even a settlement called Graafschap, consisting of Dutch-speaking, Reformed Church Germans from Bentheim in Hanover. The majority of settlers in these villages originated in the place bearing the village name; they spoke the local dialect and perpetuated local customs of food and dress. The entire Michigan settlement was known as *de Kolonie*, but it required the passing of the first generation before the colony became a common community. The Pella, Iowa, and Chicago settlements, also founded in 1847, similarly had particular regional origins (Thernstrom 1980: 287).

Recent scholarship conducted by specialists on the history of one or another European people does not challenge the validity of the American example. There is a consensus that a broad scale national consciousness cannot be detected among the Baltic, Germanic and Slavic peoples prior to the nineteenth century. We have already noted Eugen Weber's concurrence with regard to most people living within France. Even the remarkable case of the Dutch in the USA is replicated by the Danes at home. Again, despite their limited number

and a small country offering no physical barriers to integration (as well as a lengthy history as a kingdom), Danish national consciousness was a surprisingly recent, nineteenth century development (Ostergard 1992).

The literature on the English represents a partial exception. There has been a recent spate of monographs and articles, variously assigning the emergence of nationalism among the English to eras stretching from the early medieval period to the late nineteenth century. The most recent of these efforts, which includes a 53-page bibliography, favors the case for the late nineteenth century (Kumar 2003: particularly 202–25).

How can scholars disagree so starkly? This was part of my explanation offered in ‘When Is a nation?’ (100):

A key problem faced by scholars when dating the emergence of nations is that national consciousness is a mass, not an elite phenomenon, and the masses until quite recently isolated in rural pockets and being semi- or totally illiterate, were quite mute with regard to their sense of group identity(ies). Scholars have been necessarily largely dependent upon the written word for their evidence, yet it has been the elites who have chronicled history. Seldom have their generalities about national consciousness been applicable to the masses, and very often the elites’ conception of the nation did not even extend to the masses.

In short, evidence of ethnic consciousness among the aristocracy or the literati cannot be accepted as evidence of national consciousness without evidence that it is shared across a broader spectrum of the putative nation.

Smith’s response, as noted, is to question the description of the nation as a mass phenomenon. I confess that I do not know how to answer this, because I assumed that all students of nationalism agreed that the nation, when applied to a named people such as the English, German, or French, implied a single group consciousness that transcended in its appeal all lesser divisions within the group. It is in this form that the nation becomes a major force in history, and this is why historians date the age of nationalism to the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Era. A Saxon of the period offered a remarkably perspicacious evaluation and prediction (Palmer and Cotton 1971: 448):

The Revolution has awakened all forces in the French and given to each force its proper sphere of action. ... What infinite power lies sleeping undeveloped and unused within the womb of the nation! Within the breasts of thousands there lives a great genius, but their lowly condition prevents its flowering. ... The Revolution has set in action the national energy of the entire French people, putting the different classes on an equal social and fiscal basis. ... If the other states wish to establish the former balance of power, they must open up and use these same resources. They must take over the Revolution.

In sum, we study nations and nationalism because they have been and continue to be so consequential, and they became and remain so consequential because their appeal has not been restricted to elites but has extended to all major segments of the people bearing the nation’s appellation. Smith rhetorically asks: ‘must our understanding, indeed our definition, of the concept of the nation be so closely tied to the masses?’ (2002: 60). To the degree that ‘the

masses' suggests a social classification (the *hoi polloi*, the Third Estate, the common people), the answer is no. The nation, to be a mass phenomenon, must refer to the entire mass, 'the masses' and elites alike.

This brings us to the question of how broadly national consciousness must be shared by the mass before we can describe it judiciously as a nation. Smith describes my position as 'only when the great majority of a designated population has become nationally aware, can we legitimately speak of it as a nation' (2002: 57). Here is what I wrote:

The delay – in some cases stretching into centuries – between the appearance of national consciousness among sectors of the elite and its extension to the masses reminds us of the obvious but all-too-often ignored fact that nation-formation is a process, not an occurrence or event. And this, in turn, further thwarts the attempt to answer the question, 'When is a nation?' Events are easily dated; stages in a process are not. At what point did a sufficient number/percentage of a given people acquire national consciousness so that the group merited the title of nation? There is no formula. We want to know the point in the process at which a sufficient portion of the populace has internalized the national identity in order to cause appeals in its name to become an effective force for mobilizing the masses. While this does not require that 100 per cent of the people have acquired such national consciousness, the point at which a quantitative addition in the number sharing a sense of common nationhood has triggered the qualitative transformation into a nation resists arithmetic definition.

