Debate on John Hutchinson’s Nations as Zones of Conflict

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Introductory remarks

On 7 February 2007 the third Nations and Nationalism public debate took place at the London School of Economics on John Hutchinson’s Nations as Zones of Conflict (Sage, 2005). The debate was introduced and chaired by Eric Kaufmann and three reviews of the book were presented, by Umut Özkirimli, Andreas Wimmer and Gerard Delanty. John Hutchinson replied to these presentations and the panel of speakers responded to questions and comments raised by the audience. This is a written version of the debate.

Eric Kaufmann: Introducing Nations as Zones of Conflict

This journal is of course associated with the great debate in historical sociology over the modernity of nations. Anthony Smith and Ernest Gellner largely set the terms of this debate within the walls of the LSE in the 1980s and 1990s. However, while younger writers as diverse as Rogers Brubaker and Andreas Wimmer have introduced their own novel interpretations of the modernist canon, there are actually very few ‘second-generation’ theorists of note working within the Smith-Armstrong tradition. The ethno-symbolist theory is instead reproduced, incognito (and with little critical reflection), in the mainstream of medieval or classical history, while primordialism thrives within evolutionary psychology. In the social sciences, by contrast, the reverse

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holds, and we instead see the routine (obligatory) critique of the ‘primordialist’ straw man but hear precious little from the straw man himself – whether primordialist or, as in John’s case, historical-culturalist. John Hutchinson is of course an exception to this rule, and, as a direct (methodological!) descendant of Anthony Smith, is uniquely placed to flesh out the contours of the ethno-symbolist school. In this debate, Umut Özkirimli claims that John Hutchinson has an identity crisis, caught between his postmodern and ethno-symbolic halves. One could take the psychoanalytic metaphor further, since John has needed to carve out a distinct academic identity for himself while working under his mentor’s formidable methodological umbrella. In this respect, this book represents a successful debut for John, in which this creative tension has produced something which, while recognisably Smithian, is also irreducibly Hutchinsonian.

Ethno-symbolism differs from primordialism in that it locates the power of national identity in history and cultural symbols rather than biology and evolutionary psychology. Biology is primordial, but cultures which carry historical memory are essentially confined to the period of written human history which emerged in Sumer after 6000 BC and involved aggregations of peoples into urban civilisations that transcend the scale of the local Gemeinschaft. Smith and Armstrong both begin their sagas in classical rather than prehistoric times, and open the door to the idea that culture and history are not just so much evocative and qualitative embroidery, but have real social force. This is an argument which few modern historians and social scientists easily accept, given their preference for more concrete, easily measurable solids like income per head, boots on the ground or systems of government. Yet John Hutchinson convincingly argues that culture and history matter for politics. In so doing, he stands on the shoulders of giants like Anthony Smith and Chris Bayly.

I became interested in Nations as Zones of Conflict because it seemed to build on previous work and weld it more tightly together into a unified theory. In this sense, John’s most innovative chapters are the core ones (2–4), where he elaborates upon the ways in which conflicting interpretations of a nation’s ‘symbolic resources’ (see also, Zimmer 2003) actually reinforce the nation. This is a pointed riposte to a fashionable postmodernism which claims that divergent discourses of national identity reflect the meaninglessness of the entire concept and its fragmentation in the present day. Hutchinson accepts multiplicity, but contends that multiple discourses, by orienting themselves toward a common fund of symbols and the same referent, wind up reinforcing the nation. For instance, the divergent interpretations of Joan of Arc by French Republicans and Catholic monarchical conservatives demonstrate the trans-historical power of this particular resource (p. 38). Likewise, the recourse to conflicting ‘eastern’ and ‘western’ usable pasts within numerous Eastern European nations (like Hungary or Russia) reflects the continuing hold which different path-dependent symbolic layers exert over successive generations of social actors.
The ‘layering’ of pasts into which nationalists can dip is of course a product of historical events, which are often contingent. Such events can also reconfigure prevailing identity paradigms. It is a strength of John’s work that he recognises the limits of continuity and path-dependency, arguing for the episodic nature of nationalism (p. 136). Major crises and threats are often required to ignite ‘hot’ nationalism, but once ignited, nationalism often fills space according to the lineaments of mytho-symbolic recipes bequeathed by previous generations. Why did Zionists press for a homeland in Palestine rather than in Uganda, where geopolitical considerations pointed to a path of less resistance? This is the kind of question that cannot be addressed without recourse to explanations like John’s which peer at an ethnie or nation’s stock of symbolic resources. Why wouldn’t Canada adopt a French past to more easily secure its legitimacy and differentiate itself from the United States? Here again, we see that real historical events (such as the founding of modern Canada by English-speaking American Loyalists) bear a truth and lay down resources which cannot simply be brushed aside in the name of contemporary exigencies.

Yet it is simultaneously clear that not all national projects have premodern blueprints, and that inter-generational national consciousness can be broken. The Greek and Jewish cases provide prime examples. Even so, the fact that the ancient Greeks existed is not without importance for modern Greek nationalism. The national consciousness of the ancient Greek and modern Greek may be radically different, but the very fact of an ancient Greek proper name and culture has bequeathed a critical resource to modern Greek nationalists. Some modern Ulster-Protestants may try and invent the notion a pre-Plantation ‘Cruithin’ past, but this is a flimsy construct which is easily lampooned by opponents and has failed to take root even amongst its target audience. It is less easy to scoff at the connections – however interrupted – between ancient and modern Greeks or Jews. Such multiple pasts are not unified wholes, however, and serve as exemplars for competing ideologies: traditionalism or modernism, equality or hierarchy. John makes this clear in his discussion of Slavophiles and westernisers in Russia (p. 50), or of Anglo-Saxonists and proponents of the Norman inheritance in Britain (pp. 82–3). Overall, the mechanism of modern-premodern continuity is not an unbroken consciousness but a recurrent revivalism. This is generated by the algorithms encoded within seemingly inert cultural-historical resources whose latent properties point towards answers to modern predicaments.

In his final chapter, John turns to examine globalisation, and makes the point that globalisation is nothing new, but is a recurrent theme in human history. As he notes here, ‘imperial conquest, religious missions, migration [and] economic expansion’ bulked large even in premodern times. Some even locate the previous apogee of globalisation in the period 1250–1350, before the Mongol invasions upset the world system, leading eventually to the rise of western Europe (Abu Lughod 1998). The corollary of this is that ethnie and nation can coexist very nicely with globalisation, and global networks may
even help to spread the idea (p. 168). Along the way, John casts doubt on the idea that the nation may be readily superseded. The EU, for example, is heavily constrained by the intergovernmentalism and divergent ‘European’ visions of its member states (pp. 182–3). Political Islam also expresses itself primarily in national arenas, and even the explicitly universalistic Soviet communism was directed by a Russian ‘elder brother’ (p. 181), not altogether unlike France’s claim to be the ‘Eldest Daughter of the Church’ in premodern times.

In this debate, John is confronted by a series of critics who come from the loosely defined ‘modernist’ mainstream of social science. Umut Özkirimli cleverly utilises the metaphor of Veronika/Veronique to probe what he sees as the inconsistency between John’s ‘postmodern’ emphasis on multiplicity and interruption, and his ‘ethno-symbolist’ insistence on the ethnic origins of nations and national continuity. Andreas Wimmer follows this up with a sophisticated methodological critique drawn from a variable-centred social science approach worthy of King, Keohane and Verba. Much of the critique is directed at the historical sociological tradition of nationalism studies in general, whether ethno-symbolist or modernist: that it selects cases to fit the theory (‘case selection bias’) and hence cannot make statements which usefully compare against the random, or typical, median case. How important are ethno-symbols in explaining nationalist political movements? We cannot know unless we assess their impact against a set of other covariates across a random, representative range of cases, including dogs like the Frisians, Balinese and Savoyards that didn’t bark (i.e. are not ‘selected on the dependent variable’). Later, Wimmer adds a more normative dimension to his critique, accusing John of reifying the nation as social actor, and, more seriously, of endorsing a Herderian ontology which fails to see the potential for violence which is latent within nationalism.

