2.7, 8, 10); F. M. Barnard, 'National culture and political legitimacy: Herder and Rousseau', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 44 (1983), 231–53.

24 Canovan, *Nationalism*, pp. 14–22, 101–2.

25 Cf. Oliver Zimmer, *A Contested Nation: History, Memory and Nationalism in Switzerland, 1761–1891* (Cambridge: Past & Present Publications, 2003).

26 J. Breuilly, 'Reflections on nationalism', *Philosophy of the Social Sciences* 15 (1985), 65–73, repr. in Woolf (ed.), *Nationalism*, pp. 137–54.

CHAPTER 3

Changes in the political uses of the nation: continuity or discontinuity?

John Breuilly

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS*

In this essay I consider the claims that nations existed in pre-modern history and that political arguments appealing to such communities were significant. I argue that the limited evidence available from the pre-modern period suggests two principal ways in which the term 'nation' was used: ethnographically, to describe 'barbaric' societies, and as political self-description, usually of a territorial kingdom. The nation was subordinated to values associated with civilisation and monarchy. Strong claims for the nation as a 'whole society' with a widespread and continuous sense of national identity elide this ethnographic/political distinction and ignore the subordinate value nation plays in both kinds of discourse. Furthermore, those arguing for a significant pre-modern sense of nationality conflate fragmented pieces of evidence in which 'nation' and cognate terms are used, investing these with a coherence, continuity and political importance they did not possess.

I argue that national identity, understood as the processes of maintaining, reinterpreting and transmitting the values associated with the nation, has weak force in the pre-modern period because it operates discontinuously and does not fuse cultural identity with political interest, and its impact – often highly opportunistic and contingent – is confined to court, noble and Church elites. Finally, in this critical part of the essay, I suggest that nation and national identity (though not nationalism) become significant in specific parts of Europe during the confessional disputes of the early modern period but that this can be accommodated within a modernist framework.

In the second part of the essay I briefly outline the transformations of modernity which radically alter the concept of the nation, strengthen

national identity and generate nationalism. This contrasts sharply with what can be reliably established about nations, national identity and nationalism in the pre-modern period. It supports the argument that there is no significant continuity between pre-modern and modern national identity and that such connections as do exist are contingent, arising out of nationalist myth-making.

In the first section where modernists (including myself) have normally made sweeping and often misleading assertions, I focus on two cases for which very strong arguments in favour of pre-modern nations and even nationalism have been mounted: medieval England and Reformation Netherlands. If these arguments can be refuted, *a fortiori* so can those for weaker cases. The second section works more by general assertion as I can draw upon detailed modernist arguments.

DEFINITIONS

It is important to define key terms. I start with definitions of *nation, national identity* and *nationalism* proposed by Smith:[1]

NATION: 'a named human population occupying an historic territory and sharing common myths and memories, a public culture, and common laws and customs for all members'.
NATIONAL IDENTITY: 'the maintenance and continual reinterpretation of the pattern of values, symbols, memories, myths and traditions that form the distinctive heritage of the nation, and the identification of individuals with that heritage and its pattern'.
NATIONALISM: 'a *political* movement for the attainment and maintenance of autonomy, unity and identity on behalf of a population, some of whose members deem it to constitute an actual or potential "nation"'. [Smith uses the term 'an ideological movement'. For reasons which will become clear I replace 'ideological' with 'political'.]

Some writers have objected that such definitions are too precise and already load the dice in favour of modernist arguments. Thus Blanning suggests that Smith's definition of nation puts 'any investigation into lead boots before the start-line has been reached.'[2] I note two points about such objections. First, these definitions were devised by a leading critic of modernist interpretations and deliberately avoid building modernist features into the definitions. Second, like so many critics of this ilk, Blanning hints instead at a vague and inoperable 'definition', quoting with approval an eighteenth-century writer: 'the native inhabitants of a country in so far as they have a common origin and speak a common language, whether they

constitute a single state or are divided into several'. Notions like 'common origin' and 'language' beg more questions than they answer. Blanning considers any xenophobic expression as a form of nationalism, exemplified by the standard quotations from Shakespeare's *Henry V*.[3] 'Nation' becomes so loose a term as to render impossible any discriminating and analytical approach to the subject. It is up to such critics to propose more useful definitions rather than to object to such a necessary first step.

WHEN WAS THE NATION?

The perennialist claim

Recently medieval and even ancient historians have insisted on the existence of nations in their period.[4] These claims have been taken up in general works and presented as an important objection to modernist views of nation and nationalism.[5] I call arguments asserting the significant existence of pre-modern nations 'perennialism'. Perennialists do not claim that nations have a continuous or universal existence, only that there have been occurrences of the nation as a significant human group in pre-modern times.

If this perennialist claim is accepted, one could infer that pre-modern national identity also existed. It would be difficult to see how a nation could exist in the absence of processes which maintain, reinterpret and transmit values associated with it. The processes which maintain and transmit national identity are precisely what produces nations. In principle one could identify such processes and deny the existence of nations on the grounds that these processes had an extremely limited impact. I will suggest that perennialists have jumped from apparent national identity processes identified in fragmented discourses to construct an over-coherent idea of the nation. I will stress the need to establish *processes* of producing national identity which go beyond demonstrating that 'nation' and cognate terms are found in texts.

MEDIEVAL ENGLAND[6]

Introductory points

The perennialist argument is at its strongest in the case of medieval England. Key texts and events are Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the*

English People, the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, the achievements of Alfred of Wessex, the bringing together of much of England under one government in the late Anglo-Saxon period, the rapid acceptance of English identity by Normans after 1066, the elaboration of notions of English superiority from the early twelfth century, the growth of central government from the thirteenth century, the fourteenth-century emergence of an English written vernacular, and the national(ist) propaganda deployed during the Hundred Years War against France.[7]

I am not competent to debate with specialists who have researched difficult sources, textual and other, to construct a perennialist argument. However, these specialists insist on the implications of their arguments for an understanding of national identity and nationalism in the modern period.[8] Generalists like Hastings and Smith draw upon such medievalists to support their criticisms of modernists. So modernists (whose expertise is usually confined to the modern period) cannot ignore these arguments. Fortunately, there is no consensus amongst medieval historians, some of whose arguments are supportive of modernist approaches.[9] This emboldens me to engage with medieval and early modern historiography. That engagement has led me to revise but not abandon my modernist position.

The 'English' project before 1066

In both title and language the *Ecclesiastical History* asserts the identity and mission of the English against other inhabitants of Britain. The first thing that strikes a modern historian is the paucity of other evidence. We depend upon Bede for the context within which we situate his text.[10] The danger is obvious: if one accepts Bede's view of his world, his national terminology will seem appropriate to understanding that world. However, when there is non-textual evidence showing that 'British' cultural traits continued after their supposed destruction by the 'English', this suggests that the sharp distinction Bede draws between the two groups is problematic.[11]

It is now generally agreed that we should read Bede as a project, not a description. Bede pressed the claims of Roman Christian against Celtic Christian and pagan rulers; more specifically he supported Northumbrian rulers against their enemies. Bede's shift in usage from 'Saxon' to 'English', for example, makes sense in terms of the timing of Pope Gregory's mission to the English and the conversion work of Augustine. It has no ethnic or linguistic meaning.

The term 'English' therefore is subordinate to a primary Roman Christian and a secondary Northumbrian dynastic value. The promotion

of Roman Christianity proceeds by conquest (one ruler replacing another) and conversion (missionaries working on rulers). Much of the *Ecclesiastical History* is concerned with the conversion of pagans to Christianity and the acceptance by Celtic Christians of Roman Christian practices such as the dating of Easter.[12] Conversion was a top-down process of which Bede provides wonderfully vivid accounts. The 'Anglicisation' of the British Isles consists of removing or converting rulers.

One finds modern missionaries taking the same line. (Admittedly 'conversion from below' was another option.) There is abundant evidence that such conversion was superficial and fragile. The chief often 'lapsed'.[13] Bede reports chiefly conversions to Roman Christianity as the spreading of Englishness. We know that such conversions in nineteenth-century Africa were episodic, potentially reversible and did not signify ethnic transformation. Why should we assume anything different for eighth-century England? Bede seems to make an ethnic/religious equation, inviting the English to see themselves as the new Israelites, but we have no evidence that the invitation was understood, let alone accepted.

Bede's text at best is an agent in the *later* making of English national identity, influencing the way subsequent writers used national terms. As Nicholas Brooks puts it:

Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People provides many of [the] crucial components necessary for ethnogenesis: it asserts a common history and origin myth for the English; it emphasises the enmity (both military and ecclesiastical) of the Britons and thus justifies their forfeiture of most of the island of *Britannia*; and it gives only the slightest glimpses of an earlier Roman and British Christian history – the minimum necessary to provide a credible context for the conversion of the pagan Anglo-Saxons.[14]

Brooks goes on to trace Bede's influence in the use of the term 'English' upon Boniface and Alcuin, who wrote later in the eighth century.[15] But Bede's text on its own does not support perennialist claims for eighth-century England.

