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Towards a Global Culture?

Anthony D. Smith

The initial problem with the concept of a 'global culture' is one of the meaning of terms. Can we speak of 'culture' in the singular? If by 'culture' is meant a collective mode of life, or a repertoire of beliefs, styles, values and symbols, then we can only speak of cultures, never just culture; for a collective mode of life, or a repertoire of beliefs, etc., presupposes different modes and repertoires in a universe of modes and repertoires. Hence, the idea of a 'global culture' is a practical impossibility, except in interplanetary terms. Even if the concept is predicated of *homo sapiens*, as opposed to other species, the differences between segments of humanity in terms of lifestyle and belief-repertoire are too great, and the common elements too generalized, to permit us to even conceive of a globalized culture.

Or are they? Can we not at last discern the lineaments of exactly that world culture which liberals and socialists alike had dreamed of and hoped for since the last century? In the evolutionary perspective, the hallmark of history was growth: growth in size, population, knowledge and the like. Small-scale units everywhere were giving way to densely-populated societies on a continental scale, so that even the largest of nation-states was but a staging post in the ascent of humanity. For liberals, from Mill and Spencer to Parsons and Smelser, the adaptive capacity of humanity was increasing by definite stages, as modernization eroded localism and created huge, mobile and participant societies, whose flexibility and inclusiveness presaged the dissolution of all boundaries and categories of a common humanity.¹

A similar hope was entertained by socialists of all varieties. Despite the many ambiguities revealed in the scattered writings of Marx and Engels on the subject of superseding humanity's divisions, they both looked forward to the withering away of the nation-state and the internationalization of literary cultures. If they and

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their communist successors accepted the present realities of national boundaries and cultures, and even conceded the need to conduct the class struggle within those boundaries, they nevertheless looked forward to the day when the socialist revolution would infuse proletarian values into ethnic and national cultures, and when humanity's divisions would be transcended without being formally abolished.²

The Rise of Transnational Cultures

It is these hopes that have re-emerged after 1945 out of the ruins of a divided Europe and world. Before 1945, it was still possible to believe that the medium-sized nation-state was the norm of human organization in the modern era and that national culture was humanity's final goal and attribute. A world of nations, each sovereign, homogenous and free, cooperating in the League of Nations, was humanity's highest aspiration, and the guarantee of political justice through diversity and pluralism.

The Second World War destroyed that vision and aspiration. It revealed the bankruptcy of the world of nations posited by nationalists and accepted in good faith by so many. It demonstrated the hold of 'supranational' ideologies over large segments of humanity: of racism, capitalism and communism. It also brought the hegemony of 'superpowers', continental states which won the War, relegating the former 'great powers' to the middle or lower ranks of world status.

In the postwar world, a world of power blocs and ideological camps, humanity was re-divided, but in such a way as to give rise to the hope of transcending the greatest obstacle to a truly global politics and culture: the nation-state. In the postwar world, the nation-state was clearly obsolete, along with nationalism and all its rituals. In its place arose the new cultural imperialisms of Soviet communism, American capitalism, and struggling to find a place between them, a new Europeanism. Here lay the hope of eroding the state and transcending the nation.

Fundamental to the new cultural imperialisms has been the need to create a positive alternative to 'national culture.' If the nation was to be 'superseded', it could not simply be through a process of depoliticization, a 'withering away' of nationalism. To separate and destroy nationalism, but keep the organizational culture of nations intact, was to risk the renewal of that very nationalism which was to be abolished. This was in fact the Soviet approach since the

1920s (Goldhagen, 1968; G.E. Smith, 1985). But the communist authorities also realized the dangers of their policies towards nationalities, and therefore proposed the creation of a new 'Soviet' man, a citizen of the Soviet Union, whose loyalty would be an ideological one to the new 'political community', even where he or she retained a sense of emotional solidarity with their ethnic community. In the end, these ethnic communities and republics would, after a period of growing cooperation, fuse together to produce a truly 'Soviet culture' (Fedoseyev et al., 1977).

In America, too, the hope for a continental culture of assimilative modernization based on the 'American Creed' of liberty and capitalism, was counterposed to the 'narrow nationalisms' of Europe and the Third World, as well as to the communist rival. America, the land of immigrants and minorities, was held up in the 1950s as the exemplar of 'melting pot' assimilation and, when that vision proved to be a mirage, of integration through diversity. In this version, 'symbolic' attachments to particular ethnic communities are valued, and their needs and rights are politically recognized, so long as they are ultimately subordinated to the overarching political community and its complex of myths, memories and symbols. Ethnicity has become one of the basic, if informal, organizing principles of American society, but not in such a way as to impair the overriding allegiance of each citizen to America, its values, heroes, flag, Revolutionary myths and the Constitution. To this 'official nationalism', we can add a more diffuse attachment to the culture and landscapes of America, its prairies, deserts and mountain ranges, its early settlements and folk arts (Glazer and Moynihan, 1975; Kilson, 1975; Gans, 1979).

