Nationalism in the Modern World
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What is Nationalism?

• ‘We can succinctly define the political ideology of nationalism as one which claims that there exists a unique nation, that this nation has a special value and therefore right to existence and that to secure this right the nation must possess autonomy, often understood as a sovereign nation state.’

• Note: it is important to distinguish between nations and states. The latter are political entities with a high degree of sovereignty, holding territory and characterized by a bureaucracy, legal system, and monopoly of the legitimate use of force. (See Max Weber, Politics as a Vocation, 1919)

• ‘The most basic tenet of nationalism—the unique nation—is grounded historically.’

Is Nationalism an ancient or modern phenomenon?

• **Primordialist** definition: cultural nationalism existed long before the nineteenth century. This was distinct from a political nationalism, but with linked to it (Anthony Smith, Adrian Hastings, Timothy Blanning).

• **Modernist** definition: the nation is an imagined political community. It is therefore not the awakening of nations to self-consciousness. Rather, it invents nations where they do not exist (Benedict Anderson, Ernest Gellner).

• ‘Gellner highlighted the impact of industrialism on communication, or what he called ‘culture’, while Anderson emphasized ‘print capitalism’ and its capacity to generate imaginings of national community. Subsequent debates about nationalism are responses to these arguments, seeking variously to deepen and expand them, to challenge them by disputing the modernity of nationalism, and to move beyond them to postmodern arguments about nationalism as discourse.’

(John Breuilly, ‘Introduction’, p. 4)
What does ‘nation’ mean?

• *natio* (Latin) – place of origin

**Early-Modern Europe (Latin and European derivations)**

• Still retained sense of birthplace

• Early-modern republicans: ascribed *natio* to the whole free male population of a city or state

• They also ascribed *natio* to stateless but politically constituted peoples e.g. the Hebrews of the Old Testament

• Both uses, however, lacked any strong political overtones

**Late Eighteenth-Century Europe and During the French Revolution**

• The term nation is explored in increasing detail and with increasing political overtones
Civic Nationalism

Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–78):

• ‘Rousseau identified the nation as a ‘people’ constituted by individuals who, deliberating without distinction of birth, religion, or wealth, voluntarily establish their own governing authority.’

• ‘The primary bond among members of such a national community—indeed the only necessary one—is their agreement to obey the political authority they have created for themselves.’

• Note: Rousseau’s egalitarianism set him apart from most other forms of civic nationhood advocated at the time and directly afterwards.

A nation is a ‘daily plebiscite’
Ethnic Nationalism

Rousseau again:

• Corsica and Poland

• ‘Here Rousseau came close to presenting a justification for ethnic nationalism, which defines national identities in exclusive terms by grounding them in characteristics or sentiments that are said to be natural.’ (Erica Benner, ‘Nationalism’, p. 40)

• But still voluntary!!!!!!
Ethnic Nationalism (2)

Johann Gottfried Herder (1744–1803)

• Nations are constituted by common bonds of language
• Criticized the embrace of French and French culture, embracing the vernacular instead.
• Encouraged the development of each language group (sociability, social morals, human rational)
• Non-hierarchical: No language and therefore no nation is superior to others
• ‘No previous writer had so fully considered how shared identity based on language might serve as a political resource, especially a defensive resource for weaker peoples seeking to resist conquest, cultural assimilation, or persecution’ (Erica Benner, ‘Nationalism’, p. 42)
• But he did not set out the implications for national politics: multiculturalism or exclusive ethnic nationalism
Ethnic Nationalism (3)

Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762–1814)

• Supported the French Revolution in its first years and argued that republican revolutionaries were justified in using forcible intervention to advance the cause of freedom in other countries. But when Napoleon invaded Prussia, Fichte recanted these views.

• **Language** as the basis of the **nation** and of **self-government**.

• **Hierarchy**: Unlike Herder, postulated a moral hierarchy among nations, based on the extent to which their languages had been corrupted by foreign borrowings.
Ethnic Nationalism (4)

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770–1831)

• Again the experience of the French Revolution shaped his ideas.