The claim looks stronger for Alfred, who wielded more power than a monk in Northumbria. Alfred drew upon the *Ecclesiastical History* (which he had translated into English, thereby promoting its 'ethnogenesis' function) as well as the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, and framed justifications for his territorial claims in national terms. However, if we accept the point made by Reynolds,[16] that it was normal for regnal claims to be justified by claims of affinity with a territory or its inhabitants, one can see why an 'English' argument made sense in Alfred's disputes with other Anglo-Saxon as well as Danish rulers.

Alfred shifted from projecting his realm as 'Saxon' to 'Anglo-Saxon' or even 'English' (*Angelcynn*) as he extended his power over Mercia and Kent. Later, in the 890s, Alfred's court stressed that the language into which Gregory, Boethius, Bede, parts of the Bible and other writings were translated was *English*.[17] Educating 'free-born' men in reading and writing English was an aristocratic project to construct cultural, linguistic and legal unity within the different territories ruled or coveted by Alfred. His challenge to Danish control in northern England was, in a way directly influenced by Bede, framed in terms not of conquest but of unifying the English. Selecting the name 'English' helped justify his expansionist ambitions.

Alfred's achievement lay in his realisation that by harnessing and focusing these three forms of identity [cultural, linguistic, legal] through an appeal to a common memory, and by imposing a cultural hegemony he was able to provide a retrospective and self-consciously historical explanation for the creation of a fourth, national consciousness. In that sense, while Bede invented the English as a people in the sight of God, they were made one nation by 'Alfred of the English . . .'.[18]

However, it is doubtful whether this justification made sense beyond the claimant and members of the small elite Alfred tried to educate in being English. Mid-ninth-century land charters in northern England acknowledged a plurality of identities: Anglo-Saxon, Northumbrian, pagan and Briton.[19]

'England' and the English was first a local Christianising (Bede) and then a dynastic (Alfred) project. If this changing project had been pursued energetically, consistently and successfully it might be argued that it would eventually have actually produced an English nation. However, one must not confuse the early project with one possible long-run outcome. Very different, and more extensive, kinds of evidence are needed to argue this latter case. Even if the usage of the term 'English' spread and its meaning stabilised from the late ninth century, that would tell us only that subsequent political actors who followed Alfred found the same value in his 'instrumental ethnicity'.

In fact, over the next couple of centuries the meanings shifted. The Danish rulers who established political unity in the early eleventh century might find some use in national terms when responding to external threats from Scandinavia and Normandy, but did not deploy the name 'English' in internal conflicts as Alfred had. The Normans who arrived in 1066 had no interest at all in sustaining the name of the English. So thorough was their displacement of pre-Conquest elites that Henry of Huntingdon, writing in the middle of the twelfth century about the situation in 1087, judged that

the 'English people' had been destroyed.[20] He meant that the elite male figures of pre-Conquest England had been divested of their land and power by Norman conquerors. Why descendants of those conquerors, including Henry himself, re-named themselves 'English' is another story to be explained in new ways. It certainly is not a continuation of an earlier story as the perennialists would have it.[21]

The name 'English' before 1066 related to expansionist religious and political projects, not ethnographic categories. One does not find cultural stereotyping in Bede, e.g. Britons against English, pagans against Christians, civilised against barbarian – in contrast to certain twelfth-century texts.[22] Neither Bede nor Alfred understood Anglicisation as ethnic transformation. They use the name 'English' in ways which make sense to a biblical scholar and an ambitious king, but its meaning does not include that of a whole people with a common language, historic territory or shared culture.[23]

The construction of a political nation

By the late Anglo-Saxon period the projects of Christianisation and political unification had achieved a degree of success. Common administrative units and institutions such as shires and shire courts were established. This construction of a national system of government was continued and consolidated by Norman rulers after 1066.[24] 'England' and 'English' became names for this system of rule and the territory to which it applied.

If one assembles claims about the consolidation of shires and their courts, familial continuities among the landowners using such institutions, the national scope of parliaments from the thirteenth century and the consolidation of a national Church system, one could argue that from the late Anglo-Saxon period there developed self-conscious elites with extensive and continuous institutions which embodied and reproduced ideas of the English nation.[25]

Well – *possibly*. There are important qualifications and counter-arguments. First, this is a process over time. What may be the case in the fourteenth century cannot be read back into the tenth. The continuity of the name 'English' does not mean continuity in the meaning of the name. Second, the existence of an institution does not produce some determinant, matching consciousness. We may regard the shire courts as a national institution, but we need independent evidence to show that people using such courts thought about them like that. Combining these two points, the

longevity of certain institutions does not imply some constant and match-
ing group identity over that whole period.

Take the example of shire courts. As I understand it, these came to be
established over much of England by the late Anglo-Saxon period.
Presumably they took time to embed themselves in areas where they had
been most recently established, and varied in how they functioned accord-
ing to local circumstances.[26] They met twice a year and were largely
confined to adjudicating disputes within the county. Why should infre-
quent meetings of local institutions, even if organised along (roughly)
similar lines and under one royal authority, be assumed to have induced
a sense of national identity? In the absence of *direct* evidence of such a
shared sense of identity I do not see the justification for such an assump-
tion. Indeed, it is more plausible to assume the opposite, namely that most
people using these institutions cared or thought little about their national
significance and regarded them primarily as instruments for the resolution
of local disputes.

As for longevity, institutions change their purposes and the constitu-
encies they serve. Thegns using shire courts in late Anglo-Saxon England
have few connections or affinities with the early modern gentry for whom
we do have evidence of a sense of national identity.[27] I am not persuaded –
and will not be unless presented with good, direct evidence – that
substantial landholders attending a court in Wiltshire once every six
months had any sense of 'imagined community' with their counterparts
in Cheshire. For Anderson such a capacity for imagination requires not just
similarity but communication.[28] Clearly there was some communication;
shire courts were established by and answerable to royal authority. To that
extent these were national institutions but that had an impact only on the
consciousness of an extremely small elite consisting of the king and his
officials.

Furthermore, especially for the period c.1066–1300, one can find very
local and contingent explanations for the use of national language. William
of Malmesbury's assertions about the English served the interests of a
particular group of second- or third-generation elite Normans against
magnates with still-powerful ties back in Normandy, rather than indicating
the absorption of a new elite into the group identity of older elites.[29] The
same point explains the apparent contradiction of Henry of Huntingdon
mourning the destruction of the 'English people' by 1087 but affirming
their existence by the time his story ended in 1154.[30] These assertions of
Englishness differed between an earlier generation of 'English' resignation
to marginalisation by newly arrived Normans and a subsequent generation

which, as Normandy and other continental possessions were lost, identi-
fied themselves with the polity of England.[31] Incidentally, the occasional
argument about 'British' identity could be explained in similar fashion.
One reason Geoffrey of Monmouth objected to the stereotyping of the
Welsh as barbarians was that his patron, Robert of Gloucester, had formed
alliances with Welsh chiefs in his conflict with King Stephen (see below,
'The civilised and the barbaric').[32]

The consolidation of a single system of government over much of
England gave to the terms 'England' and the 'English' a new force,
referring to the territory ruled by this government, the institutions it
used and the elites which ran these institutions. However, these names
were institutional, not ethnic ones. There was no effort to persuade the
majority of subjects to identify themselves with this system of rule and its
names. The project of using English, begun under Alfred, was abandoned.
Latin was the principal written language. When a written vernacular
developed in the thirteenth century, it was *French*. English as a written
vernacular prose form only starts to become important in the fourteenth
century.[33] Any argument that the Normans understood themselves as
English[34] in any ethnic sense requires that 'ethnicity' be sharply separated
from language for some two hundred years.[35] Any attempt to locate
'ethnicity' instead in elite customs and manners founders on the 'supra-
national' ethics of chivalry and piety which came to dominate amongst
Western European elites in this period.

The achievement of strong national government, coupled with a weak-
ening hold on continental territories, ensured that the names 'England' and
'English' used by Bede and those influenced by him were taken up by rulers
of Norman descent as a political self-description but with new, often
highly instrumental and rapidly changing meanings.[36]

'England' as the name of a territorial polity became more fixed and
significant. A comparison can bring out how this influences political
language. Second- or third-generation Norman elites in England called
themselves English, often to assert themselves against Norman magnates
now acquiring an interest in the rich pickings of England. Second- or
third-generation English elites settled in Ireland called themselves English
too, even as they in turn grumbled about the lack of truly English qualities
back in the home country or amongst new arrivals, whether settlers or
administrators. There is a compelling parallel with modern examples:
Algerian French, British Rhodesians. The asymmetry in this comparison –
Normans become English in England but English stay English in Ireland – is
best explained by the centrality of the rule of the English monarchy and the

marginal positions in relation to that power of both Normandy and Ireland. As a territorially centred monarchy becomes increasingly powerful and stable, it provides the language of political identity for its elites. To that extent the increased salience of 'national identity' is to be expected in England from c.1300 onwards.