If the Soviet and American experiences demonstrated the possibilities of the new cultural imperialisms in transcending nationalism, the project of a truly 'European Community' presaged the manner in which a global culture might be created. Since the inception of the European movement in 1948, there has been much debate on the future shape of such a 'supranational' community. On the one hand, there was the Gaullist formulation of a *Europe des Patries*, shared by some British governments; on the other hand, a vision of a truly united states of Europe, politically as well as economically, of the kind that earned the name of 'super-nation' from its detractors (see Galtung, 1973). In between were various shades of federalism or confederalism, linked by a common Rhine-based culture harking back beyond the epoch of the nation-state to earlier

and looser identities — the Holy Roman Empire, the Carolingians, Christendom, even Rome itself — from which a new European cultural unity might be forged with the instruments of telecommunications and economic interdependence. In the age of television and computer, it is perfectly feasible to construct a new European culture which would match its American and Soviet rivals, and demonstrate once again the vitality of the new cultural imperialisms in a post-industrial era.

Like the American model, this new formulation of European community depends on the fashionable notion of ‘unity in diversity’, which suggests the possibility of cultural imperialism coexisting with vital cultural identities. Just as there is a balance between common economic regulation from Brussels and the specific social and economic policies of the member states of the Community; just as there is a sharing of political sovereignty between the member states and the political centres in Strasbourg and Brussels, a condominium of overlapping jurisdictions; so, in the sphere of culture, a common European heritage which will spawn the new ‘European citizen’ is balanced by the still lively, if cross-fertilized, cultures of Europe’s many nations, but in such a way as to subordinate them to the ‘cultural imperatives’ of the continent in a post-industrial era (see Schlesinger, 1987).

A ‘Post-industrial’ Global Culture?

It is not difficult to see what lies behind such formulations of the new cultural imperialism. Broadly speaking, it is argued that the era of the nation-state is over. We are entering a new world of economic giants and superpowers, of multinationals and military blocs, of vast communications networks and international division of labour. In such a world, there is no room for medium or small-scale states, let alone submerged ethnic communities and their competing and divisive nationalisms. On the one hand, capitalist competition has given birth to immensely powerful transnational corporations with huge budgets, reserves of skilled labour, advanced technologies and sophisticated information networks. Essential to their success is the ability to deliver suitably packaged imagery and symbolism which will convey their definitions of the services they provide. While they have to rely on a transnational lingua franca, it is the new systems of telecommunications and computerized information networks which enable them to by-pass differences in language and culture to secure the labour and markets they require. In other words, the resources,

range and specialized flexibility of transnational corporations' activities enable them to present imagery and information on an almost global scale, threatening to swamp the cultural networks of more local units, including nations and ethnic communities (see Said and Simmons, 1976).

On the other hand, an alternative perspective claims that we have entered, not just a post-national, but also a post-industrial, some would say 'postmodern', era. Nations and nationalism may have been functional for a world of competing industrial states, but they are obsolete in the 'service society' of an interdependent world based upon technical knowledge. It is not capitalism and its transnational corporations which have eroded the power of nation-states, but the possibilities of constructing much larger institutional units on the basis of vast telecommunications systems and computerized networks of information. In this situation, any attempt to limit such networks to national boundaries is doomed to failure; today, 'culture' can only be continental or global. But, by the same token, these same communications networks make possible a denser, more intense interaction between members of communities who share common cultural characteristics, notably language; and this fact enables us to understand why in recent years we have been witnessing the re-emergence of submerged ethnic communities and their nationalisms (Richmond, 1984).

This last point echoes Marx and Engels' concession to 'national culture' in a socialist world. Nations, Marx admitted, would be likely to persist as cultural forms, and a truly cosmopolitan culture did not rule out residual folk cultures, to which Engels referred disdainfully as so many 'ethnographic monuments' with their dying customs, creeds and languages (see Fisera and Minnerup, 1978; Cummins, 1980; Connor, 1984). Similarly, today, movements of ethnic autonomy in Western Europe have sometimes linked their fate with the growth of a European Community that would supersede the bureaucratic straitjacket of the existing system of nation-states, which have signally failed to give peripheral ethnic minorities their due in the post-War world. Only in a broader, looser European Community would such neglected minorities find recognition and equal opportunities (see Esman, 1977; A.D. Smith, 1981).