In contrast to Özkirimli and Wimmer, Gerard Delanty focuses upon John’s final chapter on globalisation and supranationalism. Here Delanty, a noted expert on the relationship between the European Union and the nation, concentrates his fire on John’s dismissal of the cultural impact of the European project. Gerard agrees with John that supranational and cosmopolitan projects do not undermine the nation, but he claims that they do alter the quality of national identity. Most national identities in Europe, he claims, have adopted a European dimension. Here Delanty makes the insightful observation that trans-national movements like Europeanisation often operate through the prism of the nation, but are no less radical for doing so.

All told, John’s critics give him an excellent run for his money, and John responds to them no less ably. What is beyond dispute is that John Hutchinson has developed a new, more flexible ethno-symbolist theory which helps to colour in many of the blank spaces which could be found in the conceptual interstices of its predecessors.
First, I would like to thank ASEN and in particular Eric Kaufmann and John Hutchinson for inviting me to this public debate on *Nations as Zones of Conflict*. I think many people who are here today, including the organizers, will be expecting me to criticize the book, given my earlier engagement with ethno-symbolism, but I would like to say, at the outset, that honouring these expectations will be a challenging task, for two simple reasons. First, *Nations as Zones of Conflict* has a lot to commend it; I am particularly taken by the discussion of Romanticism in Chapter 2 and of ‘hot’ and ‘banal’ nationalisms in Chapter 4. I also share some of the views expressed in the final chapter on globalization and the clash of civilizations – and in fact, an earlier version of this chapter was published in a book I edited in 2003. The second reason is closely related to the first; this is probably the first book written by an ethno-symbolist with which I concur so much, from a theoretical point of view. In fact, if you take the Introduction and Chapter 1 out, this is probably one of the finest examples of ‘postmodernist’ work in the field I have read in a long time! But of course Hutchinson never recants his past convictions, and ethno-symbolist theses continue to creep into his otherwise postmodernist analysis throughout the book, not just the first two chapters. This is precisely what I am going to talk about today.

More specifically, the question I want to pick up is the following: to what extent is the idea of ‘nations as zones of conflict’ compatible with ethno-symbolism? The reason I have decided to address this question is both academic and personal: academic, because answering this question may also shed some light on the wider questions of ‘what is ethno-symbolism’ and ‘which ethno-symbolism’, hence allowing us to revisit the foundational question of nationalism studies, that is, ‘how to make sense of nationalism’; personal, because while reading this book, I suffered from a minor identity crisis, concerning my own position within the theoretical debate on nationalism, and found myself asking the ultimate existential question ‘who am I’. More on this in the conclusion.

Hutchinson is very explicit about his intentions in the Introduction to his book. This interpretation, he says, ‘seeks to combine two apparently antithetical approaches. The first is the long durée ‘ethno-symbolic’ framework developed by such scholars as John Armstrong and Anthony D. Smith, which views nations as dynamic, long-term historical processes that structure the forms of modernity. The second is a ‘postmodernist’ framework (and here Hutchinson refers to my and Nira Yuval-Davis’s work), which emphasizes that collectivities and individuals have multiple and conflictual identities over which there can be no final consensus’ (p. 5). He then says he rejects the postmodernists’ ‘idealist and asociological voluntarism that ignores the binding power of identities when they are institutionalized’. Of course there is nothing in Yuval-Davis’s or my work that suggests this, but I am sure there

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are postmodernists out there who would make such a claim, so I am not going
to dwell on this. But can the synthesis between ethno-symbolism and
postmodernism work? I have my doubts. This is probably why *Nations as
Zones of Conflict* reminded of one of the early movies of the late Polish
director Krzysztof Kieslowski, *The Double Life of Véronique*. The movie was
the story of a Polish music student, Weronika, and a French music teacher,
Véronique, born on the same day and leading parallel lives, although they
never meet each other, except a brief encounter in Krakow. Strangely enough,
however, both women feel that ‘they are not alone’, sensing intuitively the
existence of the other. As in the movie, there are two John Hutchinsons in this
book, Hutchinson the postmodernist and Hutchinson the ethno-symbolist,
who never come together, but have an intuitive knowledge of the other’s
presence.

What does Hutchinson the postmodernist claim? He claims that ‘the past
should be seen as a set of overlays of different and sometimes rival traditions
that live as alternative repertoires available to be used at times of crises’
(p. 27), that these differences seem to be systemic and ‘individuals adopt a
range of heterogeneous positions and . . . shift between them’ (p. 78); that
‘national identities co-exist with other identities, and the salience of national
identities may vary from country to country and may also fluctuate over time’
(p. 116). According to Hutchinson the postmodernist, ‘nation-formation [is]
an unfinished and evolving process. All nations, to a lesser or greater extent,
contain plural ethnic repertoires that in the modern period become systemized
into competing cultural and political projects’ (p. 193). Hence, ‘there can be
no final definition of a national identity’ (p. 111).

But then there is also Hutchinson the ethno-symbolist who suggests an
alternative model of nation-formation: ‘the enduring character of nations [is]
based on a sense of being embedded in much older (ethnic) communities that
have survived centuries of vicissitudes’ (p. 4). ‘In spite of significant
differences between premodern and modern societies’, Hutchinson the
ethno-symbolist says, ‘long-established cultural repertoires (myths, symbols
and memories) are “carried” into the modern era by powerful institutions’
(p. 41). But what is it that is ‘carried’ into the modern era? Didn’t Hutchinson
the postmodernist tell us that there were indeed many competing, sometimes
even conflicting, repertoires in each nation’s past? How can we talk about
‘much older ethnic communities’ surviving centuries of vicissitudes when in
fact there are different visions or projects within each particular ethnic
community? Which project survives the vicissitudes of history? Which
project is taken up by latter-day nationalists? Why is this particular project
chosen, and not the others? What happens to the other projects? Hutchinson
the ethno-symbolist is undaunted by such questions. All projects, all cultural
repertoires survive, he argues, and in fact ‘the preservation of persisting
differences and rival cultural repertoires is one of the most important reasons
for the adaptability of the nation throughout two centuries of tumultuous
change’ (p. 5). He continues: ‘The long historical perspective of nationalists
... inspires the capacity of communities to overcome disaster by mobilizing an inner world of spiritual energies' (p. 37); ‘the capacity of... national identities to suborn other loyalties depended on whether or not they could attach themselves to a distinctive and earlier ethno-cultural heritage that regulated identities of family, class and religion’ (p. 131). And here I am confused. Which inner world would the nationalists mobilize if they have different views about that inner world? Which earlier ethno-cultural heritage would they attach themselves to if there are multiple ethno-cultural heritages competing to be their object of loyalty? Didn’t the meaning of these ethno-cultural heritages change from one group to the next? Didn’t Hutchinson the postmodernist tell us that ‘individuals adopt a range of heterogeneous positions and ... shift between them’? Some of these questions are also raised by Hutchinson the postmodernist. ‘On what grounds are specific historic pasts selected as emblematic of the nation where there are multiple heritages ...?’ (p. 75), he asks. His reply, though not exhaustive, is spot on: ‘Traumatic historical events may appear to ‘decide’ in favour of a particular vision’ (p. 109). It is then that particular historical conditions, perhaps even contingencies, help a particular vision establish its hegemony over others.

We might add to this the role of agency, or the interplay of interests and power, the dire need of popular legitimacy, in determining the outcome of the struggle for hegemony. Given that, we can argue that what matters is not the existence of ‘a distinctive and earlier ethno-cultural heritage’, or a plurality of it, but the choices of nationalist elites in the present, or the various historical conditions that ‘may appear to decide’ in favour of a particular vision.

In any case, how could the existence of plural heritages contribute to a sense of unity? Hutchinson the ethno-symbolist answers: ‘The protagonists in these cultural wars may share (perhaps unwittingly) many assumptions, and that, where there is a common ethnic substratum, ideological competition defines and elaborates a national identity’ (p. 103). Moreover, ‘rivals validate their vision by reference to an authentic past’, and the effect of this is ‘to define, codify and elaborate the characteristics of the nation. Out of the debates about the authenticity of certain figures or practices, an internalization of national values takes place’ (ibid.). But how can an internalization of national values take place if protagonists have different national values in mind? What is the common ethnic substratum that Hutchinson the ethno-symbolist talks about? How can Hutchinson the postmodernist and Hutchinson the ethno-symbolist coexist when one talks about the plurality of ethnic heritages, conflicting views about what a nation is, the other talks about a common ethnic substratum, an inner world of spiritual energies?