Having thus stressed that 'there is no formula', I did not further address the complexities of this question in my short piece. If I had done so, I would have noted that even the very loose standard of a point sufficient to permit appeals in its name to undergird an effective popular movement may face ambiguities when applied to a given people. Napoleon is customarily credited with being the first major historical figure to have employed such appeals and, as reflected in the foregoing quote from a Saxon contemporary, to have unleashed thereby a new, formidable element into global affairs. And yet we know that some one-third of Napoleon's forces were foreign mercenaries, and that most of the people in rural France did not share a French national consciousness for at least a half-century following Napoleon's death. This is in keeping with my reminder that nation-formation is a process. Did the French people deserve the title of nation during the Napoleonic Era? Or only later in the century? I am very tempted to say 'Who cares?' The preeminent point is that with Napoleon and the *levee en masse* we have our first evidence that national consciousness was no longer restricted to the aristocracy or other elites. Weber's study established that the spreading of this identity was indeed a process still underway between 1870 and 1914. His study also underlined how inappropriate it was for historians to place much credence on a few historical references to a much earlier French nation: very reputable historians had been beguiled into assertions, such as 'the texts make it plain that so far as France and Germany were concerned this national consciousness was highly developed about the year 1100'.<sup>7</sup> An assertion based upon an historical assertion is still just an assertion.



Smith also took sharp exception to a passing reference to dating national consciousness in a democracy (Smith 2002: 57):

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 mobilized along national lines. But in democracies, mass participation as measured in the 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: 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.

He repeats and extends his criticism in his most recent article (Smith 2003:2).

There is, first, an empirical problem, since one of the key features of the modernist definition is mass participation, that is, the involvement of its members in the social and political life of the nation. Walker Connor has explained this stipulation as requiring a majority of its members to be aware of belonging to the nation, which, in a democracy, would mean that they must participate in politics and therefore be able to vote. So, no nation could be said to exist before the early twentieth century, since in the vast majority of cases women were not enfranchised until after the First World War. But such a radical modernism, besides forcing us to rewrite the very terms of European and American histories, conflates a sense of belonging with political participation and enfranchisement, and militates against Connor's other observation that the nation emerges in stages (even if we cannot so term it until there is mass political participation).

Now this is what I wrote:

In some societies the history of the voting franchise also offers hints of when a nation came into existence. As we are reminded by the history of the rise of national consciousness in, *inter alia*, Japan and Germany, democratic institutions are certainly no prerequisite for nation-formation. However, if a society describes itself as a democracy, then 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. If the rights of Englishmen include the right to vote, then what can one say concerning a so-called English nation in which most Englishmen were prohibited from exercising that right? Before 1832, when landlords alone were allowed to vote, it is estimated that only one in sixty adult English males could vote. Following the so-called Reform Bill of that year, one in every thirty male adults would be permitted to do so.

Please note that I do *not* say that in democracies, 'mass participation as measured in elections provides the best indicator of nation-formation'.<sup>8</sup> I am not interested in the level of *participation* but in the restriction to an elite of a fundamental democratic *right* (the franchise which in the case at hand meant a restriction to less than 2 per cent of the would-be-nation prior to 1832).<sup>9</sup> Please note also that I did not mention the matter of woman suffrage. It was not germane to the specific context because the right of women to vote was denied

throughout the nineteenth century to all women; had women of the aristocracy and gentry been favored in this regard, it would have been germane. Finally, note that I only suggested that the franchise might ‘offer hints of when a nation came into existence,’ not that it represent, to quote Smith, ‘the best indicator.’ Indeed, to be consistent, Smith should embrace this data on the *right* to vote as a conclusive indicator of the absence of an English nation in the early nineteenth century, since it is his definitions of the nation that stress ‘common rights and duties’.

### **Onward and upward**

Nothing in ‘When is a nation?’ ruled out the possibility of nations existing in pre-modern times. Even the mild closing warning that ‘claims that a particular nation existed prior to the late nineteenth century should be treated cautiously’ applied only to ‘Europe’s currently recognized nations.’ Perhaps the Iceni who revolted against the Romans under Queen Boudicca in 61 could be shown to deserve being called a nation; but the case must be made on evidence and not on simple assertion. Similarly, the search by Smith and others to find something akin to national sentiments among the elites of earlier ages is to be applauded, if proper regard is paid to how broadly across the named people (French, English, etc.) these sentiments were intended to be shared and were in fact shared. Here I can only suggest that painstaking and imaginative research can go far toward accomplishing this (for more specifics, see Connor 2005). But for most current students of nations and nationalism, such research will require a reordering of primary interest in ascertaining the view of group-self held by elites to that held by the people writ large. Sensitivity to shreds of evidence of the perception(s) that the multitude themselves hold of their group identity(ies) must be developed. Weber’s *Peasants into Frenchmen* can aid in this development, as can the works of James Scott with regard to deciphering attitudes on the part of seemingly voiceless peasants (see also Connor 2005). If the nation is a mass phenomenon, then our priority should be to render the mass intelligible.