The civilised and the barbaric

Historians have argued persuasively that from the middle of the twelfth century there developed an ethnic discourse of the Irish and Welsh (rather less the Scots) as barbarians compared to the civilised English, even if these views were expressed in Latin and French.[37] Such texts, and supporting evidence for the greater importance of towns, money and arable farming in southern and central England compared to Wales, Ireland and highland Scotland, connect ethnic stereotypes to distinct ways of life which extend well beyond elite institutions.

This discourse is less about national differences and more about the revival of a classical ethnography There is an affinity between how Herodotus writes about Scythians or Tacitus about Germans and how William of Malmesbury writes about the Welsh. There is an implication that arable farming, market towns, civilised conduct of warfare and much else would turn barbarians into civilised people.[38] The contrasts are between elites and are based on ways of life, the civilised and the barbaric; they are not national contrasts. Tribal chiefs, their retinues and holy men, are compared to the English king, landowners and clergy, as is clear when comparison touches upon subjects such as literacy or table manners.[39]

Gillingham has argued that such ethnographic contrasts underpin what he calls a project of 'English imperialism'.[40] However, this language is distinct from that used in disputes with the Scots and the French, the principal enemies of this period. The Scottish crown and the society it ruled in the lowlands was not dissimilar to that of England in language and customs. Ethnographic distinctions played little role in Anglo-Scots and Anglo-French disputes (except when Scottish Gaeldom was involved). The most serious threats to England came from the arable and commercial kingdoms of Scotland and France, not the poorer, pastoral societies of the Welsh and the Irish. Therefore, the language of nationality used in disputes with the Scottish and French shifted from the ethnographic to the political. I will focus on the use of national terms in conflicts with France.[41]

Invoking the nation in inter-state conflict

The Hundred Years War is often cited as proof positive of the importance of national identity, even of nationalism. French and English kings appealed to the nation and depicted themselves defending national territory. The English crown commanded that sermons be preached in churches in support of war. The figure of Joan of Arc served as a focus of patriotic feeling at the time; she was not just a myth constructed much later.

There are changes in how the idea of the nation was used during this prolonged conflict. It is the work of centralising monarchy which accounts for the changes. As monarchies increased their authority over a given territory, so they identified themselves increasingly with that territory, what Reynolds calls the 'regnum':[42]

In France the thirteenth century had witnessed a gradual advance in what was regarded as a vassal's obligation, from defence of his lord (the king) to defence of the crown (the *corona*) and, by the end of the century, defence of the kingdom (the *regnum*).[43]

Increasing demands placed by the crown on those it ruled made direct relations between kings and subjects more important:

In 1439 the English Parliament moved with the times when it passed legislation making desertion, even when no war was being fought, the breaking not simply of a private contract between soldier and captain but, more important, the breaking of a formal undertaking in which both soldier and captain were the servants of a greater, public good.[44]

The nation is coterminous with the polity: territorially through the kingdom, politically through the public good as defined by the crown.

The national idea could be deployed only in certain ways and situations. The English crown could not persuade its English subjects that defence of Aquitaine – an Angevin legacy – was a defence of part of the realm of England. War had to be justified either as a pre-emptive move against possible French attack or as a source of profit. Invoking the nation correlates directly with increasing dependence on taxation falling upon ever larger segments of the population. This is a measure of both centralising royal authority and the need to sell royal policy to tax payers.

The national idea remained largely monarchical. Learned treatises argued claims in terms of lineages. Sometimes royal genealogies were posted on church doors. Myths of common descent, such as that from the Trojans, were elaborated but this was an aristocratic rationalisation,

declining in meaning with the rise of powerful and impersonal territorial polities. Such myths were purely genealogical; issues of language and custom were absent. Celebrating military success and mourning defeat focused on the king and knightly warriors (Joan of Arc is a notable exception). Two centuries later Shakespeare would depict Henry V on the eve of Agincourt moving in disguise amongst common men, ethnic stereotypes of Scot, Irishman and Welshman (but not English), but such imagery was not deployed at the time.[45]

Other, often more important identities and interests were involved. The English crown held on to Aquitaine and more short-lived occupations in other parts of France by incorporating (and sometimes importing) landed elites. When the French crown gained control of these areas, it had to come to a similar understanding with local elites, including recent immigrants from England. Much of the war effort must be seen in these local terms:

not all public expenditure related to war was the direct result of centralised intervention or initiative. French historians have … stressed … that in their country there existed two financial systems, one national, the other local, which worked side by side, and which were built up together … Opposition to the raising of taxes which might be spent in another part of the kingdom militated against involvement in a war being fought perhaps hundreds of miles away. Equally, only when their region and, consequently, their common profit was threatened, were people ready to act. Indeed, it can be argued that the piecemeal and local nature of war dictated by both the English (the enemy from without) and by the Companies (the enemy from within), to say nothing of the very local character of the civil war which dominated so much of Charles VI's reign, encouraged people to see war in local, rather than national, terms, and that this led naturally to the need for the reaction to come from local initiatives and to be based on local wealth.[46]

Even while writing this Allmand cannot resist placing these local concerns into a national framework. However, for some inhabitants of 'France', the enemy 'without' was the *French*, not the English crown.

If the crown defined the nation and claims to authority were justified by royal lineage arguments, the 'English' king could claim the 'French' crown and *vice versa*. By the Treaty of Troyes (1420) Henry V was designated next king of France, an agreement which presumably would have come into operation had Henry not died in 1422 shortly before Charles VI.[47] It is difficult to reconcile this with the claim that national identity was politically significant. The agreement of 1420 worried 'English' elites, but this was due to anxiety about Henry acquiring powers and commitments which might conflict with their interests rather than to any sense that 'their' king could not also be the ruler of another 'nation'. This was why monarchs

undertaking personal unions had to make elaborate promises to respect the customs and laws of their different kingdoms. This does demonstrate a capacity to separate 'kingdom' (= country) from 'king', but it also shows a simultaneous incapacity to oppose nation to monarchy.[48]

From the 1290s in England, and for both the English and the French crowns during the Hundred Years War, royal propaganda appealed to the national idea.[49] Documents such as royal writs and requests to the Church to say prayers for the king and preach patriotic sermons suggest that the crown sought to address the nation as a broad community extending beyond elites. The idea that authority was legitimate only if it served the common good was central to medieval political thought.[50] The immediate reasons for such appeals are also clear: the costs of war necessitated higher taxation and other impositions. These were unpopular and could provoke resistance, as in 1381. It was vital for the crown to persuade people that the wars were not narrowly royal affairs but in defence of broader English interests.

However, to interpret these appeals as evidence of nationalism or widespread national identity, or as a project to construct a favourable 'public opinion', goes further than the evidence allows. Such appeals were infrequent. During the Hundred Years War, most of them were concentrated into the first decade and there was little or nothing for years at a time. It is difficult to see how a public culture of national consciousness could be produced and transmitted by these episodic efforts. We do not know if and how local churches implemented royal commands for prayers and sermons, let alone their impact on congregations. There was no ethnic component to the addressees of these appeals: the English. The English people *are* the subjects of the English crown. The principled case, for example the claim to the French crown, was made entirely within a monarchical frame of reference and the 'nation' subsumed within that frame. There is another argument about 'defence of the realm'. Insofar as the realm is England and its population the 'English' people, this could be construed as an argument about defending the national interest. But this is an inference from the arguments deploying the non-ethnic terms of 'crown', 'realm' and 'subjects'.

Where ethnographic language bolstered dynastic claims and counterclaims, it was used in two ways. First, the enemy could be ethnically stereotyped. Thus the French were sometimes presented as effeminate, the Scottish as savage. Such stereotypes drew upon the tropes of the civilised and the barbaric. However, the specific referent was the political opponent: 'French' and 'Scottish' were often shorthand for French or Scottish kings. This language never acquired the strength and stability of

that used to characterise the Welsh and Irish, because it was a matter of occasional political manipulation rather than part of a continuous process of comparing different ways of life.

The absence of nation in political thought

In studies of medieval political thought, one rarely encounters nations, national identity or nationalism. None of these words can be found in the index of Gordon Leff, *Medieval Thought.* The index to John Bowle's *Western Political Thought* has many entries under 'natural law' but none under 'nation'. Even where the term is encountered it is not of central, conceptual importance. Antony Black entitles one chapter in his *Political Thought in Europe* 'Empires and nations'.[51] However, so far as explicit political theory is concerned, that chapter divides into sections on theories of universal monarchy ('empire') and state sovereignty. There is an intermediate section (pp. 109–113) which touches upon the subject of nations, but it consists of the author's reflections on the subject and does not involve analysis of contemporary political texts and ideas.[52]

If nations mattered, why did political thinkers not write about them? There are four possible answers. One is that they failed to confront this subject, despite its significance.[53] A second is that the failing rests with historians of medieval political thought. The third one is that nations were so *implicit* in the thought of the day that they never became an object of explicit political argument. The fourth and simplest is that nation was not a significant political concept. Invoking William of Occam, unless the more complex arguments offer some advantage over the simplest one, the latter should be preferred.

