

# The Concept and Its Varieties

Before we can embark on a substantive historical sociology of nations and nationalism, we must have a clear idea of the objects of our enquiry. Second, we need to examine the social processes and cultural resources of the formation and persistence of nations. Third, the question of premodern nations requires a deep historical perspective and a cultural genealogy of nations that stretches back to the ancient Near East and the classical world, if we are to gauge the traditions through which different types of national identities were formed in the early modern period. These, then, are the tasks of each of the following three chapters.

The modernist conception of the nation sees it as the quintessential political form of modern human association. For most modernists, the nation is characterized by:

- 1 a well-defined territory, with a fixed center and clearly demarcated and monitored borders;
- 2 a unified legal system and common legal institutions within a given territory, creating a legal and political community;
- 3 participation in the social life and politics of the nation by all the members or “citizens”;
- 4 a mass public culture disseminated by means of a public, standardized, mass education system;
- 5 collective autonomy institutionalized in a sovereign territorial state for a given nation;
- 6 membership of the nation in an “inter-national” system of the community of nations;

7 legitimation, if not creation, of the nation by and through the ideology of nationalism.

This is, of course, a pure or ideal type of the concept of the nation, to which given instances approximate, and it acts as a touchstone of nationhood in specific cases. As such, it has become almost “taken-for-granted” as *the* definitive standard from which any other conception represents a deviation. (1)

### Problems of the Modernist Conception

But closer inspection reveals that the modernist conception of the nation is historically specific. As such, it pertains to only one of the historical forms of the concept, that of the *modern nation*. This means it is a particular variant of the general concept of the nation, with its own peculiar features, only some of which may be shared by other forms or variants of the general concept.

Can we be more specific about the provenance of the ideal type of the *modern nation*? A glance at its salient features – territoriality, legal standardization, participation, mass culture and education, sovereignty, and so on – places it squarely in the so-called *civic-territorial* tradition of eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Western Europe and North America. It was in the age of revolutions and the Napoleonic Wars that a conception of nationhood distinguished by the rationalist, civic culture of the Enlightenment, notably its later “Spartan” or “neo-classical” phase associated with Rousseau, Diderot, and David, became prevalent. As Hans Kohn documented many years ago, this conception of the nation flourished mainly in those parts of the world where a powerful bourgeoisie took the lead in overthrowing hereditary monarchy and aristocratic privilege in the name of “the nation.” This is not the kind of nation imagined, let alone forged, in many other parts of the world, where these social conditions were less developed or absent. (2)

Now, if the concept of the *modern nation* and its peculiar features derive from eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century conditions in the West, then the modernist ideal type is inevitably a partial one, because it refers to a specific subtype of the generic concept of the nation, the *modern nation*, and only one kind of nationalism, the civic-territorial

type. This means that a specific version of a general concept stands in for the whole range of ideas covered by that concept, a version that bears all the hallmarks of the culture of a particular time and place. It also means that the assertion of the modernity of the nation is no more than a tautology, one which rules out any rival definition of the nation, outside of modernity and the West. The Western conception of the *modern* nation has become the measure of our understanding of the concept of the nation *per se*, with the result that all other conceptions become illegitimate.

Methodological grounds apart, there are a number of reasons why such an arbitrary stipulation should be rejected. In the first place, the term “nation,” deriving from *natio* and ultimately *nasci* (to be born), has a long, if tortuous, history of meaning, going back to the ancient Greeks and Romans. As we saw, its usage was not confined to geographically defined student bodies in medieval universities or to assembled bishops at Church Councils hailing from different parts of Christendom. It derived from the Vulgate translation of the Old and New Testaments, and from the writings of the Church Fathers, who opposed the Jews and Christians to all other nations, who were termed collectively *ta ethne*. Ancient Greek itself used the term *ethnos* for all kinds of groups sharing similar characteristics (not only human ones); but authors like Herodotus sometimes used the cognate term *genos*. In this, they were not unlike the ancient Jews, who generally used the term *am* for themselves – *am Israel* – and the term *goy* for other peoples, but with no great consistency. The Romans were more consistent, reserving for themselves the appellation *populus Romanus* and the less elevated term *natio* for others, and especially for distant, barbarian tribes. In time, however, *natio* came to stand for all peoples, including one’s own. We cannot regard these premodern usages of *natio*/nation as purely “ethnographic,” in opposition to the political concept of modern usage, for this does scant justice to the range of cases from the ancient and medieval worlds that combine both usages – starting with ancient Israel. Even though the meanings of terms often undergo considerable change in successive periods, still we cannot so easily dismiss the long history of these usages prior to the onset of modernity. (3)