Hutchinson the ethno-symbolist’s discussion of national symbols, based on concrete examples, intensifies my sense of confusion. Take the case of Joan of Arc. I am told, and I really don’t know by which Hutchinson, that ‘Action Française monarchists sought to reclaim her for the extreme right, while the communists in the 1930s attempted to win Catholic working-class support for the Popular Front by depicting her as a member of the proletariat.
betrayed by the ruling classes’ (p. 104). Now how can Joan of Arc be a symbol of national unity? As I read it, this tells me that Joan of Arc means different things to different groups, that different groups appropriate her to ‘legitimize’ their claim to represent the nation. Now I know that Hutchinson the ethno-symbolist would intervene here and say: ‘Precisely. Why would different groups feel the need to appeal to the figure of Joan of Arc if they didn’t think it would legitimize their claims, that it would resonate among the masses? Why would they turn to a symbol of the past if the past didn’t matter at all?’ But this begs the question. First of all, the appeal to the past is a characteristic of the ‘modern’ discourse of nationalism, and as such, cannot be used to justify the resilience of premodern ethnic symbols. Let us not forget that Joan of Arc started to matter only in the age of nationalism. It is the modern discourse of nationalism that redefines Joan of Arc as an ‘ethnic’ or ‘national’ symbol retrospectively, and what matters is not the existence of Joan of Arc as such, but the meaning given to her in the age of nationalism. Moreover, this meaning, as Hutchinson the postmodernist reminds us, changes from one group to the next, and fluctuates over time. In short, the appropriation of Joan of Arc in the age of nationalism tells us nothing about its resilience or its appeal. If Joan of Arc did not exist, nationalists would have found another symbol, and in fact, there are many symbols that are not taken up by nationalists, and condemned to oblivion. To put the point more rhetorically, if Joan of Arc did not exist, she had to be invented!

In sum, I do not see how the suggested synthesis between ethno-symbolism and postmodernism can work. But there is also another issue here. I think the ethno-symbolism portrayed here has little in common with classical ethno-symbolism as defined by Anthony D. Smith, who talks about ‘shared memories of golden ages, ancestors and great heroes and heroines, the communal values that they embody, the myths of ethnic origins, migration and divine election, the symbols of community, territory, history and destiny that distinguish them’ (2001: 119). Hutchinson the postmodernist, on the other hand, talks about ‘multiple and competing allegiances’, ‘long-running cultural conflicts’, ‘rival traditions’, heterogeneous and shifting positions. This is a futuristic ethno-symbolism, so to speak, an ethno-symbolism that acknowledges plurality and change more than its classical predecessor. But can ethno-symbolism, which is basically a story of continuity and recurrence, survive this amendment? Didn’t ethno-symbolism claim that modern nationalists are constrained by the existence of pre-modern cultural repertoires which resonate among the masses? But to what extent are nationalists constrained if there are indeed many different, sometimes conflicting, cultural repertoires which are open to constant change, innovation and reinterpretation? Which particular repertoire resonates among the masses? How do nationalists know which repertoire will resonate among the masses? Don’t they in fact invest enormous amounts of energy and resources to make their particular vision resonate? And what happens to the meaning of ethnonational cultural heritages once they are adopted by nationalists? Do they remain the
same? Hutchinson the postmodernist actually answers this question: cultural nationalists, or what he calls ‘moral innovators’, are ‘engaged in an internal transformation of tradition’, he says, an unpredictable process which operated ‘in part through trial and error, because the search for the nation revealed unsuspected pasts, cultural practices, ‘hidden’ sacred sites and communities’ (p. 192). But to what extent does the outcome of this unpredictable process, which operates through trial and error, resemble the original tradition? Where is continuity, which is key to the ethno-symbolist story? To what extent does the past matter if moral innovators can indeed discover ‘unsuspected pasts’, ‘hidden sacred sites and communities’? Don’t we need to put the stress on the discovery process itself, and not what is discovered, as indeed Hutchinson the postmodernist does in most of the book?

Enough questions . . . I think Hutchinson’s revisions define ethno-symbolism out of existence or reduce it to an approach which merely appreciates the significance of myths and symbols in the construction of nations, an insight that all participants to the theoretical debate on nationalism, past or present, primordialist or postmodernist, would readily embrace. I am afraid Hutchinson the postmodernist prevails over Hutchinson the ethno-symbolist!

I would like to end with a note on my personal identity crisis. It is quite simple actually. I also talk about contingency, plurality, heterogeneity and change, and I get to be called a ‘postmodernist’, and of course, Hutchinson is not the only one who calls me that. Then he talks about the same, and he is called an ‘ethno-symbolist’. Which one is true? Is Hutchinson a postmodernist too, or am I an ethno-symbolist? Or are we both postmodern ethno-symbolists? Are we Weronika or Véronique? I am truly confused. I would be very grateful to you John, if you can help me out of this impasse!

Andreas Wimmer: How to Modernise Ethno-Symbolism

Professor Hutchinson’s book represents perhaps the best available synthesis of the ‘ethno-symbolist’ school of nations and nationalism that Anthony Smith proclaimed some time ago. John Hutchinson’s book, however, also goes beyond recasting these well known positions. Reading it is an intellectually much more stimulating experience than skimming through a family album of old arguments. In Chapters 3 and 4, he outlines a new perspective on the rise of nationalism which emphasizes its internal heterogeneity and its conflictual nature. In this reader’s eyes, this is the most original part of the book and the one that inspired its title. I will limit myself to a discussion of some of the most pertinent ideas that these two chapters offer.

Contrary to the somewhat rosy picture that modernists paint of the integrative functions of nationalism and the nation-state, the national domain is one of internal struggle and conflict, John Hutchinson convincingly argues. These conflicts revolve around the question of which of the various lines of ethnic descent that have nourished the national family in the past matter most...
for its future. In France, to give one example, a Gallo-Roman-republican-secular, a Bonapartist-imperialist, and a Frankish-Catholic-conservative interpretation of the nationalist project have struggled with each other for centuries. In the author’s view, these struggles do not simply reflect competition between factions, regions or classes over the control of the national movement or the nation-state, as in most other approaches. Rather, they result from the continued relevance of the various extant ethnic traditions when romantic nationalism enters the stage of history. These older ethnic traditions compete with each other for a privileged place in the nationalist movement. Nationalist discourse therefore is multi-layered and offers various conflicting interpretations of the common history. These various interpretations develop a life of their own, mold the competing political projects and put them onto the tracks of path-dependency. What are the consequences of such heterogeneity and conflictivity, Professor Hutchinson asks? The competition between various brands of nationalism has a positive effect on the life of a nation. Such competition provides a nation with a range of alternative modes of political orientation and thus increases its capacity to react to outside challenges in a flexible and adaptive way. Furthermore, conflicts over the nationalist doctrine may reinforce, rather than weaken it: The more protagonists fight over the correct interpretation of the nation’s mission, the more they reinforce the implicit agreement that indeed there is a nation and that it does have a world historical mission.

John Hutchinson deserves much praise for offering such a thorough analysis of the internal conflicts and debates among nationalists of various leanings. His analysis of the layered character of nationalist myths, the internal heterogeneity and conflictual nature of nationalist discourse, as well as the episodic nature of nationalist mobilization represents a considerable step forward towards a more differentiated view of the nature of nationalism. This overcomes both the idealistic tendencies of earlier ethno-symbolist accounts and the functionalism of some modernist writings. I am sorry to report, however, that I disagree with his explanation of such heterogeneity and conflict and with the methodologies he chooses to make his case. In what follows, I will limit myself raise four main points. Trying to be as constructive and helpful as possible, I will hint at possible ways of overcoming these problems in order to make the ethno-symbolist argument more convincing and thus future debates in our field, well, more fun.