A closer look helps explain why the 'nation' is marginal. Medieval thinkers regarded secular government as a necessity arising from the fallen, sinful nature of man. It was recognised, particularly through the influence of Aristotle, that the state (*civitas*)[54] has purposes apart from the defence and promotion of Christianity, that this justifies temporal autonomy from the Church, and that existing rulers can be judged by their subjects to have failed these purposes. Some writers, most notably Marsiglio of Padua, expressed what could be taken as a 'democratic' view. He argued that people are the best judges of their own interests, that majority views are superior to minority ones, that government should be judged by how far it serves the people, and that temporal power in the form of coercion is not subject to spiritual power (if anything, the opposite is the case). This all suggests that there should be institutional provision for enabling the view

of 'the people' to be ascertained and brought to bear upon rulers. However, Marsiglio was unusual. Insofar as he had any conception of the people and how they could express their views, it was derived from the city-state, which had a role for citizen assemblies and could connect directly to the political writings of Aristotle. Even in Marsiglio's writings this 'democratic' conception was qualified by such phrases as 'the weightier part of the population' along with notions of 'tacit consent'. [55]

Thus there was no place for a *political* conceptualisation of the subjects of a state as an ethnic collectivity. There was a concept of the body of citizens in a city-state, but this collective had no ethnic or national quality. As for the states which we might call 'national' by the fifteenth century, such as England or France, there is no suggestion that the term implies the existence of a 'nation' consisting of citizens, more or less widely defined by certain collective characteristics (language, customs, manners) and whose interests and will must be taken into account by princes if their actions are to be regarded as legitimate. There is a body of political thought on the functions and powers of certain assemblies such as parliaments in territorial monarchies or general councils in the Church. Sometimes the term 'nation' can be linked to such bodies, such as the subdivisions within the early fifteenth-century Council of Constance. However, this was a *territorial* not an *ethnic* concept (the English were the delegates who were subjects of the English crown), and was accorded political meaning only in terms of formal, abstract reasoning about the nature of government.

The nation and 'public culture'

Smith's definition of the nation, quoted at the start of this essay, includes the term 'public culture'. However, what does 'public' culture mean in medieval England? There were few fixed points of monarchical government, few permanent physical structures which displayed the crown to its subjects. Access to these places was confined to elites or, at best, imposed restrictions on most people, as the layout of medieval churches and cathedrals makes clear.[56]

Beyond Sunday worship, with visual images for a non-literate congregation, royal faces on coins, images on bridges and other large structures and the occasional display of a royal tour, there was little in the way of symbols which might portray a public, national culture to most people. There is little evidence about the reception of these symbols.

Elites had many more possibilities for communicating ideas and values: the circulation of manuscripts amongst clerics, the rituals and imagery of

royal courts, the trappings associated with the opening and closing of legal institutions. However, this sustained specific group cultures, what in modern parlance we might call private cultures. Were images of the nation important in these enclosed elite cultures? I doubt it – and even if they were, they were always subordinate to other images.

Just to take examples of claims to a 'British' past. In the late thirteenth century one of the illuminations in a manuscript of *Flores Historiarum* was an image of King Arthur; in the early fifteenth century another image of Arthur was included in windows for the library at All Souls' College, Oxford. In both cases Arthur is placed in a selective lineage of kings of England.[57] These images were only accessible to a small part of a narrow elite and any notion of ethnicity is submerged in a royal line (which in the manuscript goes back to Troy and in the windows includes the Roman Emperor Constantine). This hardly qualifies as an element of a public culture maintaining, re-interpreting and transmitting national identity from one generation to the next.

Popular culture in this world was oral. We know virtually nothing about it. Were villagers in Kent and Warwickshire relating similar stories? Did these stories tell of wise and just national rulers, stereotypical foreigners and glorious exploits of English warriors? Did one set of villagers, as they told their national stories, imagine that they *were* just one such set, and that villagers like them all over the country were telling similar stories, as Anderson suggests happens when a thousand or a million people all sit down at breakfast to read the same newspaper? We do not know; we have too little evidence. The most plausible speculation is that there was no such imagining, that these oral cultures were tied to their localities, that even the exotica of travellers' tales were transformed by local context, and that even if – which I think unlikely – similar and national stories were told from one place to another, there was no consciousness of that happening.

The nation in medieval culture

Lack of evidence can encourage boldness of argument. I am interested in how far there existed a significant sense of national identity, even if confined to elite level, amongst late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century 'Germans'. Compared to what is available to medieval English historians, there is an abundance and variety of evidence, though thin compared to that for twentieth-century Germany. Yet gaps in the evidence make historians cautious about claims for a widely shared sense of national identity underpinning war against Napoleon in 1813–15. What evidence

there is suggests conflicting forms of national identity and the importance of other, competing senses of loyalty, such as to region, religion, monarch and social estate. Precisely because the evidence is *not* confined to elites in power but includes dissident intellectuals, local assemblies and even, occasionally, rank-and-file soldiers, the historian becomes circumspect about discerning any one central or authoritative meaning for the nation. Furthermore, other evidence such as conscription lists or measures against deserters points to the limited appeal of the national idea.

Apart from this range of material I would like to see evidence for medieval England pointing to the formation of a national elite (e.g., through geographical mobility, inter-marriage, common education and cultural tastes, economic transactions, concerted political action) capable of producing, using and sustaining a sense of national identity. For nineteenth-century Germany one can trace the formation of a *Gymnasium*- and university-educated bourgeoisie whose members cross state and regional boundaries to participate in a common culture mediated through the German language and communicated through newspapers, journals and cultural associations such as choirs and gymnastic associations. Even then there is lively debate about the role of the national idea. Perhaps the confidence with which claims about national identity in medieval England are made is helped by the *absence* of evidence which might complicate, or even undermine, such claims.

If national values mattered politically I would expect *contention* over them. In the modern period, as soon as the language of nationality becomes politically important it is contested. Consensus suggests unimportance. In medieval sources 'nation' and cognate words are used as terms of art (e.g. of classically based ethnography) in Latin manuscripts with a limited readership linked to an often local, even personal agenda on the part of the author and his patron, or intermittently and manipulatively deployed by rulers to justify dynastic claims and policies. In this second context appeals to the nation are occasional (there are many dynastic claims which would be undermined by national arguments) and subordinate to dynastic interest.

In both its ethnographic and political uses, the term 'nation' is not disputed. The nation is not used to justify political opposition to constituted rule.[58] In politics the nation is conceived of as the passive addressee of dynastic action, not an autonomous political actor.[59] What makes nationalist ideology special is that the nation, as a 'whole society', becomes the *source* of legitimacy, not an instrument deployed or appealed to by an authority legitimised in other ways.

England was precocious in constructing a common set of legal, political and religious institutions which exhibited great continuity from the late Anglo-Saxon period onwards. Furthermore, the separation between local and central institutions breaks down earlier in England than anywhere else, above all with the growth in the significance and functions of parliament from the 1530s. However, we must not project the later meanings of this institution into earlier periods (even if that was what apologists for seventeenth-century parliaments did). An institution that looks national from outside is not necessarily seen like that from inside. Ancient origins do not denote ancient consciousness. Too many historians create an over-coherent picture in time and space, arbitrarily juxtapose fragmentary pieces of evidence, and conflate ethnographic discourses about barbarians with political arguments proffered by monarchs and their followings to justify their pursuit of power.

We should not return to the misleading simplicities of Gellner's model of 'agrarian empire' with its fragmented rural communities and its horizontally separated castes of craftsmen, merchants, landowners and clerics.[60] There *is* a language of nationality in late medieval England, which became institutionalised in Church, royal courts and parliament. But we do not know whether this penetrated below the elites which ran those institutions; we cannot equate elite structures and institutions with some 'matching' sense of national identity in the absence of direct evidence; and political arguments couched in Christian and dynastic terms mattered far more than national arguments, which were set aside if they did not serve religious or dynastic purposes.

Strong perennialist claims have been made for medieval England. Yet one is entitled to feel sceptical about many of these. National identity existed only at elite level, in discontinuous and fragmented forms, in two different worlds of meaning (ethnographic and political) which were casually connected, subordinate to Christian and dynastic values, and with no 'public culture' which could maintain, reinterpret and transmit national identity on a sufficiently extensive scale and stable basis as to enable one to claim that a nation existed.

EARLY MODERN EUROPE AND THE PERENNIALIST ARGUMENT

Changes in Europe from the early sixteenth century made national identity more important. These include the development of a print culture and an accompanying expansion of literacy, and the emergence of popular movements which challenged established institutions.