A second problem concerns the modernist conception of the “mass nation.” This has been partly addressed in connection with Walker Connor’s thesis of mass participation in the life of the nation as the

criterion of its existence, and hence the need, in a democracy, for the enfranchisement of the majority of the population as a condition for designating it a nation. But it goes beyond this particular issue. Modernists like Karl Deutsch, Ernest Gellner, and Michael Mann regard the “mass nation” as the only genuine form of the nation, and as a result treat the nation as a strictly modern phenomenon. Theorists are, of course, perfectly entitled to designate a particular phenomenon – the “mass nation” in this case – as the sole political “reality,” and regard every other version as secondary and insubstantial, if not misleading. But if medieval historians can demonstrate the historical basis and importance of these other versions, which is exactly the point at issue for the neo-perennialists, the modernist stance once again becomes arbitrary and unnecessarily restrictive. This applies also to the weaker claim that the mass nation of modernity is the “fully fledged” version of the nation, and all others are lacking in some measure: does this mean that we cannot conceive of other kinds of nation from which the masses were excluded? After all, well into the modern epoch, few recognized nations could be termed “mass nations” – many members of their populations, notably the working class, women, and ethnic minorities, remained in practice excluded from the exercise of civic and political rights. So we should at least be prepared to recognize the possibility of other kinds of “nation,” apart from “mass nations.” (4)

A further problem stems from the common modernist assertion that nations are the product of nationalisms (with or without help from the state), and since *nationalism*, the ideological movement, appeared no earlier than the eighteenth century, nations must also be modern. But, even if we accept that, as a systematic ideology, nationalism did not emerge before the eighteenth century, the assumption that only nationalists create nations is questionable; and this is true, even if we define the *ideological* movement of nationalism, along with other ideologies, in relatively “modernist” terms, as I think we must, if only to avoid confusing it with more general concepts like “national sentiment” or “national consciousness.”

Now, by *nationalism*, I mean *an ideological movement for attaining and maintaining autonomy, unity, and identity on behalf of a population, some of whose members deem it to constitute an actual or potential “nation.”* And similarly, I think we can designate a “core doctrine” of nationalism, a set of general principles to which nationalists adhere, as follows:

- 1 the world is divided into nations, each with its own history, destiny, and character;
- 2 the nation is the sole source of political power;
- 3 to be free, every individual must belong to and give primary loyalty to the nation;
- 4 nations must possess maximum autonomy and self-expression;
- 5 a just and peaceful world must be based on a plurality of free nations.

In this sense, it was only in the later eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries that “nationalist” ideologies were embraced by writers and thinkers in West and Central Europe, from Rousseau and Herder to Fichte and Mazzini. As such, nationalism is a modern doctrine, and the ideological hallmark of that modernity resides in the relatively novel assumptions about political autonomy and authenticity that underlie the doctrine, and in the way these are combined with a political anthropology. (5) But this is not to deny that some elements of the doctrine go back much further. For example, ideas of the nation and a comity of nations were clearly present at the Council of Constance in 1415, and we can find many references to nations and their relations in earlier centuries, going back to antiquity, even if their interpretation poses serious problems. This means that some conceptions of the nation, which may well differ from modern conceptions of the nation, antedate by several centuries the appearance of nationalism and its particular interpretations of the nation; and as a result the concept of the nation cannot be simply derived from the ideology of nationalism. To confine the concept and the practice of the nation to an era of nationalism, and regard them as products of this modern ideology, is again arbitrary and unduly restrictive. (6) But perhaps the most serious defect of the modernist ideal type of the *modern nation* is its inherent ethnocentrism. This has, of course, been recognized by many theorists. Yet, they continue to treat the Western civic-territorial form of the modern nation and its nationalism as normative, and other forms as deviations. This was the basis of Hans Kohn’s celebrated dichotomy of “Western” and “non-Western” nationalisms mentioned earlier. The latter, unlike their rationalist, enlightened, liberal counterparts, tend to be organic, shrill, authoritarian, and often mystical – typical manifestations of a weak and disembedded intelligentsia. Kohn’s dichotomy has been followed by John Plamenatz, Hugh Seton-Watson, Michael Ignatieff, and many others for whom the popular

