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On nationalism

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Modern nationalism lies at the intersection of the universal and the particular. It thus embodies some of the key paradoxes that have shaped world history over recent centuries. By the end of the twentieth century (with the final collapse of Soviet internationalism), the idea of the nation state as the standard framework for the legitimate exercise of political–territorial sovereignty had gained nearly planet-wide acceptance (with the possible exception of Antarctica). It had achieved structural hegemony on the strength of its challenge to older, discredited imperial systems. Yet the very rapidity and extent of its diffusion had been facilitated in large measure by the very dynamics of imperial expansion and domination. Indeed, at least in its formal institutional manifestations, it reflected the continued influence of distinctively Euro-Atlantic ideas about the relationship among authority, consent, and identity. Whether the universal application of those ideas could in practice be conducive to the expression of diverse identities and to the creation of a stable and egalitarian world order remained an open question.

For the purposes of this chapter, the nation can be defined as a population larger than one of personal acquaintance, to which shared, heritable identity is ascribed, and in whose name political authority over a bounded territory is claimed.[1] Nationalism, then, describes the aspiration or active effort to achieve, maintain, or expand the scope of, a nation's shared identity, self-governance, and/or power. By the same token, a distinguishing characteristic of nationhood is that its sense of shared belonging is manifested, expressed, and developed through cultural traditions and patterns of association and commemoration that can exist apart from the state, and are indeed likely to survive open-ended periods of statelessness. Thus, an ever-evolving sense of Polish nationhood was cultivated at least among certain social classes for

1 This definition borrows and adapts in part from Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, 2nd edn (London: Verso, 1991), p. 6.

generations between the partition of the Polish Commonwealth in the late eighteenth century and the creation of an independent Polish republic in 1918. Conversely, Delaware's identity would be unlikely to survive a remapping of the United States that did away with the federal constitutional order.

In and of itself there is nothing exclusively modern about the formation of broadly inclusive, transgenerational communities of identity, nor about the association of a population's communal identity with claims of territorial sovereignty. There is good reason to hypothesize that the powerful link observable worldwide and in all periods of recorded history between humans' personal sense of self and their sentiment of group belonging is the manifestation of a genetically rooted and culturally reinforced trait. In their original form, one may conjecture, such psychologically internalized bonds of solidarity tended to be based on kinship ties. Indeed, extensive kin-based networks of mutual obligation remain vital elements of social structure in many parts of the world to this day. By the same token, all available evidence suggests that one of the distinguishing characteristics of humans as a species is their propensity for reinforcing kinship relations by attaching symbolic significance to shared cultural norms that are seen as expressive of group identity. Such norms are cultivated both as means of securing internal cohesion and as signifiers of difference between groups. Idiosyncrasies of language, religion, and dress are among the most obvious examples of such norms, but the plasticity of human culture allows for any number of other markers to play this role.

The very use of commonly cultivated and cherished cultural traits to reinforce kinship bonds creates, in turn, a bottomless tool chest of mechanisms for the incorporation of non-kin into the kinship-based group – and, indeed, for the creation of communities of social solidarity far more extensive than kinship groups. The range of possibilities is open-ended, and includes such diverse (and often overlapping) categories as communities of religion, caste, class, and ethnicity. Ethnic groups are distinguished by their association with a myth of shared ancestry and heritage, of which common cultural traits are deemed both emblematic and preservative. Ethnic identity is one of the most common socio-cultural foundations of nationalism, even as nationalism, in turn, contributes to the shaping of ethnic and other identities.

Across multiple continents and throughout much of recorded history, ethnicity has functioned as a widely prevalent, seemingly (albeit misleadingly so) irreducible rubric for the reconciliation and alignment of potentially divergent socio-political and material interests and for the

mobilization of quasi-instinctive loyalties. It is by virtue of these perceived qualities that ethnicity has been a key object of political control, instrumentalization, and manipulation practically anywhere and any time states have existed. The wholesale transportation into exile of recalcitrant ethnic elites was a key feature of imperial political–demographic engineering in the Assyrian and neo-Babylonian empires of the early to mid-first millennium BCE; historians of Southeast Asia have highlighted the politicization of ethnicity in a number of the region's centralizing kingdoms (the predecessors, so to speak, of modern-day Burma, Thailand, and Vietnam) from the fifteenth century CE onwards;[2] the mass defection of subordinate and exploited ethnic groups from their Aztec overlords played a critical role in facilitating Hernán Cortés's rapid sixteenth-century conquest of Moctezuma II's kingdom; ethnic distinctions among Manchus, Mongols, and Han Chinese were institutionalized and instrumentalized from the seventeenth century onwards in the Qing dynasty's system of ethnically stratified military formations and garrisons (the Banner System).[3]

One can go further and point to numerous pre-modern examples of claims about ethno-cultural identity playing critical roles in the legitimization of state authority, or serving as major motives for (or at least arguments in favor of) political–territorial autonomy, independence, or regime change.[4] In such cases, it is possible to speak of pre-modern expressions or invocations of national identity, or even of pre-modern forms of nationalism. Examples include the public self-definition of the Athenian state in the age of Pericles (fifth century BCE), the Jewish revolts against Rome in the first and second centuries CE, the invocation of Han identity by leaders of the rising against the Mongol Yuan dynasty in fourteenth-century China, and the appeal to Scottish heritage and identity in the 1320 Declaration of Arbroath.

Characteristics and origins of modern nationalism

What is distinctive about modern nationalism (from roughly the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries onwards) is (a) its eventual global diffusion as the default conceptual framework for independent statehood and matrix for

2 Victor Lieberman, *Strange Parallels: Southeast Asia in Global Context, c. 800–1830*, Vol. 2: *Mainland Mirrors: Europe, Japan, China, South Asia and the Islands* (Cambridge University Press, 2009).