As for the article ‘When is a nation?’ that was the focus of both Smith’s critique and this response, I believe I would stand by the following:

The chronological fixing of the birth of any nation is usually a matter of great dispute. In some instances, historians have placed the advent of a nation in the Middle Ages, while others have maintained that the same nation’s formation came about only in the late nineteenth century. In the case of some putative nations (for example, the Montenegrins), it is problematic whether nationhood has even yet been achieved. The fact that scholars can disagree by hundreds – in some cases several hundreds – of years about the date to be assigned the emergence of a nation or can disagree whether a nation does or does not presently exist underlines the difficulties involved in such calculation. Among the barriers to dating the formation of a nation are:

(1) National consciousness is a mass- rather than an elite-phenomenon, and the masses, until quite recently isolated in rural pockets and being semi- or totally illiterate, were quite mute with regard to their sense of group identity(ies).

(2) The dependence of scholarship upon the written word has necessarily caused undue weight to be given to the opinions and assertions of the literate elite, whose generalizations concerning the existence of national consciousness are often highly suspect; in many cases those declaring the existence of a nation prior to the nineteenth century considered the masses ineligible for membership. The danger posed by over reliance on the written word is underlined by many instances in which individual, contemporary members of the intellectual elite claimed contending national identities for the same people (Macedonian vs. Bulgar, Montenegrin vs. Serb).

(3) There is a lag time of varying, in some instances unending, duration between the espousal of a national consciousness by members of a literate elite and its adoption by the masses.

(4) Nation-formation is a process, not an occurrence, and the point in the process at which a sufficient portion of a people has internalized a national identity so as to make appeals in the name of the nation an effective force for mobilizing the masses does not lend itself to precise calculation.

(5) The process of nation-formation is not sequentially preordained, but capable of terminating at any point and, if not essentially completed, capable of reversal.

(6) The sense of constituting a distinct and ancestrally related people, which is central to the sense of nationhood, often has little relationship to fact, so the ethnographic history of a people is therefore often of little pertinence to the study of nation-formation.

### **The timelessness of nations**

To again risk assuming the persona of Uriah Heep, I do not feel that the issue of 'When is a nation' is of key significance. Although today's nations may in fact be modern phenomena, in a more important sense they defy dating. Stathis Gourgourus, Professor of Comparative Literature and Hellenic Studies at Princeton, has stated this seeming paradox with remarkable brevity and clarity:

My long term research into the nature of national formation and the development of nationalism in both Europe and Greece has taught me two insurmountable historical facts: (1) national symbols are always people's inventions, and (2) people often die for them with the satisfaction of serving eternal truth (Letter to the Editor, *New York Times*, 9 May 1994).

Identity does not draw its sustenance from facts but from perceptions; not from chronological/factual history but from sentient/felt history.

Failure to appreciate that national identity is predicated upon sentient history undergirds a current vogue in the literature on national identity to bifurcate contributors in terms of (1) 'primordialists' and (2) 'social constructivists'/'instrumentalists'/'modernists.' What is missed in all this academic labeling is that, while from the viewpoint of objective history, today's nations are modern creatures, in popular perceptions they are, to borrow a word from Gourgourus, 'eternal', that is to say, 'beyond time', 'timeless'. And it is not facts but perceptions of facts that undergird attitudes and behavior.

## Notes

1 Keynote Paper, 'When is a nation?', *Conference on Pre-Modern and Modern National Identity in Russia/the USSR and Eastern Europe*, University of London, School of Slavonic and East European Studies, March 1989.

2 There were, however, troubling references still to the necessity of common citizenship, e.g., on p. 165: 'Central to the concept of the nation is citizenship.' And the multiethnic Swiss were described as 'a solidary nation' (p. 146).

3 In earlier works, I have comparatively investigated the impact of homeland, religion, and economic considerations upon national identity.

4 Smith (2001) actually added a third type of 'nation' (one formed by multiethnic, immigrant societies, such as in 'America, Canada, or Australia') which would be even less influenced by myths of descent.

5 In the eighteenth century, the French statesman, Robert Turgot, complained of such a loose usage, insisting that *nation* continue to denote 'a group of families and peoples who speak the same language' and not 'a state [or] a people living in the same territory and subject to the same authority' (Cited in Margue 1979: 44–5).