distinction between “civic” and “ethnic” nationalisms encapsulates this normative tradition. (7)

Now, while these theorists would concede that “ethnic” nationalisms share with their “civic” counterparts such features as collective attachments to a “homeland,” as well as ideals of autonomy and citizenship for “the people,” they also highlight the very considerable differences. In the “ethnic” variant of nationalism, the nation is seen to be possessed of:

- 1 genealogical ties – more specifically, presumed ties of ethnic descent traceable through the generations to one or more common ancestors, and hence membership of the nation in terms of presumed descent;
- 2 vernacular culture – a culture that is not only public and distinctive, but also indigenous to the land and people in terms of language, customs, religion, and the arts;
- 3 nativist history – a belief in the virtues of indigenous history and its special interpretation of the history of the nation and its place in the world;
- 4 popular mobilization – a belief in the authenticity and energy of the “people” and its values, and the need to rouse and activate the people to create a truly national culture and polity.

This implies that, for ethnic nationalists, the “nation” is already in place at the onset of both modernity and nationalism in the form of pre-existing ethnic communities available and ready, as it were, to be propelled into the world of political nations. So, for example, in this “neo-perennialist” view, the Arab nation, descended from Arabic-speaking tribes of the Arabian peninsula, has persisted throughout history, at least from the time of the Prophet, and exhibits the classic features of an “ethnic” nation – presumed genealogical ties of descent, a classic indigenous vernacular culture (notably Qur’anic Arabic), a nativist Arab ethnohistory, and the ideal of “the Arabs” of Islam as the fount of wisdom and virtue who only need to be mobilized to achieve political autonomy. In this and similar cases, we witness the failure of modernism to include this quite different ethnic conception of the nation, which in turn derives from its theoretical rejection of any necessary linkage between ethnicity and nationhood. (8)

## Category and Description

One of the main problems with the modernist conception is its failure to recognize that the term “nation” is used in two quite different ways. On the one hand, it denotes an analytic category differentiating the nation from other related categories of collective cultural identity; on the other hand, it is used as a descriptive term enumerating the features of a historical type of human community. The problem is compounded by the fact that the historical type of human community denoted by the term “nation” is cultural and/or political, or both: that is, it designates a type of human community that is held to possess a collective cultural identity or a collective political identity, or both. (9)

There is, of course, nothing improper about using terms like “nation” to describe the features of certain kinds of historical community. The problem arises when the description is such as to restrict arbitrarily the range of instances which might be included under the ideal type of the nation seen as a category of analysis. Of course, the degree to which this constitutes a serious defect is a matter for individual judgment. But my contention is that most modernists, prompted by their theoretical stance, have gone too far in the direction of arbitrary and unnecessary restriction. If they were content to describe a subset of the general category of nation, i.e., the *modern nation*, there would be no problem. But they then go on to assert that this subset stands for the whole, and this is where a descriptive historical term becomes entangled with a general analytic category. This is not to embrace a neo-perennialist approach which would make it difficult for us to distinguish national from other kinds of collective cultural and/or political identity, or to decide which instances of community and identity fell under the “national” rubric. It is exactly these kinds of distinctions that attempting to keep the analytic category of the nation separate from its use as a descriptive term may enable us to make. (10)

Given the complex ramifications of the concept of the nation, it is no easy task to separate the analytic category from the historical descriptions of the nation. The descriptive use of the term will be necessary for enumerating the features of different subtypes of the general category of the nation. But, before we can attempt such historical description, we need a clear understanding of the nation as a general analytic category differentiated from other related categories.