Assumption of uniformity

Professor Hutchinson assumes that all nations and national histories are shaped by the same forces in similar ways. There is one, universal story to tell. This assumption plagues the historical sociology of nationalism in general, not only its ethno-symbolist variant. It is all the more deplorable because it leads to a systematic lack of attention to variation. Might it be that some nationalist discourses are more characterized by internal conflicts than others?
Could it even be that in some countries the major political conflicts have developed between nationalism on the one hand and non-nationalist forces, such as the Communist International, or an ultramontane Catholicism, or a pan-national Islamism, on the other hand, while in other places, the major dividing lines indeed run through the nationalist camp, as John Hutchinson’s analysis foresees? And instead of assuming the benevolent functions of nationalist dissent, would it perhaps be more fruitful to ask under which conditions intra-nationalist debates lead to conflict and war and under which conditions this has not been the case? Instead of trying to find the universal form, the essence, the inner truth of nationalism in all of its manifestations, we should pay attention to such variation in its appearance and consequence. This will lead us away from the somewhat romantic pre-occupation with the question ‘what is the nation’ to the more analytical question of how to comparatively explain the varied manifestations and diverging consequences of nationalism.

**Sampling on the dependent variable**

Secondly, John Hutchinson’s book and ethno-symbolism more generally samples on the dependent variable when trying to establish its claims empirically. To choose less technical language, authors in that tradition privilege examples which display the characteristics predicted by their theory, a point raised many times by earlier critiques of ethno-symbolism (e.g. Breuilly 2005). They look for continuity between ethnic pasts and nationalist presents, and find it. They look for cases where intra-nationalist debates are shaped by diverging ethnic sub-currents, and find it. There is no systematic discussion of cases that do not fit the scheme, even if some of them are mentioned *en passant* in this book (the Turks; the Slovaks). One could add many other examples, however. Debates over the future of the Swiss nation are *not* shaped by the divergent French, German, and Italian-speaking ethnic traditions; today’s debates in Germany are not, contrary to what Professor Hutchinson writes, a re-iteration of older controversies about a *Kleindeutsch* or a *Grossdeutsch* solution to the nationalist question or about whether the German nation should be defined by contrast to its republican neighbours to the West and North. Moreover, some currents of nationalist thinking have disappeared and do no longer shape the nationalist imagination. The racist, eugenicist versions of nationalism, which dominated thinking from the 1890s onwards, are no longer alive in the West.

To advance the arguments made in the ethno-symbolist tradition, one would have to overcome this case selection bias and adopt a more systematic research methodology where the choice of examples would NOT be determined by the degree of fit with the argument. Otherwise we will go on endlessly citing examples and counter-examples without ever bothering to fit the various pieces into what might turn out to be a solvable puzzle. Too much of the literature in nationalism studies (including some of my own writing) is
an exercise in throwing up examples in the air without offering any guidance
to the stunned reader as to how to catch them when they come down again.
Comparative nationalism studies should be an exercise in juggling, if I may
pursue the metaphor further to the point of *catachresis*, rather than skeet
shooting.

**Endogeneity**

Third, Hutchinson’s ethno-symbolist argument struggles with endogeneity
problems caused by the *ex-post-factum* mode of historical explanation, which
again is characteristic of many other currents of thinking, but particularly
endemic to writings in the ethno-symbolist tradition (cf. the earlier critique
raised by Gellner 1996). One example from the book may suffice here. Why
is Italy a weaker nation-state than Germany? Because its ethnic substratum is
weaker, Professor Hutchinson argues, not bothering to explore the rich
possibilities that the Roman legacy obviously offered to Italian nation-
builders.

In order for such arguments to be plausible, one would have to develop a
way to determine the strength of a group’s symbols, myths, and memories
*independently* of whether or not they have developed strong nationalisms later
on. And one would then have to systematically show that groups with *strong*
mythomoteurs have indeed developed *stronger* nationalism than others, all
other things being equal. Unfortunately, the *ceteris* often refuse to be *paribus.*
Some nationalist movements can rely on an existing network of political
alliances, such as provided by tribal ties, trading networks, or the organiza-
tional infrastructure of a church. How can we know that it is the relative
power of symbols that explains the success and failure of various nationalist
movements, rather than such organizational factors, if we do not even attempt
some sort of controlled comparison in the tradition of comparative historical
sociology (Mahoney 2004)?

**Romantic ontology**

Fourth, ethno-symbolism builds its arguments on a romantic ontology. It is
not individual or collective actors who do things to each other, pursue
political projects, and ally with each other or fight. In the world of ethno-
symbolism, it is nations, myths and memories that *do* such things. ‘National
identities’, writes Professor Hutchinson on the very first page (1), ‘remain . . . a
living force . . . , organizing individual and collective activities’. Here we have
a theory of the nation as a living organism with a lifespan of centuries and
millennia . . . a view that bears more than a family resemblance to that of the
eighteenth century philosopher Johann Gottfried von Herder (Herder 1968
[1784–1791]), the intellectual father of all nationalist thinkers. On page 94,
such conflicts are ‘strengthening the nation as it navigates the many challenges
. . . of the modern world’. Again in Herderian fashion, the nation appears as

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the subject of human history (cf. also pp. 7, 28, 45, 90). Note that this represents not just a terminological slippage, a convenient metaphor or simply a façon de parler, but a core theoretical argument. Without the claim that myths, symbols and memories have transhistorical power shaping human action over the course of centuries, the ethno-symbolist program would collapse into the simple argument that historically constituted cultural frames, including the concept of national identity, matter for processes of political mobilization (see Snow et al. 1986).

Such an approach would not only be simpler, but also more convincing. Without attributing agency to nations, myths, symbols and memories, ethno-symbolists (thus perhaps converted to ‘post-ethno-symbolism’?) would show why political actors have strong reasons to identify with a certain concept of the nation (rather than another, or with a social class ideology). Further, they would show why actors continue to find meaning in an ethnic myth even in the national age, or uphold and pass on a specific ethnic memory even in dramatically changing circumstances. Such analysis would then proceed to show how exactly how these ethno-cultural frames, once adopted and transmitted, reduce the universe of possible political options for actors in such a way as to produce the path dependency effects (Mahoney 2000) claimed by ethno-symbolism. But it would also identify the conditions under which existing ethnic and nationalist frames do NOT produce such effects. It would go on to specify when frames produce radical re-interpretations of who belongs and who does not, of which memories are relevant as templates for future political action, and of which symbols are worth struggling for. Such moments of historical openness are called ‘critical junctures’ in political science jargon (Collier and Collier 1991), or ‘turning points’ in sociological lingo (Abbott 2001: ch. 8), or simply ‘events’ in historical sociology and anthropology (Sewell 1996).

This more sophisticated, or dare I say ‘modern’, approach regarding how culture affects agency would immediately bring politics back in to the picture as well, which is strikingly absent from Hutchinson’s analysis, even if he is concerned with political events throughout his book and introduces political factors in an ad hoc manner now and then. According to his analysis, struggles over the meaning of the nation are not driven by the quest for power and recognition by various actors or coalitions of actors, but by the memories and myths which seem to lead a life of their own and breathe, like Herder’s Volksgeist, through the bodies of the nation. Professor Hutchinson even explicitly rejects the idea that the internal debates are driven by divergent interests, by political struggles over who belongs and who does not belong to the core of the national project and so forth. He argues that such an approach would fail to explain why various groups with diverging interest share similar nationalist language. He seems to be unaware of the notion of coalition and alliance, quite elementary concepts in political sociology, which explain this phenomenon effortlessly and without recurrence to a rather mystical ‘power of symbols’ argument.
Does nationalism breed violence or violence breed nationalism?

This brings me to the last weakness that I would like to briefly discuss here, which is another consequence of the absence of politics in Professor Hutchinson’s analysis. What I find most surprising, given the title of the book, is the overwhelmingly positive evaluation of nationalism’s role in the modern world. John Hutchinson’s book remains silent about what many authors see as the defining feature of nationalism: that according to its political ideology each state should represent and house one nation. The spread of nationalism into a world dominated by multi-national imperial states was, therefore, one of the most important sources of conflict and war. My own research shows, on the basis of quantitative analysis, that the spread of the nation-state is indeed responsible for most of the wars in the modern world (Wimmer and Min 2006).

In Hutchinson’s book, however, wars are treated as external events, as quasi-natural catastrophes to which peoples react with increased nationalism. Nationalism is ‘a pacific movement’, the author writes on page 70. While he mentions nationalist wars of independence on the following page in an almost embarrassed tone, quickly moving on to analyse how such wars thicken nationalist myths of heroism and sacrifice, there is no analysis of what leads to such wars in the name of the nation. And there can be no such analysis within the framework of this book because it treats nationalism as a cultural movement, rather than a political ideology demanding a state for each nation, the crucial point of the early, ‘pre-ethno-symbolist’ writings of Anthony Smith (Smith 1984a) and most of the so called ‘modernist’ school (e.g. Breuilly 1993; Gellner 1983; Wimmer 2002).