However, one must be cautious about projecting back later developments. Parliament is seen as central to the development of an oppositional sense of nationality in England. However, Elton has argued that parliament in the sixteenth century was an event rather than an institution, an instrument of royal rule rather an autonomous institution with national goals.[61] The 'national' arguments deployed in the early phase of the English Reformation come from the court and royal servants, for example, when making claims about a national church with a history pre-dating the connection to Rome.[62] Insofar as members of parliament had autonomous goals, these concerned local disputes over property and offices. It is vital to the precocious formation of a national state in England that local goals were pursued through a national institution rather than local institutions – but that is another matter.[63]

There are good arguments to support the idea that the Protestant and national values of those who pushed through reform under Henry VIII and Edward VI represented a fragile, minority zealot view which rooted itself in a broader consciousness only in the early seventeenth century (if then). The work of a regime and a small minority dispersed across the country laid the foundations for a widespread sense of national identity, but that work is not to be confused with the later achievement. Furthermore, there was much continuity with the 'old religion'.[64]

Let me take one example. Generalists arguing for a strong sense of national identity in sixteenth-century England frequently cite the high circulation figures and numerous editions of Foxe's *Book of Martyrs*.[65] The popularity of this powerful litany of Protestant martyrdom under Catholic rule, especially the Marian regime, is taken as evidence of a widespread national and Protestant sense of identity. However, a closer look indicates something rather different. It was the regime which decided to publish the book in large numbers in an expensive format. The command that all churches must keep a chained copy was an attempt to ensure sales and defray costs. Many churches resisted the order precisely because of that cost. Foxe writes about *Protestant*, not *English*, martyrs, including Scottish, German and Dutch figures. To turn Foxe's *Book of Martyrs* into an index of a popular sense of national identity in Elizabethan England is like inferring widespread Christian belief from the ubiquity of Gideon Bibles in modern hotel rooms.[66]

Nevertheless, national arguments took on a new intensity and significance when the struggle for reformed Christianity became associated with rebellion and civil war. A recent essay by Gorski focusing on the Dutch revolt against Habsburg rule presents a strong and cogent argument for the existence of nationalism, not merely national identity.[67]

Gorski provides a penetrating and fair account of modernist views of nationalism. He makes a useful distinction between content (nationalist claims), scope (the social support nationalism mobilises) and politics (specific nationalist political goals). For modernists nationalism is an ideological movement mobilising multi-class support in pursuit of political autonomy for the nation: 'I will try to show that *some instances of early modern national consciousness must be counted as instances of full-blown, modern nationalism by the very criteria set forth by modernists* [author's own emphasis]'.[68] However, Gorski has already narrowed the focus to 'national consciousness', meaning claims made in nationalist texts and images. He distinguishes four strands: Hebraic, classical (Batavian), monarchist, popular (republican). The Batavian idea derives from Tacitus' *Germania*. The Hebraic notion is of the elect nation which has made a covenant with God. Monarchical nationalism supported the House of Orange. Republican nationalism took two forms: oligarchic, associated with wealthy cities hostile to Orange rule; radical, appealing to the 'people'.

Gorski identifies these ideologies in many sources: treatises, pamphlets, images on coins, woodcuts. He shows how they were elaborated between 1620 and 1670 and used in conflicting ways in the struggle for power. The extensive circulation of printed and visual materials suggests popular resonance.

Before looking at Gorski's extension of his argument beyond seventeenth-century Holland, we need to see what he has established for his principal case.

Gorski does not go beyond analysing uses of the 'category' (his term) nation in various sources. His argument would be stronger if connected to 'proto-nationalist' movements, as has been done for English Puritanism and French Calvinism.[69] That would lead to a search for specific explanations for this cluster of cases. I would note the importance of Calvinism, even if there are similar Catholic and Lutheran cases, using a theology which justified collective resistance to authority by the people or their representatives. In territorial kingdoms, the theology could identify a chosen nation in revolt against foreign rulers and false churches.[70] Extensive print propaganda in the vernacular was vital, linked to Protestant insistence on the need to encounter the 'Word of God' as *written*. These movements flourished in commercialised regions – lowland England, Holland, lowland Scotland, the north-eastern seaboard of North America – centred on cities like London, Edinburgh, Antwerp and Boston. All this suggests a modernist interpretation.

There are severe limitations to Gorski's argument. There are three authentically 'national' arguments: Hebraic, Batavian, popular republican.[71] None possesses ethnic content. The Hebraic argument easily took on an internationalist form under Calvinist leadership. The Batavian idea was an erudite conceit and its fragility makes clear that nations cannot be invented out of nothing. Radical republicans equated the common people with the nation. Meanwhile, politics remained largely confined to elites, their interests and institutions, above all the balance of central against provincial, monarchical against urban oligarchical power.

Gorski also makes three expansionist moves beyond his Dutch case. First, he argues that there are similar features in other cases at the time, citing Portugal, Hesse, England, Scotland and North America. Ignorance prevents me commenting on Hesse and Portugal (Gorski provides no detail). I agree in the other three cases but see these in modernist terms.

Gorski's second expansionist move is back in time, citing examples of medieval kings using the language of a chosen people. I have already dealt with the strongest such case, medieval England. His third move is forward in time, suggesting that nationalism in the French Revolution is similar to his Dutch case. He does concede a greater role for secular argument. That is a significant concession: freeing the concept of the nation from Christian and monarchical associations is a radical change, not a minor alteration. More importantly Gorski's exclusive focus on discourse overlooks the point that this change in language accompanies fundamental changes in political goals and social mobilisation. An Estates-General becomes a National Assembly, drawn from constituencies across the country. Organised political parties use the term 'nation' in contested ways. The king is executed for betraying the nation. Declarations of rights invoke the nation as the bearer of those rights. National constitutions are drawn up. Some of the linguistic shifts had been anticipated in *ancien régime* France[72] but were transformed in meaning by the part they played in new types of political opposition, popular movement and state organisation. Only a narrow focus on nation as 'discourse' can ignore these fundamental changes and sustain Gorski's generalisations across different historical periods. Remove that and what remains persuasive in Gorski is that too exclusive a focus on modernity as something starting in the middle of the eighteenth century obscures significant precursors of modern national identity and even nationalism in the Reformation.

Gorski's generalisations are meant to promote not perennialism but what he calls the post-modern case.[73] Perennialists and modernists debate on the same ground. Modernists claim that nations, national identity and

nationalism are peculiar to the modern period; perennialists argue they are also significant in the pre-modern period. The post-modern argument is of a different order.

POST-MODERNISM: THE NATION AS DISCOURSE

Post-modern scepticism about how easily we can jump from discourse to the apparent referents of that discourse, and post-modern alertness to the changeable, contingent and constructive role of language in shaping what it purports to reflect or express, have had a salutary impact. It is important to look closely at discourses of nation and nationalism in their own right and not to assume that such discourse reflects in any simple or direct way the existence of nation and nationalism in any broader or more 'real' sense. Examination of the English medieval case makes it clear that there are complex discourses about the nation and modernists cannot simply deny or ignore this. The same point applies even more emphatically to the early modern period.

Difficulties arise when one tries to contextualise discourse by relating it to non-discursive actions such as mobilising a crowd or organising a faction and seeking evidence for the scope and intensity of such actions. I borrow these two terms from Gorski, who agrees that one must find ways of gauging the broader significance of discourse. By 'intensity' Gorski refers to a continuum which extends from discourse to movements, then political parties, and finally to regimes. The point is a good one, though I would place 'regimes' second on that continuum. 'National' monarchies avail themselves of national language under specific and controlled conditions before movements beyond governmental control take up such language.[74] I would also conflate movements and parties; the latter are often best understood as movements shaped by specific institutional constraints such as parliamentary elections. The last term in the continuum should be 'state', meaning not the intentional values of those holding governmental power but the ways in which state institutions are described and legitimised.

By 'scope' Gorski means a continuum stretching from intellectual elites through social elites and 'middling groups' to the 'common people'. Again I accept the general idea but modify specific terms, moving from establishment to oppositional elites to middling groups and finally to common people. In the pre-modern period 'intellectuals' were part of a clerical-aristocratic elite associated with the ruling order; 'intellectuals' in the modern sense of the term are linked to the emergence of oppositional elites.[75]

Having outlined these useful ways of contextualising national discourse, Gorski abandons them and focuses entirely on discourse, using elaborate analogies about how discourses are 'woven' and employing Foucauldian terms of analysis. However, what happens if one introduces into the analysis the notions of intensity and scope Gorski had earlier considered important?

I will crudely create two indices on a 1–4 basis, using my modified version of Gorski's scales of intensity and scope. The weakest form of nationalism has a score of 2: pure discourse confined to establishment elites. The strongest form of nationalism has a score of 8: state institutions described and legitimised in a national language which appeals to the common people.

There are many weak cases in the pre-modern period. In a few pre-modern cases, like late medieval England, where national language appealed to middling groups, the score might occasionally rise to 3, even 4. Only in the Reformation are national ideas taken up by movements which occasionally mobilise non-elite support. The index might rise to 4 or 5. Only after the post-1789 period do we obtain higher scores of 6 to 8.

This *is* crude. Sometimes, however, there is virtue in crudity. Sophisticated analyses of texts displaying the 'discourse' of nationalism can overlook the point that we study nationalism because of its *political* significance.[76] To be politically significant such discourses must be taken up by movements, appeal to different social groups and help re-order political power. Cases which score 2 on this crude index do not qualify as politically significant. The clustering of higher scores for the post-1789 period demonstrates that modernists are right to insist against post-modernism on the need to contextualise national discourse and against perennialism on the modernity of politically significant national discourse.