The first step, then, is to define the concept of the nation in ideal-typical terms, and thereby recognize the persistent nature of the analytic category as a transhistorical ideal type. Here the term “nation” represents an analytic category based on general social processes which *could* in principle be exemplified in any period of history. By differentiating the analytic category of the nation from other categories of collective identity, we may avoid designating all kinds of community and identity as “nations.” At the same time, this procedure offers some chance of freeing the category of the nation from undue restrictions and offers the possibility of finding instances of the nation outside the modern period and the West, if the evidence so indicates. Thus the concept of the nation, like that of the religious community and the *ethnie*, should in the first instance be treated as a general analytic category, which can in principle be applied to all continents and periods of history. On the other hand, the content of the “nation” as a historical form of human community, exemplified in the specific features of its subtypes, will vary with the historical context. With each epoch we may expect important variations in the features of nations, but they will nevertheless accord with the basic form of the category. As at one and the same time an analytic category based on general social processes and a historical form of human community characterized by a cultural and/or a political collective identity, the ideal type of the nation is inevitably complex and problematic, and its construction is for this reason a fraught and contested task, and one which necessarily involves an element of stipulation. (11)

In this spirit, I propose the following ideal-typical definition of the “nation,” as *a named and self-defined human community whose members cultivate shared myths, memories, symbols, values, and traditions, reside in and identify with a historic homeland, create and disseminate a distinctive public culture, and observe shared customs and common laws*. In similar vein, we may also define “national identity” as *the continuous reproduction and reinterpretation of the pattern of values, symbols, memories, myths, and traditions that compose the distinctive heritage of nations, and the identification of individuals with that pattern and heritage*. (12)

Three assumptions have led to the selection of the features of the ideal type. The first is the centrality of social processes and symbolic resources in the formation and persistence of nations, giving them their distinctive but flexible character. The second is that



many of the features of the ideal type derive from prior ethnic and ethno-religious symbols, traditions, myths, and memories among populations deemed to be similar or related. Together, these two assumptions address the question of “who is the nation?” i.e., the unique character of the historic nation. The third assumption is that these social processes and symbolic resources, though subject to periodic change, may resonate among populations over long periods of time. This means that our analyses of the formation and persistence of nations require, as John Armstrong has so clearly demonstrated, a scrutiny of social and symbolic processes across successive historical epochs over the *longue durée*. (13)

The insistence on analyzing social and cultural elements over the long term implies, first of all, that nations be treated separately from nationalism, and that the formation of nations needs to be investigated independently of the rise of the ideological movement of nationalism. Second, by bringing together past (history), present time, and future (destiny), the way is opened for long-term analysis of ethnic and national phenomena across different epochs. This in turn may suggest different ways in which the social and cultural features of *ethnies* (ethnic communities) and nations can be linked.

There are three main ways in which such connections are made. The most obvious, and the one sought by most historians of nations and states, is through *continuity* of forms, if not content. Here we are usually speaking about linkages between medieval (rarely ancient) communities and *modern nations*. As we shall see, even historians of medieval and ancient communities tend to measure their degree of “nationness” by the yardstick of the characteristics of the *modern nation*, if only to deny the presence of nations in their period. This entails another form of “retrospective nationalism,” in which, as Bruce Routledge puts it, the past is seen as the mirror of the present. Thus, the normal way of claiming continuity for given nations is to trace back the lineages and roots of the modern form of the nation into medieval times, in the manner advocated by Adrian Hastings and the “neo-perennialists” for Western Europe. Alternatively, one can argue that some of these modern nations have drawn on the social and symbolic features and resources of earlier *ethnies* to which they claim some kind of kinship and with which they feel an ancestral relationship – the kind of claim made by Slavophiles and others in late Tsarist Russia when they expressed a deep affinity with Old (pre-Petrine) Muscovy,

or by Gaelic revivalists who identified the sources of the modern Irish nation in the Christian monastic culture of early medieval Ireland. In such cases, understandings of an ethnic past frame later conceptions of the present, as much as the latter select aspects of that past; and the task of the analyst is to attempt some kind of assessment of documented historical linkages – and discontinuities. (14)