Blinding out the war-proneness of nationalism and the historic role that it had in the military mobilization of the masses quite simply risks of getting the history of nationalism over the past 200 years wrong. It looks at that history from the humanistic point of view of Herder’s eighteenth century, when the prospect for nationalism to morally educate peoples to a higher level of shared humanity was not yet tarnished by the subsequent catastrophes that it has brought to peoples across the world. It seems that ethno-symbolism’s foremost task for its future development might be to swim free from the Herderian currents of thinking that it has mapped out with so much empathy, clarity and subtlety.

Gerard Delanty: The Three Faces of the Nation

I was interested to read this book since its author has written what in my personal estimation is one of the finest works on Irish cultural nationalism (Hutchinson 1987). With this book under discussion John Hutchinson has established a strong argument on the cultural foundations of nationalism. It is a work deeply grounded in historical knowledge and is full of fascinating insights. But it is guided by a big idea and one that I wish to engage with in
this critical comment with respect to some claims that only become evident in the final chapter.

Hutchinson has provided a convincing critique of the so-called modernist conception of nationalism for its relative neglect of the deeper cultural aspects of nationalism and he gives an interesting and robust account of nationalism as a powerful current in the world today (although I note most of his examples relate to Europe). On the whole I have little to dispute with the general claims put forward in this book, which is a significant work in the field and should be seen as a major corrective of the modernist approach.

In this short critical note I address myself to the final chapter, ‘Nationalism and the Clash of Civilizations’. Before I do so, I wish to make a few general observations on the argument as a whole since I would like to refer to some aspects of the general argument to disagree with the claims made in this chapter and the general conclusions that follow from what appears to be the central argument of the book. Reading the book for the first time, I thought the final chapter was the weaker one, but on closer inspection I have reached the view that the weakness of the argument is a consequence of a problem with the more general thesis and is less evident in the other chapters where the examples taken tend to suggest an ethno-symbolist approach.

I entirely agree with what I understand to be a central argument of the book that conceptions of the nation are very often, if not always, divided. As he says on p. 121 ‘... the unified mass nation is something of a myth, and ... there are always multiple and competing allegiances ...’. Like Hutchinson, I have also been struck by the fact that divisions within the national community are often more significant than conflicts with others. This way of looking at nationhood tends to shift the emphasis away from Self vs. Others to conflicts within the Self. Now, I do think this is an important argument and one that does not fit too well with the claim that nationalism is rooted in a common cultural/ethnic community and for this reason is enduring. His argument in Chapter 3 – in my view the most interesting part of the book and by far the most original and insightful chapter – that there are competing interpretations of the nation suggests a conception of nationalism as a field of interpretations. In my view this does not necessitate a view of it as a field of conflicts and – when we get to Chapter 5 – clashes between different worldviews, civilizations, and societies (although I recognise he disagrees with Huntington). In essence, I think the argument overplays the ‘quasi-ethnic nature’ of nationalism and reduces the problems of the present day to premodern forces.

At this point I can put my main criticism, which I want to take up specifically with respect to Chapter 5. Nations are internally contested, due to different interpretations of nationhood, and are not homogenous and unified. This operates not only on the political level but also on the cultural level of ethnic attachments. Hutchinson relies too much on a primordial notion of ethnicity that always defines the field of nationhood. With his target a neatly defined take on the modernist position this all makes sense and is not objectionable – especially with respect to the historical national identity.
projects of the modern era. But when it comes to some aspects of the current situation I think there are some problems and the terms of the analysis are simply not robust enough. It is easy to oppose statist concepts of national identity with an approach that emphasises the ethnic component, but what is lost in this is the civic dimension of nationalism, which is arguably a third dimension of nationalism. This is a dimension that is lost both to the modernists and to their ethno-symbolist critics, such as Hutchinson and Smith. Let me make clear, it is not my intention to refute the ethno-symbolist position advanced in this book, nor is it my aim to defend the modernist statist approach, but to argue for this third dimension of nationhood. I would prefer to see nationalism theorised in terms of political/state, civic, and ethnic/cultural forces than any one or two of these elements (Delanty 2003, 2002). It is the interaction of these forces that explains the durability and versatility of nationalism.

In my view, the limits of both the position John Hutchinson is criticizing and his own alternative are evident in the argument advanced in the final chapter that there can be no real sense of national community beyond the national one. Many relevant points are made, but here his target is the European equivalents – who are rarely identified – of the modernists unmasked in Chapter 1. There are three relevant considerations here. The first is the claim that he has made against the obviously mistaken view of European identity as an alternative national identity. As he points out (p. 171), most conceptions of European identity have been articulated through the very category of the nation and not against it. The notion of Europe is indeed indeterminate, but, I would argue, so too is the category of the nation. In any case, he reverts to a view of the European project as one that is overcoming nations – as opposed to nationalism – and is only upheld by elites. Undoubtedly there are some Euro elites who see as their aim the overcoming of nationality and nationhood, but this is only one dynamic and I would argue a minor aspect of Europeanization, which has in most of its processes operated through the category of the nation. We also need to be cautious of equating nationality and nationhood with nationalism. I do think nationalism has been considerably diluted as a result of Europeanization, but I would not claim that this is true of nationhood. Again, as in the critique of the modernists, but more forcibly here since there is no Gellner and the like to contend with, Hutchinson has set up a fairly simple target that is easy to hit. His target is the supranational conception of Europe (41Delanty 2005). Neglected in it is the tremendous transformation of nationality that has been a feature of the past few decades. In this context the civic tradition is particularly relevant. It is too simple to claim that the European project has operated only on the political level: the reality is that it has penetrated the cultural and moral fabric of European societies to a considerable extent. There is now a convincing empirical and scholarly literature documenting the Europeanization of collective identities (Herrmann, 2004). The claim, which is on the face of it correct, that Europeanization is dominated by national
interests (p. 177) fails to see that the national project has been transformed by
Europeanization and that the relation between both is a reflexive one, each
being transformed by the other (as well as many other forces, such as
regionalization).

This is an argument that is not specific to Europeanization, but is relevant
to wider processes of globalization. Again here the target is too simple, for
I do not think there are many who argue that globalization makes the nation
state redundant. It has been recognized by several theorists that globalization
does not simply undermine nationhood, but offers it new opportunities to
reinvent itself. What we need now to address in greater detail is less the
consequences of modernity for nationalism than the relation of globalization
to nationalism and nations.1

This brings me to the third point, the civic dimension of nationalism. By
this I mean a view of the nation that emphasizes the public dimension of
culture and the link between nationalism and democracy. Hutchinson
ultimately relies on a notion of culture as symbolic and embodied in ethnicity.
This neglects the civic or public dimension of culture as public contestation.
Notions of ethnicity and nationhood are not exempt from this. Following the
interesting suggestion made in Chapter 3, the nation can be seen as a field of
conflicting interpretations without being necessarily one of deeply engraved
cultural conflict. Cultural diversity does not amount to cultural conflict. The
nation may not be invented in the way the modernists believed by elites for
instrumental purposes, but it is continuously constructed in debates about it.
Now, with respect to Europe I think it is simply too easy to say that there is
‘no common fate as Europeans’ (p. 184) and that consequently there is no real
alternative to the ethnically based nation state. While I agree that the notion
of a trauma inherited from the Second World War is also not strong enough
to create a sense of belonging or identity (p. 189), this does not warrant the
conclusion drawn. There is a European civic tradition of nationhood – as
reflected in citizenship, social struggles over rights and justice – and one that
has a considerable significance today. Its significance consists less in a
common supranational European identity than a mode of public discourse
over issues of political community and civil society. I would argue that this
dimension of nationhood came to the fore, for example, in Ireland in recent
years and has succeeded in diluting both the communitarian and statist
conceptions of the nation. I do not see any recognition of this in the analysis.