CONNECTING THE PRE-MODERN TO THE MODERN

Nothing is completely new or the same as what went before. In this sense arguments about 'continuity' and 'discontinuity' are vacuous. No political concept is constructed *ab nihilo*. This seems especially true of nationalist discourse which draws on past motifs to insist on the historicity of the nation. Looked at in this way it is impossible to dispute perennialist or ethno-symbolic arguments. There will always be *something* in the pre-modern period – language, rituals, names, customs – which resembles or is continuous with national language, rituals, names and customs in the modern period.

The real issue is that of *connection*. *How* do pre-modern discourses, forms of action, senses of identity, relate to modern ones? It is insufficient to consider each of these elements in isolation. People use language as part of some larger project; they acquire a sense of themselves in relation to roles they play and interests they pursue. To detach discourse from action, identity from role, is to mystify. One must start with one subject – say the use of national terms in certain documents or the function of appeals to the nation in political movements – but to make sense of that subject one needs to go beyond it. So my question becomes: how do pre-modern uses of terms like 'nation' connect to modern uses? In particular, given the central concern of this book, my question is: how do pre-modern uses of the term 'nation' relate to the project of gaining or using power and how does that connect to modern uses of the term for the same purpose?

To answer this question one must make clear the significance of the pre-modern/modern distinction. Just to select a moment (the middle of the eighteenth century, 1789, the start of the nineteenth century) and connect that to some event (industrialisation, the French Revolution, reaction to Napoleon) is insufficient. The particular event can never bear the weight of explanation placed upon it. My point of departure is rather to see these various events within the context of a societal transformation which I call modernisation.[77]

Modernisation re-orders the institutional means by which societies carry out the operations which enable them to survive and replicate. Producing and raising children, making and exchanging goods and services, exercising political and military power, creating and communicating agreed knowledge of society and nature: these tasks are taken up by more functionally specialised institutions than existed in pre-modern societies. Such institutions include the nuclear family; the market-oriented firm; the elected parliament and/or professional bureaucracy; armed forces based on professional volunteers or universal conscription; universal and compulsory schooling; universities with research and teaching functions; print media extending from mass circulation newspapers to specialised journals. These replace, marginalise or transform such institutions as guilds; corporations; manorial and common lands; personal monarchy; monopolistic established churches; peasant armies officered by aristocrats.

This is not a simple, instantaneous or invariant transformation but a complex, protracted and variable one. In some cases there is an extensive period of gradual institutional change; in others such change comes about rapidly. Usually one or another element of modernisation takes the leading role: rapid mechanisation in parts of England; the sudden emergence of

mass politics in France; the imposition of bureaucratic rule in Napoleonic Germany. As a consequence, the way in which nationalism develops varies.

Such a transformation alters the way political power is understood and justified. The state becomes an impersonal set of institutions controlling a sharply defined territory which is legitimated in terms of the interests and views of those it rules. Between the middle of the eighteenth century and the late nineteenth century the idea of democracy moved from the political margins to become the dominant political creed, the fiction to which states must subscribe. States enveloped those they ruled with border controls and surveillance techniques.[78] The idea of the nation ceased to be an ethnographic label for barbarians or the political self-description of kingdoms. It became the claim that whole societies were nations entitled to their own states. This idea was used by oppositions claiming to represent the nation and demanding institutional and/or boundary changes. Specialised institutions, such as political parties and a political press, appealed to a broad range of social groups, addressing them as the 'nation'. States took up the call, using new mass institutions such as schools to present their version of the idea.

Precisely how the doctrines, politics and sentiments of nationalism developed in particular cases requires specific investigation. The concept of modernisation is not a formula which can dispense with historical research; rather it is a framework to enable research into particular cases as well as systematic comparison between cases.

No one seriously disputes that much of modern nationalism is peculiar to the modern period. The question is rather of how far modern nationalism builds upon earlier ideas of the nation. Once one is clear about the scale and kinds of difference between pre-modern and modern ideas of the nation, it is easier to focus on this question.

We need to consider principally what political uses the idea of the nation serves and how the idea can be produced and diffused and transmitted from one generation to another.

I have argued that the pre-modern national idea, insofar as it was an idea with political significance, operated in two different ways: ethnographic and political. The first use developed on the borders between different societies, framed as the contrast between civilised and barbaric. It was sustained through continued separation. If and when English-origin settler groups began to inter-marry with indigenous Welsh or Irish groups, and the two groups began to imitate each other's ways of life, so the contrasts would diminish. In Ireland, for example, the development of 'old English' institutions could lead to political uses of the idea of the nation, now

portrayed as 'Ireland'.[79] There was a constant tendency for the ethnographic contrast to become weaker. In the modern era nationalists would return to these earlier ethnographies and appropriate them for contemporary usage but this followed a period of diminished usage.

The political concept was different. As a monarchical idea it served as a political self-description. Courts, parliaments and established Churches proclaimed the idea. One can see how this idea could be transmitted institutionally across generations. The idea could even become contested, as when aristocratic elites defended their prerogatives on 'national' grounds against the crown, and the crown justified its attempts to overcome such prerogatives by appealing to subjects beyond the elite. Nevertheless, the idea remained political and subordinate to the institutions associated with monarchy: courts, aristocrat-dominated assemblies, territorial Churches.[80]

A rupture with these political patterns came with the Reformation, in particular with appeals to the 'people' as the collective bearer of true Christian values, the new Israelites in a world of corruption and sin. The crushing of the radical Reformation stopped this notion of the Elect Nation providing a political alternative to monarchical rule, although there remained a significant, often underground legacy. Echoes of the radical idea were taken up by existing regimes: for example, the conceit of a Protestant British nation fighting against foreign Catholic powers.

The modern and enduring transformation of the national idea into one of a 'whole society' understood not as ethnographic category but as political actor was usually the work of political opposition. This involved detaching the national idea from dominant institutions. This new idea combined national labelling with demands for reformed political institutions.

The results are complex. Attempts to distinguish between civic and ethnic or cultural and political nationalism fail in the face of this complexity.[81] Political groups tried to retain older associations of the national idea, combining these with new arguments about language or customs having a political significance. The range of possible combinations is bewildering, and any coherent political ideology had to ignore or marginalise most possible associations.[82] What remains common to all modern nationalist discourses is that the nation is a 'whole society' and is no longer ideologically subordinate to any other idea. That is linked to its appeal for popular support, if necessary directed against existing authority, and to the claim that the nation can provide the justification for reformed political institutions.

These new ideological uses of the concept of the nation are taken up by a broad range of institutions, including elite institutions of the pre-modern

period, a popular print media, specialised political movements, schools and cultural associations, town councils and economic interest groups. Such institutions may seize upon some earlier names and practices but they do so in transformative ways. Equally they may repudiate earlier ideas, as in revolutionary France. Perennialists stress *similarity* as the principal form of *connection,* ethno-symbolists stress *continuity*. The modernist emphasis is upon *transformation* and connection is understood as *appropriation.* That one nationalist movement is dominated by a rhetoric of modernity and another by a rhetoric of the archaic does not suggest to the modernist an essential difference, but rather poses the question of why similar movements take up different postures to an imagined past. Clearly the 'real' nature of that past matters in the sense that (modern) notions of evidence and reason impose limits on what can be claimed. It is important that there were earlier usages of national terms, ethnographic and political. But that is all. Just as building materials limit the range of possible buildings but do not determine (or make it possible to predict) just what building will be constructed, so do historical legacies relate to political ideologies.

The recurrence of particular words in pre-modern and modern discourses does not establish significant similarities or continuities between those discourses. Similarities in the *functions* of words are what matter. Words associated with the idea of the nation were deployed in various discourses in medieval England and Reformation Europe and modernists, including myself, must recognise this. There are interesting and important accounts to be written about pre-modern notions of national ideas which can tell us much about the mentalities and politics of the societies involved. Many of the essays in this book do precisely that.

However, only by ignoring the limited, distinct, changing and discontinuous uses to which those words were put, and paying insufficient attention to the institutions and interests which produced and reproduced those ideas, can one simply match words in the pre-modern discourses with the same or similar words in modern discourses to produce false notions of similarity and continuity. Matching does not establish comparability of meaning or significance of national terms or of the institutional processes of transmission of such terms. Under conditions of modernity these are transformed. Connection with pre-modern usages takes the form of appropriating old terms for new purposes, not of repeating or building upon the earlier meanings of those terms. Furthermore, where a demand for modern national terms exists, it can be supplied even if there are no older terms conveniently available.

The modernist approach to nationalism remains the most effective one. However, modernists have been too sweeping in their dismissal of the significance of pre-modern ideas of the nation. The major contribution perennialists and ethno-symbolists have made to the study of nationalism is that of compelling modernists to improve upon their arguments.

NOTES

1 I take these quotations from Anthony D. Smith, *Chosen Peoples: Sacred Sources of National Identity* (Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 24–5.

2 T. C. W. Blanning, *The Culture of Power and the Power of Culture: Old Regime Europe 1660–1789* (Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 17.