3 Mark Elliott, *The Manchu Way: The Eight Banners and Ethnic Identity in Late Imperial China* (Stanford University Press, 2001).

4 Anthony D. Smith, *The Antiquity of Nations* (New York: Polity Press, 2004).

inter-societal relations and (b) its close association with the concept of popular sovereignty. Indeed, I would argue that it is the spread of the idea of popular sovereignty (and a concomitant trend towards the secularization of the political sphere) that underlies the global standardization of nationhood as the foundation of legitimate political–territorial authority. To the extent that a state's political sovereignty is thought of as flowing from one unitary source (the normative absolutist and post-absolutist concept in a number of the West European countries whose overseas empires had a disproportionately important role in shaping political cultures around the world), that quality of irreducibility can readily be embodied in the person of the monarch who rules on the basis of divine right. But wherever subjects became citizens, sovereignty shifted from the person of the monarch to the collectivity of the populace (whether in rhetorically explicit terms, as in the various French republics, or *de facto*, as in the gradual democratization of the British constitutional monarchy). Yet, while the King had one body (or at most two, in the figurative sense highlighted by Ernst Kantorowicz[5]), the popular sovereign could literally consist of several tens of millions. What would undergird the unity of the state if its sovereign was no longer one person but many and if the principle of divine-right rule no longer held? The answer was that the principle of popular sovereignty both presupposed and required that the populace share some common form of identity whose notional unity transcended its many parts. That said, struggles to assert popular sovereignty and national identity could serve either to reinforce existing political boundaries, or to subvert and challenge them. Outcomes were related in part to the contingencies of pre-existing patterns of ethnocultural, linguistic, religious, and/or regional bonds and allegiances, and the degree to which they happened to be congruent or not with existing political–territorial configurations. Regardless of the diverse circumstances that shaped each individual scenario, the interconnections among the ideas and practices of political modernization, popular sovereignty, self-determination, and nationalism necessarily ran deep.

Understanding the global spread of modern nationalism therefore requires that we examine the diffusion of popular sovereignty as an ideal on which it was parasitical – an ideal, moreover, that shaped political cultures, institutions, and practices across a very wide spectrum of regime types (from constitutional monarchies to liberal-democratic republics to plebiscitary

5 Ernst H. Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology* (Princeton University Press, 1957).

dictatorships, to repressively authoritarian regimes that murdered millions of people in the very name of the people).

It is striking that among the earliest, classic exemplars of the modern nation state were precisely some of the West European countries most heavily committed to, and dependent on, the cultivation of overseas commercial and colonial empires. In other words, the modern nation state was born amidst ever more entangled and entangling global networks of exploitation, migration, cultural transfer, and economic exchange. The Netherlands and England/Britain are the two most compelling illustrations of this correlation, with France perhaps a slightly less convincing example. One is tempted to speculate that the experience of collective self-governance among globally entrepreneurial joint-stock companies and chartered overseas trading enterprises had a spill-over effect on domestic political culture. By the same token, mercantile elites and the financial interests associated with them had a strong motivation to look to the state for military, diplomatic, and legal support as they invested their resources and pursued their livelihoods in risk-laden foreign ventures. All this transpired against the backdrop of a violently competitive European state system that, as Charles Tilly among others has described, drove governments to cultivate ever-deeper and more extensive sources of revenue to sustain their ever-larger standing armies (or massive navy in Britain's case) and military capabilities.[6] The result was a steadily deepening interpenetration of state and society, with the commercially and colonially enterprising (and mutually competitive) countries of Europe's Atlantic seaboard at the cutting edge of the trend.

Confronted with increasingly demanding exaction of taxes and customs duties by ever more-intrusive governments, members of the most economically enterprising, literate, and politically engaged sectors of these societies – such as portions of the land-owning gentry, the commercial and professional middle classes, and even the nobility – expected a greater say in the affairs of state in return. The seventeenth, eighteenth, and early nineteenth centuries were marked by a series of consequent revolutionary upheavals and ideological paradigm shifts. Such watershed moments (e.g. the English Civil War and Glorious Revolution of the 1640s and 1688, respectively, the American and French revolutions of the late eighteenth century, the independence of the Latin American countries in the

6 Charles Tilly, *Coercion, Capital, and European States,* AD *990–1990* (Cambridge, MA: Basil Blackwell, 1990).

early nineteenth-century wake of the Napoleonic Wars) marked the relentless rise – however punctuated by reactionary reversals – of those principles of popular sovereignty, political representation, and constitutional government with which the ideas of nationalism and national self-determination proved inextricably intertwined.

Where these crises played out within the bounds of geographically contiguous territories whose land-owning and urban social elites had long since been assimilated into a common language and/or a shared historical consciousness, the eventual outcome tended to be an institutionally, rhetorically, symbolically, and educationally consolidated and reinforced form of self-aware national identity that cut across much of the upper and middle classes, and that at least notionally encompassed some among the less privileged social echelons. The answer to the question that formed the title of the Abbé Sieyès's famed revolutionary pamphlet of 1789, "What is the Third Estate?," said it all: "The Third Estate is a complete nation."[7] The democratic ideal and the national ideal functioned as two sides of the same coin. Even when and where West European monarchies were preserved or restored, it was generally in constitutional rather than divine-right form, and the monarch himself or herself was, so to speak, nationalized – portrayed as an embodiment of the nation's distinctive virtues or even the first among its citizens.