Yet, the main thrust of 'late-capitalism' and/or 'post-industrialism' analyses is away from the small-scale community and towards a world of cultural imperialism, based on economic, state and

communications technology and institutions. Whether the imperialisms are ideological or political or economic, their cultural base is always technical and elitist. They are, as with every imperialism, cultures of state or states, promoted 'from above', with little or no popular base and with little or no reference to the cultural traditions of the peoples incorporated in their domain.

But there is an important difference from earlier cultural imperialisms. Earlier imperialisms were usually extensions of ethnic or national sentiments and ideologies, French, British, Russian, etc. Today's imperialisms are ostensibly non-national; 'capitalism' and 'socialism', and in a different sense 'Europeanism', are by definition and intention 'supranational', if not universal. They are supported by a technological infrastructure which is truly 'cosmopolitan', in the sense that the same telecommunications base will eventually erode cultural differences and create a genuinely 'global culture' based on the properties of the media themselves, to which the 'message' will become increasingly incidental. For the rest, tourism and museology alone will preserve the memory of an earlier era of 'national cultures', of the kind that Donald Horne has given us such a vivid record (Horne, 1984).

What is the content of such a post-industrial 'global culture'? How shall we picture its operations? Answers to such questions usually take the form of extrapolation from recent western cultural experiences of 'postmodernism'. Beneath a modernist veneer, we find in practice a pastiche of cultural motifs and styles, underpinned by a universal scientific and technical discourse. A global culture, so the argument runs, will be eclectic like its western or European progenitor, but will wear a uniformly streamlined packaging. Standardized, commercialized mass commodities will nevertheless draw for their contents upon revivals of traditional, folk or national motifs and styles in fashions, furnishings, music and the arts, lifted out of their original contexts and anaesthetized. So that a global culture would operate at several levels simultaneously: as a cornucopia of standardized commodities, as a patchwork of denationalized ethnic or folk motifs, as a series of generalized 'human values and interests', as a uniform 'scientific' discourse of meaning, and finally as the interdependent system of communications which forms the material base for all the other components and levels.³

It might be argued that there is nothing especially new about a 'global culture', that earlier cultural imperialisms were every whit as eclectic and simultaneously standardized. After all, the helleniza-

tion that Alexander's armies carried throughout the ancient Near East, drew on a variety of local motifs as well as giving them expression in the Greco-Macedonian forms of theatre, assembly, marketplace and gymnasium. And the same was true of the *pax Romana* throughout the Mediterranean world (see Tcherikover, 1970; Balsdon, 1979).

Yet, those pre-modern cultural imperialisms were neither global nor universal. They were ultimately tied to their places of origin, and carried with them their special myths and symbols for all to recognize and emulate. Today's emerging global culture is tied to no place or period. It is context-less, a true melange of disparate components drawn from everywhere and nowhere, borne upon the modern chariots of global telecommunications systems.

There is something equally timeless about the concept of a global culture. Widely diffused in space, a global culture is cut off from any past. As the perennial pursuit of an elusive present or imagined future, it has no history. A global culture is here and now and everywhere, and for its purposes the past only serves to offer some decontextualized example or element for its cosmopolitan patchwork.

This sense of timelessness is powerfully underlined by the pre-eminently technical nature of its discourse. A global culture is essentially calculated and artificial, posing technical problems with technical solutions and using its folk motifs in a spirit of detached playfulness. Affectively neutral, a cosmopolitan culture reflects a technological base made up of many overlapping systems of communications bound by a common quantitative and technical discourse, manned by an increasingly technical intelligentsia, whose 'culture of critical discourse' replaces the social critique of its earlier humanistic counterparts (see Gouldner, 1979).

Memory, Identity and Cultures

Eclectic, universal, timeless and technical, a global culture is seen as pre-eminently a 'constructed' culture, the final and most imposing of a whole series of human constructs in the era of human liberation and mastery over nature. In a sense, the nation too was just such a construct, a sovereign but finite 'imagined community'.

Nations were 'built' and 'forged' by state elites or intelligentsias or capitalists; like the Scots kilt or the British Coronation ceremony, they are composed of so many 'invented traditions', whose symbols we need to read through a process of 'deconstruction', if we are to

grasp the hidden meanings beneath the 'text' of their discourse. The fact, therefore, that a global culture would need to be constructed, along with global economic and political institutions, should occasion no surprise; nor should we cavil at the eclecticism with which such a cosmopolitan culture is likely to make use of bits and pieces of pre-existing national and folk cultures.⁴

Let us concede for the moment that nations are, in some sense, social 'constructs' and 'imagined' communities. Is it because of this 'constructed' quality that they have managed to survive and flourish so well? Are we therefore justified in predicting the same bright future for an equally well crafted 'global culture'?