A second kind of linkage over the *longue durée* looks to the idea of *recurrence* of ethnic and national forms, as well as their basic socio-cultural elements, both at the particular and the general levels. In this perspective, nations as well as *ethnies* along with other types of collective cultural or political identities are recurrent phenomena, i.e., types of cultural community and political organization that can be found in every period and continent, and which are subject to ceaseless ebb and flow, emerging, flourishing, declining, and being submerged again, in some cases only to re-emerge (with or without the help of nationalists). Once again, we have to turn to the pages of John Armstrong's massive volume and his panorama of ethnic identities and their constituent elements in medieval Christendom and Islam to grasp both the persistence and recurrence of ethnic and national identities over the *longue durée*. (15)

Finally, linkages between pasts and presents can be effected through the *discovery and appropriation* of ethnic history. This is a familiar theme in the literature on nationalism, usually to be found in chapters on the "national awakening" or "revival." Intellectuals, as the new priests and scribes of the nation, elaborate the category of the national community, and for this purpose choose symbolic and social features from earlier ethnic cultures that are presumed to be "related" to their own designated communities and populations. This is often done by selecting significant but particular local dialects, customs, folklore, music, or poetry to stand in for the whole of the nation, as occurred in parts of Eastern Europe. The criterion here is the cult of "authenticity," in which, in order to reconstruct the community as a pure, original nation, it becomes necessary to discover and use cultural features that are felt to be genuine and strictly indigenous, untainted by foreign accretions or influence, and which represent the community "at its best." Interestingly, such cults had their premodern counterparts. Most of the premodern movements sought to create communities modeled on visions of earlier ethnoreligious cultures – such as Asshur-bani-pal's urge to recreate a superior Babylonian culture in the

late Assyrian empire, or Chosroes II's harking back to pristine Iranian myth, ritual, and tradition in late Sasanian Persia. But we also find in late Republican Rome a more than nostalgic desire to return to the genuine ways and simple faith of ancestors and earlier generations, to a Cato and Scipio, in order to discover and appropriate a venerated and virtuous ethnic past. (16)

## The Nation as Cultural Resource

I turn now to the second main usage of the concept of "nation" – as a descriptive term for a form of historical human community. A significant aspect of the nation as a form of community characterized by a cultural and/or political identity has been its role as a model of sociocultural organization. If at the conceptual level the nation needs to be seen as an analytic category, at the concrete historical level it can also be fruitfully regarded as a social and cultural resource, or better as a set of resources and a model which can be used in different ways and in varying circumstances. Just as the Han empire in China and Akkadian empire in Mesopotamia acted as models and cultural resources for later attempts to build empires in these and other areas, so the kingdoms of Israel and Judah, and the city-states of ancient Athens and Sparta and Republican Rome, provided models and guides for subsequent communities. This is not to prejudge the question of whether, or how far, these societies might themselves be designated as *national* communities, only to say that much later nations looked back to these examples as models of nationhood and drew from them certain resources – ideals, beliefs, and attachments, as well as of social and cultural organization.

Perhaps the best example of what I have in mind is the European reception of the biblical account of ancient Israel – a point that Hastings made, but did not really develop sufficiently. It is not only that Christianity took over the Old Testament model of a polity, the kingdom of ancient Israel, as he claimed, but that medieval rulers and elites of empires, kingdoms, and principalities in Europe from England and France to Bohemia and Muscovy, and also of churches and universities, drew on and made use of the ideas, beliefs, and attachments of the ancient Israelite community which *they* had come to understand as a "national" community. Well before the Reformation, ancient Israel

had come to serve as a model and guide for the creation of their chosen communities and historic territories and for the dissemination of their distinctive cultures. (17)