In cases where settler populations were separated from metropoles by wide oceans and distinctive administrative arrangements, the movement towards representative government and popular sovereignty almost necessarily led to political separatism and the accompanying crystallization of separate national identities. I say "almost necessarily" because this was certainly not how the matter initially appeared to many eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century North and South American advocates of political reform. On the contrary, a typical initial colonial response to imperial centralizing efforts was often to demand a greater say in all-imperial affairs along with the preservation or enhancement of local autonomy. During the 1750s, Benjamin Franklin spent time and effort on both sides of the Atlantic trying to win support for his vision of a transatlantic Anglo-American empire of equals.[8] Representatives of the Spanish Empire's Central and South American provinces participated in the liberal-dominated legislative

7 Emmanuel Joseph Sieyès, "Qu'est-ce que le Tiers état?" (1789; Paris: Éditions du Boucher, 2002), p. 2. My translation.

8 Gordon Wood, *The Americanization of Benjamin Franklin* (New York: Penguin, 2005), chapter 2.

assembly (Cortes) convened under British naval protection at Cádiz in southwestern Spain during the Napoleonic occupation of the rest of the country. They hoped to have an equal voice in the forging of a new constitutional order that would enshrine the principle of popular sovereignty for the Spanish Empire as a whole. It was only when the Peninsular majority in the Cortes rebuffed proposals for a federal system of government and demographically proportional electoral weight for the colonies that colonial elites turned to the alternative path of political separation and national independence – a process accelerated by the efforts of the restored, post-Napoleonic Spanish monarchy to reconsolidate central authority by dint of military force. It was effectively *in the wake of independence* and the notional achievement of popular sovereignty that each of the new Hispano-American states faced the enormous challenge of actually fashioning a distinctive sense of national identity that would cut across deep internal social, cultural, and ethnic divisions and lend the new polities political cohesion and international legitimacy.[9] This situation was hardly unique. As David A. Bell has pointed out, it is one of the characteristic paradoxes of nationalism that its political leaders must often scramble to define – and, if need be, coercively consolidate – the identity of the very collectivity on whose behalf they claim to be acting.[10]

Global convergence and diffusion

The nineteenth and twentieth centuries witnessed the continued global spread and development of the twinned ideas of popular sovereignty and nationalism. An essential element fueling this dynamic was the evident power of the modern nation state. Governments of nation states such as Britain, revolutionary France, and the nascent United States appeared able to tap into the potential of their human and material resources much more fully than older dynastic regimes that ruled over royal subjects rather than in the name of national citizens. (To be sure, Britons nominally remain subjects of the Crown to this day, but the power of what John Brewer dubbed the British "fiscal-military" state was directly and obviously linked to the vitality of its parliamentary institutions – incrementally reformed

9 Jeremy Adelman, "Iberian passages: continuity and change in the South Atlantic," in David Armitage and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, eds., *The Age of Revolutions in Global Context, c. 1760–1840* (Houndsmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), pp. 59–82.

10 David A. Bell, *The Cult of the Nation in France: Inventing Nationalism, 1680–1800* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), p. 200.

along democratizing lines in the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries – and the vigor of its national sentiment.[11]) Administrative centralization, high levels of taxation (and consequent ability to borrow at lower rates on the financial markets), and the consequent ability to field large armies or navies – all these essential elements of Great Power status seemed much more readily achievable for states that claimed to embody the identity (rather than merely protect the interests) of the populace on whom such exactions were imposed. The more a state's power rested on popular consent, the freer it was to coerce.

The nation state was thus a very attractive model in what remained a volatile and fiercely competitive global political environment. The fact that modern nationalism had first become such a powerful force in the countries that were among the most deeply engaged with global commerce and colonial expansion also led to the association of the nation state with economic prosperity, industrial enterprise, and political–military power. That said, to the extent that other societies and states hoped to catch up with the prosperity of a country like Britain, nationalism could go hand in hand with economic protectionism (even as nineteenth-century Britain embraced the doctrine of free trade). Indeed, nationalism spread not simply by virtue of imitation of a distant model, but also through a dynamic of defensive responses to direct and often violent encounters with the power of expansive nation states such as France and Britain. The short-lived conquest of Europe by Napoleonic France provoked nationalist responses among broad sectors of the literate classes in Germany and Italy. Decades later, ambitious monarchic states (Prussia in Germany's case and Piedmont in Italy's) with embryonic parliamentary systems were to capitalize on those growing passions by achieving national unifications on their own terms through a combination of war, diplomacy, and the mobilization and manipulation of domestic and foreign public opinion.

Over the course of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a new wave of overseas imperialism on the part of some of the major Euro-Atlantic powers plus Japan led to the French conquest of Algeria, the consolidation, expansion, and formalization of British control over South Asia, the expansion and tightening of Dutch power in the East Indies, the

11 John Brewer, *The Sinews of Power: War, Money and the English State, 1688–1783* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988); Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707–1837* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992).

late nineteenth-century European partition of Africa and French subjection of Indochina, the American occupation of the Philippines, the Japanese occupation of Korea and Taiwan, and the post-First World War Anglo-French partition of much of the former Ottoman Empire in the Middle East. These expansionist juggernauts led to the anomalous spectacle of some of the world's most liberal-democratic nation states exercising formal imperial rule over hundreds of millions of disenfranchised colonial subjects. The humiliation of conquest and rule by aliens from overseas would have eventually generated resistance in any case, but the hypocrisy and self-contradiction of the situation – awareness of which grew increasingly acute in the course of the first half of the twentieth century among colonial subjects, and particularly among their Western-educated elites (e.g. Mahatma Gandhi and Ho Chi Minh) – galvanized anti-colonial nationalism all the more effectively.

At the same time, those non-Western states that managed to hold on to substantive or even nominal independence responded to the threats and pressures of colonial powers by seeking to selectively adopt and adapt features of successful European self-governance, including the centralization of government, the establishment of meritocratic administrative systems, the mapping of their land, resources, and population, the fostering of economic development, constitutional reform, the quest for equality of status with Western states under international law, and – to hold their societies together under the enormous pressures of such rapid and radical changes – the cultivation of national sentiment. Late nineteenth-century Japan and Siam (Thailand) both underwent intensive transformations along these lines, while the Ottoman Empire and China were among states that sought to do the same. Where such polities had long been associated with a distinctive culture and identity shared by much of the social and administrative elite ("politicized ethnicity," to use Victor Lieberman's phrase[12]), reformist regimes had a potential edge in their quest to fashion and promote nationalist consciousness. Japan is a notable case in point, as is Siam. Where blatant ethno-cultural gaps divided rulers from ruled (as in the case of China under the ethnically Manchu Qing dynasty of 1644–1912), or where literate and administratively or economically prominent elites were divided among members of multiple linguistic, religious, and/or ethnic groups (as in the Ottoman and Habsburg empires), the national card was much harder and more dangerous to play (see below).