The thesis of the book ultimately falls on the examples discussed in the final
Conclusion – Australia, Canada, USA and many countries in the non-western
world – where an uncertainty enters into the picture on those countries which
have been relatively successful in creating multi-ethnic national communities.
It is indeed the case that in Australia the Anglo-Celtic ethnicity formed the
main component, but current attempts to articulate a more inclusive Aus-
tralian national identity are not premised on this ethnicity; it cannot be
credibly argued that Canadian national identity is based on an Anglo-French
core – indeed it is arguably the case that Canadian national identity is an

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accommodation, if not a neutralization, of the British and French traditions. And what about the many examples of non-western countries where conceptions of the nation do not appeal to a premodern ethnic past? Again, I suggest the problem is the absence of a civic conception of nationalism and an approach that is limited by the concern with providing an ethno-symbolist corrective of the modernist theory of nationalism.

In sum, this impressively argued book on the contemporaneity of nationhood is weighed down by an obsession with the past or premodern origins of the nation and a view of ethnicity as coeval with the nation; it fails to see that nations are more than both nationalism and ethnicity. The key insight of the book for me is not that nations are zones of conflict but fields of conflicting interpretations of the world. I think that the most significant aspects of Europeanization and wider cosmopolitan currents have occurred within and through nationality rather than above it. Thus the category of the nation can be a positive source of renewal and not one of historical fatalism. The key to the appeal of nationalism is not its integral connection to ethnicity but rather its association with democracy and self-determination.

John Hutchinson: In Defence of Transhistorical Ethno-Symbolism: A Reply to My Critics

It was once the fashion for scholars to engage in an autocritique of their intellectual flaws. The debates inaugurated by *Nations and Nationalism* make this task redundant, at least for scholars of nationalism, since the three distinguished academics invited to discuss *Nations as Zones of Conflict* have done a better job than I ever could. I thank them for their appreciation and for their searching criticisms. Before, I was unaware I was a transhistorical ethno-symbolist: now I know I am. I thank also Eric Kaufmann for organising this occasion so efficiently.

To begin with, let me explain the book. I did not intend a comprehensive overview, let alone a theory of nationalism and nations. My aim was to stimulate debate by bringing into focus the unacknowledged role of conflict in the constitution of nations. My main theses were: Nations are products of globalisation, which is not a novel but an ancient and recurrent phenomenon (including imperial conquest, religious missions, migration, economic expansion), that is ethno-genetic, and has resulted in many populations having layered and traumatic pasts. Although built on such pasts, nations are modern political entities, created by nationalists who employ historical revivals in order to overthrow ethnic traditionalists. In many cases, the memories of traumatic pasts have provided reference points for competing nationalist projects that have offered alternative models of modernisation as well as producing civil conflict. Although nationalists typically seek unitary and bounded nation-states, they have never succeeded because their populations have always been immersed within wider networks that sustain rival
class, religious, regional-continental identities, with which they periodically clash. In short, conflict is endemic to nations, and the idea of the unitary nation-state as the exemplar of modernity is a myth. Nationalists may propose the nation and even attempt via a state to impose a nation, but the nation can only be formed as recurrent process from below. Equally mythical is the idea that we are moving into a post-national age because of the multiplicity of loyalties resulting from global pressures. Competing loyalties have existed from the origins of nationalism and are the primary reason we see its episodic revival. Further globalisation will generate new rounds of nation-creation.

I aimed to provoke, but my critics’ reactions indicate I may have been too successful. In one, my book has induced an identity crisis; in another, an attempt at methodological exorcism. Umut Özkirimli, a postmodernist, is worried because he largely agrees with me: I am rebuked for defending an ethno-symbolism that I have effectively abandoned. Andreas Wimmer, however, claims the weaknesses of the book come from its rampant ethno-symbolism: I have essentialised ethnicity and nations as transhistorical entities. Clearly both can’t be right, but can I defend myself against the one without seeming to confirm the criticisms of the other?

All books are partial, and a short book that is trying to say something original in one respect is likely to neglect other aspects of nationalism. I had hoped to discuss the non-ethnic bases of nation formation, but space prevented me. Politics is there; I do discuss the importance of the state, for example, but there is much more to be said, as my critics point out. I agree that state centralisation is the best predictor of nationalism, but the book is not about nationalism so much as nation-formation. Hence, my focus on the cultural dimension.

Nonetheless, Gerard Delanty is right about my neglect of the civic side of nationalism. I should have devoted more attention to this on the bases of my own arguments. I had suggested that populations were often forged into distinctive ethnic groups by global processes (such as empires or missionary religions making cosmic claims); and that ethnicities and nations in turn could offer platforms for broader (global) networks. Logically then, I should have examined how populations combine a sense of ethnic distinctiveness with universalist models such as civic republicanism (see Roshwald 2006: ch. 4). Delanty also states I emphasise the national framing of Europeanism at the expense of how Europeanisation is changing the nation. But I do observe that national identity was forged in relation to European wide movements (e.g. the religious wars provoked by the Reformation) and also that pan-European movements such as the republicanism and romanticism articulated alternative models of nation-formation. Furthermore, there are many potent processes, originally European, that have been with us for a long time that have affected nation-states, for example, secularisation, industrialisation and militarisation. Is contemporary Europeanisation qualitatively different from such precursors? Even if we accept this, there are many forms of Europeanisation. Some
are benign and have stabilised civic democracy in several states. Others are not so benign, and are perceived to be reducing democratic accountability. I agree, there is more to be said about this.

Delanty claims my model fails to account for multicultural nations. Surely, contemporary debates (e.g. Huntington 2003) confirm the continued salience of ethnicity in influencing policy options. For example, Australian multiculturalism is part of a nationalist project to distance Australia from British monarchical traditions, and is influenced by (though not premised on) an old battle fought between those of English and Irish descent (O’Farrell 1993). The English dominated the Liberal party, business and favoured a British monarchical Australia; the Irish were overrepresented in the Labour party, the unions and republican movements. In the cabinet of Bob Hawke’s Labour government that promoted multiculturalism and republicanism in the 1980s, a majority were of Irish descent. Hawke’s Labour successor Paul Keating combined a fervent republican multiculturalism with an Irish nationalist bravado. He was defeated by the Liberal John Howard, committed to the British connection, who has dampened both republicanism and multiculturalism.

Andreas Wimmer is a formidable theoretician of nationalism and ethnicity, but he has at times misconstrued my book. He is wrong to suggest I offer a general theory of nations or present them as uniform. Rather, I emphasise (as a historian would) that populations are affected unevenly by long range social processes. I do not posit that all nations are similarly divided, that all conflicts have ethnic bases, or that all ethnic pasts persist into the present. I analyse the regional and class bases of competing national models (pp. 85–7), but I claim we cannot explain the recurrence of these models by such interests. I discuss conflicts between nationalists and ultramontane Catholicism (pp. 120–2, 134–5, 144–5) and Islam (pp. 184–6). Wimmer is able to find passages where I appear to write as if the nation is a collective actor. This, however, is a terminological not a methodological slip, and one shared by all scholars in the field (including himself!) who from time to time appear to give independent volition to ‘nationalism’, ‘nation-state’, and the ‘international system’.

So, far from being a romantic ontologist, I argue (in Chapter 2) that nationalists are typically outsiders, who sometimes work against ethnic traditions, that their movements are often weak and divided, that they typically achieve power only by default because of a collapse of the state in war, and that the most secure means of nation-formation is the possession of a state of your own. Still more to the point, I repeatedly state that ethnic identities are often destroyed and that they are more likely to survive when embedded by multiple institutions, especially religious, that are generally more stable and socially penetrative than polities before the modern period (pp. 15, 25–7, 37). Such identities persist into the present because they ‘are carried into the modern era by powerful institutions (states, churches, armies, legal systems)’ (p. 41). I also provide a similar explanation for the recurrence of competing ethnic and national repertoires which are often the product of
traumatic historical episodes ‘memories of which have been carried by social institutions’ (p. 88). I name these institutions, which are various. In Russia, for example, the divisions between Westerners and Russianists are embodied in rival ‘capital’ cities St Petersburg and Moscow as well as religious and literary institutions (pp. 86, 88).