To answer affirmatively would require us to place the whole weight of demonstration on the common characteristic of human construction and imagination, at the expense of those characteristics in which nations and national cultures differ markedly from our description of the qualities of a global culture. The obstinate fact is that national cultures, like all cultures before the modern epoch, are *particular, timebound* and *expressive*, and their eclecticism operates within strict cultural constraints. As we said at the outset, there can in practice be no such thing as 'culture', only specific, historical cultures possessing strong emotional connotations for those who share in the particular culture. It is, of course, possible to 'invent', even manufacture, traditions as commodities to serve particular class or ethnic interests. But they will only survive and flourish as part of the repertoire of national culture, if they can be made continuous with a much longer past that members of that community presume to constitute their 'heritage'. In other words, 'grafting' extraneous elements must always be a delicate operation; the new traditions must evoke a popular response if they are to survive, and that means hewing close to vernacular motifs and styles. That was the instinct which guided most nationalists and helped to ensure their lasting successes. The success of the nineteenth-century British Coronation ceremony or the Welsh Eisteddfodau owed much to the ability of those who revived them to draw on much older cultural motifs and traditions, memories of which were still alive; though in one sense 'new', these revivals were only able to flourish because they could be presented, and were accepted, as continuous with a valued past (see Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983).

If cultures are historically specific and spatially limited, so are those images and symbols that have obtained a hold on human imagination. Even the most imperialist of those images — emperor,

Pope or Tsar — have drawn their power from the heritage of Roman and Byzantine symbolism. It is one thing to be able to package imagery and diffuse it through world-wide telecommunications networks. It is quite another to ensure that such images retain their power to move and inspire populations, who have for so long been divided by particular histories and cultures, which have mirrored and crystallized the experiences of historically separated social groups, whether classes or regions, religious congregations or ethnic communities. The meanings of even the most universal of imagery for a particular population derives as much from the historical experiences and social status of that group as from the intentions of purveyors, as recent research on the national reception of popular television serials suggests (see Schlesinger, 1987).⁵

In other words, images and cultural traditions do not derive from, or descend upon, mute and passive populations on whose *tabula rasa* they inscribe themselves. Instead, they invariably express the identities which historical circumstances have formed, often over long periods. The concept of ‘identity’ is here used, not of a common denominator of patterns of life and activity, much less some average, but rather of the subjective feelings and valuations of any population which possesses common experiences and one or more shared cultural characteristics (usually customs, language or religion). These feelings and values refer to three components of their shared experiences:

1. a sense of continuity between the experiences of succeeding generations of the unit of population;
2. shared memories of specific events and personages which have been turning-points of a collective history; and
3. a sense of common destiny on the part of the collectivity sharing those experiences.

By a collective cultural identity, therefore, is meant those feelings and values in respect of a sense of continuity, shared memories and a sense of common destiny of a given unit of population which has had common experiences and cultural attributes.⁶

It is in just these senses that ‘nations’ can be understood as historic identities, or at least deriving closely from them, while a global and cosmopolitan culture fails to relate to any such historic identity. Unlike national cultures, a global culture is essentially memoryless. Where the ‘nation’ can be constructed so as to draw

upon and revive latent popular experiences and needs, a 'global culture' answers to no living needs, no identity-in-the-making. It has to be painfully put together, artificially, out of the many existing folk and national identities into which humanity has been so long divided. There are no 'world memories' that can be used to *unite* humanity; the most global experiences to date — colonialism and the World Wars — can only serve to remind us of our historic cleavages. (If it is argued that nationalists suffered selective amnesia in order to construct their nations, the creators of a global culture would have to suffer total amnesia, to have any chance of success!)

The central difficulty in any project to construct a global identity and hence a global culture, is that collective identity, like imagery and culture, is always historically specific because it is based on shared memories and a sense of continuity between generations.

To believe that 'culture follows structure', that the techno-economic sphere will provide the conditions and therefore the impetus and content of a global culture, is to be misled once again by the same economic determinism that dogged the debate about 'industrial convergence', and to overlook the vital role of common historical experiences and memories in shaping identity and culture. Given the plurality of such experiences and identities, and given the historical depth of such memories, the project of a global culture, as opposed to global communications, must appear premature for some time to come.