12 Lieberman, *Strange Parallels*, p. 41.

In brief, over the course of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the idea spread that states functioned most effectively and legitimately when they embodied the identities and thus channeled the energies of their populations. The concept of the modern nation state was diffused by virtue of the dynamics of military and economic competition that appeared to present societies and polities around the world with the alternatives of adapting to this model or else falling victim to it. The ever more tightly woven networks of communication and transportation in the era of the steamship, the telegraph, the news agency, and the railroad helped speed this process of cultural, ideological, and institutional transfer and exchange. Modern nationalism took on its stereotypical role as agent of radical and often violent transformation in the many world regions where close matches did not seem to exist between the existing configuration of political–territorial entities and the distribution of ethno-cultural groups.[13] It was also seized upon as an instrument of political consolidation and economic modernization in countries that had a long history of shared culture and political institutions, such as Japan. Indeed, as C. A. Bayly has pointed out, there was a strong element of convergence at play alongside the factor of diffusion, as dynamics similar to those that fostered state centralization and consequent crystallizations of national sentiment in the Euro-Atlantic sphere manifested themselves in other regions of the world during the nineteenth-century phase of what has come to be called globalization.[14]

The geopolitical implications of modern nationalism were highly diverse, contingent as they were on the infinitely variable (and constantly changing) relationship between political and ethno-linguistic borders, among other factors. Where a common literary language and/or shared historical memory cut across existing political boundaries, as among the multiple states of the German Confederation (successor to the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation) or the Italian peninsula prior to the 1860s, or the post-Ottoman Arab states of the twentieth century, the logic of nationalism pushed towards the unification of many polities into one (whether unification was actually realized or not). Where even the social, economic, cultural, and administrative elites of an existing polity were sharply divided along lines of language or religion, or by other distinct

13 On nationalism as an actively transformative political movement, see John Breuilly, *Nationalism and the State*, 2nd edn (University of Chicago Press, 1994).

14 C. A. Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World, 1780–1914* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), chapter 6.

markers of communal identity, nationalism threatened to operate as a centrifugal force. This was classically the case among such territorially contiguous, ethno-culturally diverse empires as the Habsburg, Ottoman, and Romanov monarchies. The partition of India at independence in 1947 is another prominent example.

Nationalism's ideological malleability and pervasiveness: the communist example

The very global extent of its appeal was such that modern nationalism became associated with, and instrumentalized by, an endlessly diverse array of political forces, social groups, states, and movements. It could be used against regimes or by ruling authorities. It could be a source of internal turmoil, a mechanism for political consolidation, and/or a catalyst for inter-state conflict. Nationalism continued to be associated with movements of democratization, as in the 1848 revolutions in Europe, the "Wilsonian moment" of 1919,[15] or the Congress Party's struggle for Indian independence. But throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, authoritarian regimes – from Napoleonic France to Bismarck's Prusso-Germany and Hitler's Nazi Germany, Mussolini's Italy to Saddam Hussein's Iraq, Tojo's Japan to Vargas's Brazil – were eager to have their nationalist cake and eat it too, tapping into the power of nationalism as a means of strengthening, rather than loosening, their own preponderant grip on power. By the second half of the twentieth century, the concept of popular sovereignty in the framework of the nation state had become so quasi-universally normative that nationalism in this era could best be understood not so much as a distinctive ideology as an inescapable part of the mental landscape of political modernity. It was a ubiquitous substratum upon which virtually any political ideology had to build, which multiple parties in any country sought to exploit, and with which nearly every movement and regime had to contend. The ideologies associated with or sustained by nationalism varied as radically as the multiple global and historical contexts within which nationalist politics played out.

So inescapable was the logic and force of nationalism in the modern world that movements or regimes that dismissed it as an irrational and destructive

15 Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism* (Oxford University Press, 2007).

force ultimately found it difficult if not impossible to adhere consistently to this position. As the twentieth century's most globally influential alternative to nationalism, communism provides the most compelling illustration of this point.

Marxists saw nationalism as a transitional phenomenon associated with the capitalist mode of production. To the extent that it was associated with the triumph of the bourgeoisie over feudalism, and in so far as it facilitated the unification of politically and economically fragmented regions into larger, integrated markets – as in the cases of German and Italian unification or the triumph of the Union in the American Civil War – nationalism had a progressive role to play in Marxism's historical script. But for Marxists, class – not nation – remained the fundamental category of collective interest and historical agency. The objective interests of the industrial working class transcended national differences and political boundaries, and it was the task of socialists to awaken the workers to this fact. The proletarian revolution to come was to be carried out in the spirit of internationalism.

Yet in 1914, not only were socialists unable to prevent the outbreak of the First World War; in most cases (Italy in 1915 being a notable exception) socialist political parties embraced their countries' respective causes and pledged their support to their military efforts. To stand firm in opposition to war would have been to cut themselves off from a significant proportion of their own constituencies and to brand themselves traitors in the eyes of their governments. Moreover, even top socialist political leaders found themselves caught up in the euphoric sense of national solidarity that gripped the urban centers of the major belligerents in the first days of war, seeming to sweep away all internal divisions of class and party. It was all too easy for socialists to rationalize support for their own country's cause by arguing that its social and political system was more progressive than its opponents'. And it was all too easy to see through such arguments to the nationalist sentiments that underlay them.