3 This is a common and easy approach. Turville-Petre furnishes another favourite 'nationalist' quote, John of Gaunt's speech on 'this sceptred isle' in *Richard II*. Thorlac Turville-Petre, *England the Nation: Language, Literature, and National Identity, 1290–1340* (Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 4, which tells us little about nationalism and nothing about the late fourteenth century.

4 S. Grosby, 'Religion and nationality in Antiquity', *European Journal of Sociology* 33 (1991), 229–65; Patrick Wormald, 'The eternal Angle', *Times Literary Supplement*, 16 March 2001, 3–4.

5 Anthony D. Smith, *Nationalism and Modernism: a Critical Survey of Recent Theories of Nations and Nationalism* (London: Routledge, 1998); Adrian Hastings, *The Construction of Nationhood: Ethnicity, Religion and Nationalism* (Cambridge University Press, 1997).

6 A good recent survey of arguments about English national identity which includes a review of the arguments for the medieval and early modern periods is Krishnan Kumar, *The Making of English National Identity* (Cambridge University Press, 2003), chs. 3–5.

7 Different medievalists place the 'moment' of emergence of national identity in one or other of these periods, for example Wormald in pre-Conquest England, Gillingham in the Anglo-Norman period, Clanchy and Prestwich in the thirteenth century, Jones and Allmand in the period of the Hundred Years War. Predictably, historians tend to make 'their' period the crucial one. For Wormald see his essay in this volume and note 4 above. For the others see: John Gillingham, *The English in the Twelfth Century: Imperialism, National Identity and Political Values* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2000), esp. the essays in Part 2; M. T. Clanchy, *England and its Rulers 1066–1272: Foreign Lordship and National Identity* (London: Fontana, 1983), pp. 241–62; Michael Prestwich, *English Politics in the Thirteenth Century* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1990), ch. 5; W. R. Jones, 'The English church and royal propaganda during the Hundred Years War', *Journal of British Studies* 19 (1979), 18–30; Christopher Allmand, *The Hundred Years War: England and France at War c. 1300–c. 1450* (Cambridge University Press, 1988), esp. ch. 6.

8 See Wormald, 'Eternal Angle', for such an example.

9 For a recent constructionist approach applied generally to early medieval Europe see Patrick J. Geary, *The Myth of Nations: The Medieval Origins of Europe* (Princeton University Press, 2002).

10 D. Rollason, 'Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*', *The Historian* 73 (2002), 7.

11 Ibid. There is no consensus on just how Bede used his key term 'Angli'. Nicholas Brooks, *Bede and the English*, Jarrow Lecture ([s.l.]: [s.n.], 1999).

12 Bede wrote extensively on the measurement of time, and the construction of calendars, used a single chronological system in his *Ecclesiastical History*, and contributed to the debate on how Easter was to be dated.

13 This happened to the only chief David Livingstone 'converted'. Livingstone subsequently reversed the Bedan approach: make Africans more like the British and Christian conversion could be achieved. Andrew Ross, *David Livingstone: Mission and Empire* (London: Hambledon, 2002).

14 Brooks, *Bede and the English*, p. 5.

15 N. Brooks, 'English Identity from Bede to the Millennium', *Journal of the Haskins Society* 14 (2004), 33–51.

16 S. Reynolds, *Kingdoms and Communities in Western Europe, 900–1300* (2nd edn, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), esp. ch. 8. Nevertheless, I think the claims made by Reynolds for a widespread sense of English identity in late Anglo-Saxon times go beyond what the evidence will reasonably bear.

17 See Sarah Foot, 'The making of *Angelcynn*: English identity before the Norman Conquest', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 6th ser., 6 (1996), 25–49.

18 Ibid., 49. The quotation at the end is from Bishop Wulfsige.

19 Brooks, 'English identity'.

20 The passage merits quoting at length. 'In ... [1087], when the Normans had fulfilled the just will of the Lord upon the English people, and there was scarcely a noble of English descent in England, but all had been reduced to servitude and lamentation, *and it was even disgraceful to be called English*, William, the agent of this vengeance, ended his life. For *God had chosen the Normans to wipe out the English nation*, because he had seen that they surpassed all other people in their unparalleled savagery' (emphases added). Diana E. Greenway, *Henry of Huntingdon: The History of the English People 1000–1154* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002), p. 31.

21 I have not had time to consult Hugh M. Thomas, *The English and the Normans: Ethnic Hostility, Assimilation and Identity, 1066–c. 1220* (Oxford University Press, 2003), but drew much profit from the review of this book by R. R. Davies in *English Historical Review* 118 (2003), 1308–10.

22 I follow John Gillingham, 'The beginnings of English imperialism', in Gillingham, *The English in the Twelfth Century*.

23 Len Scales in his very useful comments on a draft of this essay stressed the importance, throughout the medieval period, of the Old Testament culture of the nation. However, the projects of *conversion* or *expansion* make it difficult to equate Bede and Alfred with the self-centred Old Testament focus on one people seeking to survive and to sustain their faith against permanently alien

and hostile pagans. It is also difficult to equate with the rhetoric of Roman Christianity, a supra-ethnic faith and institution.

24 James Campbell, *The Anglo-Saxon State* (London: Hambledon, 2000). See the essay by Foot in this volume for a criticism of Campbell's use of the concept 'state' in the term 'nation-state'. My concern is with the other half of the term.

25 It is not enough to locate texts with names such as 'English' to support claims concerning national identity; one must also show that these names play a central role in social practices which produce and transmit national identity. If, for example, one found the name 'English' being used at a local level, say in county-level institutions, one would still need to be cautious about claiming that the term indicated a sense of identity above the level of the county. To make that case one would need to show similar usages across a range of such local institutions which also were in communication with each other. There must be tests of this kind or one can make claims for national identity on the basis of any encounter with words like 'nation'.

26 There is a tendency to equate 'England' at any moment with the situation in the south-east of the country. That is not a vice confined to medieval historians.

27 By the seventeenth century there are many more recent developments which could account for such a sense of national identity.

28 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (revised edn, London: Verso, 1991).

29 Gillingham, 'Beginnings of English imperialism'. Robin Frame, in his essay in this volume, makes a similar point about the 'Old English' in Ireland in a way that suggests parallels with white settlers in modern colonies whose 'national' identity is as much an assertion against the mother country as it is against the indigenous people of the colony.

30 Greenway, *Henry of Huntingdon*.

31 Clanchy, *England and its Rulers*, pp. 241–2. Clanchy's later accounts of the Battle of Lincoln (1217) and the civil strife of 1258–64 show just how 'un-English' was the consciousness of many of those subsequently seen as fighting for national independence or liberty.

32 'The context and purposes of Geoffrey of Monmouth's *History of the Kings of Britain*', in Gillingham, *The English in the Twelfth Century*, pp. 19–40. I accept that such arguments on their own are too narrow to account fully for the national identity arguments encountered in such texts, but they do draw attention to the importance of particular, changing and contingent influences which shape such arguments.

33 The earlier use of English verse form suggests texts designed to be read aloud to illiterate elite figures who spoke English as their native tongue.

34 It would make more sense to imagine that the Normans used the term 'English' in its ethnic sense to refer to those they ruled.

35 Hastings, *Construction of Nationhood*, makes the strong point that a written vernacular is a powerful force for the development of a sense of national identity. It fixes and standardises language; a purely oral language in

pre-industrial societies is bound to diverge into a number of dialects, often mutually incomprehensible. Add widespread literacy and the basis for bringing together popular and oral with elite and written language is created. English is the first language where all of this comes together. However, this only starts to happen at the very earliest in the fourteenth century. This makes it all the more puzzling that Hastings argues for any widespread or significant sense of national identity before the fourteenth century.

36 For one transient meaning, see Clanchy, *England and its Rulers*, ch. 10 on 'English' objections to Henry III's 'foreign' brothers. Clanchy notes that the Latin term used for 'native people' was *viros naturalis*, avoiding the word *nativus* with its connotations of the common or vulgar people. This is a very limited, clique usage.

37 Gillingham, *The English in the Twelfth Century*; R. R. Davies, *The First English Empire: Power and Identities in the British Isles, 1093–1343* (Oxford University Press, 2000).

38 Although the stress is usually upon conquest and subjection and the establishment of enclaves of settlers, rather than a civilising mission.

39 The general organisation of society has implications for the manners and morals of the whole of that society, but explicit comparisons remain confined to elite levels. Norbert Elias saw this period as marking the origins of the notion of elite cultural and moral improvement as a civilising process: Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process: the History of Manners* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1978).

40 Gillingham, 'Beginnings of English imperialism'. Davies, *First English Empire*, argues that the political use of ethnographic categories was strongest when English kings sought control over the British Isles as a whole and faded along with that project.

41 These are tendencies rather than separate discourses. Any political propaganda directed against a foreign enemy is bound to emphasise the enemy's foreignness. However, in the case of the French the stress was on 'effeminacy' (an excess of civilisation) rather than 'savagery' (not civilised enough), rather like some of the Scottish images of the English. (The trend continues in recent films like *Braveheart* where most of the English male characters are portrayed as refined, sadistic and gay.)