'Ethno-history' and Posterity

If it proves difficult to envisage a point of departure for this project in common human experiences and memories, the universal stumbling-block to its construction is not far to seek. That ubiquitous obstacle is embodied in the continued presence of pre-modern ties and sentiments in the modern epoch. Indeed, just as a 'postmodern' era awaits its liberation from the modern industrial world, so the latter is still weighed down by the burden of pre-modern traditions, myths and boundaries. I have argued elsewhere that many of today's nations are built up on the basis of pre-modern 'ethnic cores' whose myths and memories, values and symbols shaped the culture and boundaries of the nation that modern elites managed to forge. Such a view, if conceded, must qualify our earlier acceptance of the largely 'constructed' quality of modern nations. That nationalist elites were active in inculcating a sense of nationality in large sections of 'their' populations who were ignorant of any

national affiliations, is well-documented (see Kedourie, 1960; Breuilly, 1982). It does not follow that they 'invented nations where none existed', as Gellner had once claimed, even where they used pre-existing materials and even when nations are defined as large, anonymous, unmediated, co-cultural units (see Gellner, 1964, Chapter 7; also Gellner, 1983, Chapter 5).

Nationalists, like others, found themselves constrained by accepted cultural traditions, from which they might select, and by popular responses, which they hoped to channel, if not manipulate. But their room for cultural manoeuvre was always limited by those cultural traditions and popular, vernacular repertoires of myth, memory, symbol and value. For nationalists, the 'nation-to-be' was not any large, anonymous, co-cultural unit. It was a community of history and culture, possessing a compact territory, unified economy and common legal rights and duties for all members. If 'nationalism creates nations' in its own image, then its definition of the nation was of a piece with its aspirations for collective autonomy, fraternal unity and distinctive identity. The identity and unity that was sought was of and for an existing historic culture-community, which the nationalists thought they were reviving and returning to a 'world of nations'. It depended, therefore, in large measure on the rediscovery of the community's 'ethno-history', its peculiar and distinctive cultural contribution to the worldwide fund of what Weber called 'irreplaceable culture values'. This was the nationalist project, and it is one that has by no means run its course, even as signs of its super-session by wider projects are on the horizon. In fact, it can be argued that nationalist and post-nationalist projects feed off each other, and are likely to do so for some time to come.

In fact, the success of the nationalist project depended not only on the creative skills and organizational ability of the intelligentsia, but on the persistence, antiquity and resonance of the community's ethno-history. The more salient, pervasive and enduring that history, the firmer the cultural base it afforded for the formation of a modern nation. Once again, these are largely subjective aspects. It is the salience of that history in the eyes of the community's members, and the *felt* antiquity of their ethnic ties and sentiments, which give an ethno-history its power and resonance among wide strata. It matters little whether the communal events recounted happened in the manner purveyed, or if heroes acted nobly as tradition would have us believe; the Exodus, William Tell, Great

Zimbabwe, derive their power not from a sober historical assessment, but from the way events, heroes and landscapes have been woven by myth, memory and symbol into the popular consciousness. For the participants in this drama, ethno-history has a 'primordial' quality, or it is power-less (A.D. Smith, 1988).⁷

Why do such myths and memories retain their hold, even today, to fuel the nationalist project? There is no single answer; but two considerations must take priority. The first is the role of ethno-history, its myths, values, memories and symbols, in assuring collective dignity (and through that some measure of dignity for the individual) for populations which have come to feel excluded, neglected or suppressed in the distribution of values and opportunities. By establishing the unity of a submerged or excluded population around an ancient and preferably illustrious pedigree, not only is the sense of bonding intensified, but a reversal of collective status is achieved, at least on the cognitive and moral levels. It is the start of a moral and social revolution through the mobilization of hidden collective energies, or *Kräfte*, to use Herder's prophetic term (see Barnard, 1965).

The second consideration is even more important. With the attenuation of the hold of traditional cosmic images of another, unseen existence beyond the everyday world, the problem of individual oblivion and collective disintegration becomes more pressing and less easily answered. Loss of social cohesion feeding off an increasing sense of individual meaninglessness, in a century when the old 'problem of evil' has been posed in unparalleled ways, drives more and more people to discover new ways of understanding and preserving 'identity' in the face of annihilation. For many, the only guarantee of preservation of some form of identity is in the appeal to 'posterity', to the future generations that are 'ours', because they think and feel as 'we' do, just as our children are supposed to feel and think like each of us individually. With the dissolution of all traditional theodicies, only the appeal to a collective posterity offers hope of deliverance from oblivion (see A.D. Smith, 1970; Anderson, 1983: Chapter 1).