His discussion suggests that I do not specify conditions under which ideological shifts occur. But I do this at many points of my book. In Chapter 2 I discuss why novel strains of nationalism emerge to try to trump older forms of attachment (pp. 65–73), and why state elites and intelligentsia oscillated between rival national conceptions in France and the Tsarist Empire (pp. 94–8). In Chapter 4 I locate factors that cause the decline of nationalist in relation to religious, socialist and Pan-European identities.

Am I then already a post-ethno-symbolist offering an institutionalist equivalent to ‘historically-constituted cultural frames’? On the contrary, I reject sociological (and all other) reductionisms as applied to ethnic and nationalist myth-histories. Like all belief systems, true and false, these are transhistorical and belong to Popper’s world of ‘objective knowledge’ that exists independently of the knowing subject (Popper 1972: ch. 4), even when they are transmitted by oral vernacular genres. What descriptor other than ‘transhistorical’ is applicable to the myth of Anglo-Saxon liberties? Originating soon after the Norman conquest, this acquired new meanings when historicised in the seventeenth century by common lawyers, a core element in English parliaments, became part of the insurrectionary Civil war underground, and was adopted in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries by radical and conservative movements (Hill 1968: ch. 3). It continues into the contemporary period in the discourse of Margaret Thatcher and Tony Benn. Where such myths are produced or transmitted by vernacular high cultures that encompass written histories, literatures, law codes, political charters, and religious texts, each with their specialists and reflective traditions, there may be a bank of such myth-histories capable of being invoked (see Kidd 1999). Of course, competing myths are often associated with different power interests, but they are not reducible to them, as the Anglo-Saxon example indicates. When individuals regard particular myths as combining cognitive and affective solutions to pressing problems, myths may operate as causal agents. They resurface and become reinforced in social life because they appear to explain crises as manifestations of older challenges. This is particularly true when old friend-enemy stereotypes are revived with respect to geo-political rivalries which can be presented as expressions of an archetypal struggle (pp. 41–2, 109–12).

This brings us to the heart of the matter: our difference over the explanatory significance of ethnicity and the constitutive role played by historical experiences and their interpretation. Wimmer believes that modernity rests on ethnic and national principles, but argues for the primacy of politics. The key to nation-formation lies in the capacity of the modern state to use citizenship and the welfare state as mechanisms of inclusion and
exclusion, that bind conflicting classes within the dominant ethnie into a
bordered society and at the same time exclude ethnic ‘others’ (Wimmer 2002).
His model is powerful, but since Andreas has offered intellectual assistance to
me, let me repay him by suggesting his modernism requires radical ethno-
symbolic revision.

His model fails to give weight either to the history or the content of the
ethnicity in the name of which nationalists act. This history is important when
ethnicity has crystallised out of the collisions of populations in war, religious
conflict and economic competition. The dominant and subordinate ethnies of
which he speaks are often historically laden with specific (though competing)
concepts of homeland, geo-politics, friend-foe relations, cultural exclusiveness
and historical destiny. Were he to recognise this, he would have to admit that
although in some respects nations are modern, in others they are often
profoundly unmodern. Nationalists may reinforce through the state much
older collective identifications with religion: for example, with Catholicism in
Poland. They may seek to mobilise their societies to regain ancient territories
as when nationalists drove the Greek state’s long disastrous quest through
several wars to reconquer the lands of the Byzantine Empire, at the expense
of its socio-economic development (Pepelassis 1958).

Moreover, these older identifications often continue to have dynamic
properties even as nationalist state-builders attempt to establish more
routinised collective loyalties. Throughout the modern period the impact of
war and transnational ideological movements reverberates, making nations-
states unstable entities. They can be overthrown in war, subject to dramatic
territorial contractions or expansions, or be shaken by ideological competitors
from outside, such as ultramontane Catholicism, Communism and Islam,
which can appear to threaten core collective values. This means we cannot
conceive of nation-states as enclosed worlds or cages in which populations are
formed into stable identities by elite co-ordination and mass propaganda.

Because the very nature of the territorial state around which political
interests assemble comes periodically into doubt, nationalists are forced
regularly to consider existential (and ontologically prepolitical) questions of
who they are, where they should be, and on what moral basis the nation
should be constituted. Inevitably they are drawn to consider the relevance of
the stock of older geo-political and cultural images, where these are available,
in order to reformulate programmes and mobilise populations in defence of
the nation. Nationalists then can only form the nation in recurring waves
with the support of the population from below, and it is of great advantage
then to have both a bank of ‘historical’ memories and a solid popular heritage
on which to build.

Transhistorical questions of identity (linking past, present and future), the
stock of historical repertoires available to actors, and the debates through
which options are sifted lie then at the heart of nationalism in its ‘hot’
manifestations. They are not secondary to the politics of resource competi-
tion, important though these are (see Hutchinson 1987: ch. 8). They are the
ground on which politics rests, though political interests enter into their resolution. Can we then independently assess the strength of ethnic traditions and predict successful nation-formation? This is to confuse ethno-symbolism with an ethnic determinism. As I show, ethnic traditions are strong where they are institutionalised, and if they are tied to conservative groups, they may act as a block on nationalist movements. One example is the prolonged resistance of Orthodox Judaism to secular Zionism. The permutations of identity politics are too complex to allow for sociological prediction. A historical approach is more suitable, especially since there are not stable societal units for rigorous comparison, when the terrain on which nationalists act changes.

Do then ethno-symbolists focus only on the dependent variable, ignoring difficult cases? By no means. We recognise that ethnic communities disappear from history and also advocate its relevance for political communities that at first sight appear to be modern constructs. This approach, still relatively young, has been applied fruitfully to the cases of the USA (Grant 2004), the Middle East (Gerber 2004) and Turkey (Canele 2002; Gerber 2006), and by me to the identity politics of Australia, Canada and the USA, where the relatively thin sense of distinctiveness and a focus on the future rather than the past as justification of a national identity has consequences for internal and external relations (Hutchinson 1994: ch. 6). What ethno-symbolists maintain is that historical myths and a sense of cultural distinctiveness lie at the core of national identity, and that you cannot understand the options of nation-builders unless you include in your analysis their cultural assumptions and symbolic resources, as well as the political setting in which they act. This is precisely an agency-based approach, and one that must inform the analyses of coalition-building and political mobilisation.

Finally, Andreas Wimmer asks (somewhat rhetorically), ‘Does nationalism breed violence or violence breed nationalism?’, and condemns me for concentrating on the latter. This, however, cannot be an either/or issue. The violent effects of nationalism were not the focus of this book. They deserve a study unto themselves, and this is my current research project. It is too simple to speak of ‘the war-proneness of nationalism’. It invites the response – compared with what other belief and political systems?

Umut Özkitrimli’s witty discussion makes several interesting points. Dubbing my work ‘futuristic ethno-symbolism’, he claims it marks a substantial shift from the ‘classical’ formulation of Anthony Smith (1986). As a nominalist, I see no virtue in seeking an ‘essentialist’ definition of ‘ethno-symbolism’, which is a theoretical framework only (ie not a theory), and can be inflected in different ways, depending on the problem to be investigated. He, however, states there is a contradiction (asserted also by the other discussants) between my emphasis both on the embeddedness of ethnic repertoire and on the transformational character of nationalism. I see a tension, not a contradiction. I argue that (ancient and modern) global processes are often ethnogenetic, resulting in populations having layered pasts, but that globalisation is
an unpredictable and unending phenomenon that can erode established identities, as well as being a catalyst for new ethnic crystallisations. I admit I am interested in the making and remaking of nations as a recurring process as well as in examining how far older ethnic values and forms influence the routes to modernisation. That is simply a different use of the framework to grasp another aspect of the protean problem of nationalism. This inflection is particularly useful when examining how ‘new’ nations, such as the USA, form. In my book I also look at nationalist strategies of ‘mythic overlaying’, but there is room for more work on how new ethnic or national repertoires interrelate with older identities, and on the circumstances under which one becomes dominant.

Nonetheless, how can one argue that national identities are embedded but also variable in their reach and intensity? My answer is twofold. In the first place, individuals always operate with many layers of attachment and that nationalists are strategic about when to adopt a national lens, normally viewing their family or religious ties as compatible with their core national identities. It is impossible to maintain a single identity in this world. There is also variability in a second sense to refer to identity shift. I argue that if powerful experiences (such as collective participation in war) are important factors in the crystallisation of national identities, so other such experiences can undermine national loyalties. For example, if your nation engages in wars stigmatised as genocidal. Indeed, the rise of the European Union is a response to the perception of many of the peoples of Europe after the Second World War that unbridled nationalism was the road to mutual destruction.