• Hegel argued that the state of war was the permanent condition of international relations...it could be used to strengthen a sense of national difference

• History/historical ranking
Politics of Nationalism by Regions

• Ideas
• Politics
• Diffusion (mass movements)
1848 and Stateless Nationalities

- In 1848 the French Foreign Minister Alphonse de Lamartine announced that a universal ‘principe de nationalité’ authorized France to give military aid to any movement of subject nationalities in Europe.
- **Karl Marx** (1818–83) interprets this cynically
- **John Stuart Mill** (1806–73) was less cynical
- **Utility**: Mill proposed that specific national claims should be judged against their ability to promote individual liberty.
- **Result**: absorption of smaller nationalities in Europe but not so in the British colonies, especially India.
The Case of India

• Mill believed that:
  • Colonial rule was untenable in the long term in India (relative population size)
  • Native populations would demand self-government at some point
  • Mill urged the European Powers to ‘use their superiority’ to try to prepare the colonies—mainly non-European peoples—for ‘improvement’, including eventual self-government.

• More generous to non-European nations but still paternalistic

• Provoked resistance eg Japanese liberal philosopher Yukichi Fukuzawa (1835–1901)
Unification Nationalism

- Italian unification (1861)
- German unification (1871)
- A **unique moment** in the international system which facilitated further state building
- ‘**Bismarck** understood better than anyone how to exploit the unstable relationship between dynastic mechanisms and the forces of mass nationalism’ (Christopher Clark, *Iron Kingdom*)
- **Mass nationalism would be a consequence not a cause of the new German nation**
- Nationalism after the nation state
  - Celebrating a common past
  - National education systems (Eugene Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen*)
  - Military training as a ‘learning site’ of national belonging
Empire and Radical Nationalism

- Radical nationalism can take many forms, but all involve perceptions of threats to a nation’s survival or standing.
- Aggressive colonial policies to preserve global influence and national standing (e.g. Alexis de Tocqueville)
- Momentum from the idea that national hierarchies were determined by the quality of biological ‘races’ (deterministic biology).
- Racial doctrines gained a wide following in academic, political, and military circles throughout Europe, and the language of racial inequality began to seep into nationalist doctrines across the political spectrum.
- Violent implications: inferior race groups were thought to possess a brutish power that endangered the survival of higher races and their civilizations. The targets of these fears included rebellious colonized populations, but also other major European ‘races’ e.g. the Slavic, the Jewish.
- Dovetailed just as well with ethnonationalism as radicalized civic nationalism, which had already become less egalitarian over the course of the nineteenth century.
Anti-Western Traditions of Nationalism at the end of the 19th century

• Criticism of the ‘West’ – a long history that meant many different things in the colonies and semi-colonized regions.

• Nationalism in the non-Western world cannot be reduced either to anti-Western doctrines based on traditional values or the simple appropriation of Western models.

• Prasenjit Duara - argues that nationalists outside the West adapted the evolutionary assumptions of their colonial masters. (invention of tradition)

• Christopher Bayly - identifies patriotism as the central concept of India’s regional and pan-Indian nationalist movements that emerged at the end of the nineteenth century. (nationalism as based on earlier patriotism)

The Aftermath of WWI and Expansionist Nationalism

• Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900) - national values had become mere herd-thinking, ‘bovine nationalism’. The quest for strong group identities had degenerated into a demand for cultural, then racial unity, producing an irrational fear of minorities—especially those like the Jews.

• By the early 1930s the term ‘nationalism’ was associated almost exclusively with movements that placed the ends of particular nations above wider considerations of order or justice.

• Nazi Germany: expansion for national survival (Lebensraum)
Decolonization, Anti-Colonial Nationalism, and Post-Colonial Nationalism

- **Mahatma Gandhi** and Indian independence
- ‘combined in [his] ideas about nationalism a critique of the West based on references to the value of indigenous traditions with many Western concepts. Thus [his] specific understanding of nationalism was neither traditional nor modern, neither Western nor anti-Western, but a kind of bricolage and an ongoing effort to negotiate what is ‘traditional’ and what is ‘modern’, what is ‘indigenous’ and what is ‘foreign’, and what is ‘right’ and what is ‘wrong’. (Eckert, ‘Anti-Western Doctrines’, p.)
- African decolonization and **postcolonial nationalism**
Challenges for the Historian

- Selection of nationalism that resulted in a nation state (origins-rise-success) gives a sense of inevitability...obstacles, conflicts, anticipated different futures, surprised by outcomes. IE developing a sense of contingency.
- The politics of nationalism by regions
- Clearing up the relationship to globalization (Osterhammel)...which leads us to....
Nationalism Today