It was in the eighteenth century that the quest for a terrestrial collective immortality was first firmly voiced, and not just for the philosopher. Poets, sculptors, painters and architects recorded and celebrated ancient and modern heroes whose *exempla virtutis* ensured the immortality of themselves and their communities, notably Sparta, Athens and ancient Rome, but equally of modern

nations — England, France, Italy, Germany, America (see Rosenblum, 1967: Chapter 2; Abrams, 1985). The same century witnessed the birth of *nationalism*, the ideological movement, and the demand to revive or build nations on the Anglo-French model, which would act as modern communities of history and destiny, to keep alive the sacred memory of individuals and families in the march of the nation through history. By placing that memory in the lap of the nation, posterity and a transcendent purpose would restore meaning and identity to individuals liberated by secularism. To this day, the serried monuments to the fallen, the ceaseless ritual of remembrance, the fervent celebration of heroes and symbols across the globe, testify to the same impulse to collective immortality, the same concern for the judgment and solace of posterity.

Vernacular Mobilization and Cultural Competition

There are also more specific reasons for the continuing hold of national cultures with their ethnic myths and memories in an increasingly interdependent world.

Perhaps the most common way in which nations have been, and are being, formed is through processes of ‘vernacular mobilization’ and ‘cultural politicization’. Where ethnic communities (or *ethnie*) lack states of their own, having usually been incorporated in wider polities in an earlier epoch, they risk dissolution in the transition to modernity, unless an indigenous intelligentsia emerges, strong enough to mobilize wider sections of ‘their’ community on the basis of a rediscovered ethno-history and vernacular culture. The success of the intelligentsia largely hinges on their ability to discover a convincing cultural base, one that can find a popular response, at least among educated strata. The intelligentsia are populist to the extent that they make use of (some) popular culture and a living communal history, even where they stop short of mobilizing actual peasants. The important task is to convince immediate followers, and enemies outside, of the cultural viability of the nation-to-be. The richer, more fully documented, the ethno-history, the more widely spoken the vernacular tongue and the more widely practised the native customs and religion, the less difficult will it be to convince others, friends and enemies, of the actuality of the ‘nation’; for it can be made to ‘flow’ coterminously with the demotic *ethnie* and seem its reincarnation after a long period of presumed death. Conversely, the scantier the records of ethno-history and less widely spoken the vernacular and practised the

customs, the harder will it be to convince others of the viability of the national project, and the more it will be necessary to find new ways of overcoming doubt and hostility. Hence the appeal to lost epics and forgotten heroes — an Oisín or Lemminkäinen — to furnish a noble pedigree and sacred landscape for submerged or neglected communities (see Hutchinson, 1987; Branch, 1985: Introduction).

To create the nation, therefore, it is not enough simply to mobilize compatriots. They must be taught who they are, where they came from and whither they are going. They must be turned into conationals through a process of mobilization into the vernacular culture, albeit one adapted to modern social and political conditions. Only then can the old-new culture become a political base and furnish political weapons in the much more intense cultural competition of a world of nations. Old religious sages and saints can now be turned into national heroes, ancient chronicles and epics become examples of the creative national genius, while great ages of achievement in the community's past are presented as the nation's 'golden age' of pristine purity and nobility. The former culture of a community which had no other end beyond itself, now becomes the talisman and legitimation for all manner of 'national' policies and purposes, from agricultural villagization to militarism and aggrandisement. Ethnicity is nationalized (see Seton-Watson, 1977: Chapters 2–4; A.D. Smith, 1986: Chapter 8).

Though the intelligentsia tend to be the prime beneficiaries of the politicization of culture, other strata share in the realization of the national project. Peasants and workers are not immune, even if they are rarely prime movers, particularly where a marxisant 'national communism' holds sway. On the whole, it is the nationalist motifs which tap peasant energies most effectively, particularly where a foreign threat can be convincingly portrayed, as when China was invaded by Japan (see Johnson, 1969; A.D. Smith, 1979: Chapter 5). Because of this 'multi-class' character, the national project retains a popularity that is the envy of other ideological movements; for it appears to offer each class not just a tangible benefit, but the promise of dignity and unity in the 'super-family' of the nation (see Nairn, 1977: Chapter 9; Horowitz, 1985: Chapter 2).

One other reason for the continuing power of the national idea today needs to be remembered. This is the accentuation of that idea and of the several national cultures across the globe by their competition for adherents and prestige. I am not simply referring here to the way in which such cultures have become interwoven with

the rivalry of states in the international arena. The cultures themselves have been thrown into conflict, as communities in their struggle for political rights and recognition have drawn upon their cultural resources — music, literature, the arts and crafts, dress, food and so on — to make their mark in the wider political arena, regionally and internationally, and continue to do so by the use of comparative statistics, prestige projects, tourism and the like. These are veritable ‘cultural wars’, which underline the polycentric nature of our interdependent world, as each community discovers afresh its ‘national essence’ in its ‘irreplaceable culture values’ (Weber, 1968, Vol. 1: Chapter 5).