6 Smith maintained that his 1991 definition which included, *inter alia*, common rights and duties and a common economy 'sets it clearly apart from any conception of the state. The latter refers exclusively to public institutions, differentiated from, and autonomous of, other social institutions and exercising a monopoly of coercion and extraction within a given territory. The nation, on the other hand, signifies a cultural and political bond, uniting in a single political community all who share a historic culture and homeland.' (Smith 1991: 14–15). Presumably, however, the 'political bond' and the 'single political community' imply a state. In any case, a people divided by a political border would not be considered a nation under Smith's definition.

7 For this and other illustrations of unsubstantiated early claims of nationhood, see Connor (1990: 92). The reference to German nationalism in 1100 is equally unfounded. For evidence that it was a late nineteenth century development (see Hamerow 1969, Hughes 1988, Gagliardo 1969).

8 In some manner unclear to me, Smith ties his interpretation of my passing comments on democracy to what he critically describes as my 'quantitative methodology'. This characterization is made four times (Smith 2002: 59, 62 (twice), and 68). As one who has never squared a chi and who views quantitative analytical studies of comparative nationalism as of little value, I must demur. Smith further pairs this characterization of my work as quantitative with what he sees as an inappropriate overemphasis upon the individual to produce 'methodological individualism' (Smith 2002: 60). Connor 'insists on the primacy of the individual and sees the nation as the sum of its individuals members' (pp. 59–60). I have never insisted or even suggested any such thing. My nation, after all, is 'a mass phenomenon'. It is the 'gessellschaft' – Smith's 'civic nation' – that rests upon individualism (see the above Glossary).

9 The issue of participation may merit a comment. Smith elsewhere attributes my view of nations currently recognized as such as being of recent vintage to three alleged assumptions: 'nations are necessarily mass phenomena; national awareness is tantamount to participation; and, in democracies, participation is measured by voting' (Smith 2002: 69). To the first assumption I plead guilty. The third (which I deny) is treated in part below. The second I do not understand. Certainly I would maintain that before acknowledging the existence of a nation, some evidence for popular national consciousness must be uncovered. But this could be passive resistance by a group to an authority viewed as alien, including the many forms of passive non-compliance brilliantly described by James Scott (See, for example, Scott 1986: 5–35). Or the passive protection extended by a homeland people to a guerrilla movement conducting a war of national liberation or resistance. For a fuller treatment of the varied forms of evidence of the existence/non-existence of a nation, see Connor (2005).

## References

Connor, Walker. 1972. 'Nation-building or nation destroying?', *World Politics* 24.

- Connor, Walker. 1978. 'A nation is a nation, is an ethnic group, is a ...', *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 1: 377–400.
- Connor, Walker. 1990. 'When is a nation?', *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 13: 92–103.
- Connor, Walker. 1991. 'From tribe to nation?', *History of European Ideas* 13: 5–18.
- Connor, Walker. 2005. *Popular Sovereignty*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Gagliardo, John. 1969. *From Pariah to Patriot: the Changing Image of the German Peasant 1770–1840*. Lexington State of Kentucky, University Press of Kentucky.
- Hamerow, Theodore. 1969. *The Social Foundations of German Unification 1858–1876*, Vol.2. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Hughes, Michael. 1988. *Nationalism and Society: Germany 1800–1945*. London: Edward Arnold.
- Hutchinson, John and Anthony Smith (eds.). 1995. *Nationalism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Kumar, Krishan. 2003. *The Making of English National Identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Margue, Pierre. 1979. *Contre L'Etat-Nation*. Paris: Denöel.
- Ostergard, Uffe. 1992. 'Peasants and Danes: the Danish national identity and political culture', *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 34: 3–27.
- Palmer, R. R. and Joel Cotton. 1971. *A History of the Modern World*. 4th ed. New York: Alfred Knopf.
- Scott, James. 1986. 'Everyday forms of peasant resistance' in *Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance in South-East Asia*. London: Frank Cass.
- Smith, Anthony. 1971. *Theories of Nationalism*. London: Duckworth.
- Smith, Anthony. 1986. *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Smith, Anthony. 1991. *National Identity*. London: Penguin.
- Smith, Anthony. 2001. 'Ethno-symbolism' in Athena Leoussi (ed.), *Encyclopaedia of Nationalism*. New Brunswick: Transaction.
- Smith, Anthony. 2002. 'Dating the nation' in Daniele Conversi (ed.), *Ethnonationalism and the Contemporary World: Walker Connor and the Study of Nationalism*. London: Routledge.
- Smith, Anthony. 2003. 'The genealogy of nations: an ethnosymbolic approach'. Forthcoming.
- Thernstrom, Stephen (ed.). 1980. *Harvard Encyclopedia of American Ethnic Groups*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Weber, Eugen. 1976. *Peasants into Frenchmen: the Modernization of Rural France, 1870–1914*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.