How, in practice, can earlier communities be shown to provide resources and models for later ones? By what mechanisms can such influence be disseminated? The case of ancient Israel suggests the importance of sacred texts, but also of the laws, rituals, ceremonies, and offices described in those texts. Other kinds of cultural resources include customs and mores; symbols such as words and titles, languages and scripts; artifacts, like obelisks and temples, banners and insignia, icons and statues; and more generally artistic styles and motifs, such as those of ancient Greece and Rome, which were revived and renewed in subsequent epochs. Though these general resources could be used for a variety of communities other than nations, the point is that they were readily available, and some of them were associated with communities that appeared, at a distance, to resemble the later aspirant nations of Europe and could act as models for them. The messages associated with these texts, rituals, symbols, and artifacts may not have been those of their creators and original users, and the memory of them might have been fairly selective. Yet, they continued to resonate among the elites of successive generations as cultural traditions and social elements able to furnish sacred resources for the collective cultural identity of nations. (18)

### The Nation as “Felt Community”

My argument so far is that we need to distinguish “nation” as a general category from the historical manifestations of the nation as a human community, one which takes different forms and reveals various features in different epochs, over and above the basic features of the ideal type. In this second usage, that of a form of human community characterized by a cultural and/or political identity, nations can be seen as sets of social and cultural resources on which the members can draw, and which, in varying degrees, enable them to express their interests, needs, and goals. This means that we may also describe the nation as an “imagined, willed, and felt community” of its members.

Such language inevitably raises suspicions of essentialism and reification, even when it is recognized that it represents a shorthand

for statements about large numbers of individuals and their normative contexts. Nations, it is argued, are not enduring, homogeneous, substantial communities with fixed traits and essential needs, but simply practical categories imposed by states intent on classifying and designating large numbers of their populations in suitable ways, as was attempted and to some extent realized in early Soviet nationalities policies. In fact, according to the view advanced by Rogers Brubaker, we should not really be analyzing nations at all, only nationalisms, and treat “nations” simply as institutional practices, categories, and contingent events. (19)

But this is to throw out the baby with the bathwater. For, apart from privileging the state (itself just as much a construct), this is to miss out entirely on the understandings, sentiments, and commitments of large numbers of people *vis-à-vis* “their” nations, making it difficult to explain, for example, why so many people were prepared to make great sacrifices (including life itself) on their behalf – except in terms of mass coercion. To try to explain why, in the hearts and minds of so many of their members, their nations and their national identities appear distinctive, binding, and enduring, we do not have to share, much less use, the conceptions and sentiments of the members of nations as categories of our own analyses; nor do we have to assume that nations are homogeneous, much less that they have “substance,” “essences,” or “fixity.” But we do have to recognize that it is these selfsame members of nations who imagine, will, and feel the community, though they do so for the most part within certain social and cultural limits. As Michael Billig has documented, because national institutions, customs, rituals, and discourses persist over generations, many people tend to accept the basic parameters and understandings of their communities from their forebears. (20)

This is not to suggest that historical nations have not been subject to considerable conflict and change, or that their “destinies” have not been the locus of elite rivalries and public contestation. Like all communities and identities, nations and national identities are subject to periodic reinterpretations of their meanings and revolutions of their social structures and boundaries, which in turn may alter the contents of their cultures. Nor should we imagine that national identities are not continually challenged by other kinds of collective identity – of family, region, religion, class, and gender, as well as by supranational associations and religious civilizations. But these caveats do not

detract from the historical impact of nations as “lived and felt” communities. Certainly, at the level of the *individual*, nationality is only one of a number of identities, but it is the one that can often be critical and decisive. Individuals may have “multiple identities” and move from one role and identity to another, as the situation appears to require. But *national* identities can also be “pervasive”: they can encompass, subsume, and color other roles and identities, particularly in times of crisis. Moreover, with the exception of religion, no other kind of identity and community appears to evoke more passion and commitment, including mass self-sacrifice, than the community of the nation. (21)