42 Reynolds, *Kingdoms and Communities*, esp. ch. 8.

43 Allmand, *Hundred Years War*, p. 103.

44 Ibid., p. 115.

45 Shakespeare's characters make sense only in terms of the proto-nationalism of his time and of which he was the greatest exponent. In *Henry V* ethnic stereotyping functions to *deny* links between ethnicity and political loyalty. In the early fifteenth century ethnic stereotypes were terms of abuse applied to enemies, not a positive way of depicting a multi-ethnic nation. These are very different ways of connecting together ethnicity, political allegiance and the common people, both of them in turn unlike modern ethnic nationalist ideology. It is these differences we should explore, not the superficial continuity of using the same names.

46 Allmand, *Hundred Years War*, pp. 109–10.

47 Henry's son, Henry VI, was crowned king of France.

48 Thus an impersonal notion of 'kingdom' developed in hereditary as well as elective monarchies. See the essay by Robert Frost on elective kingship, this volume.

49 Jones, 'The English church and royal propaganda'.

50 I elaborate on this point in the next section.

51 Antony Black, *Political Thought in Europe 1250–1450* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992). Len Scales drew my attention to this study.

52 Just one more example. In a major edited work of just over 800 pages, J. H. Burns (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Medieval Political Thought c. 350–c. 1450* (Cambridge University Press, 1988), there are just eight short references to 'nation' and cognate terms. All those for the period before 1100 (pp. 137, 141, 163, 176, 244) are concerned to deny the significance of the national. A couple of passages suggest that the rise of stronger territorial polities *weakened* the role of ethnicity in political identity, by undermining the idea of personal ties between chiefs and their followings which in turn were legitimised by descent myths (p. 244). It is also argued that the term *gens* should not be seen as ethnic (p. 137). Post-1100 references (pp. 351–2, 479, 481–2) do include references to peoples as divided by race, climate and customs (p. 481), but only to add that this was a polemical argument used to fend off English claims to the French crown. Even in a passage arguing for the crystallisation of national identity around certain polities in the thirteenth century (pp. 351–2), the writer states: 'In Europe in the period up to 1450 a genuine relationship between the nation and the state can be found only in England, France and Bohemia' (J. P. Canning, in the essay introducing the section of the book on the period 1150–1450).

53 Black, *Political Thought*, p. 3, suggests why: political theorists were more interested in what should be than what actually was. Nevertheless, they were interested in ideal versions of what actually existed, such as universal monarchy (an ideal version of the Holy Roman Empire), or an ideal solution to the problem of the relationship between the papacy and secular authority.

54 The actual word 'state', used roughly as we use it, was unknown until the late fifteenth century. *Civitas, res publica, regnum*, all with different and varying meanings, were the main terms used.

55 See Black, *Political Thought*, p. 65.

56 Len Scales has pointed out to me the ubiquity of assemblies in medieval Europe, down to the hundred court in England, and the centrality of the urban market place as a site where many people came together and discussed matters of common concern and where public pronouncements were made. Nevertheless, market gossip and grumbles and the work of humble courts are not capable of creating a 'public' culture. In the territorial monarchy (clearly things were different in zones of city-states or peasant republics) authoritative institutions were formal and closed, places of broader and more open participation lacked authority beyond the locality. It is precisely when this division

between central and local power breaks down that the 'nation' becomes a significant political category.

57 Davies, *First English Empire*, pp. 1–3.

58 There may be some examples to the contrary, for example the Hussites, though I think this is the exception which proves the rule. See František Šmahel, 'The idea of the "nation" in Hussite Bohemia', *Historica* 6 (1969), 143–247 and 17 (1970), 93–197; Thomas A. Fudge, *The Magnificent Ride: The First Reformation in Hussite Bohemia* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998).

59 I do not mean that the nation is not imagined to 'act', as indicated in the title of a chronicle which Len Scales has drawn to my attention – *God's Deeds Done by the Franks*. But the 'Franks' are an elite, led by a chief or king, and assumed to share the ambitions of their leader. Such a concept cannot be transferred to a stable territorial polity and the subject population.

60 Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983).

61 G. R. Elton, 'Parliament in the sixteenth century: functions and fortunes', *The Historical Journal* 22 (1979), 255–78.

62 For the 'invention' of this argument, one incidentally which breaks with Bede's linkage between the English and Roman Christianity, see Edwin Jones, *The English Nation: the Great Myth* (Stroud: Sutton, 1998).

63 I argue this point at length in the Conclusion to John Breuilly, *Nationalism and the State* (2nd edn, Manchester University Press, 1993).

64 I draw especially upon Patrick Collinson, 'England', in R. Scribner *et al.* (eds.), *The Reformation in National Context* (Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 80–94.

65 For example, Hastings, *Construction of Nationhood*, pp. 58–59. The most recent citation of this kind I have encountered is Anthony Marx, *Faith in Nation: Exclusionary Origins of Nationalism* (Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 62–3.

66 Since originally writing this paragraph I attended a session on Foxe at the Reformation conference held in Birmingham in April 2004 at which papers were presented by Tom Freeman, Elizabeth Evenden and John Craig. I drew various conclusions from these papers, including the following: after 1570 the regime did not press churches to acquire copies; the reception history is complex and does not support any 'national' argument; even from the point of view of its 'author' (though Foxe was more a constantly revising editor) the book cannot be construed in 'national' terms. This was a central thesis in William Haller, *Foxe's 'Book of Martyrs' and the Elect Nation* (London: Cape, 1967), on which Hastings and Smith draw. For many of these recent arguments see Patrick Collinson, 'John Foxe and national consciousness', in Christopher Highley and John N. King (eds.), *John Foxe and his World* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), pp. 10–34.

67 Philip S. Gorski, 'The mosaic moment: An early modernist critique of modernist theories of nationalism', *American Journal of Sociology* 105 (2000), 1428–68. Marx, *Faith in Nation*, only came to my attention as I was finishing this essay. This ambitious comparative study of early modern Spain, France

and England argues for the mobilisation of national sentiments, primarily through the exclusionary use of confessional identities. The material on such uses is interesting but I do not find it persuasive to treat measures to enforce unity of *belief* (not language or custom or assumed descent), such as the revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685, as examples of national(ist) sentiment.

68 Gorski, 'Mosaic moment', 1433.

69 I use here the term coined by Hobsbawm, another modernist who recognises that aspects of nationalism are to be encountered in Reformation Europe. I argued something similar in Breuilly, *Nationalism and the State*, pp. 76–81.

70 Ethnicity (Dutch against Spanish) was unimportant compared to a political conception of the nation as those who follow the true God.

71 The Orange case is more like the English medieval identification of nation with dynasty which I have already considered.

72 For a recent study on the language of nation in *ancien régime* France, see David A. Bell, *The Cult of the Nation in France: Inventing French Nationalism, 1680–1800* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001).

73 For a more general treatment of post-modernist approaches to nationalism see Smith, *Nationalism and Modernism*, esp. ch. 9.

74 Len Scales makes the point that this could too easily make monarchs the authors of nations and medieval political cultures into simple representations of monarchical values. I would not seek to argue that every usage of the term nation should be seen in this way; doubtless different writers and interests drawn from the Church, law, the nobility, have their own concerns. However, I do not see these as in any significant way using the nation as a *counter* to monarchy, or deploying it in oppositional movements.

75 On the modernity of such an intelligentsia see Elie Kedourie, *Nationalism* (London: Hutchinson, 1960); Bernhard Giessen, *Intellectuals and the German Nation: Collective Identity in an Axial Age* (Cambridge University Press, 1998).

76 Furthermore, as it becomes politically significant, the discourse of nationalism itself is changed. The development of collective action in pursuit of state power clarifies and institutionally fixes nationalist ideology.

77 I have outlined this argument elsewhere. See, for example, J. Breuilly, 'Napoleonic Germany and state-formation', in Michael Rowe (ed.), *Collaboration and Resistance in Napoleonic Europe: State Formation in an Age of Upheaval, c. 1800–1815* (London: Palgrave, 2003), pp. 121–52.

78 These should not be seen as impositions from above but as part of a broad societal change. Labour movements agitated for factory and other inspectorates; progressive income tax and income redistribution by means of selective benefits require a large amount of reliable information on earnings; compulsory education and universal health care call for massive documentation.

79 See the essay by McBride in this volume.

80 On some occasions the ethnographic and political ideas could be combined, above all when one or other of the parties in an inter-state conflict could draw upon some ethnographic label to apply to their opponents. I sometimes think

that much of the medieval case for nationalism consists of taking these infrequent cases and suggesting they were normal.

81 A fine recent study of the mix of ideas in German nationalist discourse in the middle of the nineteenth century which brings out the inadequacy of these distinctions is Brian E. Vick, *Defining Germany: The 1848 Frankfurt Parliamentarians and National Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002).

82 This is another way of making Renan's point; nationalists have to forget as well as remember much of 'their' history. Perennialists and ethno-symbolists forget the need to forget.