This left the mainstream socialist parties vulnerable to Lenin's charges of hypocrisy – accusations that gained traction as the Great War dragged on and as its enormous toll caused social fissures to reappear, wider than ever, within the belligerent states. In the wake of the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution, Russia's new authorities set about creating a new, worldwide Communist International (Comintern) which laid claim to the mantle of Marxist legitimacy and professed complete devotion to revolutionary internationalism. The Comintern's constituent parties, in turn, were required not to defer to

the alleged national interests of their respective states, but rather to follow the lead of the one Communist Party that had been able not only to seize political power but to hold on to it – namely the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU).

Yet such was the pervasive force of nationalism in a world where states and societies seemed ever more tightly intertwined that even Soviet Communism was caught up from the start with the problem of how to accommodate it. Soviet nationalities policy, at least as first conceived of by Lenin, was designed to achieve the denationalization of imperial identity. The territorial cohesiveness of the Tsarist Empire had been undermined, Lenin was convinced, by the infusion of Russian nationalist content into the imperial mission – a process that necessarily marginalized and antagonized members of the realm's non-Russian nationalities, as indicated by the wave of secessionist movements that had come in the wake of the 1917 revolutions. Only through a systematic de-Russification of the USSR's identity could the peoples of the former empire develop a shared Soviet political identity that transcended cultural diversity.

During the 1920s, there was a very conscious effort to combat and compensate for the legacy of Russian chauvinism by carving out discrete territorial republics and autonomous regions for the former empire's constituent nationalities. The idea of a policy that would be "national in form, socialist in content" was premised on the assumption that ethnocultural identity was a neutral medium through which one could diffuse any set of political values, including Marxism–Leninism – just as the Christian Gospel had been spread through translation into a diversity of languages. Through the miracle of dialectical transubstantiation, shared class consciousness and a common commitment to socialist transformation would transcend the very ethno-national particularism that Moscow was institutionalizing, leading to the emergence of a supranational Soviet man and Soviet woman.

In practice, Soviet nationalities policy proved more inconsistent and self-contradictory than dialectical. If any hint of secessionism did manifest itself under this ostensibly egalitarian and enlightened system, it was by definition a symptom of bourgeois reaction and was dealt with accordingly – through the ruthless application of violent force. Under Stalin, the increasing tendency was to apply such force pre-emptively and massively. At the same time, to the extent that Leninist ethno-federalism remained formally in place, the long-term dynamic of that approach was centrifugal rather than centripetal. That is, the creation of formalized territorial boundaries and bureaucratic

distinctions among nationalities served to reify national differences rather than to erode them.[16]

Conversely, to the extent that a trans-ethnic Soviet identity was nonetheless in the process of being created in the USSR, it operated as a sort of territorial nationalism of its own or even as a neo-imperial/Russian nationalism rather than as the launching pad of genuine internationalism. It is true that, for many decades, the loyalty to Moscow of many communist parties around the world remained remarkably consistent – as long as those parties did not succeed in coming to power. But where communist parties did succeed in fighting their own way to power, as in Yugoslavia and China, the states in question tended to move rapidly away from Moscow and, indeed, towards confrontation with it, as they espoused a communist nationalism of their own. One set of exceptions included North Korea, North Vietnam (later Vietnam), and Cuba – all geopolitically positioned such that they could accept Soviet assistance without much risk of losing their national independence, and each needing Soviet support in pursuit of its own nationalist agenda. The other category of exceptions consisted of those countries where communism had been directly or indirectly imposed by the Soviet Union, as in the Eastern European members of the Warsaw Pact. As soon as Soviet support was withdrawn in 1989, these regimes fell to liberal-nationalist revolutions. The forced internationalism of the Warsaw Pact was the exception that proved the rule: even communism could not secure its grip on power without drawing on the sentiments and loyalties of nationalism.

Nationalism, empire, and ethnic conflict in the twentieth century

For all of nationalism's ideological malleability, there were two elements that were not readily detachable from the modern idea of nationhood: (a) the idea of the nation as a horizontal community of equals; (b) the assertion that one's own nation was at least the equal (in terms both of rights and of cultural and historical achievements) of any other nation on the face of the planet. Unexceptional as these concepts may seem, the transition to a political system compatible with them was and remains a

16 Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Revenge of the Past: Nationalism, Revolution, and the Collapse of the Soviet Union* (Stanford University Press, 1993); Rogers Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe* (Cambridge University Press, 1996), chapter 1.

chaotic and often violence-ridden process. Virulent ethnic conflicts have constituted one significant aspect of a complex, interlocking array of crises associated with the modern transition away from the formally hierarchical, corporate social and political systems that once constituted the nearly universal global norm.

Religious and ethno-cultural affiliations were among the markers used to code for differential corporate status, rights, and obligations in many pre-modern political systems. Across much of pre-modern Europe, Jews were allowed to lend money at interest, but not to own land. Prior to the nineteenth-century reforms, non-Muslim "people of the book" (e.g. Christians and Jews) in the Ottoman Empire enjoyed the protection of the state as long as they accepted their inferior juridical status, suffered institutionalized forms of humiliation, and paid special taxes. Ethnic Manchus and Mongols served in elite units of the Qing armed forces and occupied distinct sectors of garrison communities around the empire. Even as formal inequalities were abolished, their legacies long survived in the form of a continued differentiation of socio-economic function and status: the overwhelming majority of the gentry in Habsburg Hungary were Magyars, while the great majority of Slovaks were peasants; Armenian and Greek Christians remained prominent in the international commerce of the Ottoman Empire while Muslims predominated in the armed forces and administration. Elements of such systems survived well into the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in many parts of the world, including some European states such as the Russian Empire. Similar arrangements were reproduced by the most politically progressive European states in the contexts of their overseas empires: Sikhs and other groups identified as "martial races" were disproportionately recruited into the armed forces of the British Raj; members of the Alawite minority were similarly favored for service in the indigenous auxiliaries armed and trained by the French authorities in Syria, while the British co-opted the traditional, Sunni-Arab minority elite in Iraq; ethnic Chinese were embraced as economic intermediaries by the Dutch authorities in the East Indies (future Indonesia).