At the *collective* level, the role and impact of the nation are even more striking. Here, we may speak of long-term persistence through changes of both *ethnies* and nations – something that cannot be derived simply from the choices and predispositions of their members. For, just as we cannot read off the character of individual members from the political culture of the nation, so the latter cannot be deduced from the sum total of their individual preferences or dispositions, because the political cultures of *ethnies* and nations have their own norms and institutions, symbols and codes of communication. This helps to explain the fact that ethnic communities and nations may persist over long periods, despite the desertion, ethnocide, or even genocide of large numbers of their members; and why cultures can persist even in the absence of most of their practitioners. Long after the final destruction of Carthage in 146 BC and the selling of its inhabitants into slavery, Punic culture persisted in North Africa – till the fifth century AD. (22)

## A Political Community?

We can now return to our starting point, the political conception of the nation proposed by many modernists, and ask: are nations to be regarded as significant only insofar as they are seen as first and foremost forms of political community and identity, or should they be seen as primarily types of cultural community and identity?

For most modernists, as we saw, the nation is a political category *par excellence*, not just in the generic sense of a community of power, but in the more specific sense of an autonomous community institutionalized in sovereign territorial statehood. Here, they draw their

inspiration from Max Weber's belief in the primacy of political action and institutions in molding ethnicity and nationhood. For Weber,

A nation is a community of sentiment which would adequately manifest itself in a state of its own; hence, a nation is a community which normally tends to produce a state of its own. (23)

In the same vein, modernists like John Breuilly and Michael Mann see *nationalism* as primarily a political movement and regard its social and cultural dimensions as secondary. Since, for these modernists, nations are the creation of states and nationalisms, they are inherently political phenomena, and they become significant only to the extent that they are harnessed to states. As for their cultural attributes, these are essentially "pre-political" and of mainly ethnographic interest. (24)

Now, it is true that nations, like other kinds of collective cultural identity, are communities of power and energy, and can attract the allegiance and energies of large numbers of men and women. They may also be seen as conflict groups, united by war against other collectivities, especially other nations and national states. But, this does not mean that all nations seek states of their own, or that sovereign statehood is the focus and goal of all their endeavors. This is not the case, for example, with the Flemish and Bretons, Scots and Catalans, Welsh and Basques, despite the (variable) prominence of parties and movements among them seeking independent statehood for these nations. In each of these cases, a fervent aspiration to attain internal autonomy or "home rule" is accompanied by a commitment to remain part of the wider multinational state in which they are historically enconced, whether it be for economic or political reasons. In fact, their aspiration to internal autonomy is in part instrumental. It provides the means for realizing other social, economic, moral, and cultural goals that are valued in and for themselves, even more than is political sovereignty. This is particularly true, as John Hutchinson has documented, of cultural nationalists bent on regenerating their national communities after centuries of lethargy and decline. (25)

Again, it is true that some nations emerged in the crucible of the state, or *pari passu* with its development. This was especially the case in early modern Western Europe, where in both England and France, and to a lesser extent in Spain, we can trace the emergence of national communities alongside the growth of the state's centralizing

and bureaucratic powers. Once again, we can see how a peculiar geo-historical context has helped to condition and shape the modernist conception of the nation, to the exclusion of other historical contexts and understandings. (26)

But, equally, we should not overgeneralize from this context and its associated conception of the nation. In other historical contexts – premodern and/or non-Western – the contents of the historical community of the nation, and hence our understandings of it, are very different. There, social, cultural, and religious elements have often had a greater influence and importance than the political dimensions and conceptions favored in the West. To treat these as somehow of lesser significance betrays again that ethnocentrism which was so distinctive a feature of the modernist conception of the nation, and which has proved so detrimental to a wider understanding of nations and national identities.

It is for these reasons that historical nations which belong to different types of the general category of the nation should be seen as forms of human community characterized by a collective cultural *and/or* political identity. In other words, while some nations can be regarded as predominantly forms of political community, aspiring to or conjoined with sovereign states, others are best seen as forms of cultural and territorial community without such political partnership or aspirations, in the specific sense of claims to sovereign statehood. Their drive for internal autonomy tends to focus on social, economic, and cultural goals and aspires to their control within a given territory, without recourse to outright independence and sovereignty. We should take care not to regard such “nations without states” and their nationalisms as of less account than those that possess or aspire to states of their own, for they are often the crucibles of the future politicization of ethnicity. (27)