Vernacular mobilization; the politicization of cultures; the role of intelligentsia and other strata; and the intensification of cultural wars: here are some of the reasons, briefly sketched, why national cultures inspired by rediscovered ethno-histories, continue to divide our world into discrete cultural blocks, which show little sign of harmonization, let alone amalgamation. When we add the sharply uneven nature of the distributions of both a ‘rich’ ethno-history and economic and political resources between nations and *ethnie* today, the likelihood of an early ‘super-session’ of nationalism appears remote. Feeding on each other, ethnic nationalisms seem set to multiply and accentuate national and ethnic boundaries and the uneven distribution of cultural and economic resources, at least in those areas where there remain a multitude of unsatisfied ethno-national claims. If the various regional inter-state systems appear strong enough (for how long?) to contain conflicting ethno-nationalist movements, even in Africa and Asia, the number and intensity of current and potential ethnic conflicts hardly suggests a global diminution of the power of nationalism or the hold of national cultures in the next few decades.

Lingua Franca and Culture Areas

From the standpoint of both global security and cosmopolitan culture, this is a bleak conclusion. There is, however, another side to the overall picture, which may over the longer term help to mitigate some of the worst effects of intensified and proliferating ethno-national conflicts. I refer to the growing importance of the lingua franca and of various ‘culture areas’.

The fact that certain languages — English, French, Russian, Arabic, Swahili and Chinese — have achieved regional or even global coverage and recognition, would not in itself lead us to

predict a convergence of cultures, let alone a transcendence of nationalism. None of these widely spoken languages have achieved the transterritorial and transcultural corporate identity that medieval Latin and Arabic possessed. In that period, there were few rival written languages extending throughout the social scale of particular ethnic communities, except perhaps other sacred languages (Greek, Hebrew, Armenian in the West and Near East). The situation now is very different. Many 'low' cultures with purely spoken languages and dialects have been turned into literary 'high' cultures of mass, public education involving all social classes. Hence, the national identities that have emerged today are qualitatively different from the loose 'lateral' corporate identities of medieval clergy, ulema and aristocrats (see Armstrong, 1982: Chapter 3). This means that, in and of themselves, the rise of the lingua franca in various parts of the world, while affording a possibility for wider transterritorial cultures, cannot ensure their emergence. Other factors have to enter the field, which can then make use of the new linguistic and communications opportunities.

Paradoxically, it is a form of nationalism itself, coupled with political goals of regional peace and prosperity, which may afford a basis for the rise of regional, if not global, cultures. I have in mind the so-called 'Pan' nationalisms, defined as the attempt to unify in a single political community several, usually contiguous, states on the basis of common cultural characteristics or a 'family of cultures'. Historical examples of such nationalisms have included Pan-Turkism, Pan-Arabism, Pan-Africanism and to a lesser degree Pan-Latin Americanism.

From a narrow political standpoint, none of these movements was a success, where 'success' means unification of separate states into a 'super-state'; and those who measure Pan-Europeanism in similar circumscribed terms are fond of invoking these negative precedents. But we need not adopt so strictly political a standpoint. Judged in terms of other dimensions — cultural, economic, philanthropic — Pan nationalisms have some achievements to their credit. Pan-Arabism may not have prevented internecine wars among Arabs, but it has inspired inter-Arab development projects and broader cultural and philanthropic links, and the same was true, on a lesser scale, in the case of Pan-Turkism (see Landau, 1981). Above all, Pan nationalisms, by reminding burgeoning states and nations of a wider cultural heritage to which they are joint heirs, help to counteract the fissiparous tendencies of minority ethnic

nationalisms and the rivalries of territorial state nationalisms. Even if the economic motivations and political will are insufficient to overcome conflicts, they keep alive the broad desire to negotiate differences within culture areas and create wider regional alignments and institutions.

It is in this context that we should view postwar attempts to create wider and deeper regional alignments in the western half of Europe. It is not a question of creating unity in or through diversity. Rather, the European 'family of cultures' consists of overlapping and boundary-transcending cultural and political motifs and traditions — Roman law, Renaissance humanism, Enlightenment rationalism, romanticism, democracy — which have surfaced in various parts of the continent at different times and in some cases continue to do so, creating or recreating sentiments of recognition and kinship among the peoples of Europe. It is on this basis, that a Pan-European movement, a loose form of 'Pan' nationalism, has been attempting to guide the desire for greater economic co-operation and union, and the political will to avoid the disastrous wars of the first half of this century, in the direction of a broad 'political community', though not necessarily a United States of Europe, let alone a 'super-state' (or 'super-nation') of Europe (see however Galtung, 1973).