Over the course of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the territorially contiguous, multinational empires tended to respond to competitive pressures from abroad and rising demands from below by reducing or abolishing juridical inequalities among subject-population categories other than those of gender and age. Habsburg, Ottoman, and Romanov governments also introduced elements of electoral and representative politics, albeit under the continued aegis of dynastic legitimacy and authoritarian forms of executive power. The transition from corporate to meritocratic society was

difficult and conflict-ridden under the best of circumstances. Where corporate status was closely linked to religion, language, race, and/or ethnic identity – that is, to markers perceived as essential, heritable (whether biologically or culturally), and in some cases practically indelible – the chances of a violent transition were all the higher. Ethno-culturally alien minorities had been easier for culturally majoritarian populations to tolerate as long as they "knew their place" as defined and enforced by the state. The idea of equality for all subjects of an empire or citizens of a state threatened to upset such hierarchies. Imperial regimes' policies themselves often contributed directly or indirectly to the resultant conflicts.

Given the disturbing course of twentieth-century nationalist politics, it is quite understandable that many historians would look back with a certain degree of nostalgia if not admiration on the seemingly more tranquil, albeit authoritarian, order of the territorially contiguous, multinational empires of yesteryear.[17] However, it would be misleading to portray the fall of these empires – or even of the West European nation states' overseas empires – as resulting from a unilinear process of nationalist agitation and mobilization from below. Empires were not sleeping giants that just happened to be fatally stung by a poisonous fly called nationalism. Nineteenth- and twentieth-century empires, like their similarly doomed New World predecessors, were actively involved in mutual rivalries and in associated political, economic, and technological modernization projects that, through a variety of dialectical processes and feedback loops, contributed actively to the very nationalization of politics that proved their undoing. Moreover, even as they did away with past forms of inequality among their subjects, the imperial states cast about for new forms of political and cultural identity that could consolidate their authority on firmer ground, in some cases themselves having recourse to what Benedict Anderson has dubbed "official nationalism."[18]

Thus, when Young Turk reformers, who rose to power in Istanbul following the 1908 revolution, promoted "Ottomanism" as a quasi-national or pan-imperial identity for all the empire's subjects, they merely begged the question of what cultural substance was to fill this empty vessel. It quickly became obvious that in practice, Ottomanism was to be heavily infused with

17 See, for example, Jane Burbank and Frederick Cooper, *Empires in World History: Power and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton University Press, 2010); Dominic Lieven, *Empire: The Russian Empire and its Rivals* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002); Karen Barkey, *Empire of Difference: The Ottomans in Comparative Perspective* (Cambridge University Press, 2008).

18 Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, chapter 6.

Turkic content – given Turkish linguistic predominance among the empire's core population and military-administrative elite – rather than with elements of Arabic, Armenian, or Greek language and identity. The consequent alienation of non-Turkic elites was predictable. The regime, in turn, responded with ever more coercive forms of official nationalism, culminating in the Armenian genocide carried out under the cover of war in 1915, and setting the scene for the creation of a Turkish nation state in Anatolia in the aftermath of Ottoman defeat in the First World War.

When the Magyar-speaking elites of the Austro-Hungarian Dual Monarchy's Hungarian half sought to make assimilation into Magyar language and culture an effective condition of upward mobility for the Hungarian kingdom's Slovaks or Croatians, they provoked an all too predictable nationalist backlash. In the Habsburg monarchy's western half, German nationalism remained a populist phenomenon from which the imperial authorities distanced themselves. Yet the introduction of electoral politics in the late 1800s begged provocative questions about whose collective interests were to be represented in ethnically mixed regions, and thus contributed to rising ethno-nationalist tensions among territorially intermingled language groups such as the Czechs and Germans of Bohemia (the western region of the contemporary Czech Republic).

For its part, the Russian imperial government used its coercive powers to try and Russify parts of its non-Russian-speaking Slavic population, particularly in regions that had once constituted portions of the formerly independent Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. In the last years before the First World War, Russian military planners made sharp distinctions between allegedly reliable ethnic Russian elements of the population and unreliable non-Russians or non-Slavs who were seen as obstacles to the creation of a more cohesive body politic (and hence a more disciplined and cohesive conscript army).[19]

Such pressures from above tended to provoke the very nationalist responses from below that they were intended to contain or pre-empt. At the same time, subject populations were being ever more politicized by such factors as the spread of literacy, the tightening of regional as well as global webs of communication, urbanization, and integration (on unequal terms) into global markets, along with the tentative steps towards representative

19 Peter Holquist, "To count, to extract, and to exterminate: population statistics and population politics in late imperial and Soviet Russia," in Ronald Grigor Suny and Terry Martin, eds., *A State of Nations: Empire and Nation-Making in the Age of Lenin and Stalin* (Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 111–144.

politics in the multinational empires during the pre-First World War years and in some portions of the overseas empires in the middle decades of the twentieth century. All these forces contributed to the spread (by process of convergent evolution as well as diffusion and mutual imitation) of ideas about the right to popular sovereignty, which in turn further fueled the politicization of ethnicity.[20]

As in the cases of the New World revolutions of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, twentieth-century separatist outcomes were often the unintended (but not necessarily any less inevitable for that) consequences of what had begun as movements for equality of status *within* existing empires. This was clearly the case in the multinational empires; to a degree it was true even of the overseas empires where the double standards were much more blatant. Almost until the very end, the mainstream of Ottoman Arab, Habsburg Czech, Senegalese, Ivorian, Algerian-Muslim, and (prior to 1919) Indian elites had sought greater measures of self-government and self-determination – or else full and direct participation in decision-making at the metropolitan center – in the context of *reformed imperial frameworks*. Demands for the outright dissolution of empire tended to come later, in response to the frustration of more moderate agendas. Indeed, and once again as in the earlier cases of Britain's and Spain's New World empires (which had collapsed under the impact of global conflicts – the Seven Years' War and the Napoleonic Wars, respectively), it was a pair of world wars and their aftermaths that highlighted how structurally unattainable were visions of compromise between metropolitan centers and imperial peripheries, bringing matters to a climax that many had feared but few had originally desired.