Özkirimli also asks if there is no single ethnic past, why cannot nationalists select the past that will serve present needs, and suggests that the success of nationalism is due to the work they put in to promoting their version of the world. I agree in part. All our decisions about the world arise out of current preoccupations, but equally our perception of current problems is framed by assumptions that are (necessarily) historically given. In my book I speak of the past in two senses. There is the past as sets of unexamined assumptions which inform our view of the world as well as our practices – this is the lived past, of traditions, including ethnic traditions. Then especially (though not exclusively) in the modern world where history becomes a surrogate religion, there is also the past as ideology, as source of meaning, and this is more free-floating. Histori­cist nationalist ideologies by finding new ‘solutions’ to present problems may operate as causal agents, for example by legitimising social, economic and political borrowing.

These pasts – the past as experience and the past as ideological programme-may clash. I argue that nationalists in order to justify socio-political innovation may seek to import new meanings into a touchstone age or find an alternative. There may be many alternative pasts available to nationalists. But to be successful, nationalists must speak to their constituencies in languages the latter understand. If they fail to do so, their project is

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still-born and they may be overthrown by counter elites. It is in this sense that I speak of trial and error, which implies an interaction between elites and their target population.

It might be argued that in many, if not most, cases there are several ‘live’ competing ethnic traditions, and this gives political elites room to select. In nineteenth century Ireland there were three main traditions. There was the constitutionalist nationalism of the (largely) Catholic urban middle class elite who argued for Irish political autonomy within the British Isles, invoking the memory of the Irish parliament abolished in 1801, and still older Anglo-Norman institutions. Many constitutional nationalists were active also in British radical movements and hoped for a union of hearts between the Irish and British democracies. There was the Ireland of Catholic martyrdom promoted by the Catholic hierarchy, suspicious of secular politicians, which saw itself as the patriarchal leader of a rural conservative people. Thirdly, there were millenarian traditions of a peasantry (feared by constitutionalists and Bishops) who dreamed of reversing the land settlement of the seventeenth century conquest and of overthrowing British and Protestant power. Revolutionaries sought to co-opt this radicalism. To obtain power constitutional nationalists had (rather than chose) to build coalitions with the other two forces, but they were united only in their anti-Britishness, and this was like trying to drive a wagon with three horses pulling in different directions. From time to time the wagon overturned; and there were recurring civil conflicts within Irish nationalism out of which an alternative Gaelic revivalist separatist nationalism formed, a section of which joined the revolutionary underground. During the First World War when constitutionalist nationalists were co-opted to the British war effort, they were usurped by the revolutionaries, thanks to the British response to the Easter revolt in 1916, when the rebels were executed, military rule was imposed and conscription threatened. At that point a new constellation of forces emerged, with the revolutionaries in informal alliance with the Church and the bulk of the Catholic people. When a new Irish nation-state emerged it was culturally separatist, Catholic, and rural-populist, though also strongly democratic (a tribute to the legacy of the constitutionalists).

This outcome was not ethnically determined but neither is it explicable by elite autonomy. Successful politicians do not typically operate above their society, as if unaffected in their goals and strategies by the traditions of their upbringing. Only an analysis that recognises the interplay between political elites, as they circulate with competing ideological programmes, institutional power, circumstances, and the range of popular ideas and sentiments that constrain and inspire such elites can account for the character of the nation (state) that emerges. I do not accept, therefore, postmodernists’ claims about nationalists’ freedom to select national identities or that nationalists win because they manufacture consent.

I conclude then, Umut, that I fear your identity crisis must continue. You are not an ethno-symbolist, but whether you are Veronika or Veronique, I
doubt if you can be a postmodernist. Postmodernists, to my knowledge, do not have identity crises. For all of us, however, the debate continues.

Notes

1. This is in part the aim of the *Handbook of Nations and Nationalism*, in Delanty and Kumar (2006).

2. I argued that the Italian nation-state was weakened not just, as Wimmer claims, because of ‘a weak ethnic stratum’ but also because, it was rejected by the Papacy, the central Italian medieval institution. As Adrian Lyttelton (1993: 100) states: ‘Under the shadow of the Vatican, ‘the new Rome’ far from assuming a role of universal significance, failed even to fulfil the functions of a true political and cultural capital.’

3. For example, the quotation from p. 94 could easily be reformulated as ‘strengthening the attachment of populations to national identities as they navigate the many challenges . . .’.

4. This is explored at much greater length in Hutchinson 1987. I examine the pattern of alternation between a communitarian cultural and statist nationalism in Ireland over two centuries, and the existence of rival strains of cultural nationalism, Anglo-Irish and Gaelic. I discuss patterns of state centralisation, of social mobility, and of political opportunity structures in order to explain the rise and fall of varieties of nationalism.

5. Catastrophic defeat compelled Greeks after 1922 to surrender the Byzantine adventure, and there was a shift to a Hellenic civic republicanism.

6. He cites me asserting that nationalism is essentially a pacific movement, but here I was referring to cultural nationalists who often explicitly reject a statist politics. The problem I was posing is: why do such movements often switch into violent revolutionary mode? In Chapter 3 I do discuss the circumstances under which cultural conflicts descend into internecine violence.

7. Much of the destructiveness of the modern period derives from the organisational capacities of the industrial state and the killing power of military technology. Wimmer forgets that the conflict between capitalist democracy and Soviet communism came close on one occasion to annihilating much of humanity. Moreover, the Revolutionary wars which conventionally initiate the era of nationalism were only the last in a series of conflicts between Britain and France that began 100 years before, and for much of the eighteenth century Europe was wracked by Imperial and dynastic wars, so vividly satirised in Voltaire’s *Candide*. Before that there were the religious wars of the sixteenth and seventeenth century that culminated in the devastation of Central Europe. The fifteenth century saw the end of the Hundred Years War between the English and French crowns, the expulsion of the Moors and Jews from Spain, and the beginnings of the Hispanic colonisation of the Americas that resulted in the deaths of most of the inhabitants. Before that we have the Crusades. Should we go back for a model to the Roman empire which, in the words of Tacitus, ‘created a desert and called it peace’?

8. This contrast between Anthony Smith’s and my work, however, not only overlooks Smith’s pioneering analysis of competing myths of descent (Smith 1984b), but also presents a static image of his corpus. It fails to recognise that his (1986) merely *launched* a paradigm shift in the field of nationalism, one that he has continued to develop. His perspectives have broadened to consider the religious foundations of nations (Smith 2003).

9. In theory all the pasts of a community are recuperable to nationalists, if historical techniques and sources allow, but *only* in this abstract sense. The past, if it is to be mined to inspire programmes and movements, must be alive in the minds and practices of individuals, as well as being embedded in social institutions.

10. This manner of viewing political actors is conveyed by the term ‘political entrepreneur’ an analytic term that many social scientists apply unproblematically as empirical description. Some nationalists may be so described, but, as Donald Horowitz has observed, many nationalist leaders are primordialists (Horowitz 2004).

11. This also applies to the case of Jeanne d’Arc, the choice of whom was not arbitrary. Although not a continuous symbol of a French identity, she was employed so intermittently, and was...
certainly not obscure (Winock 1998). There were good reasons why republicans and anti-republicans converged on her. Both required a broader legitimation after the revolutionary period: republicans because of the failure of the revolution through the excesses of its Jacobin elite; anti-republicans because in a democratic age, monarchical symbols, now associated with foreign restoration, were losing their power. Moreover, all sides believed in the historic political grandeur of France and its cultural leadership of Europe. This could be traced back to the later Middle Ages, when the French kingdom was unified, led Christendom during the Crusades, developed European vernacular styles such as Gothic architecture, and, of course, expelled English ‘invaders’ in the era of Jeanne from its territories. Jeanne became increasingly potent as an inspirational symbol in a century that saw France occupied wholly or in part by foreign powers several times, in 1814, in 1870 (with the loss of Alsace and Lorraine), and in the First and Second World Wars. The cult of Jeanne enabled different French traditions to link past and present in order to articulate hopes for the future.

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