Though the will to co-operation among European states is mainly economic in content, it is also based on cultural assumptions and traditions. Though individual national cultures remain distinctive and vibrant, there are also broader European cultural patterns which transcend national cultural boundaries to create an overlapping 'family' of common components. Democratic ideals and parliamentary institutions; civil rights and legal codes; Judeo-Christian traditions of ethics; the values of scientific enquiry; artistic traditions of realism and romanticism; humanism and individualism: these are some of the cultural patterns which straddle many of Europe's national cultures, to create a syndrome of repeated elements and form a culture area of overlapping components. Some of these components have been institutionalized; others remain at the level of belief and value, of underlying cultural assumption, as legitimations of choice and action.

It would be misleading to think of such 'culture areas' as unities in diversity or diversity within a unified framework. Perhaps such unities are and will be created in the political and economic spheres. But they bear only a partial relationship to the realities of culture areas and lingua franca. They are willed, constructed, institutional

unities; whereas a culture area, with or without its lingua franca, is a product of long-term historical circumstances, often undirected and unintentional and unanticipated, which are no less powerful because they remain inchoate and uninstitutionalized. Islamic, Russian or European identities and sentiments are no less potent than the social and political institutions that 'express' them officially.

Conclusion

Such culture areas are, of course, a far cry from the ideal of a global culture which will supersede the many national cultures that still divide the world so resoundingly. Their loose patchwork quality and mixture of cultures do not as yet offer a serious challenge to the still fairly compact, and frequently revived, national cultures. There are, it is true, signs of partial 'hybridization' of national cultures, which were of course never monolithic in reality. At the same time, immigration and cultural mixing can produce powerful ethnic reactions on the part of indigenous cultures, as has occurred in some western societies (see Samuel, 1989, Vol. II).

As this example illustrates, we are still far from even mapping out the kind of global culture and cosmopolitan ideal that can truly supersede a world of nations, each cultivating its distinctive historical character and rediscovering its national myths, memories and symbols in past golden ages and sacred landscapes. A world of competing cultures, seeking to improve their comparative status rankings and enlarge their cultural resources, affords little basis for global projects, despite the technical and linguistic infrastructural possibilities.

At the same time, the partial mixing of cultures, the rise of lingua franca and of wider 'Pan' nationalisms, though sometimes working in opposed directions, have created the possibility of 'families of culture' which portend wider regional patchwork culture-areas.

Such culture-areas may perhaps serve as models in the more long-term future for even broader inter-continental versions. Even in such distant scenarios, it is hard to envisage the absorption of ethno-national cultures, only a diminution in their political relevance. So attenuated a cosmopolitanism is unlikely to entail the supersession of national cultures.

Notes

1. This was a common neo-evolutionist theme in the 1960s; see Parsons (1966) and Smelser (1968). It was already presupposed in the work of 'communications theorists' such as Deutsch and Lerner; see also Netti and Robertson (1968).

2. The Hegelian theory of 'history-less peoples' also played a part in their more specific analyses of particular nations, especially in the writings of Engels; see Davis (1967) and Cummins (1980).

3. I have brought together different phases of twentieth-century western culture in this sketch, in particular, the modernist trends of the 1960s, the 'postmodern' reactions of the 1960s and 1970s, and the technical 'neutrality' of the mass computer revolution of the 1980s. Of course, these trends and phases overlap: Stravinsky's pastiche dates from the early 1920s, while 'modernism' still exerts profound influences till today. The main point is that this Western image of 'things to come' is composed of several contradictory layers.

4. For the idea that nations should be conceived as sovereign but limited 'imagined communities', see Anderson (1983). His analysis, which gives pride of place to the 'technology of print capitalism' and the 'administrative pilgrimages' of provincial (read 'national' today) elites (to Washington, Moscow, Brussels?), could indeed shed light on the chances, and obstacles, to the rise of wider 'regional' cultures today.

5. Schlesinger (1987) discusses the work of Mattelart, Stuart Hall, Morley and others, which demonstrate the ways in which popular responses to the cultural products of American 'cultural imperialism' vary according to ethnic group and social class, lending support to the arguments for the historical specificity of imagery.

6. This is a necessarily curtailed discussion of the concept of collective cultural identity, which needs to be distinguished from the 'situational' analysis of individual identity, on which see Okamura (1981); see A.D. Smith (1986, Chapters 1-2).

7. This should not be construed as an argument for 'primordialism', the view that ethnicity and nationality are somehow 'givens' of human existence and/or history. For a discussion of the issues involved, see the essays by Brass and Robinson in Taylor and Yapp (1979); cf. also A.D. Smith (1984).

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