The rise of the nation state out of the rubble of empire – in East Central Europe after 1918 and across much of the Afro-Asian world in the decade and a half or so after 1945 – was supposed to resolve all these problems. But in practice, the triumph of nationalism (even when it was a triumph by default, in the aftermath of imperial collapse) tended to be violently traumatic and led to even more acute dilemmas. As with any political and ideological paradigm shift, things generally got much worse before they began to show any signs of growing better. Recasting the global political order on the basis of popular sovereignty and national self-determination rendered the status of ethno-national minorities more anomalous than

20 See Jörn Leonhard and Ulrike von Hirschhausen, eds., *Comparing Empires: Encounters and Transfers in the Long Nineteenth Century* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011).

ever. By the same token, it often turned members of former majoritarian or dominant groups into subordinate minorities overnight. This had been the experience of Muslims in the Balkan peninsula, as much of it was lost to newly independent, Christian-majority nation states in the course of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Ethnic Germans in post-1918 Poland and Czechoslovakia felt similarly dispossessed as a collectivity, even when their individual civil, political, property, and even cultural rights were respected under the new dispensations. The French settlers in Algeria could not imagine subjecting themselves to majority rule in an independent Algerian state. Tutsis, privileged (and in part defined) as an ethno-racial group under Belgian rule, were left as a suddenly vulnerable minority in post-independence Rwanda.

As Roger Petersen has argued, the prospect or experience of a sudden reversal of ethnic hierarchy can provoke intense resentments, fears, and hatreds, often unleashing horrific patterns of mass violence, ethnic cleansing, or outright genocide.[21] The twentieth century's global transition from empires to nation states, taking place as much of it did in the context or aftermath of massive total wars that tore apart the moral fabric of societies, served to illustrate this point all too dramatically and painfully.

Nationalism and the international system

The very prevalence in multiple languages of the term "international," serving as it does as a virtual synonym for "interstate," illustrates the degree to which the idea of the nation state has become globally normative. Nationalism, the nation state, and the international system have all shaped one another's evolution in the modern era. The July 1914 crisis was born in part of the Habsburg monarchy's inability to cope effectively with internal and external nationalist challenges in the Balkans, and we have just noted the enormous impact that the First World War in turn had on the spread and evolution of the nation-state system. In the aftermath of that transformative conflict, the liberal internationalism articulated by the likes of Woodrow Wilson led to the institutionalization of the nation state within the framework of a League of Nations that was supposed to enshrine the juridical equality of all nation states, big and small alike, while mediating their relations through arbitration and collective security arrangements that would put an end to war. In practice, the

21 Roger D. Petersen, *Resistance and Rebellion: Lessons from Eastern Europe* (Cambridge University Press, 2006).

League of Nations proved an abject failure on multiple grounds, ranging from the double-standard it maintained between European nation states and colonized peoples allegedly unprepared for political independence, to the United States' failure to join the organization.

Left to fend for themselves, newly created or refounded nation states – alongside longer-established ones – were quickly confronted with the reality that their mutual equality of status in international law was belied by their vulnerability to depredation by stronger states or coalitions of states in the dog-eat-dog world of power politics. Moreover, the principle of national self-determination could be employed just as readily in the destruction of nation states as in their creation. In 1938, Hitler was to press the rhetoric of national self-determination all too cynically into service in the course of his early annexationist moves against neighboring countries (Austria and Czechoslovakia) containing German-speaking populations.[22]

Indeed, it was from the start one of the paradoxes of the nation state system that it potentially undermined the very principle of states' territorial sovereignty (the so-called Westphalian system) that it purportedly legitimized. The distribution of ethno-national groups usually cut across the borders of nation states – an unavoidable outcome given the widespread territorial intermingling of culturally diverse populations. Thus, even as the crystallization of nation states was associated with the transformation of blurry, early modern, interstate frontiers into sharply delineated, modern, international boundaries,[23] nation states also developed claims about their right to intervene on behalf of ethno-cultural kin across those very borders.[24] In all too many cases, the resolution of such potentially explosive situations took the form of massive and violent ethno-demographic re-engineering projects in the context or aftermath of war. It is a disturbing subtext of modern history that the relative stability of some of the most peaceful regions of the contemporary state system, such as the European Union, is built in part on the horrific genocidal campaigns, population transfers, and boundary changes of the first half of the twentieth century, which left in their wake ethno-culturally much more homogeneous states with fewer opportunities for fomenting unrest across one another's borders.[25]

22 See Hitler's January 30, 1939 Reichstag speech in Max Domarus, *Hitler: Reden und Proklamationen, 1932–45* (Würzburg: Mainpresse Richterdruck, 1987), Vol. 3, p. 1049.

23 See Peter Sahlins, *Boundaries: The Making of France and Spain in the Pyrenees* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1989).

24 Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed*, chapter 3.

25 See Jerry Muller, "Us and them: the enduring power of ethnic nationalism," *Foreign Affairs* 87:2 (March/April 2008), 18–35.

Nationalist sentiments and arguments could also be instrumentalized by great powers in subtler ways. One of the modern era's most favored techniques of exercising hegemony without formally annexing territory has been what I would call "sponsored self-determination."[26] Its origins can be traced at least as far back as Revolutionary and Napoleonic France's sponsorship of nominally self-governing polities (e.g. the Grand Duchy of Warsaw) across portions of Europe, and Britain's nineteenth-century enforcement of the United States's Monroe Doctrine, which conveniently left the newly independent countries of Latin America open to British exports, investments, and influence.

But it was in the twentieth century that sponsored self-determination really came into its own. By 1919, the term "self-determination of nations" had become a universal catchphrase. This was thanks in part to the soaring rhetoric of Woodrow Wilson and the expectations it raised not only in Europe but across much of the colonial world, as Erez Manela has documented.[27] It was also propagated by the Bolsheviks, with whom Wilson was competing for global support.[28] But the first practical application of the concept in the context of the First World War had not taken the form of national independence for a formerly oppressed people. Instead, the ideal was used as a fig leaf for one state's conquest of another's territory. Imperial Germany's wartime occupation of the Russian partition of Poland was dressed up as a prelude to the restoration of a self-governing Polish monarchy. Berlin's cynical manipulation of the self-determination principle came to a climax in the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, under whose terms the disposition of territories ceded by Russia was to be determined by Germany and Austria-Hungary "with the consent of their inhabitants."[29] The West followed suit, as it were, with the League of Nations mandates that allowed British and French expansion at Ottoman and German-colonial expense to call itself something other than naked imperialism.[30] For

26 On the manipulation of national self-determination doctrine by twentieth-century imperial powers, see Prasenjit Duara, *Sovereignty and Authenticity: Manchukuo and the East Asian Modern* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003).

27 Manela, *Wilsonian Moment*.

28 Arno J. Mayer, *Political Origins of the New Diplomacy, 1917–1918* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1959).

29 From Article 2 of the treaty, which is available online at http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/bl34.asp#treatytext. See also Borislav Chernev, "The Brest-Litovsk moment: self-determination discourse in Eastern Europe before Wilsonianism," *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 22:3 (September 2011), 369–387.

30 For a critique of the League of Nations (and of the original vision for its successor, the United Nations) as an exercise in "imperial internationalism," see Mark Mazower, *No Enchanted Palace: The End of Empire and the Ideological Origins of the United Nations* (Princeton University Press, 2009).

their part, as we have seen, the Bolsheviks proved even more adept at utilizing the outward forms of national self-determination for the peoples of the former Russian Empire as instruments for the Communist Party's exercise of centralized, supranational control. There was indeed a multitude of variations upon this formula. Some of the resultant relationships were formal, as in the constitution of the ostensibly ethno-federal USSR; others were informal, as in Britain's negotiation of highly qualified independence for Egypt and Iraq during the interwar years, or in Japan's 1932 creation of a puppet-state (Manchukuo) in Manchuria.

Yet, if the concept of national self-determination could be cynically exploited in the short term as a fashionable new fig leaf for imperialism, this approach often backfired in the longer term. Fig leaves may eventually end up striking root and sprouting in ways that those who first employed them never imagined possible. Arab nationalism certainly did not prove conducive to the long-run survival of British hegemony in the Middle East. With the collapse of the Communist ideology and party that had held the USSR together, the country fragmented into the very national republics that had once served Moscow as convenient façades for its centralized power. Conversely, in cases where the ascription of a distinctive political identity to a subject population had little popular resonance, the credibility of the venture might be cast into doubt from the very first, as was the case with Manchukuo.

Whereas the League of Nations played an ambiguous role as both upholder of national self-determination and legitimizer of imperial expansion, its post-Second World War successor organization, the United Nations, rapidly evolved into a forum for the advocacy and celebration of decolonization.[31] Yet the very global spread of the nation state has raised questions about its sustainability in many cases. The nationalist movements that came to power across much of Africa and Asia in the second half of the twentieth century were often defined more by their struggle against subjection, exploitation, and humiliation at the hands of European colonial powers than by a shared sense of ethnic, cultural, historical, or political identity. This is because the territorial configuration of these polities usually reflected political boundaries and administrative divisions that had been fixed by imperial powers with little or no regard for the legacies of pre-imperial polities or the distribution of ethno-linguistic or religious groups. Once the yoke of imperialism had been lifted, there was little left to bind together the elites or masses of nominal nation states

31 Ibid. chapter 4.

formed on the territories of, say, the former Belgian Congo or Anglo-Egyptian Sudan. Conversely, in the Arab world, the logic of nationalism cut across the political boundaries of individual states, many of whose regimes sought to reinforce their authority by claiming leadership of the ultimately unrealizable pan-Arab nationalist cause. Among the exceptions to this fragility of Afro-Asiatic polities, a striking number are nation states that can in fact trace their origins to pre-modern times, such as Thailand, China, or Iran. It is fashionable among contemporary scholars to insist that, as a social construction, it makes no difference to its functionality whether or not a national identity draws upon pre-modern antecedents. Yet as time passes, there appear to be some striking correlations between the presence or absence of an "available past,"[32] and the prospects for a nation state's long-term existence within roughly stable territorial borders (regardless of interstate conflicts, internal ideological upheavals, and changes of regime).[33]

Even as many of the world's polities can still be described as states in search of nations, and many of its societies as nations in search of states, the wave of economic and technological globalization that has been sweeping the planet since the end of the Cold War has led some to question the continued relevance or viability of the nation state as a model of governance. Yet, as this essay has sought to highlight, modern nationalism and the model of the nation state were themselves developed and diffused in close association with earlier patterns of globalization. It would be premature to assume that, as world history continues to unfold, the nation state and nationalism will not have a vital – at times productive and at times destructive – role to play in mediating the relationship between the global and the local.

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32 Rogers Brubaker, *Ethnicity without Groups* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), p. 204.

33 Bayly, *Birth of the Modern World*, p. 219, makes a similar point.

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